



Press briefing notes

2ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE AGENDA 2030: IS MALAWI ON TRACK?

Crossroads Hotel, 25 September 2017

1. PREAMBLE

On 25 September 2015, world leaders agreed to a definitive plan for the planet and the people on it by adopting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals were partially built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), while including new areas such as climate change, inequality, sustainable consumption and production, peace and justice, among other priorities. The SDGs apply to all countries and they are highly interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. If all the 193 governments, including the Government of Malawi, that signed up stick to the plan, the results would be extraordinary.

25 September 2017 marks the second anniversary of the SDGs. It has already been two years. The commemoration is coming at a time when Malawi is experiencing increased poverty and inequality, accountability challenges, devastating effects of climate change and diminishing commitment towards development financing. The key questions are: Are we on track? Are Malawi leaders sticking to the pledge?’

As members of the Civil society Taskforce on SDGs in Malawi, we would like to challenge leaders in government, donor community, private sector, citizens and ourselves that the clock is

ticking and there is need for more commitment towards realization of SDGs. Considering the pace at which we are moving as a country, it reflects the slow pace which Malawi took in embracing the MDGs; a situation that resulted in poor achievement of the same. While there are several areas which need to be addressed for Malawi to make progress in achieving SDGs, the Taskforce would like to bring to the attention of government four critical areas which set a benchmark for achieving SDGs. The areas are SDG localisation, gender equality, accountability and development financing.

2. AREAS OF FOCUS

2.1. Localisation

We are concerned that localization of SDGs has not been taken seriously since their adoption in September 2015. The SDGs came at a time when the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II), an overarching development strategy, was about to expire in June 2016. It has been over a year since MGDS II expired. Implicitly, there has been no overarching strategy to guide the localization process of the SDGs over the past two years. While we recognize efforts that Government is pursuing to ensure SDGs are localized through MGDS III, we are of the view that the process is retarding. Such retardation is affecting the localization of the SDGs. As noted at various fora at national and global levels, achieving SDGs will largely depend on how ready member countries of the United Nations are able to localize them. In tandem with such challenges, the coalition would like to make the following recommendations:

- a. Government should speed up finalization of MGDS III to set pace for achieving SDGs. Further, MGDS III should establish clear linkage with SDGs to avoid losing-out the essence of Agenda 2030.
- b. Government should deliberately raise awareness on SDGs to all citizens in Malawi through its structures such as Ministry of Civic Education. It is envisaged that such awareness would bring wide ranging benefits to both localization and achievement of SDGs. Further, the media should be brought on board early, or should be regularly engaged on SDGs.

- c. Government should ensure that SDGs are supported in all local and national development planning frameworks; and legal and policy frameworks. This will ensure that all government structures embrace SDGs in all activities.
- d. Government should consider taking local government as key drivers of the localization process, to avoid a repeat of the MDGs era which left them out. Local Governments might play a leadership role at local level in SDG domestication, resource mobilization, creating partnerships, alignment to policies and relevant implementation. For this to happen, Government has to make decentralization and devolution realistic.
- e. Government should provide room for comprehensive, diverse and inclusive leadership in the implementation of SDGs. All development stakeholder representatives should have seats at the table. Government might consider establishing a national steering committee for SDGs, just as it did for MDGs. This will ensure that voices from all stakeholders are brought on board
- f. Government should consider publishing annual reports for SDGs to share with citizens and development stakeholders on how the country is faring. Such reports would be critical in assessing progress and relevant challenges.

2.2. Gender equality

Although Malawi has been making strides in enhancing gender equality, the sector has been facing challenges. Out of the eight MDGs, Malawi failed to achieve four. The four were focusing on ending poverty and hunger, promoting gender, achieving universal primary education and reducing maternal mortality rate. Each of these goals which Malawi failed to achieve has a gender face. So far, progress continues to be uneven and very patchy, with instances of backsliding in some aspects. More mothers continue dying while giving birth; more girls than boys continue dropping out of schools; domestic violence continues to escalate, land grabbing continues to haunt women and children; and more women and girls continue to experience poverty. This is happening at a time Malawi has made some strides in formulating relevant laws and policies and committing to internationally agreed Beijing conference outcomes and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). With all

these laws, policies and commitments, we need a concerted action by all stakeholders to ensure that by 2030, gender related promises made so far are not broken. As CSOs, we do not want a repeat of the MDGs when gender related targets were all missed.

We recognized that full integration of gender equality and active participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of the SDGs. As such, we would like to make the following recommendations:

- a. Government should apply a holistic approach recognizing the interdependence of gender equality and the global development agenda. Engendering the current power structures is critical to further addressing women's economic empowerment and the reduction in the feminization of poverty.
- b. Government should support the Ministry of Gender with adequate resources as a tool for expanding women's voice, leadership and participation in different sectors of development, including economic empowerment
- c. Government should take concrete steps in the provision of adequate and long-term financial resources for the implementation of various instruments on gender, women empowerment, education for girls and property, among others.
- d. Government should ensure that those found to perpetrating violence against or carrying actions that disaggregate women and girls are punished adequately by the law. If it happens that the law or policy is weak in enforcing some gender standards, government should take appropriate steps in resolving the weakness.

2.3. Governance: transparency and accountability

Governance is critical for achieving sound, stable and sustainable development programmes capable of protecting the Malawi's most vulnerable people. Improved governance entails putting in place measures that reduce corruption, alleviate poverty, prevent money laundering and enhance transparency in all sectors of development. Corruption and a lack of transparency affect development initiatives at the outset. Corruption skews policies and budgets to benefit private rather than public interests. It increases income inequality and fundamentally

undermines the ability of government to provide basic services to their people, including those related to the right to food, housing, health and education. Concrete anti-corruption implementation strategies need to include benchmarks and timeframes for action. While commending government on anti-corruption including formulation of instruments and structures, we feel there is more that can be done.

