

A civil society review of progress
towards the Millennium Development
Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report:

Malawi



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A civil society review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report:

Malawi

This project aims to encourage and articulate civil society analysis of: progress towards the MDGs; the usefulness of the MDG framework for civil society; the contribution of civil society to the attainment of the MDGs; issues for a post-2015 agenda to consider.

This report documents the outputs of a two-stage process: desk research to review UN, government, civil society and other multilateral reports on national progress towards achieving the MDGs; and a national consultation workshop with civil society, which tested the findings of the desk research and enabled a deeper discussion on MDG progress, utility and post-2015 agenda setting.

This project was undertaken as part of a programme with the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), which supported country-level research by civil society organisations in 20 countries.

The Commonwealth Foundation led this process for the following 14 countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Malawi, New Zealand, Pakistan, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia. The UNMC led in the following six countries: India, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines and The Gambia.

Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is a development organisation with an international remit and reach, uniquely situated at the interface between government and civil society. We develop the capacity of civil society to act together and learn from each other to engage with the institutions that shape people's lives. We strive for more effective, responsive and accountable governance with civil society participation, which contributes to improved development outcomes.

UN Millennium Campaign

The UN Millennium Campaign was established by the UN Secretary General in 2002. The Campaign supports citizens' efforts to hold their governments to account for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 world leaders from rich and poor countries, as part of the Millennium Declaration which was signed in 2000. These leaders agreed to achieve the Goals by 2015. Our premise is simple: we are the first generation that can end poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity.

Executive Summary

Project rationale and process

This summary presents perspectives from civil society in Malawi on progress made and challenges experienced in relation to the national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Based on their reflections, Malawian civil society organisations (CSOs) made a number of recommendations to accelerate progress on the MDGs and improve future development frameworks.

The review draws from semi-structured interviews with key informants, two small focus group discussions, one with street children and one with CSO leaders, and desk research carried out by the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA) in the first half of 2012. CONGOMA and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation then partnered to convene a national consultation in December 2012 to verify and augment the research findings and develop further recommendations.

Civil society review of the MDGs in Malawi

CSOs assess that the most significant progress has been made on Goals 2 and 6, while they believe Goal 4 could be brought on target with increased effort. They see Goals 1 and 3 as unlikely to be achieved, as with Goal 8, although here progress is mixed, and view Goal 5 as being off track and performance on Goal 7 as very poor.

The review drew attention to the vulnerability of Malawi's economy to external shocks that can adversely affect employment and development, including recent food and fuel price rises and corresponding high inflation and foreign currency shortages, which have prompted public protests. These vulnerabilities mean that people can very easily slip into poverty. CSOs believe there is ample evidence from their work with communities that hunger is increasing, and that official poverty statistics do not fully reflect recent deterioration. There is also a growing debate about inequality. The poorest parts of the population are most affected by limited job creation capacity, weak or sporadic cash transfers, poor targeting methods and inadequate distribution of economic gains.

CSOs point to a recent fall in official development assistance (ODA) as a limiting factor in future progress, suggesting that while there is a recent global decline in ODA, there are also specific Malawian dimensions: some funding,

such as support from UKAID, was withheld over concerns about governance and human rights. The government's resulting 'zero deficit budget' led to higher costs of living. CSOs assert that this shows the need for civil society to be able to play a monitoring role to help avoid such donor reactions in future.

Other reasons for slow progress on the MDGs suggested by CSOs are insufficient commitment of resources, lack of visibility in the national budget, poor public service delivery, inadequate political will and limited public awareness of the MDGs. Other challenges identified include the lack of a law to regulate access to public information, unreliable data and what civil society sees as short-term development initiatives linked to electoral cycles. CSOs suggest factors that limit their own role in the MDGs include shortage of resources, lack of alignment with MDGs and low prioritisation. CSOs believe they are also seeing a longer-term trend of donors turning away from supporting civil society to directly transferring resources to government, further inhibiting CSOs from playing a full role.

CSOs recognise the MDGs as having offered a new advocacy tool, given that they established development benchmarks against which progress could be checked, and feel that they have value as a driver of solidarity, networking and partnerships. Yet they assess that efforts to mainstream the MDGs have been mixed, as they did not fully align with national priorities, such as those on infrastructure development.

Many CSOs believe that Malawian governments tend to regard civil society with mistrust. From a low starting point, they feel the MDGs have helped to improve the atmosphere by offering new ground for collaboration. Cooperation between civil society and the government has however remained somewhat ad hoc and by invitation. CSOs participate in government sector working groups, but also raise problems such as opaque selection processes and unclear mandates.

A significant civil society critique of the MDGs is that they do not properly address the root causes of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. The MDG framework also does not pay explicit attention to the roles to be played by civil society, and so does not necessarily drive CSO engagement. Further, CSOs assess the relative inflexibility of the framework to encompass localisation as a limiting factor in implementation. A related critique is that the MDGs were to some extent imposed on Malawi without sufficient debate and consultation, and so there is limited participation at the community level in policy formulation and implementation.

