

MALGA Today

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Foreword from the Executive Director

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We welcome you once again to the third edition of “**MALGA TODAY**” that highlights major events that have occurred in the period, April to June 2009 relating to governance in general and local governance in particular.

First and foremost, MALGA would like to congratulate all Malawians for the peaceful Parliamentary and Presidential Elections (PPE) that took place in May 2009. Of more significance, the Elections retained His Excellence Ngwazi Dr Bingu wa Mutharika in the high office of the President and ushered in the Right Honourable Joyce Banda as the first woman in the history of Malawi to occupy the office of Vice President of the Republic.

MALGA is also grateful to have the new Minister of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), Dr Goodall Gondwe, who also ascended to the seat after winning the said elections. We have every hope that he will continue from the good works that Dr George Chononda, former Minister of Local Government, left behind before he joined the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

MALGA would also like to welcome Mr Patrick Kabambe the new Principal Secretary for MLGRD who has replaced Mr George Mkondiwa who has since been posted to the Ministry responsible for People with disabilities and Elderly persons .

The period between April and July has also seen a number of District Commissioners, who constitute the Chief Advisor Group (CEAG) to MALGA, posted from one station to another.

As a secretariat we wish them quick settlement in the new working places. July has also been an exceptionally eventful month for MALGA. This has been the month in which the most awaited annual national budget was passed by Parliament. More important to MALGA was the passing of the Local Government Election (LGE) Budget that will see Councillors rolling back in Local Government Assemblies some time in 2010 at a date to be announced by the relevant authorities.

We at MALGA would therefore like to call upon all the citizens of Malawi, politicians, women, the youth, the academia, Non State Actors (NSA) and development partners to join hands and make the 2010 LGEs more successful and effective. Already the Malawi Electoral Systems Network (MESN) has started holding meetings to strategies on these elections.

May the good Lord bless you all.



MESN participants strategizes on 2010 LGE at Lilongwe Hotel

THE MCHINJI DISTRICT ASSEMBLY: LOCAL GOVERNMENT -CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION COLLABORATION MODEL

The Mchinji District Assembly has adapted a Local Government and Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network collaboration arrangement for implementing most of its development activities. The initiative came as a response to the growing number of inconsistencies that were apparent whenever the Local Government Assembly (LGA) or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were offering public services in the district. MALGA caught up with the Assembly's District Commissioner (DC), the Director of Planning and Development (DPD) and a representative from the CSO network to find out more on the initiative.

MALGA: Tell us the background of this initiative.

LGA: The initiative was developed by the District Executive Committee (DEC) in an effort to improve service delivery among local communities in the Local Authority. As CSOs were booming in the district, it was a relief for the LGA since many implementers were coming on board. However, this caused a big challenge in that these CSOs were working as competitors and not as collaborative partners in the development of the LGA. In other occasions, there was duplication of efforts among the CSOs themselves.

MALGA: How would you describe this network?

LGA: This network started in 2006 followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the LGA – DEC and CSO network to formalize the formation and coordination of the partnership. Its membership includes all the CSOs in the district. It has the DPD, Director Of Administration and District Information Officer as ex-officio members and the DC as the Patron.

MALGA: What are some of the modalities that were set in place to ensure smooth operation and coordination of the network?

LGA: We have a Constitution which among other things, stipulates that every new CSO is mandated to become a member of the network before it starts its operations in the district. It is then allocated to a sub-theme that is in line with its operations and it later pays K4000 as annual fee. We meet once every month to report as well as review our work implementation so that we are aligned to district and central government objectives. The DEC is mandated to carry out field monitoring every three months.

MALGA: What are these sub-themes?

LGA: These are areas of focus which are also reflected in the work plan of each sector/department of the LGA or the district. These include:

- District Education Network (DEN) covering the Education mandate.
- Democracy & Decentralization/ Human Rights that includes gender issues

- Agriculture and Food Security Water and Sanitation, etc.

MALGA: Tell us more about Democracy & Decentralization and Human Rights as a sub –theme?

LGA: We are working with GDC-MGPDD (German Technical assistance) on the implementation of the sub-theme of DD & HR/ Gender. Currently, we have developed a work plan with assistance from their advisor and activities are yet to start.

MALGA: What challenges does this innovate way of District development collaboration face?

LGA: Some members of the CSO group fail to pay the annual fee. And some do not want to join the network before starting or rolling out their projects. However, we are able to discover that through our extension workers.

MALGA: Any success stories?

