



2019 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

For Sub-Saharan Africa: Malawi
September 2020

Cover Photo: A group of youth gather at a free WIFI spot to access the internet in Maputo, Mozambique in March 2020. USAID is developing programs in several countries, mainly in Africa, to promote universal internet access. The program enables free access to information for young people who may not have the financial resources to access the internet otherwise, thereby helping them to participate in democratic processes, practice citizenship, and exercise their right to information.

Photo Credit: Gideon Américo Muiambo, representative of the Movement for the Prevention of Crime (MHPC)

This photo was a submission in the 2020 USAID Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance photo contest.

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For Malawi

September 2020

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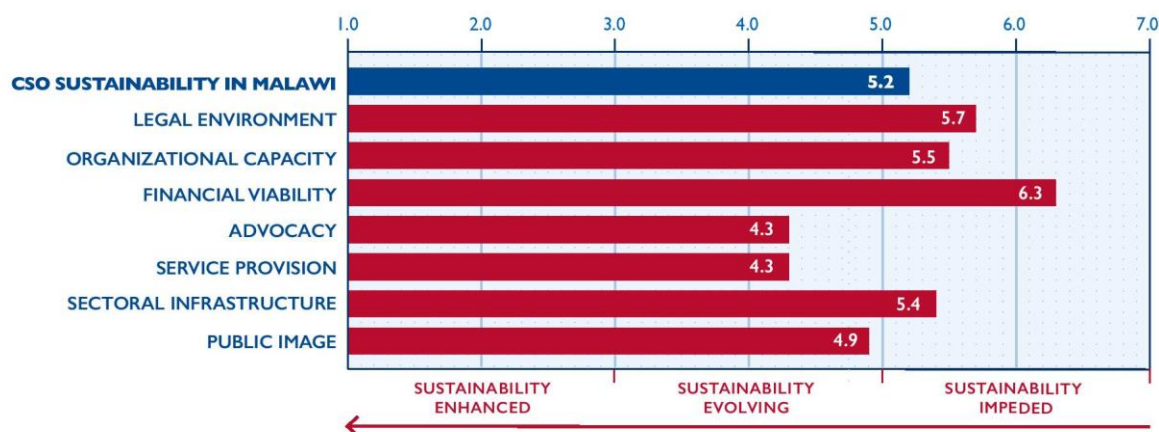
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OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 5.2



Malawi conducted general elections on May 21, 2019. Although a new law regulating the activities of political parties, including party financing, was enacted in 2018, it did not become operational in 2019. As a result, political parties did not declare their sources of funding and were not prevented from giving handouts to voters during their election campaigning. After President Peter Mutharika and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) were declared the winners, the opposition alleged voting irregularities and contested the results in court. The case was still in the High Court at the end of the year.

The election largely defined CSOs' activities during the year. Led by the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) and Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN), CSOs provided civic and voter education in the run-up to the elections, and many CSO workers served as observers on Election Day. After the announcement of the election results, a coalition of governance and human rights CSOs, led by the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC), took issue with the management of the elections and mobilized the public in nationwide demonstrations calling for the ouster of the chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC). The DPP responded by introducing measures to stop the demonstrations and organizing counter-demonstrations led by the party's youth cadets. HRDC and other CSOs turned to the courts to obtain injunctions to stop the government from interfering in the right to demonstrate. The Public Affairs Committee (PAC), an interfaith umbrella organization, assumed the role of mediator and brought together representatives of the government, CSOs, and opposition parties to seek a resolution of the election disputes. The dialogue failed to produce concrete results, as most of PAC's recommendations were rejected by the president and the DPP, including recommendations for the government to fire MEC commissioners and engage in electoral reforms.