CSOs suggest that future processes need to ensure that systematic measures are taken to reach the marginalised, such as people with disabilities, the urban poor, and Malawi's many young people. Thematic areas that future frameworks should address include unemployment, underemployment and decent work, particularly for young people and women; food security, which has recently emerged as a more significant issue; and the expansion of social protection programmes.

Recommendations

Recommendations from CSOs to improve the participation of civil society include:

- There is a need to develop more structured mechanisms for engagement, and to expand the arenas where engagement occurs, such as parliamentary liaison and with the Office for Advisor to the President
- Donors should designate that a proportion of any funding goes to civil society

Civil society recommendations for a future development framework include:

- Existing MDG targets should be reviewed so that they can change to reflect new conditions and needs that have become more evident
- Donors should renew their commitment to make available 0.7 per cent of their GDP to developing countries to meet new goals, and provide predictable funding, and make available a proportion of grants to civil society
- More inclusive processes are needed: future development goals will be more successful if the process that develops them is locally grounded, broad-based and genuinely consultative, thereby developing greater trust and ownership
- New goals should have clear mechanisms for monitoring, checking progress on good governance and identifying emerging trends

1. Introduction

This report presents perspectives from civil society in Malawi on progress made and challenges experienced with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and assesses the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. The review drew from semi-structured interviews with key informants, two small focus group discussions, one with street children and one with civil society organisation (CSO) leaders, and desk research carried out by the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA) in the first half of 2012. CONGOMA and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation then partnered to convene a national consultation in December 2012 to verify and augment the research findings and develop further recommendations.

In the opinion of many CSOs consulted in this review, Malawian governments have shown a tendency to regard civil society with mistrust and suspicion, from independence in 1964 to the present date. However, civil society has continued to try to play its role of a watchdog, alongside its other major roles of service provision, advocacy for pro-poor policies and laws, and community empowerment.

An assessment of Malawi's progress towards the MDGs needs to take into account the economic context. Malawi's economy remains undiversified and vulnerable to external shocks that can dictate the pace and magnitude of economic activities, and adversely affect employment and development. Malawi had enjoyed uninterrupted and impressive growth from 2007 to 2010, at an average rate of 8.3 per cent, with agriculture forming the main engine for growth. But from 2010 the situation began to deteriorate, with the return of acute economic problems, and growth fell to 4.5 per cent in 2011.¹ Headline inflation rose, to 25 per cent in August 2012 from 10.3 per cent in January 2012, and compared to single digit figures in 2010.²

Malawi is a net importer of petrol products, prices of which are determined by international markets, and which have fluctuated dramatically in recent years.³ A shortage of petrol products available in Malawi, attributable to a lack of foreign exchange, itself a consequence of a low export base and a poor foreign exchange regime, leaves Malawi vulnerable to petrol price rises, with recent increases having serious negative impacts on the social and economic life of many Malawians. Petrol price spikes from around 2008 onwards increased the price of transportation and therefore the prices of food and other goods, forcing up inflation as a whole.⁴ The ending of the government-subsidised fuel price stabilisation mechanism and the abolition of the fixed exchange rate for Malawi's currency, the Kwacha, in 2012 caused a sharp fuel price rise and depreciation of the currency against the US dollar.⁵

¹ Statement at the conclusion of an IMF staff mission to Malawi, International Monetary Fund, April 2011, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2012/pr12115.htm>

² Malawi Economy 2012, World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malawi/overview>

³ The cost of crude oil reached US\$111 per barrel for the first time ever in 2008. The Price of Fuel, <http://www.thepriceoffuel.com/howcountriescompare>

⁴ Food accounts for 58 per cent of Malawi's inflation basket. See 'Malawi Hikes Fuel Prices by 27 per cent', Mabvuto Banda, Reuters, 8 November 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/08/malawi-fuel-idAFL6E7M817Z20111108>

⁵ 'Fuel adjustment crisis: Cama faults adoption of automatic fuel pricing mechanism', Malawi Voice, 7 September 2012, <http://www.malawivoice.com/2012/09/07/fuel-adjustment-crisis-cama-faults-adoption-of-automatic-fuel-pricing-mechanism-13780/>

⁶ 'What Went Wrong? Lessons from Malawi's Food Crisis: Autocracy and Aid Dependency Killed an Agriculture Success Story', Masmiba Tafirenyika, *African Renewal*, 2013, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2013/what-went-wrong-lessons-malawi's-food-crisis>

⁷ 'Malawi Food Security Outlook: February through June 2012', USAID and Famine Early Warning Systems (FEWS) Network

⁸ Annual Economic Report, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 2011

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Malawi's annual population growth in 2011 was 3.2 per cent according to World Bank data, one of the highest rates in the world

¹¹ As set out, for example, in the civil society petition to the late President Bingu wa Mutharika, 'Uniting For Resistance Against Bad Economic and Democratic Governance – A Better Malawi Is Possible', 2011