LGA: The smooth collaboration that has been established is easing implementation and monitoring of activities by the assembly. A good example is that some CSOs are very supportive and welcoming when the LA has asked support from them. In a recent incident, there was an Agriculture show in the District and a CSO, (Millennium Village Development) provided support on almost everything that the LGA needed for the show to be effectively conducted. This kind of complementarity leads to efficient and effective service delivery and development in the area.

MALGA: Any last word?

LGA: We would like to encourage other assemblies to replicate this initiative because it helps a lot in the implementation of activities in the District Development Plan. The initiative also ensures that all sectors of the LGA are receiving attention as the network has got sub-themes. Lastly, the network has helped the LGA in tracing every CSO and to know what it is doing and follow it up if its operations are not in tandem with the District Plan.



From left: District Commissioner for Mchinji (Mr.. Ali Phiri) the Director of Planning and the Treasurer for CSC Network

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING AT THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY LEVEL: THE CASE OF BLANTYRE CITY ASSEMBLY

A budget is an important management instrument that every corporate institution cannot operate without. For a local Government Assembly (LGA), budgeting is one crucial activity that is done under the provision of Section 51(1) of the Local Government Act (1998).

The method of local government budgeting under this section prescribes that the assembly management with the involvement of elected and non-elected members of the assembly (the councilors and, Chiefs, MPs, and five people representing interest groups) in the local government area are the major players that carry out the budgeting function in any LGA. Therefore under this traditional arrangement the budgetary process is done through representative democracy where the views of the all local residents on the municipal budget are represented by elected and non-elected officials of local governments.

Participatory budgeting (PB) on the other hand is a fairly new and innovative concept in the area of fiscal decentralization among local governments in Africa.

PB is defined as the process of democratic deliberations and decision-making in which ordinary residents as individuals or groups, (rate payers, business communities; civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners work together with elected and non-elected officials of local governments and decide how to allocate the municipal budget.

Like most project cycles, an ideal PB cycle process involves four major stages namely; the PB Preparatory Stage; the Formulation Stage; the Implementation Stage and finally the Monitoring and Evaluation Stage. However, the major distinguishing features of PB in the local governments are political will of the elected members (Councillors); collective identification of spending priorities by the residents/community members, elected and non-elected officials; open invitation to residents or election of budget delegates to represent different communities; facilitation and provision of technical assistance by non-elected officials of the local government; deliberation and voting on spending priorities; collective implementation of direct-impact community projects; and collective evaluation of budgetary results.

Blantyre City Assembly (BCA) is the pioneer of PB among LGAs in Malawi. BCA decided to directly engage the citizenry and CSOs, National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) and Blantyre Urban Networks (BUNs) and private sector organizations in the budgeting process.

The main objectives of this arrangement was to ensure that all citizens are aware of what the Assembly intends to do for them, instill a sense of belonging and ownership of the development programmes and overcome the mistrust that existed between BCA and its citizens resulting in the latter's resistance to pay city rates.

Ordinarily, in order to deepen local democracy through the budgeting process, non-elected officials of BCA ask for inputs in the course of drafting the budget from the citizens through informal meetings organized in the Wards. They also take on board comments from the media and general public when drafting the budget. Once the budget has been approved by the Finance Committee, elected and non-elected officials organize meetings with citizens in the Wards for their final input before submitting it to the full Assembly (for adoption) and thereafter, to the National Local Government (NLGFC). After more scrutiny and technical support from NLGFC, the budget is brought to Parliament for information purposes.

BCA has derived a number of achievements from embracing the PB process. For example, the process has led to the establishment of a forum and structures to enable a variety of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors to take part in the budgeting process. Secondly, there is improved understanding and relationship between the Assembly and its citizens. In addition the LGA is now aware that it needs to involve its constituents in all its activities including budgeting and more importantly there is improved revenue collection.

Despite its achievements this innovative budgetary process is also prone to a number of challenges. For instance, there are no formal guidelines on PB in central and local governments statutes. Key stakeholders and CSOs have limited skills and knowledge on the subject. At times negative pronouncements are made by politicians that have the effect of discouraging people from participating in the budgeting process. And finally the process is costly.

In conclusion, it is inevitable to applaud Blantyre City Assembly for taking such a bold step in pioneering and sustaining the PB process in Malawi even in the absence of Councillors.