In March, the Center for the Development of People (CEDEP) and Center for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) obtained an injunction to stop the president from swearing in commissioners of the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), an independent government body, on the grounds that he had appointed two of the commissioners without following set procedures. State agents continued to perpetrate significant human rights violations in 2019. The most common violations included the torching of property of members of opposition parties; the torching to death of people, mainly the elderly, who were suspected of practicing witchcraft; oppression of the media; and stifling of the right to demonstrate. Several criminal suspects were beaten up while in police custody, and some of them died. For example, an individual suspected of involvement in the abduction of a boy with albinism died in police custody in February 2019, and a postmortem report commissioned by the MHRC indicated that he had been severely tortured and died a result of electrocution. An HRDC leader was severely assaulted while leading a demonstration against the mismanagement of the 2019 elections in Blantyre in September.

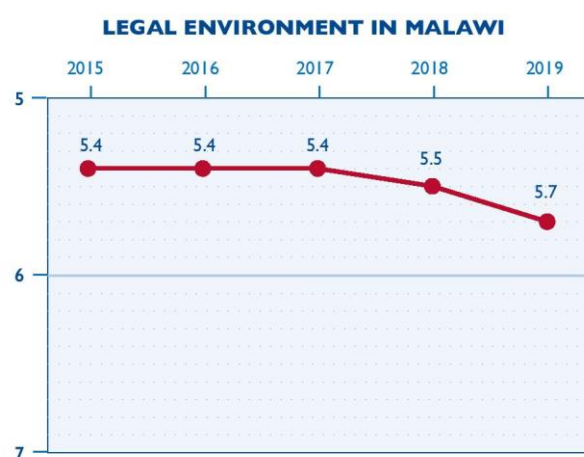
Malawi's economy grew at a slightly faster rate of 4.4 percent in 2019, buoyed by a better crop harvest, according to the World Bank. The inflation rate remained at about 9 percent. The general welfare of citizens remained a concern, as Malawi ranked 172 out of 189 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Slightly more than 1 million people of an estimated rural population of 15

million required food aid during the year. Malawi was among the southern African countries hit by cyclone Idai, which caused severe flooding and displaced thousands of citizens, who required assistance from the government and international donors. Local and international CSOs, including the Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA), Concern Worldwide, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Plan international, and Oxfam, also played an active role in providing assistance to Malawians displaced by the cyclone.

The overall sustainability of the CSO sector in Malawi did not change in 2019. The legal environment deteriorated moderately as the government harassed and threatened CSO leaders. The sector's financial viability deteriorated moderately as funding declines and shifts in donors' focus threatened the sustainability of many organizations. At the same time, advocacy was moderately stronger thanks to several effective campaigns in the governance sector. CSOs' service provision was enhanced by two major service-provision campaigns that responded to urgent community needs. CSOs' public image also improved thanks to positive coverage by private media. CSOs' organizational capacity and sectoral infrastructure were unchanged.

According to the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Board, 671 CSOs were registered in Malawi as of the end of 2019. This figure represents a drop from the 713 CSOs registered at the end of 2018, probably because some organizations closed or did not renew their registrations with the NGO Board. However, the actual number of organizations is far larger, since many CSOs are not registered.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 5.7



The legal environment governing CSOs in Malawi deteriorated moderately in 2019 as CSO leaders were harassed by the government, beaten up by ruling-party agents, and subjected to death threats.

All CSOs, other than faith-based organizations (FBOs) and informal organizations without written constitutions, must register under the NGO Act before beginning operations. To register, CSOs apply to the Office of the Registrar General, which either approves the applications directly or refers them to the minister of justice for approval. Before they begin their operations, CSOs must also register with the NGO Board and CONGOMA, which are statutory entities established under the Non-Governmental Organizations Act (2000). Community-based organizations (CBOs) register only with district

councils' social welfare offices.

The NGO Act stipulates that registered CSOs must have a board of trustees with at least two members who are Malawian citizens. FBOs are exempted from this requirement. CSOs must seek written permission from the government to use the word "Malawi" in their names, since it is protected under the Protected Flag, Emblems, and Names Act of 1966.