¹² In 2010 ODA to Malawi totalled US\$1,095 million. Between 2005 to 2009, ODA averaged 21 per cent of Malawi's GNI. See 'Aid Effectiveness in Malawi', https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CC8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.finance.gov.mw%2Findex.php%3Foption%3Dcom_docman%26task%3Ddoc_download%26gid%3D110%26Itemid%3D55&ei=5lj2Ueb3C4XA0QXAg4G4Bw&usq=AFOjCNGsZ5HDaGhDrMgbjTG0S3_ydsAfQ&sig2=iS3HwvKXrHMTHuX2FjsNUg. An analysis of subsequent Ministry of Finance Budget Statements suggests an average ODA of 26 per cent of GNI between 2009 and 2012, with a peak of 33 per cent in the 2009/10 financial year

¹³ 2010 Malawi Millennium Development Goals Report, Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation, 2010

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Country Profile: Malawi Statistics, UN Data, <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=MALAWI>

¹⁶ Country Profile: Zambia Statistics, UN Data, <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Zambia>

¹⁷ Malawi MDG Report 2010, op. cit

¹⁸ 'Education in Malawi', Ripple Africa, <http://www.rippleafrica.org/education-in-malawi-africa/general-education-in-malawi-africa>

In consequence, it was estimated that more than 1.63 million people, 11 per cent of the population, faced severe food shortages in early 2013. By the end of 2012, Malawi needed US\$30 million to cover the shortfall of available food⁶ and over 200,000 people were relying on a government food aid programme to meet their needs.⁷

Agriculture remains the primary economic activity in Malawi, contributing almost a third of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012,⁸ and Malawi relies on producing an agricultural surplus, as this provides over 90 per cent of export earnings. Agriculture also employs 85 per cent of the labour force.⁹ A growing population¹⁰ and the continuance of manual farming practices are placing pressure on the land and agriculture, while trading partners for cash crops such as tobacco may have been deterred by increased perceptions in recent years of instability, linked to poor democratic and economic governance.¹¹ Agriculture also remains vulnerable to droughts and erratic rainfall patterns, linked to climate change.

In addition, Malawi is landlocked, which makes it harder to be competitive in exports and makes the import of raw materials expensive. Its main agricultural exports are vulnerable to commodity price fluctuation. Malawi faces trade deficits almost every year, and for the most part its annual budget deficit is compensated for by official development assistance (ODA). In general, donor assistance to Malawi constitutes a significant portion of the national budget.¹²

Shortages of fuel and foreign exchange were among the causes of the widespread national demonstrations called on 20 July 2012 by the 'Concerned Citizens' coalition of 80 civil society groups, in which 20 people were reported killed. Thousands of people were reported to have taken part in protests against high inflation caused by currency devaluation in January 2013.

2. Civil society perspectives on progress towards the MDGs

Against this background, civil society sees major challenges in achieving fundamental development targets, with official figures underlining the scale of what still needs to be done.

For example, in relation to Goal 1, Malawi's poverty levels remain alarming. In 2010 Malawi ranked 160 out of 182 countries for poverty, with 39 per cent per cent of the population living on less than US\$1 per day.¹³ Malawi's MDG report also states that the poverty gap ratio, which assesses how far the poor are from being above the poverty line, has increased.¹⁴ Malawi's GDP per capita rose from US\$203 in current terms in 2000 to US\$318,¹⁵ but this compares unfavourably to its neighbour, Zambia, which moved from US\$309 to US\$986 in the same period.¹⁶

In relation to Goal 2, on education, the net enrolment rate in primary education has increased, but the proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reached Grade 5 without repeating a grade declined from 86 per cent in 2006 to 76 per cent in 2008.¹⁷ According to UNESCO, only 58 per cent of children will complete a full course of primary school.¹⁸ Other challenges here, in the assessment of

CSOs involved in this review, include low quality of education, a poor learning environment and a high teacher-pupil ratio.¹⁹ There is high gender imbalance in literacy rates.²⁰

In another example, when assessing Goal 7, it is important to note that, according to the 2008 Population and Housing Census, paraffin usage has remained the most common energy source for lighting,²¹ while firewood remains the dominant energy source for cooking, with 98 per cent of the rural population using it, which will continue to have negative implications for forestry. The total forest loss estimated from 1990 to 2005 is 12.7 per cent;²² at this rate, all primary forest in Malawi would be degraded or deforested by 2040.²³

Table 1: Civil society assessment of progress towards the MDGs

Goals, targets and indicators ²⁴	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: 1a. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day 1b. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people 1c. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	Mixed picture, but unlikely to be fully achieved	Likely to be met	The Government's Poverty Head Count, which assesses what proportion of the population is not able to purchase a minimum daily food basket, shows a reduction from 54 per cent in 1990 to 39 per cent in 2009, although there are different methods of assessing poverty.²⁵ This suggests significant progress has been made, although the 39 per cent figure, if considered accurate, still remains short of the target of 27 per cent by 2015. CSOs believe that realities on the ground give little cause for optimism. First, the US\$1 a day guideline used in many measures of poverty in Malawi is seen by many as arbitrary, and in some cases insufficient. The vulnerabilities outlined above mean that people can slip into poverty very easily in terms of their ability to purchase basic goods. There is ample evidence from CSOs' work with communities that hunger is increasing. Official statistics do not fully reflect the recent impact of the food crisis.

