

Malawi Chapter Status on National and Regional Coordination Mechanisms Existing CSO coordination mechanisms in Malawi.



Introduction

There is existing coordination among CSOs in Malawi but it requires strengthening. Currently Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA), and the NGO Regulatory Authority coordinates and governs CSOs in Malawi. Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare is a mother ministry of CSOs in Malawi. Youth organizations on the other hand are coordinated by the National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM). There are also CSOs thematic networks and coalitions in Malawi among others; Civil Society Coalition on Education (CSEC), Malawi SRHR Alliance, NGO- Coalition on Child Rights (NGO CCR), NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO GCN), Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN), CSO Network on Nutrition, Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WESNET), National Advocacy Platform, Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Affected by AIDS (MANERELLA), White Ribbon Alliance, Civil Society Agriculture Network (CSANET), Malawi All In, All Learning (MAIAL) and others.

Generally, there is weak, transactional, and unsustainable coordination among CSOs and the government in Malawi and there are joint efforts through a dialogue mechanism to facilitate and normalize meaningful cooperation between civil society and the Government of Malawi. Building on existing dialogue and coordination efforts, including Country Coordination Mechanisms (CCMs), it is expected that the Civil Society Dialogue Mechanism will improve government responsiveness to governance and human rights issues and maximize citizen participation in policy-making and implementation. In June 2019, CONGOMA co-convoked a meeting together with partners such as the National Planning Commission, UNDP, and IM Swedish Development Partner to discuss effective implementation and coordination mechanisms for the MGDS III and SDGs. During the meeting, presentations were made on the topics of CSO coordination in SDGs, social accountability programs, economic planning and development, localizing implementation of MGDS III and SDGs, case studies from other countries on SDG coordination as well as Sector Working Groups reporting on their progress. Even after the initiative, coordination between CSOs and the government remains a challenge.

Stakeholders made resolutions to empower the National Planning Commission to have a joint oversight role among Sector Working Groups (SWG), establish accountability mechanisms for each SWG, and establish a basket fund for SWGs to ensure that no such group is left behind due to finances. Further resolutions were made to ensure that the Sector Working Groups are multi-stakeholder and include all players such as Government, DPs, CSOs, Private Sector, and media, among others as well as ensuring that each group has a progress tracking mechanism.

CSO coordination is generally weak compounded by several factors. There is no structural and sustainable approach to coordination. CSOs often work individually as they consider each other more as competitors than partners, CONGOMA, NYCOM, and other coordination bodies have insufficient resources to effectively coordinate CSOs.

Networks and coalitions are donor-dependent and often strong where there is a running funded program.

Multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms in Malawi.

The public and private sector as well as CSO are key stakeholders in development in Malawi. United Nations agencies complement both the public and CSO sectors technically and financially. There is a multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism in Malawi for specific development programmes. Informed by MGDS and SDGs, the government of Malawi works with CSOs and private sectors who complement each other on specific development programmes. However, the CSOs and private sector engagement are somewhat weak as few private sector companies support CSO work through their corporate responsibility programmes. Among other companies who have demonstrated noticeable partnerships with CSOs are TNM, Airtel, Alliance One, National Bank, Old Mutual, Ecobank, Standard Bank, NBS Bank and others.

Government development planning has a connotation of a multi-stakeholder approach where several government ministries come together and complement each other towards achieving some long-term ends. Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health have been implementing long-term national programmes guided by the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach. The Ministry of Agriculture has been implementing the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach Programme (ASWAP) which brings together different sectors complementing each other to achieve a common goal. UN agencies encourage a multi-stakeholder approach. UNAIDS, UNICEF, UN WOMEN and UNFPA have been key in fostering multi-stakeholder programme implementation in Malawi among others. However, Multi-stakeholder engagement has no clear coordinated mechanism and guiding principles hence partnerships are often transactional and programme-based.

Existence of SADC-CNGO, SADC Civil Society Forum and SADC National Committees (SNC).

Albeit being the SADC chair in 2021 -2022 SADC-CNGO has no formal structures in Malawi. However, individual CSOs participate in the council's events and meetings. Further, there is no SADC Civil Society Forum in Malawi but individual organisations engage the SADC secretariat on different agendas in line with their work. There is the SADC Youth Forum (SAYOF) a youth NGO based in Zimbabwe that coordinates youth activities related to the SADC agenda and has a loose country chapter in Malawi which is not recognized by the SADC National Commission yet.

CSOs in Malawi discussed the need for improved CSO coordination on the SADC agenda during the SADC People's Summit which was held from 17th to 19th of August 2021 in Malawi as part of the 41st Ordinary Summit of SADC at which Malawi assumed the Chairmanship. His Excellency Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, President of the Republic of Malawi launched the Malawi Southern African Development Committee (SADC) committee.