A bill to amend the NGO Act that was introduced in 2018 remained under judicial review in 2019. Among other provisions, the draft NGO Amendment Bill would concentrate powers for the registration, regulation, and deregistration of CSOs with the NGO Board, thereby excluding CONGOMA. In addition, the new law would restructure the NGO Board into a statutory corporation, or government company, with members appointed by the government and would give the minister of finance more powers to regulate CSOs. The legal tussle between CONGOMA and the NGO Board over significant increases in registration fees, which the government proposed in December 2017, continued in 2019 while the fee hike was under judicial review. Once the injunction is lifted and higher fees are imposed, organizations that operate at the district and national levels are likely to be more affected than CBOs, which are registered by district councils rather than the NGO Board. The NGO Board has indicated that the purpose of the fee increase is to enhance accountability, but many CSOs believe that the new fees are actually meant to shrink the space for civil society.

The government used its power to shrink the space for CSOs and silence organizations viewed as critical of its activities in 2019. In the tense post-election period, CSO leaders were arrested, detained, beaten, and subject to death threats by agents of the ruling party. DPP youth militants attacked and beat demonstrators and CSO leaders while in many instances the police refused to act. Traditional leaders were used to garner support for the ruling party and spoke out frequently against CSO leaders. The government responded to CSOs' use of social media by interfering with social media channels, and the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority threatened to use the Electronic Transactions and Cyber-Security Act to force mobile phone companies to shut down popular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

CSOs are allowed by law to receive grants and donations and generate income. The National Decentralization Policy requires CSOs to inform the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development of any assistance that they receive. This requirement is not fulfilled by most CSOs, and some district commissioners have threatened to expel CSOs that do not comply on the grounds that they lack transparency.

Like other nationally registered entities, CSOs are required to pay taxes on all income, including grants. The Malawi Revenue Authority receives CSOs' tax returns and scrutinizes them to confirm that they comply with the Taxation Act. Registered CSOs can receive exemptions from taxes on essential imported goods from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning, and Development.

Few CSOs have in-house legal departments. Some CSOs with programs on law, human rights, and governance have internal legal teams that provide services to their organizations while conducting programmatic activities. Other CSOs obtain legal services as the need arises. Legal services from private lawyers are usually too expensive for CSOs, causing them to either fail to challenge litigation or to resort to public legal institutions, such as the Office of the Ombudsman. The Malawi Legal Aid Bureau also provides free legal services to CSOs.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 5.5

The organizational capacity of CSOs was unchanged in 2019. Declines in donor funding continued to prevent CSOs from improving their internal systems and structures. Many organizations responded to this challenge by broadening their mandates to apply to a larger pool of potential funders. However, this survival strategy tends to weaken their capacity to deliver quality services or advocate effectively, because they lack the workforce and expertise to implement the broader scope of interventions.

CSOs coordinate with their constituencies and involve them in project planning and implementation. In 2019, however, CSOs were urged by various sectors to improve their relationships with the government and the wider public. Speaking at a conference with more than 100 local CSOs in December 2019, the NGO Board, for example, called on CSOs to align their programs with district development plans. CSOs were also urged to improve their accountability not only to donors, but to the people that they serve. In response, CSOs scaled up their efforts to employ bottom-up and participatory approaches to project formulation. Some CSOs have started to implement their projects through existing local government development committees instead of creating their own structures.

Most CSOs possess strategic plans and policy documents that outline their visions, core values, and missions. These documents are usually required by donors, and CSOs feel compelled to include elements such as theories of change and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, even if they do not use them. Many strategic plans depict a broad organizational focus to expand funding possibilities. But in practice, strategic plans and policy documents are rarely adhered to because of the constantly changing operating environment, which demands that decisions be made in the moment.



The organizational structures of most CSOs clearly define divisions of labor and reporting channels. CSOs are required under the NGO Act to have boards of trustees or directors. In many instances, the boards are ceremonial and symbolic, while the management actually discharges policy-making, strategic guidance, and operational functions. Boards often fail to meet because of associated costs. CSOs tend to draw their board members from their social networks. It is common for CSO leaders to sit on each other's boards, which stifles accountability and creativity in the CSO sector.