¹⁹ Between 2004 and 2006 pupil/classroom ratios were, on average, around 107 pupils to a classroom. Urban areas had a higher ratio. In 2007, the teacher-pupil ratio was one to 78, and the qualified teacher-pupil ratio was one to 88. *World Data on Education: Malawi*, 7th Edition, UNESCO and the International Bureau of Education, 2010/11

²⁰ According to the Population and Housing Census (National Statistical Office, 2008) 64 per cent of the population in Malawi is literate, but only 59 per cent of women are literate, compared with 69 per cent of men

²¹ 2008 *Population and Housing Census Results*, National Statistical Bureau of Malawi, 2008

²² 'Malawi Forest Figures', *Mongabay Environmental News*, <http://rainforests.mongabay.com/20malawi.htm>

²³ 'Forest Cover Mapping in Malawi', Planet Action, <http://www.planet-action.org/web/85-project-detail.php?projectId=5090>

²⁴ Unless otherwise stated, government assessments, targets, indicators and quantitative data in this table are drawn from the *Malawi MDG Report 2010*, op. cit. Unless otherwise stated, the deadline for targets to be achieved is 2015

²⁵ The 2005 Commonwealth civil society study drew attention to the different measurements of poverty applied by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, National Statistics Office, United Nations and World Bank. *Ripple Africa*, op. cit

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education: 2a. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	Significant progress, but unlikely to be achieved	Unlikely to be met	Primary education in Malawi has been essentially free of school fees since 1994.²⁶ This move has seen an increase in primary school net enrolment from 73 per cent in 2006 to 83 per cent in 2009. However, primary education is not compulsory. Trend analysis in the government's 2010 progress report indicates that indicators will not be met by 2015. For example, net enrolment is expected to miss the 100 per cent target by 8 per cent, and youth literacy is projected to reach only approximately 95 per cent. The proportion of children completing the five grades of primary education is projected to only reach 75 per cent by 2015, again missing the 100 per cent target.²⁷ CSOs assess that there is a critical shortage of teaching staff, inadequate teacher training and a high rate of attrition of teachers, while school facilities, lack of materials and long travel distances to schools are barriers to school attendance. The domestic conditions of the poorest also often inhibit school attendance, particularly for girls, while the school feeding programme is highly reliant on donors, and so would be vulnerable to donor withdrawal, which has to be considered a risk given the current global economic climate.
Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women: 3a. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	Unlikely to be achieved	Unlikely to be met	Analysis of trends indicates that the ratio of girls to boys in primary school has equalised, from 0.87 in 1990 to 1.03 in 2010, and the projection is that this will be sustained. Positive factors that are believed to have led to this include abolition of primary school fees and improved sanitation in schools. However, the story is different at secondary school where the ratio is much lower, at 0.79 in 2010, showing that gender inequality worsens as girls grow up. CSOs suggest that there are many reasons that may force girls out of school, including early marriages and pregnancies, and family responsibilities, as girls are more likely than boys to be made to assume domestic care provision roles.

²⁶ Ripple Africa, *op. cit*

²⁷ Projections extrapolated from *Malawi MDG Report 2010* by researcher

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women: 3a. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	Unlikely to be achieved	Unlikely to be met	On the question of the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, there is little change, from 13.1 per cent in 2000 to only 15 per cent stated in the 2010 progress report, and it seems impossible that the MDG target of 50 per cent by 2015 will be met. Women remain concentrated in the agricultural sector. Women make up 22 per cent of current members of parliament, and assuming the rate of improvement continues, the share of women in parliament is projected to reach about 32 per cent by 2015. This figure, while still low, places Malawi above the majority of sub-Saharan African countries.
Goal 4. Reduce child mortality: 4a. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	Possible to meet, but increased effort would be needed	Likely to be met	Under five and infant mortality are both declining at a rate that suggests they will be close to the target by 2015. The indicator is hard to measure, but the government estimates that in 2015 under five mortality will stand at 61 deaths per 1,000 live births and infant mortality at 45 deaths per 1,000, the first of which would be under target and the second on target. As for the proportion of one-year-old children immunised against measles, the government position is that the projection shows Malawi may attain the target by 2015, if current efforts are maintained. However, CSOs consulted suggest this is unlikely, and indicate that the real figure may be lower as not all births are captured in national statistics.
Goal 5. Improve maternal health: 5a. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio 5b. Achieve universal access to reproductive health	Far off track	Unlikely to be met	From the figures available it is evident that the maternal mortality rate has declined from 1,120 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to an estimated 810 average in 2006/10.²⁸ However, despite positive improvements, this trend is not sufficient to meet the MDG target of 155 deaths per 100,000 live births; projections in the 2010 progress report are that the rate will be 338 deaths per 100,000 live births. At the same time the proportion of births attended by skilled personnel has increased steadily from 57 per cent in 2004 to 75 per cent in 2009. Again, this will fall short of the 100 per cent target.

