

①MALAWI Civil Society in a
Democracy: The NGO's Role as Advocate,
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*National Democratic
Institute for
International
Affairs*

**Civil Society in a Democracy:
The NGO's Role as Advocate**

*A Report of the Proceedings of a
CONGOMA/NDI Conference for
Nongovernmental Organizations*

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**Civil Society in a Democracy:
The NGO's Role as Advocate**

CONFERENCE REPORT

*Sponsored by CONGOMA and NDI
Malawi Institute of Management
October 25-27, 1995
Lilongwe, Malawi*

Attachments: 1) Agenda 2) NGO Questionnaire; 3) Evaluation Form

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ken, Jean, Pat K., SAT
FROM: Traci Cook
DATE: December 3, 1995
SUBJ: NGO Advocacy Conference

SUMMARY

From October 25-27, 1995, NDI Malawi and the Council for Nongovernmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA) jointly sponsored a conference for leaders of indigenous NGOs in Malawi entitled, "Civil Society in a Democracy: The NGO's Role as Advocate." The conference was the result of a concern, expressed by CONGOMA to NDI, that NGOs did not understand their role as advocates in civil society and also lacked the skills to effectively access and influence government. Although NDI Malawi normally works with democracy and governance NGOs, the participants for this conference were drawn primarily from the development community to stress the importance of the participation of all NGOs in policy advocacy. In order to make the conference as relevant as possible to the Malawi situation, NDI invited Members of Parliament, members of local government, journalists and principal secretaries from various ministries to address the group and to begin a dialogue between these representatives of various institutions and NGOs. Dr. Katini Ombaka, a member of Kenya Nongovernmental Council, gave the keynote address and led two working groups. Forty-four NGO representatives attended the conference.

BACKGROUND

There are currently about 150 registered NGOs in Malawi--relatively few compared with other countries in the region. Many of those NGOs are affiliated with international or religious organizations. The few indigenous NGOs who are not affiliated with these groups are new and relatively weak. In general, NGOs are just beginning to emerge from the legacy of a political system that discouraged consultation and participation by NGOs and weakened civil society in general. During the one-party era, it was extremely difficult to obtain registration as an NGO and those that did were subject to intense scrutiny and control by the government. The one party system was very effective in conditioning NGOs to be cautious of any activity which could be viewed as political, and therefore NGOs have developed few skills to access government and affect policy-making.

While the new democratically elected government officially supports the proliferation of NGOs, in practice many of the attitudes from the past prevail. Many government officials see NGOs as a nuisance with little value, and few NGOs push for input into government policy into their areas of interest. The majority of NGOs who are engaged in delivering health, education or agricultural services do not see it as their role to influence the government decision-making process. In general, NGOs react negatively to activities which could be viewed as "political" and very few see it as one of their roles to be a watchdog of the government.

OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of the conference was to give Malawian NGOs a broader definition of the role of NGOs and civil society in general in a democracy. With this information and with specific instruction on how to access the decision-making process in Malawi, NDI and CONGOMA hoped to empower the NGOs, both democracy and governance NGOs and development NGOs, to become more active participants in the democratic process.

In designing the program, NDI and CONGOMA hoped to achieve the following objectives:

- o educate NGOs on their critical role as advocates in civil society;
- o impart skills which will allow the NGOs to become effective advocates;
- o promote the development of advocacy practices that permit the increased and direct participation of civic organizations at all level of government;
- o facilitate a continuing dialogue between government officials and civic organizations; and
- o encourage communication and cooperation between the nascent civic organizations in Malawi.

To accomplish these goals, NDI Malawi invited an international trainer to lead the conference and to share the experience of NGO development in another African country. Equally important, however, was our decision to make the conference as relevant and as concrete as possible by devoting almost an entire day of the meeting to the Malawi-specific government situation. As a result, over 13 Malawian government officials and journalists participated in the program.

PROGRAM PREPARATIONS

Because working with development NGOs was a new area for NDI Malawi and because very little information exists on NGOs in Malawi, NDI put a lot of effort into preparing for the conference. We met extensively with our partner in this project, CONGOMA, to get their input into the agenda and to benefit from their experience of coordinating the NGO community.