Malawian CSOs have been slow to adopt new technologies because of their high cost. Charges for internet and mobile phone services are among the highest in the world, and connection speeds are low. According to Afrobarometer survey data from 2019, 35 percent of the country's citizens do not own mobile phones, and the proportion in rural areas is higher. Nevertheless, many CSOs use social media for their internal communications and outreach to constituents. During the 2019 election campaigns, for example, MESN, Youth Net and Counseling (YONECO), and Youth and Society (YAS) used Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to educate and mobilize voters.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.3



CSOs' financial viability deteriorated moderately in 2019 because of shrinking donor funding and donors' shift in focus to the elections and "aid for trade." The difficult funding environment threatened the sustainability of many CSOs and forced some organizations to close or scale back their activities. For example, at least twenty partner members of the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) closed in 2019 because of a lack of funds. In addition, the state's deliberate campaign to damage CSOs' reputations impinged on their ability to access donor funding.

CSOs continued to rely on foreign sources of funding in 2019. Prominent donors include the European Union (EU), Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), UNDP, USAID, United Kingdom's Department

for International Development (DFID), Norwegian embassy, and Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. In the run-up to the 2019 general elections, these partners provided financial support to CSOs for civic education, election monitoring, and specialized projects, such as the 50-50 Campaign, which aimed to boost the election of women candidates. Donors' focus on the elections in 2019 left most CSOs working in other areas without sufficient financial resources to implement activities and meet operational costs. Even CSOs working on the elections complained that they were unable to secure funding to run effective civic education campaigns.

Most funding agencies prefer to work with relatively large CSOs, which are likely to have big impact and high visibility but are not necessarily responsive to the needs of local constituents. Small CBOs often believe that they are not well served by funding agencies because of their bias in favor of urban organizations. In 2019, local CSOs expressed concerns that some international CSOs were implementing projects directly in local communities, thereby sidelining rather than partnering with Malawian CSOs. For their part, international CSOs indicated that they had reservations about the capacity, accountability, and transparency of Malawian CSOs. Malawian CSOs do not commonly put up joint bids for funding, mainly because of persistent competition among domestic organizations. This lack of cooperation limits CSOs' ability to access funds when donors require bidders to form a consortium. Any joint bidding is usually for short-term projects.

Another trend that affected the financial position of many organizations in 2019 was donors' increasing reliance on an "aid-for-trade" approach, which promotes trade over traditional forms of development assistance to developing countries. Among the donors adopting this approach are the UNDP, African Development Bank, EU, and World Bank. The aid-for-trade approach is not fully understood by most CSOs. They are challenged by the need to incorporate business models into their projects and to rely on profits both to cover some operational costs and to invest in their longer-term sustainability. CSOs view such models as contradicting their basic philosophy, which is

to serve the poor through charitable activities, and they have yet to re-orient their thinking to accommodate these emerging aid modalities.

There are few local sources of funding in Malawi. The Tilitonse Foundation, funded by a consortium of donors, including the Norwegian embassy, DFID, and EU, remained one of the largest local funders of CSOs in 2019. Tilitonse mostly supported CBO projects in urban governance and management, local governance, and active citizenship.

The government does not provide financial support to CSOs. In 2019, the government committed to creating a “matching fund” mechanism in a memorandum of understanding signed with CSOs, but it had not yet honored this commitment by the end of the year. Through CONGOMA, CSOs requested that the government include MK 500 million (about \$650,000) in its 2019–20 budget, which would be accessed by CSOs implementing projects listed in the NGO Policy. The government failed to make the requested funds available.

During the year, the corporate sector provided funding to some CSOs as part of their corporate social responsibility activities. For example, the National Bank of Malawi supported the Information and Communications Technology Association of Malawi and Economics Association of Malawi. FDH Bank and Standard Bank donated to many CSOs, including the Adventist Relief Agency, Public Relations Society of Malawi, and Hope for the Blind.