This section is continued opposite

28 Country Profile: Malawi Statistics, UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/malawi_statistics.html

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 5. Improve maternal health: 5a. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio 5b. Achieve universal access to reproductive health	Far off track	Unlikely to be met	The 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey reported that 82 per cent of women had at least one problem in accessing healthcare. The leading barrier, for 61 per cent of women, was concern that drugs would not be available to meet their needs. Other problems included the distance from a health facility, for 56 per cent of women, and accessing money for treatment, for 52 per cent.²⁹
Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases: 6a. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS 6b. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it 6c. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	Significant progress, but unlikely to be achieved	Likely to be met	HIV/AIDS prevalence among pregnant 15–24 year olds has halved, according to the 2010 progress report, from 24 per cent in 1998 to 12 per cent in 2009. This is attributed to increased awareness and knowledge in the population, and behavioural changes as a result of programmes implemented. The large number of CSOs working on HIV/AIDS must take some of the credit for this. Malaria-associated deaths increased from 3.6 per cent in 2000 to 5 per cent in 2006, with the rise due to highly resistant strains. The rate has since dropped to 3 per cent in 2009, partly as a result of better distribution of treated nets. Deaths associated with TB have also decreased from 19 per cent in 2005 to 8 per cent in 2009. Continued improvements on these trends will however depend on the availability of drugs.
Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability: 7a. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources 7b. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss 7c. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation 7d. Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	Very poor performance	Likely to be met	CSOs see regression on many of the targets here, with the amount of forest cover decreasing, as outlined earlier, and fears over loss of biodiversity. Very high population growth places great pressure on the country's natural resources.³⁰ The lack of sustainable alternatives to solid fuels is a continuing challenge. Access to a sustainable water source has improved, so that if current levels continue, the rate should surpass the MDG target by approximately 20 per cent. However, 51.8 per cent of the population still relies on boreholes or tube wells for their drinking water. These are susceptible to droughts or dry weather spells, placing a large part of the population in a potentially vulnerable position.³¹

²⁹ 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (2010 MDHS) Report, National Statistical Office of Malawi, 2011

³⁰ 'Population, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development in Malawi', Policy Action Brief, African Institute for Policy Development and Population Action International, September 2012

³¹ 2010 MDHS Report, op. cit

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development 8a. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system 8b. Address the special needs of least developed countries 8c. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states 8d. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries 8e. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries 8f. In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications	Mixed picture, unlikely to be fully achieved	Likely to be met	Net ODA as a percentage of GDP increased gradually over time, growing from 13 per cent of gross national income in 2005 to 22 per cent at its peak in 2009.³² However, ODA has since slumped, to 13 per cent in 2011, a worrying decline. This can be seen as part of an international trend in decreasing ODA in response to financial crisis.³³ But CSOs suggest there are also specific Malawian dimensions: some funding, such as aid from the UK, was withheld due to concerns about poor governance and human rights. The government's response of instituting a 'zero deficit budget' led to increased taxes and higher costs of living. In the views of CSOs consulted, this showed a direct connection between poor accountability and governance and quality of life, and highlights the need for civil society to be able to play a proper watchdog role. There has been a dramatic growth in personal computer use and internet access, which has increased from 0.07 per cent in 2005 to 16.8 per cent in 2010, with a growth in the numbers of internet service providers and village internet centres. Mobile phone subscriptions have also grown sharply, with the 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey Report recording that 41.1 per cent of the population possesses mobile phones.³⁴ On youth unemployment, CSOs believe that the statistics do not reflect the reality as they see it on the ground. Unemployment as a whole was reported to be falling before the 2010 economic setback, from 9 per cent in 2006 to 4 per cent in 2009, and the government has introduced schemes such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund. However, with 67 per cent of the population under the age of 25, placing priority on creating youth employment opportunities remains a critical issue for Malawi.³⁵ The government has also established the Malawi Rural Development Fund, but employment remains largely in agriculture, where there are large amounts of unpaid jobs and seasonal work, raising questions about the quality of employment and the lack of decent work.

³² Malawi Statistics, Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), <http://www.oecd.org/countries/malawi/>

³³ In 2011, members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD provided US\$133.5 billion of net ODA, representing 0.31 per cent of their combined GNI. This was a 2.7 per cent drop in real terms compared to 2010, the year it reached its peak. This decrease reflects fiscal constraints in several DAC countries. See 'Aid to Developing Countries Falls Because of Global Recession', OECD, April 2012 <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/developmentaidtodevelopingcountriesfallsbecauseofglobalrecession.htm>

³⁴ 2010 MDHS Report, op. cit

³⁵ Ibid

As can be seen, there are some quite wide areas of disagreement between the government's stated positions and those of CSOs involved in this review, who rate progress less optimistically, particularly on Goals 1, 6, 7 and 8.