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SALIMA DISTRICT: A PILOT ASSEMBLY IN A PUBLIC SERVICE CHARTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

In July 2008, the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRRC) with financial support from the Danish Institute for Human Rights embarked on a Malawi Public Service Charter Programme. The aim of the programme is to bridge the gap that has been identified between what is in the government policies and what is actually implemented on the ground especially at grass root level. It is in this light that MHRRC decided to design an intervention that would ensure that basic services that are accessible to local communities correspond to the needs of the poor, and are provided in accordance with transparent and accountable standards developed through a consultative and interactive process between the government, its stakeholders in service delivery as well as the common man who is the recipient of the services.

A Service Charter is a simple public document, developed by service sectors in consultation with staff and citizens setting out the standards of service that citizens can expect. It may cover direct, indirect or regulatory functions. So far, the programme has identified and sampled Salima District Assembly as a pilot assembly.

The programme has been developed to promote Rights Based Approach to Public Service delivery. Along with this, there are other policies that also recommend the use of the service charter and these are ACB Integrity standards (STDs), Ministry of Health Patient Charter, MHRRC STDs; STDs for Economic and Social Rights, Economic Planning and Development (EP and D) Community Monitoring Score Cards as opposed to routine methods of service delivery.

The programme started with the first phase which was mainly focusing on sensitization. This process was informing the eligible stakeholders and service recipients on the new programme in order to garner their expectations. This in turn helped the communities and officials at the assembly to realize that they also have a vital role to play in making the programme successful. Sensitization also helped clear out false hopes on the expectations that people especially from the communities may have developed.

Later, a Technical Committee was formed at the assembly level which is one of the Sub-Committees of the District Executive Committee (DEC). Members of this technical team were later trained in the basics of Rights Based Approach to service delivery and formulation of a Public Service Charter. At the moment, the Team has developed draft service charters for the following sectors ; Police, Health, Health, Education, Agriculture and Social Welfare as starting public sectors for the pilot assembly.

The draft Charters are aligned to government policies and to the expectations of the beneficiaries of the public services documented during the sensitization period.

The second phase is the implementation process. This is the stage at which this programme is currently operating. To make implementation easier and more substantial, the programme has established technical teams within the committee structures that were formed at national, district, as well as at community levels. Nationally, one of the committees that has been formed is the Media Task team. Having members from all the media houses, the team is responsible for acquiring and sharing information as well as informing the nation about the development of the whole programme.

At the assembly level, the following teams have been formulated under the DEC; the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, Motivation and Awards Committee and the Complaints Committee. At the community level where the programme aims to improve the situation, there are service user committees which are being formulated now. These teams will be trained on their roles and responsibilities which are mainly to do with tracking and reporting all the progress at the local level.

At the moment the programme is doing test surveys at the Traditional Authority level of the pilot assembly. Several offices belonging to the 5 main sectors on the programme are being visited to find out what and how they are currently offering their public services to the people, the beneficiaries. On the other hand, the beneficiaries are also being asked how they view the services they are getting from the respective offices. The National Media Task team is responsible for acquiring information on behalf of the MHRRC that will form part of the recommendations that the programme will make in preparation for the next steps.

At the Central government level, OPC is also in the process of developing its own Service Charter. To avoid duplication of efforts, MHRRC plans to document the best practices and lessons learnt from the pilot and consider giving the information to the government for adoption if it is appropriate for the government's programme.

MALGA was privileged to join the Media Task Team in July 2009 and it observed progress on this MHRRC driven programme in the Health and Agriculture sectors at Chipoka Health Centre and Extension Planning Area(EPA.)

MALGA would therefore urge all local Assemblies to embrace this innovative approach to local development and service delivery once it is introduced in their localities.

NTCHISI DISTRICT ASSEMBLY IN AN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP WITH A NORWEGIAN MUNICIPALITY

In the year 2000, the Norwegian government through NORAD requested local institutions within Norway to form partnerships with municipalities in third world countries including Malawi. The main aim of the programme was and still is to build the capacities of Malawian local institutions on a variety of thematic areas. In this partnership the Norwegian institution acts as a role model and a mentor to the Malawian counterpart.

The specific objectives of this partnership programme are to help the Malawian counterpart achieve the following goals: Empowerment and promotion of women participation in democratic dialogue; Sustainable economic development through environment management; Good governance and promotion of democratic principles through municipal services and municipal international understanding (exchange visits).

By coincidence, Ntchisi District Assembly (DA) a beneficiary of a municipal partnership that developed between Nkhota kota DA and a Norwegian municipality called Flørø which began in October 2006.