Some membership-based CSOs generate income from their members. For example, the Teachers Union of Malawi receives subscription fees, which the government deducts from members’ salaries. If a dispute arise between the government and a union, the government often threatens to stop deducting and remitting the fees, thereby threatening the union’s operations and independence. CSOs sometimes generate income through fundraising initiatives or donations from the diaspora and people living in towns. The amounts raised from these initiatives are usually low and support specific activities.

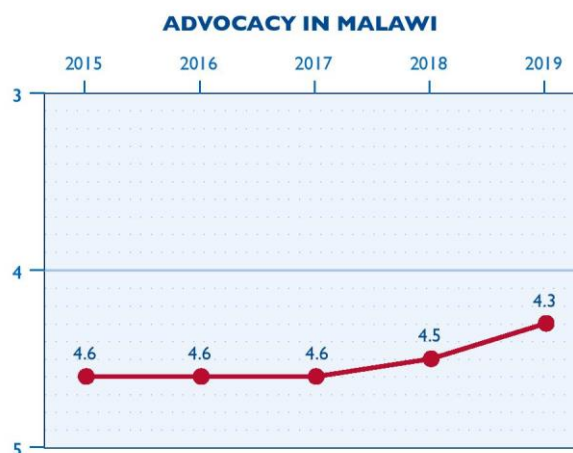
A culture of innovation in income-generation is generally lacking. One of the few exceptions is Timveni, a child and youth media organization, which at the time of its launch received seed funding from Plan International to establish a commercial department that would operate a radio and television station. The station now is able to generate income to supplement donor funding. This type of initiative has not been explored by many other CSOs in Malawi, since donors usually fund projects rather than offering seed grants.

CSOs’ financial management capacity is varied. Large CSOs have ample and qualified capacity to manage financial resources, including donor aid, while smaller CSOs and CBOs rarely have the resources to employ and retain qualified financial staff. Some CBOs and CSOs were rejected for grants because they failed due diligence tests. Donors often awarded funding directly to international organizations in 2019 because of inadequacies in local CSOs’ financial management capacity.

ADVOCACY: 4.3

CSO advocacy improved moderately in 2019 with several successful advocacy campaigns in the governance sector, particularly human rights and electoral justice.

CSOs continued to cooperate with the central and local governments on policy issues, using the few formal avenues available for consultation, such as joint sectoral working groups and committees of the National Planning Commission. CSOs were invited to take part in consultations on the national budget, although the government did not take most of their suggestions into account in the final budget documents tabled in the parliament in September 2019. CSOs interacted with local governments through the executive committees of district councils and area and village development committees, which are the basic local government bodies in Malawi.



In the run-up to the elections, many CSOs, including the Gender Coordination Network, a grouping of fifty-one organizations working on gender equality, launched the 50-50 Campaign to support women candidates standing for parliamentary and local offices. The campaign was a partial success: a record 304 women competed in the parliamentary race and forty-four women were elected, compared to 262 women candidates and thirty-two women elected in 2014. Under the banner Youth Decide, CSOs such as YAS, YONECO, Network for Youth Development, and Young Politicians Union developed a youth manifesto, which they presented to all major political parties in a campaign for youth-centric policies. After the media reported on numerous government corruption scandals, CSOs such as YAS, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and HRDC organized demonstrations against financial abuse, which they argued benefited the ruling party by financing electoral campaigns and rewarding party loyalists. CSOs offered moral support to the Office of the Ombudsman, which took two principal secretaries to court for their roles in the so-called Tractorgate scandal, which involved the sale to influential politicians of government tractors meant for local farmers.

In the second half of 2019, HRDC took center stage in protesting the mismanagement of the general elections by organizing multiple nationwide demonstrations and vigils at strategically selected government sites. Thousands of Malawians from different backgrounds joined these protests, which continued throughout the year. The president did not act on protesters' calls to oust electoral commissioners, but the campaign for electoral justice maintained its momentum and became a symbol of the struggle for a better Malawi. A survey conducted by Afrobarometer in November 2019 found that 61 percent of Malawians considered the HRDC-led demonstrations justified.