Civil society critiques are accompanied by growing discourse about inequality as a neglected issue. The richest 10 per cent of the population has an average per capita income that is nine times higher than the poorest 10 per cent.³⁶ The poorest parts of the population are most affected by limited job creation capacity, weak or sporadic cash transfers, poor targeting methods for the poorest and inadequate distribution of the gains of economic growth, and are most vulnerable to any regression.

For a full list of the MDGs, along with the targets and indicators, see: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officiallist.htm>

3. Usefulness and challenges of the MDG framework to civil society

Overall, CSOs involved in this review recognised that the MDGs offer a new advocacy tool, given that they have established development benchmarks against which progress can be checked, and felt that they had value as a driver of solidarity, networking and partnerships.

CSOs observed in the consultations that generally the MDG framework did not highlight roles to be played by CSOs, and that this seems to empower states to direct the terms of engagement with civil society. Perhaps for this reason, CSOs made clear that they believe the government has the main duty to deliver on the MDG targets, yet they felt that efforts to mainstream the MDGs had been mixed. The MDGs were partly integrated into the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), the overarching national development roadmap, and were also benchmarked in ministerial level plans. However, a deficit here is that the MGDs did not fully align with national priorities, such as those on infrastructure development.

While expecting the government to take the lead, CSOs agree that they should try to complement and influence the government's efforts. They believe the MDGs have helped to improve relations between CSOs and the government by offering new ground for collaboration.

In some cases, the government has made available technical knowledge and information on MDG issues to CSOs, and this has enriched CSOs' efforts to address the MDGs. There has been some cross-learning through sharing of experiences and information. For example, the Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation has tried to produce and share with CSOs the Malawi MDGs Progress Report most years. These reports have offered critical reference points around which CSOs have been able to formulate advocacy plans and actions on the MDGs. For example, CSOs involved in the 50-50 campaign for gender parity in parliament have used data from government reports to promote their cause.

³⁶ National Statistical Office, 2011

CSOs are also represented on 16 government sector working groups, but here some problems have been identified, including the lack of representation of some CSOs, opaque selection processes, and unclear mandates and roles for CSOs.

Malawian CSOs also believe that the MDGs have given them more opportunities to engage with the UN system, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malawi Office and the UN Millennium Campaign. Areas of collaboration identified with these agencies include the provision of technical and financial support to CSOs, and joint planning and implementation of campaigns. CSOs acknowledge that the UNDP Malawi office plays a critical role in research and dissemination on the MDGs, such as with the publication of the Gender Human Development Report for Malawi and the Malawi component of the global Human Development Report.

Much of CSOs' delivery of programmes related to the MDGs has, however, come about 'by accident' rather than as a result of strategic focus: CSOs are working in areas that speak to their missions and mandates, as opposed to taking a lead directly from the MDGs. Limiting factors that CSOs identify as preventing them from doing more on MDG delivery include shortage of resources, lack of alignment with MDGs and low prioritisation. Unpredictable donor commitments have also been raised as an issue, for CSOs and the government alike.

A low level of public knowledge on the MDGs is assessed as a factor in limited implementation, arising partly from illiteracy and an underdeveloped reading culture among the citizenry. MDG awareness messages have not always succeeded, for example because they were not translated into vernacular languages. There has also been much less discussion of targets and indicators compared to goals.

Some of the cross-cutting reasons for slow progress on the MDGs suggested by CSOs in this review include an insufficient commitment of resources to the MDGs, a lack of visibility in the national budget (where MDG allocations are subsumed under ministry allocation headings), poor public service delivery and inadequate political will at both executive and legislative levels, including the lack of any parliamentary committee on the MDGs.

A further significant critique of the MDGs mounted by CSOs is that they do not properly address the root causes of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, because such ingrained causes, which arise from power imbalances, politics and deep-seated patterns of discrimination, were not sufficiently considered in the design, planning and implementation of the MDGs.

The MDG framework is assessed as not being very amenable to localisation or customisation, which is considered a factor in low levels of implementation. Further, because of minimal participation in the setting of targets and indicators, some targets, such as those on women's empowerment or environmental issues (particularly the indicator on solid fuel use), were always likely to be unrealistic.

CSOs believe that the MDGs have given new stimulus for networking, but have also reported weak co-ordination capacity of umbrella bodies and sectoral networks, which limits their ability to be proactive. There have also

been examples of larger, international CSOs supporting collaboration and coalition building, including support from Oxfam Malawi/Novib and Action Aid International Malawi, to an MDG coalition formed from over 15 CSO thematic networks in 2008, under the oversight of CONGOMA, to improve co-ordination of CSO actions on the MDGs. However, at the same time, CSO representatives are reporting a recent trend towards donors preferring to channel resources directly to government, which can lead to CSOs not having sufficient resources to exercise their accountability role over government spending.

