

REPORT ON CSOS PREPARATORY CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON THE THIRD HIGH LEVEL FORUM (HLF) ON DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

*Held on Thursday, 13th September 2017
At the Crossroads Hotel, Lilongwe*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In readiness for The Third National High Level Forum (HLF3) on Development Effectiveness, The Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) and the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA) in close collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, (MoFEPD), successfully organised a CSOs Preparatory Consultative Meeting which was conducted on Wednesday, 13th September 2017 at Crossroads Hotel in Lilongwe.

The CSOs preparatory meeting was held in line with the spirit of the Development Co-operation Strategy 2016-2018 (DCS), which identifies the High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness (HLF) as the highest level forum for policy dialogue between the Government of Malawi and its co-operating partners. This Forum brings together Government, Development Partners, Civil Society, Academia, and the Private Sector and it is chaired by the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

The meeting was thus premised on helping mobilise and organise the Civil Society perspectives and messages towards the forth-coming High Level Forum, whose theme is '*Towards an Inclusive and Accelerated Implementation of the Third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy*'. Among other things, it was aimed at providing a forum for reflections (since the previous engagements) and consultations of the issues and key messages that Malawi CSOs as a constituency in the Development Effectiveness agenda embedded in the Development Cooperation Strategy (DCS) spirit.

The Conference brought together **civil society** representatives from various leading CSOs and Media stakeholders in Malawi (see participants' list and photos). Specifically, the objectives for the meeting included the following:

(a) Sharing the concept of September 2017, Third High Level Forum (HLF) on Development Effectiveness; and

(b) Soliciting key issues and messages that will inform the Third High Level Forum (HLF) on Development Effectiveness, which is expected to further the discussions towards moving forward with the forthcoming National Development Agenda - Implementation of the Third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III).

Specifically, the 3rd HLF is expected to spur dialogue on funding and opportunities available to support implementation of MGDS III; linking National Resilience Strategy to MGDS III; Unleashing the potential of decentralization in support of MGDS III implementation; and managing population growth for full realization of MGDS III aspirations.

2.0 PLENARY AND DISCUSSION ISSUES

During the highly interactive and participatory meeting, the MoFEPD presented the concept of September 2017 Third High Level Forum (HLF) on Development Effectiveness. The presentation stimulated thinking and discussion around Malawi's aspirations contained in the MDGS III. Discussions were then effectively centred on the messages for the forthcoming High Level Forum.

It was NOTED in the discussions that:

- a. Government was commended for recognizing the role of CSOs in the Development Cooperation Strategy (DCS) and for championing the quest to improving the 'inclusive' participation of non-state actors in policy formulation and dialogue mechanisms;
- b. CSOs bemoaned some persistent elements of lack in proper feedback from the Government to the contributions from the civil society and other stakeholders; citing still existent challenges as the limited political will by Government to fully effect and implement all the CSOs ideas and inputs. It was reported that as many as are the cases that Government consults CSOs in Malawi, that reality has been that they never take into account all their ideas on board;
- c. CSOs concerns also centred on the HLF3 draft concept note presented which, according to members, still lacked in some important updates on the progress since the second HLF resolutions and action points in 2015, let alone since the many CSOs messages that were already presented after the June, 2015 consultations. The CSOs

noted that such would help proactively and progressively inform the development effectiveness agenda and platform on its effectiveness

Following are some of the identified and underscored key messages proffered towards the next third High Level Forum, particularly in the three (3) thematic areas:

2.1 Population Growth and Demographics

Key Messages and Strategies under this were as follows:

- a. Need to harness the Malawi “demographic dividend” in real terms, not just as an empty song; especially considering that the youth are indeed in majority in Malawi; as such they should be at the center stage in decision making and not being decided for.
- b. Need to concentrate on time-bound investments and activities that will ably help change the peoples’ mindset and attitude into serious implementation mechanisms of refraining from doing business usual to business unusual. The CSOs stressed on need to work on the ‘software’ which deals with changing citizens’ behavior on critical issues affecting their lives.
- c. Need to strategically target children and adolescents, in building their mindset to focus more on entrepreneurship and not only on the white collar jobs.
- d. Government should boldly reign in with a clear policy direction underscoring the minimum benchmarks of acceptable numbers of children any family would bear, which is in need of urgent enforcing. This should be followed up with a clear marketable and popularized messaging that echo sentiments that “small families are beautiful”.
- e. Need to balance up the needs of industry against the available skills, to effectively deal with and manage the current mismatch between what the secondary and tertiary education system is churning out; versus what the industry is demanding.
- f. In this regard Government should, as a matter of urgency fill up/regulate and/or rationalize, the currently growing and escalated gaps that are there in between the public education system and private education. Failing which there would be a far more serious ‘inclusiveness’ problem continuing to be aggravated, between the “haves” and have nots” spurring even more severe vulnerabilities and marginalization.

2.2 Decentralization and decentralizing the implementation of the MGDS III

Key Messages and Strategies under this were as follows:

- a. Ensure for quality in the institutional arrangements and programming since the current decentralization concept has largely emerged to be highly unsuccessful due to failure of implementation.
- b. Include 'devolution' as an aspect of Decentralization in order to address the gaps that have been observed to be huge hindrances in the implementation of decentralization and devolution agenda, particularly at the national level.
- c. Adequately finance and ensure that district development plans are effectively funded in the national budget, as they closely reflect the local citizens' aspirations in many instances, than the top-down issues identified many times. This would not only ensure effectiveness of development planning structures at local level, but it will also provide an opportunity for people-responsive and tailor-made priority projects.
- d. Need to enhance and strengthen the oversight role of elected officials and capacitate the technical staff at local councils. Of particular interest were Monitoring and Evaluation departments which are instrumental in generating data critical in informing evidence-based development plans.
- e. Need to strengthen the oversight role not only of the elected officials but also on the technocrats at the local authority and central Government levels. In this regard the Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms were underscored to be in urgent need of financing as they remain quite strategic in the effective monitoring of the MDGS III implementation.
- f. District Councils that have capacitated M. and E. offices were reported to be doing substantially well in both resource mobilization as well as in the implementation of the different development programs and projects.

2.3 Resourcing and Financing the MDGS III

Members among other things underscored the urgent need to ensure for the following:

- a. Need for productive sectors of economy to grow and produce more tradeable goods.
- b. Need for Malawi to come to a full realisation that Malawi is well-resourced; and what needs to be grasped is efficient and effective resource allocations/usage.
- c. Need to generate new financing opportunities while capitalising on available funding mechanisms
- d. Need for prudence, efficiency and effectiveness in the utilisation of public resources i.e. exercising good governance in both the public and private institutions. A special call was

made to infrastructure development sector, a sector that has recently enjoyed great levels of financing but still seems to be grossly lacking in the value for money.

- e. Members underscored the urgent need to practice transparency and accountability for both maximum and optimum value for public money, particularly in the execution of all the public sector infrastructure development projects.
- f. Need for reclaiming Malawi's moral fibre and integrity which has been on a steep decline and at the risk of fast waning at all levels of public governance.

3.0 CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

Going forward, it was AGREED as follows, that:

- a. The agenda should include a statement or presentation on updates from the previous forum meetings.
- b. MEJN would document the key messages and submit to MoFEPD for wider circulation and consideration at the High Level Forum.
- c. CONGOMA would advise on the representation to be a part of the panel at the 3rd HLF in the economic cluster, farmers' organisations cluster, faith-based institutions cluster, and the governance cluster.
- d. With the MEJN continuing to play the Secretariat role for the civil society constituency on development effectiveness.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The meeting ended on a very high note with great hope and optimism by the CSOs; amidst calls for the CSOs inputs to be proactively considered by Government and most importantly to add value to the quest for an Inclusive and Accelerated Implementation of the Third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy for Malawi's development effectiveness and results.

Members finally underscored the significance and spirit displayed of such a gesture towards further enabling of CSOs with an explicitly stated and successful policy influencing and advocacy.

ENDS