In 2019, a group of CSOs operating under the banner of the Civil Society Platform on Governance lobbied the parliament to allocate funds for activities to protect people with albinism in accordance with the National Action Plan on Persons with Albinism, which was launched in 2018. The government responded by allocating MWK 400 million (approximately \$545,000) in the 2019–20 national budget to implement the plan. The Association of People with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) lobbied successfully for the appointment of a commission of inquiry to investigate the market in body parts of people with albinism and obtained the release of MWK 3.1 billion (approximately \$4.2 million) to implement provisions in the National Action Plan on Persons with Albinism over a four-year period. In a separate action, the Malawi Health Equity Network successfully lobbied to recruit more 3,000 nurses, doctors, pharmacists, and ward attendants for government health facilities across the country.

CSOs' involvement in formal and informal policy making increased in 2019, in part because of improved networking, which allowed organizations to share information and participate in policy-making processes in a coordinated way. However, CSO networking suffered a major blow with the establishment of breakaway networks in 2019, which deprived CSOs of the opportunity to speak with one voice and exacerbated competition among policy-oriented CSOs, especially if they were funded by different donors. For example, in the post-election period, a new grouping called Forum for Concerned Women Association (FCWA) organized demonstrations defending the MEC chairperson, whose ouster was demanded by a coalition of governance and human rights CSOs led by HRDC. The formation of smaller consortia focused on specific issues also led to competition for donor resources and the attention of policymakers in 2019. Political parties, especially the ruling DPP, took advantage of CSOs' lack of coordination to create confusion by creating or backing organizations that supported the government. For example, the leadership of the Forum for National Development (FND) spoke out regularly against HRDC and other CSOs that were critical of government actions and lobbied for the removal of the HRDC chairperson from the board of MESN.

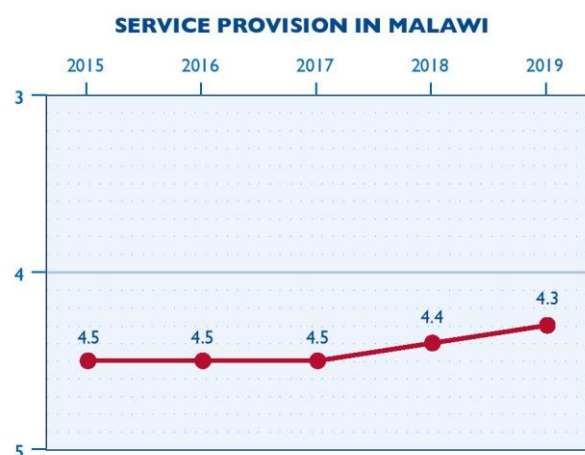
Most CSOs do not invest in research because of a lack of funding or a failure to appreciate its value. As a result, they are unable to engage in evidence-based policy making. CSOs that have empirical data often gather their information through participatory methods from local communities, and thus it is too localized to apply to issues of national interest.

CSOs' efforts to improve governance are often derailed by the slow pace of institutions mandated to investigate and prosecute financial injustices, such as the Anti-Corruption Bureau and Financial Intelligence Bureau. These agencies complain that they have inadequate resources to operate effectively, but CSOs charge that they are selective in their choice of cases and do not give sufficient attention to cases involving politically connected individuals.

Instead of taking a proactive approach to legislation affecting the sector in 2019, CSOs largely maintained a reactive approach. For example, following the government's decision to introduce a carbon tax in the 2019 budget, CSOs, led by the Center for Environmental Policy and Advocacy, questioned the legality of the new tax and lobbied

unsuccessfully against it. CSOs must now pay the carbon tax. After CONGOMA obtained an injunction against the hike in registration fees and CHRR obtained an injunction against the NGO Amendment Bill in 2018, CSOs engaged with the NGO Board and the Ministry of Gender to resolve the disagreements in 2019.