A further constraint on civil society efforts to mobilise on the MDGs is that Malawi has no law to regulate access to public information. In addition, as the previous review stated in 2005, the data that exist are difficult to compare, and there are variances in how measures such as GDP are computed in different years. CSOs also assess some official figures as not reflecting the reality they see on the ground. There are some accusations of bias in official data, while other variations may arise from lack of co-ordination between different actors working on separate projects in the same sphere. CSOs consulted believe that a further limiting factor in civil society's work with the government is that government programmes tend to have a short- and medium-term focus, aligned to the electoral cycle.

4. Contribution of CSOs to the MDGs and their delivery

Civil society is playing a range of roles that are relevant to the MDGs. One role is that of a direct service provider. Examples put forward in this review of work in service delivery include work in health, including maternal and child health, education, food security and nutrition, the environment and poverty reduction, for example through micro finance and public works programmes. For instance, after the Ministry of Health, the next major provider of health care in Malawi is the Christian Hospitals Association (CHAM), which owns 26 per cent of healthcare facilities³⁷ and employs 21.5 per cent of professional nurses and midwives.³⁸ CSOs consulted assess direct service delivery as the largest contribution Malawian civil society makes towards the attainment of the MDGs.

Another key role is that of advocacy for improved policies and practices. CSOs have mainly targeted the national government and the UN system with policy proposals relating to the attainment of the MDGs. Advocacy initiatives include joining with international civil society in campaigns on debt cancellation. The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) Malawi coalition has in addition conducted annual citizens' mobilisation campaigns at national, thematic and community levels.

Civil society also plays the role of a watchdog and whistleblower, particularly on issues of poor administration and corruption. For example, a recent project carried out by CONGOMA, Plan Malawi International and Action Aid Malawi used community scorecards to empower people to rank their satisfaction with public services in terms of satisfaction. This shed light on uncompleted or stalled school infrastructure projects and improper procurement practices at the local level,

³⁷ Human Resources for Health Country Profile: Malawi, Africa Health Workforce Observatory (AHWO), October 2009

³⁸ Andrew Nove, *The State of the World's Midwifery 2011*, Midwifery in Malawi: In-Depth Country Analysis, May 2011

which were then presented to the Minister of Local Government for follow up on progress. Also on Goal 2, a number of CSOs continue to fight against delays in paying teachers, which hinders progress towards improving the quality of education.

When successful, CSOs feel that this role has helped to prevent the loss of valuable resources intended for development, including in agriculture, food security, health and the environment, as well as education. In this way, CSOs believe they are contributing to the more prudent management of state resources, with the benefit of making progress on MDG targets.

Partnering is also recognised as a way in which CSOs try to address the MDGs. Examples put forward of CSOs working with other actors to help contribute to progress on the MDGs included CSO participation in planning and policy development through budget consultations, and budget analysis processes led by CSOs to engage the citizenry, parliamentarians, development partners and other non-state and public actors. The results, CSOs assert, have been improved budgetary allocations to meet regional and internationally agreed targets, such as the Abuja Declaration on Health.³⁹ Further examples of collaboration are the positive engagement by CSOs in government policy processes on child protection law, disability law and review of agricultural policies.

The sphere of agriculture demonstrates the different roles CSOs have played on the MDGs. Some CSOs have implemented agricultural capacity building projects, while others have provided small soft loans to smallholder farmers to buy improved agricultural materials, such as fertiliser, seeds and water pumps. Some CSOs are lobbying and advocating for better prices for smallholders' agricultural produce. However these efforts also reveal the constraints, as there seems to be general agreement among government, civil society and the private sector that there is much that Malawi still needs to do to reduce the vulnerability of the agricultural sector to better realise the Goal 1 target on reducing hunger. This is indicated by sources such as CSO surveys and government reports on the MDGs.

A factor that CSOs put forward on this is that the Malawian policy environment favours foreign direct investments over local investments in areas such as agriculture, thereby limiting citizens' access to their local resources.

³⁹ The Abuja Declaration on Health, 2001, committed African governments to allocating 15 per cent of their national budget to the health sector

5. In focus: international civil society co-operation to improve maternal health

A collaborative effort between CSOs in Malawi and Scotland, United Kingdom on maternal health issues led to an increase in related aid to Malawi. Activists from GCAP Malawi discussed the situation of maternal health with their counterparts in Scotland. In collaboration with a local municipality, GCAP Scotland then lobbied UK ministers and captured public attention with a media event involving pregnant break-dancers. The day after this media event, the UK government increased its aid budget to Malawi for maternal health. Advocacy was carried out before the event, such that the government department knew that the call for action was coming.

This experience shows how effective a combination of targeted advocacy and pressure through mobilisation and campaigning across national platforms can be; also it also demonstrates the value of international civil society connections in leveraging additional development support.

6. Lessons learned and recommendations

CSOs report that they have encountered growing public perceptions that civil society is more involved in pursuing political rights than social rights, probably as a result of the July 2012 events and subsequent protests. These perceptions, and demonstration of the connection between the fulfilment of political rights and social rights, are challenges that need to be addressed if CSOs are to play a full role in development.

