

**Summative Report of Civil Society Consultation Workshop On
The Commission For Africa Report (CFA), Lilongwe Hotel**

10th February 2006



MALAWI ECONOMIC JUSTICE NETWORK

IN PATNERSHIP WITH



SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGIONAL POVERTY NETWORK

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The workshop was opened by a prayer offered by one of the participants. This was followed by introductory remarks from the Ag Executive Director of MEJN, Mavuto Bamusi. His remarks focused on the justification for the CFA report, which essentially was the deep and widespread poverty in Africa against a background of considerable natural resources compared to Asia.

He noted the lack of debate on the CFA report in Malawi. He explained the need to raise the profile of the CFA amongst various stakeholders and prayed that the meeting should serve as a platform for initiating a platform for monitoring the CFA report recommendations in Malawi. Mr. Bamusi also drew the attention of participants to what the Malawi government was doing towards the CFA report and challenged participants to critically assess what the going was doing.

This was followed by remarks from Alfred, Hamadziripi of SARP. He observed that the CFA report could be used to lobby and hold governments to account for their own action to meet targets laid out in the report. Therefore there was a strong need for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to monitor implementation. Alfred also observed that other commentators have already pointed out some gaps in the report and the need for political will in order to implement the report. He further raised a number of issues that participants needed to address during the workshop as follows:

- How significantly different was the CFA process from other processes like SAP etc?
- How can the CFA be used to inform other development strategies being promoted across sub-Saharan Africa such as Millennium Development Goals, EU strategy for Africa etc?
- What has happened since the report was released? What elements got momentum? In which sectors?
- How do the CFA recommendations fit into national and regional anti-poverty initiatives?

In a way the remarks by Alfred set the agenda and tone for the workshop. Next on the agenda was the Ag British High Commissioner to Malawi, Dr. Chris Wright. He focused on more strategic issues that participants needed to be aware of and needed to debate amongst themselves. He began by stating that the CFA report has broadly concluded:

- More aid to Africa.
- Better aid, aid that works.

- Foreign debt cancellation.
- Bridging the cultural gap.

However the CFA report also highlights actions that need to be taken on the African side as follows:

- Improve governance
- Invest in education and infrastructure

Dr. Wright noted that the major thrust in the CFA report was economic growth and that growth has failed to take place so far in Africa due to poor governance and lack of proper investments in sectors that would support growth such as infrastructure and education.

He further noted that the CFA report was very relevant to Malawi as follows:

- Governance was still an issue although there have been major improvements over the past couple of months
- Corruption was still a teething problem despite high level efforts to deal with the problem
- Aid to Malawi was rising. The Malawi Scotland Partnership was singled out as an example.
- More political will was required to make the necessary policy and governance improvements

The High Commissioner concluded by saying that Malawi needs to take the CFA report very seriously. His remarks were followed by a brief question and answer session. The following issues emerged:

- The declining national education budget. Does Britain have a hand in influencing hand considering the paramount importance of education in the CFA report? The British High Commissioner noted that Britain would continue to support the education sector and also lobby other donors who have an interest in the sector to continue and also increase their support. Britain on the other hand cannot dictate the terms for the national budget.
- Any action by the Malawi government to make use of the CFA report? The High Commissioner noted that most of the issues raised in the CFA report have been dealt with in Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), which is a new national policy paper. This was later observed in the workshop as being coincidental rather than by design as there were a number of clear cut omissions observed in the 2 documents by participants for example in the education sector.
- Was Britain leading by example in the area of debt cancellation? The High Commissioner observed that Britain was not owed much by the Malawi government and that much of the debt was local from commercial sources. Britain could therefore do nothing much about that. However, Britain was hopeful that Malawi would benefit from the HIPC initiative this year. It was observed later in the workshop that Malawi's debt was not largely local and that the HIPC initiative had failed to deliver for Malawi without proper explanations being provided.

- How much of an African voice was present in the preparation of the CFA report? The High Commissioner reported that the composition of CFA was African in majority including two heads of state. African of international standing from the UN and other organizations were also included. Consultations did take place across Africa and Malawi was also included in the consultations phase.
- The High Commissioner observed that the issue of donor behaviour requires some action as well. Donors have also been responsible for some of the bad policy and governance practices on the continent.

Presentations from the Malawi government and Parliament were expected to follow. However, these did not take place since no one was available to make comments. A senior government official was available but did not prepare any presentation, and ended up confusing CFA and NEPAD during the workshop. This may be very indicative of the level of awareness and importance that the CFA report has received within the government systems of the country. As a result of these unexpected changes in the programme there was no comprehensive input from the government and parliament. The workshop proceeded into plenary.

Various issues arose from the plenary, although some of them peripheral to the CFA report itself, they were critical in whether the CFA report would make any policy difference in Malawi or not. All the issues that arose during discussions are presented below.