SERVICE PROVISION: 4.3



There was a slight improvement in CSO service provision in 2019. The choice of services provided by CSOs is influenced largely by donors, which, in an effort to avoid accusations by the government of political interference, usually focus on “soft” themes, such as health care, civic education, climate change, and agriculture. This dynamic brings into question the responsiveness of services provided by CSOs, as well as the claimed participatory and bottom-up nature of the methods used to involve constituents.

Nevertheless, in 2019, CSOs engaged in two major service-provision campaigns that responded to urgent community needs. Following cyclone Idai, which affected about 700,000 people, both international and domestic CSOs supported the Department of Disaster

Management Affairs (DoDMA) in delivering a well-coordinated range of services. CSOs joined forces with the government to distribute hygiene kits containing essential items, such as water buckets, laundry soap, food, tents, and temporary housing. Organizations taking part in this effort included CONGOMA, Médecins Sans Frontières, Save the Children, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Church and Society, Catholic Commission of Development in Malawi, Tithandizane Youth Support Organization, and Reach Out and Touch. Despite DoDMA’s coordinating role, government officials raised concerns that some CSOs were limiting the effectiveness of relief interventions in bypassing official structures and duplicating efforts and costs.

CSOs also played an active role during the 2019 elections. The MEC accredited 121 CSOs to conduct civic and voter education activities. However, funding challenges prevented most accredited CSOs from fulfilling this role, except for organizations with external funding, such as MESN, NICE, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Women Legal Resources Center, and Center for Multiparty Democracy.

CSOs provide goods and services to their constituencies and clientele without discrimination, although resource constraints sometimes limit their targeted audiences. A few CSOs must reach out to specific clientele carefully to avoid victimizing their clients. For instance, CEDEP took a discreet approach to working with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex community because of cultural and religious sensitivities in Malawi.

CSOs usually provide their services free of charge, since they are expected to serve vulnerable and poor communities. CSOs sometimes sign agreements with partners to meet the costs of service provision. For example, the Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) signed a service-level agreement with the government so that CHAM hospitals could provide free maternal health services to local communities, with the government covering the costs. World Vision Malawi signed agreements with community members, who were sponsored for teacher training provided they teach in local schools after completing their education.

The government typically expresses appreciation for essential services provided by CSOs in areas such as health care and education, indicating that it regards them as “true” partners in promoting the welfare of Malawi’s people.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.4

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector in Malawi was unchanged in 2019. CSOs' need for information was generally satisfied through institutions with libraries and information centers, such as the Malawi National Library Service and NICE. Thanks to the government's initiative to establish telecenters, which provide internet and related services to rural communities, district-based CSOs and CBOs had better access to online information in 2019.

The most prominent local grantmaker is the Tilitonse Foundation, which is funded by a consortium of donors that includes the Norwegian embassy, DFID, and EU. In 2019, Tilitonse supported CSOs' projects in urban governance and management, local governance, and building and strengthening active citizenship. Tilitonse Foundation also conducted informational sessions in major cities and posted calls for proposals on its website. However, these informational sessions did not benefit most CBOs, since they usually did not have funding for travel and internet access.

The lack of trust among Malawian CSOs usually prevents them from sharing information and working together systematically. In addition, CSO leaders that split their time between leading their parent organizations and their coalitions face the challenge of advancing the strategic plans of two bodies that are not always pushing in the same direction. For example, HRDC leaders were accused of focusing more on the HRDC agenda in 2019 at the expense of the strategic plans of their respective organizations. Successful networks such as the CSEC and CISANET provide their members with technical support on projects they are implementing, lobby on their behalf, and vouch for their credibility when seeking funds from donors. CONGOMA coordinates and promotes the interests of CSOs and interfaces with the government on CSO governance issues.