CSOs have also struggled with a selective media that makes it difficult to undertake advocacy and mobilisation on some issues, such as water and sanitation. This suggests there is a need for CSOs to put efforts into building up their media relations, and also taking more advantage of the rapid growth of social media use in Malawi.⁴⁰

There are still criticisms that the MDGs were to some extent imposed on Malawi without sufficient debate and consultation. Following on from this, there has been limited participation of people at the community level in policy formulation and implementation, due to lack of consultation. This suggests that future processes need to make systematic measures to reach the marginalised, such as people with disabilities and the urban poor, and Malawi's many young people.

⁴⁰ While still low, the number of Facebook users in Malawi grew by 50 per cent between March 2011 and March 2012, according to Socialbakers.com

Co-operation between civil society and the government has remained somewhat ad hoc and by invitation. The patchy experience with the MDGs suggests there is a need to develop more structured mechanisms for CSO engagement and for improving relationships. CSOs suggest that there is also a need to expand the arenas where engagement occurs, such as instituting parliamentary liaison to bring together CSOs and MPs, and regular engagement with the Office for Advisor to the President.

7. Post-2015 development framework

The consultations undertaken for this review lead to the view that there is a continuing need for development goals of some kind, and that the post-2015 MDGs framework should embrace the following elements:

Review targets

MDG targets should be reviewed so that they reflect the changing conditions in various countries and also accommodate needs that have become more evident. This should include targets and indicators for all goals, for example, indicators for urbanisation, rather than just for slum reduction, as is the case with the current Goal 7. This would be relevant in an African context, where many countries see large-scale rural to urban migration and pressure on urban resources.

A renewed commitment from donors

For post-2015 goals, there should be a renewed commitment from donor countries that they will make available 0.7 per cent of their GDP to developing countries to meet the new goals. In addition, there should be an obligation to make available to civil society a proportion of any grants given to states, and there should be better mechanisms to monitor grant arrangements in order to improve accountability and transparency. Donors need to honour their commitments and ensure predictability of funding. Alongside this a renewed commitment should be made by states receiving ODA that they will rigorously pursue the attainment of development goals.

Not aid alone but also industrialisation

While renewed commitments from donors are needed, ways should be found of reducing reliance on ODA and encouraging self-sufficiency. This implies generating new growth, including through industrialisation.

Run the best possible process for the goals

Future development goals will have more chance of success if the process that develops them is bottom-up, locally grounded, broad-based and genuinely consultative. The processes of consultation should also develop trust. There should be full and clear integration with national development plans and national level financing networks, which implies that a bottom-up approach should also be taken to national planning. This will encourage ownership of

goals and offer a stronger platform for implementation and mobilisation. Each goal should provide a clear mechanism for promoting and checking progress on good governance. To enable this enhanced accountability requires co-ordinated data management, clear and reliable data sources and improved access to information. For outreach and building public support, there is a need to embrace the growing uptake of social media and include education about the goals in the education curriculum. Periodic reviews should be included to enable the incorporation of emerging trends not adequately captured in the framework.

Some thematic areas are assessed as not being adequately covered by the MDGs as they stand, and it is suggested that they are part of any new framework:

- Employment issues, including underemployment and decent work, particularly for young people and women
- Food security, which has emerged as a more significant issue in recent years
- The need to enhance and expand social protection programmes, still something with very limited coverage in Malawi, for which sufficient resources are not currently available
- Growing discourse around the power relations between different groups in society, and the ways in which the interface between the government and the people is affecting distribution and access to productive resources

8. Conclusion

Given the analysis above, it cannot be said that Malawi will fully achieve any of the MDGs by 2015, with the exception of a few indicators within some goals, it is assessed by CSOs involved in this review as being off track. This calls for a redoubling of efforts by all stakeholders to reverse the adverse factors standing in the way of achieving the MDGs and to model practices for future goals. CSOs can be a crucial part of these efforts, but they need to be acknowledged as, and enabled to be, full partners if they are to play their maximum role.

Participating organisations

Original research partners:

- Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi

Research interview participants:

- Centre for Environmental Policy Advocacy
- Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment
- Civil Society Coalition on MDGs
- NGO Gender Coordination Network
- The Samaritan Trust

In addition a focus group was held with three young people (two men and one woman, aged between 15 and 19) at The Samaritan Trust, a CSO that works with street children.

Consultation partners:

- Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Consultation participants:

- ActionAid International Malawi
- Al-Barakah Charity Trust
- Blantyre Newspapers Limited
- Church and Society, CCAP Synod of Livingstonia
- Civil Society Coalition on MDGs
- Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education
- Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi
- Eye for Development
- Eye of the Child
- Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
- Malawi Economic Justice Network
- Malawi Network of AIDS Service Organisations
- National Media Institute of Southern Africa
- National Organisation of Nurses in Malawi
- Nation Publications Limited
- Pan African Civic Educators Network
- The Young Advocates for the Advancement of ICT-Related Development
- Youth Consultative Forum
- Youth Empowerment and Civic Education
- Youth Net and Counselling



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