Malawi has a SADC National Committee (SNC) that comprises Ministers, Principal Secretaries and Directors from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries.

The SNC also comprises of National Planning Commission and other actors. The SADC National Committee (SNC) was established in accordance with Article 16A of the amended SADC Treaty and with the support of a program called Strengthening the National and Regional Linkages (SNRL) Co-funded by the Federal Government of Germany and the European Union GIZ that aims at initiating regional integration within SADC. The SNC was established in line with the SADC Industrialization and Strategy Roadmap 2015-2063 and will help the Malawi Vision 2063 to realise its aim of achieving inclusive wealth and a self-reliant industrialized upper middle-income nation. The committee works to implement the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the Strategic Plan of the Organ (SIPO) and make appropriate recommendations to the SADC. There is also an SADC Parliamentary forum hosted at the Malawi National Assembly led by the Clerk of Parliament who has the role of leading national assembly SADC programs.

Below is a list of members of the SADC SNC;
Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs (Chairperson);
Minister responsible for Finance;
Minister responsible for Justice;
Minister responsible for Transport and Public Works;
Minister responsible for Agriculture;
Minister responsible for Trade;
Minister responsible for Health;
Minister for Information;
Deputy Minister responsible for Defence;
Chairperson, National Planning Commission;

OTHER ACTORS

The Speaker, Malawi National Assembly;
President, Malawi Confederation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI);
President, Non-Governmental Organisations of Malawi (CONGOMA);
Chairperson, Public Affairs Committee (PAC);
President, Media Council of Malawi (MCM); and
President, Malawi Congress of Trade Unions

These committee members work hand in hand with various SNC sub-committees on Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI), Infrastructure and Services (I&S), Defense and Security, Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR), Social and Human Development and Special Programs as well as Crosscutting Issues.

Opportunities and effectiveness of the mechanisms and the challenges in Malawi.

The coordination mechanism is not very effective because of several factors. The line ministries lack a proper multi-sectoral engagement plan and resources for coordination. CSOs in Malawi have limited knowledge of integration processes at national and regional levels and hence operate in silos and as competitors. CSO networks, alliances and coalitions have limited resources to be fully functional permanently.

SADC and CSO coordination mechanism in Malawi is working but at a lower level. Often few organisations and engaged individually by the SADC secretariat on specific agendas. Few CSOs submit reports to SADC-CNGO and the SADC secretariat. Further, few local NGOs participate in SADC summits and related SADC programmes. Strengthening a Civil Society Engagement Mechanism in Malawi will ensure CSO's effective participation in SADC regional integration processes.

On the other hand, there are more opportunities for enhancing government and other stakeholder's coordination in Malawi. The NGO Regulatory Authority and CONGOMA have a database of CSOs in Malawi with their clear thematic areas. Similarly, CSOs apparently sign MOUs with line government ministries and councils as a first step of coordination hence there is a basis and existing foundation for enhancing coordination and the community and national levels. The SISR 2015-2063, SADC RISDP 2025 and Malawi 2063 vision and other national and regional frameworks provide an opportunity for coordinated and joint planning among stakeholders namely the CSOs, Multilateral and Bilateral partners, public and private sector. Another opportunity is that Malawi has a vibrant CSO sector implementing programmes across the country in line with all 17 SDGs complementing the efforts and resources of the Malawi government.

National planning entities, functionality and CSO engagement in Malawi.

There is a functional National Planning Commission in Malawi. The Board of the National Planning Commission has a chairperson appointed by the President. The other members of the board are also appointed by the President in consultation with relevant professional and other bodies. The Secretary responsible for planning and development is by default also a board member and the deputy chairperson. The Board of the Commission is confirmed by the Public Appointments Committee of the National Assembly. The Secretariat is headed by the Director General and has the main role of coordinating the development of long and medium-term national development plans for Malawi including the flagship projects that would operationalize them. The secretariat is also charged with overseeing the implementation of those plans and coordinating the efforts of different stakeholders in achieving common objectives defined in the overall national development agenda. The commission in Malawi leads in the planning of national programmes including MGDSIII and the recently launched 2063 vision.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Malawi's coordination among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), government, and other stakeholders faces various challenges, including weak and unsustainable coordination structures, limited resources, and a lack of multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improvement. The existence of databases, MOUs, and national and regional frameworks provides a basis for enhancing coordination efforts. Strengthening a Civil Society Engagement Mechanism in Malawi, especially in the context of SADC regional integration, can lead to more effective participation of CSOs.

Additionally, the functional National Planning Commission plays a vital role in planning and development, providing a foundation for coordinated efforts towards achieving national development goals, such as the Malawi 2063 vision. Addressing these challenges and capitalizing on these opportunities will be essential for fostering better coordination and collaboration among key stakeholders in Malawi's development landscape.

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