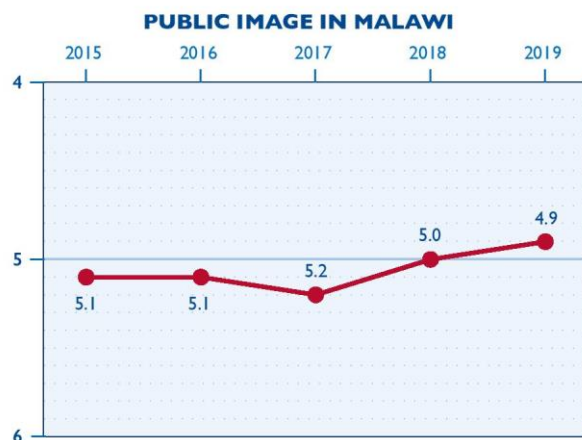
Donors often provide training in line with projects that they support and sponsor general trainings on topics such as organizational structure, financial management, and communications. CSOs feel that donors prefer to work with organizations that already have the capacity that they seek, thereby creating a situation in which it is unclear whether CSOs should expect to be given support to develop their capacity or should develop their capacity to receive support. CSOs that are well resourced sometimes hire external trainers with specialized knowledge, while other CSOs conduct internal workshops in which staff members pass on their knowledge to other staff. In 2019, however, CSOs initiated limited training because of financial constraints.

CSOs cooperated with other sectors on various fronts in 2019. A network of nine CSOs and four media houses formed to manage the presidential debates. CSOs cooperated with the government and businesses through sector and technical working groups established to support the implementation of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. For instance, CISANET was engaged in deliberations of the Agriculture Sector Working Group.



PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.9

The public image of Malawian CSOs improved slightly in 2019. While state media coverage of CSOs was mostly negative, private media offered generally good reviews of CSOs and their activities. Because of their limited access to public media platforms, CSOs relied mostly on private media to reach large audiences. During the 2019 elections, CSOs in the governance sector focused more on obtaining coverage of their press conferences than of their project activities. Their success in attracting coverage, which came mostly from radio and television, usually depended on their ability and willingness to pay for the placement of press releases and direct payments to journalists to attend press conferences. Other costs included travel and meals for the staff of media houses attending the meetings.



Public perceptions of CSOs were generally positive in 2019. For example, many people responded enthusiastically to the protests organized by HRDC and had positive views of CSOs' role in fighting corruption. In fact, a national survey conducted by the Institute of Public Opinion and Research in April 2019 found that CSO leaders were highly rated to lead the fight against corruption. At the same time, certain negative perceptions of CSOs persisted, usually reflecting political divisions. Part of the public saw certain CSOs as anti-government or pro-opposition and took part in demonstrations and press conference supporting the ruling party.

This division was encouraged by the president and senior government officials, who accused CSOs that were

critical of the administration of being pro-opposition or appendages of the donor community. The government sometimes sought to discredit the activities of governance CSOs by labelling them "anti-government" and "anti-development." At the same time, the government depicted service-providing organizations as model CSOs. Since service provision is mostly implemented by international CSOs, they were generally perceived as pro-government, while Malawian CSOs, which make up the bulk of advocacy and governance organizations, were assumed to be anti-government. Officials from the Directorate of Public Sector Reforms and Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare mobilized ruling-party supporters to demonstrate in support of the MEC commissioners when CSOs called for their ouster. FND, a pro-government CSO, issued several press statements attacking governance CSOs and their leaders. The deliberate campaign by the state to damage CSOs' reputations undermined their ability to access donor funding.

The private sector tends to perceive CSOs as partners able to offer good results and visibility while meeting community needs. Businesses seem to recognize that they need to go through CSOs if they are to have an impact in local communities, since they do not have effective structures that allow them to work with communities directly.

CSOs publicize their activities and share information with other organizations and their constituents by means such as pullouts in daily and weekend newspapers showcasing their achievements. In 2019, CSOs publicizing their activities on radio and television included CEDEP, YAS, Malawi Human Rights Resource Center, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Plan Malawi, and Church and Society.

CSOs' self-regulatory efforts in 2019 included the maintenance of records of meetings of management and boards. CONGOMA continued to serve as the self-regulatory platform for CSOs, although its ability to fulfil this role was limited by a lack of capacity, including insufficient funding and staffing challenges. Some CSOs publish annual reports, especially if they are required by their donors.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.

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