- Gender element was noticeably missing in the CFA report. This was however explained by the resource persons to have been a deliberate position taken by the CFA. Gender was a crosscutting issue. Participants however still felt this was a problem and should be reflected as the CFA report informs national actions.
- Partnerships are central in the CFA report but appear to be given lip service in Malawi. An example was drawn from the Malawi Scotland Partnership where the Scots had to organize Malawians. No follow-up opportunities are created at national level and it was wondered whether this was a problem of political will. Some clarity was provided indicating the existence of a national committee but pertinent questions remained regarding the absence of clear strategies by the national government to enter, encourage and acknowledge partnerships with civil society.
- Growth underpins the CFA report but how does the government balance the need for growth and the need to provide social services? The government officer available explained that the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy had the balance right by including all the sectors in the strategy. However, it was contended that evidence from budget allocations suggested that social spending was getting low and moving down the pecking order. It was noted that lessons from PRSP implementation showed that even if good policies were crafted their implementation was haphazard, and may as well be the same for the MGDS.
- Discussions also considered the mechanisms that are available for enforcement of CFA report recommendations. Of particular concern was the mechanisms for ensuring that commitments by governments in the rich west and poor Africa

complied with and met their commitments such as better and effective aid. It was observed that CFA report was useful as lobby tool and much else could not be enforced.

- Mechanisms for the implementation of the MGDS would largely dictate whether the CFA agenda makes a difference in Malawi or not. According to the High commissioner, the CFA report issues were largely taken on board in the MGDS and therefore workshop participants felt that whatever happens to the MGDS happens to the CFA report. There was lack of clear direction from the government officer available as to what improved mechanisms are there to ensure that MGDS was implemented at all levels in government as opposed to the PRSP, which largely was a talkshop at policy level.
- Participants were keen to learn what the Malawi government's position was regarding the CFA report. The officer available indicated that the CFA was very linked to NEPAD, "resources have to go through NEPAD." The Malawi government was supportive of the NEPAD initiative under the African Union, which does not support consumption projects. Clearly this was not directly addressing the issue at hand and therefore participants observed that if there was any semblance of the CFA agenda in the MGDS, it was coincidental.
- Further concerns were expressed regarding the role of Britain in the brain drain problem affecting developing countries such as Malawi. There was a feeling that this was a case where the CFA was saying invest in education and the British labour market was taking that capacity away resulting in no change for Africa. It was at the end of the discussion noted that this was a tricky issue when individual's rights to work were brought into the picture.
- Advocating for growth should be tied to where that growth takes place and where it accumulates. There was no point promoting growth and then not allowing the resulting wealth to accumulate in Africa or indeed Malawi. With the current economic set-up prospects are that any growth in Malawi would result into wealth accumulating elsewhere, and this needed to be addressed by the CFA.
- It was also discussed as to whether the CFA report would result into any improvements at the village level. The observation was prompted by the conclusion that there was so much talking about poverty yet there was very little action on the ground. In connection with this:
 - Discussion ensued regarding how the CFA report would be widely disseminated? There was feeling that there was very little knowledge in Malawi about the CFA
 - Discussion took place on the extent to which the CFA report could be used to empower the rural masses that are in poverty. It was observed that perhaps this would be a far-fetched idea and the CFA report needed to inform national policy and spending as strategic entry points.
- Participants further noted that corruption was getting institutionalised. There was wrong perception that only politicians were corrupt leading to a culture of petty

corruption. As a result there was too much focus on grand corruption involving cabinet ministers and other high profiled individuals. Much as this was necessary attention should also be paid to petty corruption.

Having gone through the presentations and input from the resource persons and also the discussions participants considered the way forward for the CFA process in Malawi. The following were highlighted:

- Monitor the recommendations of CFA. Efforts should be made to get to know which government dept is responsible for what that is relevant to the CFA report.
- Strategies should be formulated to push the government to take the report seriously. Specifically MEJN should make a quick assessment of the MGDS in terms of how it fairs in view of the CFA report and widely disseminate the findings.
- Simplify the report and take it to the communities, government officials at different levels (especially the district offices). This will give the report a wider audience.
- As actions are developed based on the CFA report, gender mainstreaming should be incorporated. A rights-based approach should be used in understanding the CFA report.
- On the policy front, there was need for mainstreaming of CFA recommendations into main government policy documents such as the MGDS. Also examine how the government specifically responded to the CFA report.
- The donor factor should be re-examined. How much aid do we need as a country? This should include an examination of transparency, conditionalities and absorptive capacity.
- Learn from other country's experiences. How have the other SADC countries dealt with the CFA report. SARPAN should provide information on this matter.
- Plans should be made to include members of parliament in the CFA process at country level. An interface with members of parliament will be necessary to give more impetus for lobbying government to attend to issue raised in the CFA report.

In conclusion, the workshop served as a major eye opener for the participating members of civil society. It was very conspicuous that most of them had no information about the CFA report prior to the workshop. This did affect the level of discussion during the workshop. There therefore a need for more information sharing within civil society if any meaningful will be played by the Malawian civil society in any undertakings relating to the CFA.