The most important preparation, however, proved to be the development of a questionnaire which explored past and present NGO contact with various levels of government. The questionnaire was distributed to 70 NGOs, with over fifty responding. The form required NGOs to specify the areas in which they worked, to list the frequency of government contact, to detail their contacts at all levels of government, to describe any efforts to influence governmental policy decisions and finally to outline future policy advocacy projects the group plans to undertake. The results were revealing. We found that, generally, the frequency of government contact at some level was greater than we anticipated, but that the efforts were

rarely successful or rarely focused on influencing key policy decisions. The exception was NGOs involved in environmental matters, where the government has invited NGO participation and has treated NGOs as true partners in programmatic areas. In other areas, however, there was a general expression of frustration by NGOs who had tried to initiate any type of relationship with government. On the questionnaire, NGOs described what they perceive as an unwillingness of government officials to have NGOs participate in policy decisions in any meaningful way. "We've had a lot of problems getting information...there is a lack of interest on the part of government to work with NGOs," one NGO noted. Nevertheless, many NGOs stated that their relationship with district and local level officials was good, and they expressed a desire to have a better relationship with officials at all levels government. Almost all noted their desire to influence government policy in their sectors in the future.

We prepared a summary of all of the responses to the questionnaire and forwarded this to our international trainer. The summary was also provided to CONGOMA to become part of their permanent research on NGOs. It would have been useful to provide the results to the Malawian government officials as well, but there was some concern on the part of NGOs about the confidentiality of their responses. In the future, we will work to solve this problem so that all participants can benefit from our research. Nevertheless, the use of the questionnaire was instrumental in shaping the agenda for the conference. We saw from the responses that it was very important to bring NGOs and government officials together to encourage a continuing dialogue and so we made the decision to devote even more time to this part of the program. It was clear too that, when asked, NGOs indicated their eagerness to embark upon policy advocacy activities, but few could list the actual policies or the decision making processes they would like to affect. This suggested a fundamental lack of understanding of basic elements of policy advocacy and a limited view of the role of NGOs. In response, we devoted two plenary sessions to exploring the role of NGOs in Malawi and to defining and describing policy advocacy. In addition, we decided to focus the working groups on the most basic elements of advocacy, leaving more advanced discussion for a later time.

The questionnaire also influenced the development of materials for the conference. We collected various advocacy materials from the region and the U.S. which we deemed relevant based on the responses. We knew too from the questionnaire and from our own experiences in Malawi that very few people had access to information or knowledge of government in general and the legislative process in particular. Therefore, we devoted a great deal of time before the conference to developing such materials. We created a booklet which contained home addresses and home and business phone numbers for all Members of Parliament; addresses, ministers, principal secretaries, phone numbers and facsimile numbers for all ministries; mailing addresses, physical addresses, editors, reporters and their beats, deadlines, advertising rates, phone numbers and facsimile numbers for all media outlets in Malawi. The booklet was received enthusiastically by the participants, and we have had many requests for additional copies. The severity of the lack of access to even this simple information was underscored when requests for copies of the booklet came from the Malawian government officials who were themselves listed in the booklet, including principal secretaries and Members of Parliament.

The more substantive materials we developed for the conference focused on the legislative process in Malawi. Those materials began with simple language instructions on interaction with

Members of Parliament and included, "Writing to Your Member of Parliament," "Contacting Your Member of Parliament by Phone" and "Meeting with Your Member of Parliament." We also developed a "How Laws Are Made" question and answer guide which described the law-making process at the executive and legislative level; a one-page description of the role of NGOs in the law-making process; charts on the structure of government; and instructions on how to submit a public petition to Parliament. Again, these materials were very well-received by the participants in the conference. When we had a Ministry of Justice official present the "How Laws Are Made" pamphlet, she was deluged with questions, indicating that, for most, this material was new and exciting. Because of this, we are exploring the possibility of assisting a local NGO in expanding the legislative materials and creating one pamphlet on the legislative process in Malawi.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The conference focused exclusively on policy advocacy for NGOs, but in order to establish a context for advocacy in Malawi we began the conference with a more basic discussion of civil society in a democracy. The number of NGOs has been steadily increasing in Malawi since the country's first multiparty elections and although this is one sign of a vibrant sector, there were other indications that NGOs, both existing and newly created ones, were not adjusting quickly to their role in the new political dispensation. NGOs rarely comment on legislation or have any interaction with MPs, do not use the media often or effectively, and in general have poor or nonexistent relationships with the ministries. In some areas there was a sense that "development is what we do, not policy." With this reality, it was clear that while NGOs may have been providing important services, that was, as one participant said, "only half their job," and it did not address their absolutely critical role as part of civil society which is a partner and critic of the government in a democracy. With CONGOMA, NDI Malawi designed the conference to introduce to NGOs, for the first time in Malawi, the concept of full participation in policy decision-making not only as an activity which was important in a democracy, but also as a vital part of their development programs.

Opening Plenaries

Dr. Katini Ombaka, a medical doctor who gave up her practice to join an NGO to fight for women's medical rights, was the featured international trainer at the conference. Dr. Ombaka is a member of the Kenya Nongovernmental Council and had extensive experience in lobbying elected officials to address the concerns of the Council's members. She was chosen by the UNDP to represent the Council at the 1995 United Nations Conference on Beijing.