A neighboring Municipality of Flørø called Førde was impressed with the impact of the Nkhotakota/Flørø sister-ship. It then requested the Nkhotakota/Flørø partnership to organize all District Assemblies bordering Nkhotakota for a contest to win the Norwegian partner. Five Assemblies gathered in Nkhotakota namely Kasungu Town Assembly, Nkhata Bay DA, Salima DA Kasungu and Ntchisi DA. In the end Ntchisi won the contest and immediately signed a three year partnership agreement with Førde for the period 2006 to 2009.

Apart from the two partnerships, the Norad programme funding also caters for a wide range of government sectoral developmental programmes and initiatives. For instance, before the Ntchisi/Førde s and the Nkhotakota/Flørø sister-ship began, Lilongwe City Education sector was already benefiting from the Norad programme.

Coordination of the municipal partnership is done at the assembly level and the Ntchisi District Assembly Coordinator, who is also the Director of Planning and Development (DPD) in the DA, has traveled twice to Norway and once to Walvis Bay Namibia, to attend the global networking meetings which are held every two years under the same programme.

And very recently a delegation led by the Coordinator comprising four local women and three men including students from Ntchisi Secondary school has just come back from Norway on a nine days exchange visit.

Due to the sound management of project funds by Ntchisi District Assembly, Norad has invited it to submit another proposal for another three years until 2012 for which the Assembly will benefit about MK 25 million.

However, there are challenges which hinder the smooth implementation and performance of the programme such as too much paper work to meet deadlines. This calls for a lot of dedication and commitment on the part of the coordinator despite demands from his daily work. In addition, the programme is run on a voluntary basis that means no extra allowance or salary is paid out on this assignment which makes the programme look unattractive to people who are used to getting allowances on any work they do during official time.

MALGA would, however, like to urge the assembly that it is only through hard work and dedication that the District Assembly can earn the promised MK25million.

(Continued from page 3...)

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING: THE CASE OF BLANTYRE CITY ASSEMBLY

MALGA would like to urge other LGAs to emulate the BCA example because it is clear that PB helps to deepen local democracy, fight social exclusion at the local level and ensure provision of quality and demand-driven services by the local governments in conformity with the priorities of the residents. It is also regarded as a mechanism for giving more political power to those with least economic power thereby ensuring responsiveness of local government to the demands of the residents and creating new relationships between the local government and disadvantaged citizens.

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FIRST LGE TASKTEAM MEETING:

The Local Government Elections (LGE) TaskTeam which was formed after the UCLGA Roundtable Conference in Malawi in April 2009 held its first meeting on 12 June 2009. The Conference was conducted with the intention of reminding Malawians on the need to resuscitate good local governance in the country. A roadmap was drafted that saw the need to have an LGE Task Team to lobby for the next LGEs in 2010. The membership of the task team consists of MALGA, as the secretariat, various CSO that are working on good governance and elections, and representatives from the three major political parties namely DPP, MCP and UDF. The meeting looked at the draft Terms of Reference for the Task Team, its membership and work plan. It also chose office bearers. The Task Team is scheduled to meet again for a Strategy Development Workshop once it secures funding.



LGE Task team meeting at MALGA

MALGA PAYS A COURTESY CALL AT THE NEW PS

MALGA secretariat paid a courtesy call at the new PS for MLGRD Mr. Patrick Kabambe on 11th June, 2009. MALGA was accompanied by the General Secretary of the Malawi Municipal Workers Union (MAMWU), Mr. P. Chimbalu and the unions Second Vice President, Mrs. C. Kauye.

Among other things, the two organizations went to brief the PS on their activities, achievements and challenges that they are facing.

The PS thanked the two teams for sparing time and effort to meet him and brief him on their activities. He also pledged to support the two organizations wherever he could.

FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE IN LOCAL ASSEMBLIES.

Did you know ...?

That the Local Government Act (1998) Sec 42 (1 & 2) requires local Authorities to provide information to the populace?

That the two aspects of the relationship between local authorities and their citizens regarding financial accounting requirements are **stewardship** and **accountability**?

Local authorities have a stewardship function and this has been stipulated below;

- To demonstrate to their electorates that the public assets which they hold have not been misappropriated
- That all expenditure is recorded and correct
- That expenditure is in accordance with the approved budget
- That financial regulations and other regulatory and legal requirements are adhered to.

Local authorities are also accountable for:

- The way in which public monies are spent
- The quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the services which they provide.

Please demonstrate today your commitment to full and public disclosure of financial information by;

- Closing your books of accounts on time,
- Clearing outstanding backlog of accounts,
- Reconciling your accounts,
- Displaying financial and Assembly project information in public places such as civic offices, markets, library etc.

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