Accountability in promises by duty bearers is also key. There should be deliberate commitment to keep commitments at both local and international levels. Citizens should be able to monitor commitments and agreements that are made on their behalf. As CSOs, we commit to ensuring Government meets all promises by empowering citizens to engage duty bearers. SDGs are commitments which leaders of the Government of Malawi made. Citizens are waiting for the promise to mature before or by 2030.

Correspondingly, we would like to make the following recommendations:

- a. Three arms of Government should speed up conclusion of public resources theft and enhance financial control mechanisms within government systems
- b. Government should strengthen whistle-blower protection rules to avoid jeopardising the anti-corruption drive
- c. The Presidency should not be responsible for appointing leaders of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Financial Intelligence Unit, Office of the Auditor General and other key offices. Instead, a relevant arm of parliament should be involved in both screening and interviewing applicants.
- d. Government should formulate a new anti-corruption strategy following expiry of the previous strategy in 2013. The new strategy should be inclusive with clearly stipulated roles by all development stakeholders, including citizens.
- e. Government should establish a Accountability Framework that is robust, credible, transparent and inclusive. Among other things, the framework will ensure that promises and commitments are tracked, including relevant localization for international instruments. This is meant to foster strong, responsible, accountable and transparent

national development partnerships in the delivery of all commitments.

2.4. Financing

Development financing plays a fundamental role in actualising development plans and poverty eradication. Success of the SDGs hinges on local mobilisation of resources and prudence in the utilisation of the mobilised resources. In this regard, government needs to demonstrate commitment towards mobilisation of resources for achieving SDG obligations, without necessarily harming the already few tax payers. One of the issues that led to poor performance of the MDGs at national level was inadequate resources. As CSOs, we believe in learning from past mistakes for future success. Some of the areas that government has to focus on to inform successful implementation of SDGs include climate change financing, debt sustainability, financial transaction tax, tax havens and foreign direct investment, financial inclusion, aid pledges and commitments, trade and financing civic participation in development processes.

In tandem with financing, we would like to make the following recommendations:

- a. Budget allocation to climate change activities should be increased and be gender responsive to reverse the current trend which shows that local climate change financing has been declining. Local councils should get a lion's share of such allocation as that is the where effects of climate change are being felt. Further, local councils are strategically positioned for building resilience while sustaining the gains made so far in the sector.
- b. Government of Malawi should embrace policies that ensure good debt management and accountability at all levels. In addition, a holistic approach to ensure optimum use of loans should be employed i.e. close monitoring, anti-corruption efforts and general cultivation of a culture of responsibility by all citizens. Further, government should re-enforce existing standards of service delivery to guarantee value for money. This will ensure that Malawi makes the loans it borrows sustainable.

- c. Government of Malawi should introduce targeted Financial Transaction Tax in Malawi to all big companies starting with those listed under the Malawi Stock Exchange. For a start, we propose a 1% tax on all transactions. Further, Government should review the Taxation Act to enable it broaden the tax base (to include informal sector) and put in place improved mechanisms for collecting non-tax revenue
- d. Government should ensure that it takes out politics out of foreign investment decisions and allow technical people handle relevant processes such as negotiation, cost benefit analysis and monitoring
- e. Government should ensure that it empowers citizens financially by deliberately implementing programmes that promote financial literacy and independence. Further, Government should review the Pensions act to protect retired employees from vulnerability
- f. Government should be prudent and transparent in the use of development aid. There should be deliberate strategies to check abuse of such resources and adhere to existing standards and procedures, including financial sector reforms. Further, Government should ensure it aligns the aid agenda to its defined priorities in national development plans i.e. having clear mechanisms for directing foreign aid to the priorities. National development strategies should have clear ways of financing using both domestic and foreign resources.
- g. Government should ensure that it promotes industrialisation through building capacity of Malawian enterprises. Developed countries have invested more in their citizens through entrepreneurship. Promoting such practices ensures that profits are accrued to the country as opposed to direct foreign investment which takes out most of the profits.

5. CONCLUSION

The 2nd Anniversary of the SDGs provides an opportunity for reflecting on gaps that are likely to choke implementation of the SDGs and build on what is working already. It is up to us as Malawians to define our future in line with Agenda 2030 aspirations or not. All stakeholders

have a role to play, but Government has bigger role in helping the nation realise its national development potential. As CSOs, we will continue providing the support, including offering opinions and implementing as required. We will continue informing Malawians on the need to develop nation. The need to do so is even greater, due to the sustained underperformance of our country in global development indices, such as the United Nation's Global Development Index which has been rating Malawi to be among the poorest 20 countries for over 20 years.

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1. ActionAid International - Malawi
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3. Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC)
4. Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE)
5. Council for NGOs in Malawi (CONGOMA) - Secretariat
6. Eye for Development
7. Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA)
8. Forum for African Women Educationists in Malawi (FAWEMA)
9. Hope for the Elderly (HOFE)
10. Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC)
11. Malawi Congress of Trade Union (MCTU)
12. Malawi Council of Churches (MCC)
13. Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN)
14. Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN)
15. Malawi Network for Elderly People Organisations (MANEPO)
16. Malawi Network of AIDS Service Organisations (MANASO)
17. National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS in Malawi (NAPHAM)

18. Network of Organisations working with Vulnerable Orphans and Children (NOVOC)
19. National Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA)
20. National Organisation of Nurses and Midwives in Malawi (NONM)
21. NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO-GCN)
22. OXFAM – Malawi
23. Youth Consultative Forum
24. Water Aid – Malawi
25. World Vision - Malawi