Dr. Ombaka kicked off the conference with a keynote address entitled, "Role of an NGO in a Democracy," a topic which our research with NGOs had proven would be critical to establishing a base upon which to launch the policy advocacy concept. In her speech, Dr. Ombaka gave a historical perspective on the work of NGOs and catalogued the transformation of NGOs in the third world. She described how NGOs originated primarily as affiliates of churches and how they evolved into performing development micro-projects and providing humanitarian aid. However, recently, Ombaka noted, NGOs in some third world countries had demonstrated the ability to act politically and to influence political and economic relationships.

Ombaka indicated that she saw this as a natural and critical step in the development of indigenous NGOs. She warned the NGOs present, though, that to take this step NGOs in Malawi must address the issue of civic empowerment and their role in democracy and governance. Throughout her talk, Ombaka stressed the importance of NGOs maintaining their independence and building coalitions, "unity in diversity, strength in numbers," within the NGO community. She concluded her address with a story about a doctor who was spending all of his time treating people who were becoming ill because of a bad water supply and who decided one day to hang up his stethoscope and travel to the capital to try to get government to respond to the health crisis. Ombaka followed the story by saying, "NGOs are down stream workers as far as policy is concerned. Their achievements could be cancelled in a day by bad policies and unjust laws. NGOs must therefore include elements of advocacy in all their work. NGOs should become aware of the dangers of being passive observers even as policy is being made that will affect them in its formulation and implementation."

From the response of the audience, it was clear that Ombaka had excited the group. In the comments following her speech, the participants were trying to reconcile their traditional way of operating with what Ombaka called the duty to influence policy. Some accepted the instruction and indicated their agreement and willingness to place great emphasis on policy advocacy in the future. Others, while accepting this duty superficially, complained that it was "duty" of the government officials to know what was best for the country. When Ombaka specifically referred to the "duty" of NGOs to educate MPs on their issues, there was an initial outcry with many NGO representatives complaining that MPs were paid to know their jobs and why should NGOs do it for them. This was quite a shocking statement and an indication on how far the conference would need to go to change attitudes developed over thirty years. However, Ombaka adeptly brought the discussion back to the idea of policy advocacy as essential for development work, giving examples in Kenya where years of good work had been destroyed by policies into which NGOs had no input. She also assured the audience that "lobbying" was not new to Africa or alien to African culture. In fact, she noted, community input, compromise and consensus was not uncommon at the village level.

Having established the parameters for the discussion, the second plenary, also led by Ombaka, focused on trying to impart technical information and concrete skills in the area of policy advocacy. Ombaka began by defining policy advocacy in very basic terms, "it is the means by which NGOs can influence government policy decisions," and "it is efforts which are designed to influence those in power to adopt policies which aid the NGOs' constituencies." She then tried to diffuse the notion that politics is only for politicians by instructing the group that there was politics in issues as well as political parties. The last half of Ombaka's presentation focused on describing the various components of an advocacy campaign: choosing an issue, developing a strategy, targeting partners, creating a message, using the media, devising tactics and building coalitions. Again, the question and answer period was spirited. Some comments focused on what has been, at times, a very divisive atmosphere within the community. Ombaka urged the NGOs to move beyond this perhaps necessary but unproductive stage of NGO development for the good of all. Others seized upon some of the ideas she had presented, such as the use of the media or influencing decision-makers, but complained that access to either group was very difficult to impossible. Still, many were intrigued by possibility of gaining

greater access to and influence within government if not individually, then in a coalition with other NGOs and were eager to head into the working groups.

To set the stage for the working groups in which we would address specific elements of advocacy in the Malawi context, the third plenary was chaired by 1602 representatives from the Malawi NGO community, one international and one national NGO. Their topic was "NGOs in Malawi: Who are they? What is their future? Who do they represent?" The presenters cited the statistics which supported a slow, but steady rise in the number of NGOs. They also were candid about the situation in which most NGOs had developed in a one party system, but the representative from the international NGO reiterated Ombaka's call to break from the past and to be true participants in civil society. Both representatives decried the lack of receptiveness on the part of government to continuous NGO involvement in decision-making. They called on all the NGOs present to make a concerted effort to improve their relationships with government as the only avenue for input into long-term policies. Finally, the presenters outlined the efforts currently underway to develop an NGO law which will treat all NGOs equally. Following the representatives' speeches, most of the questions by the audience focused on the efforts of the Malawi NGO community coordinating body, CONGOMA. There was a call for more activity on the part of the organization to develop a vision for the future for NGOs in Malawi and to explore greater coordination by sector among NGOs. Some participants suggested that the NGO law would be an appropriate issue upon which an initial coordination effort could be made, with each NGO lobbying in their respective sectors. The remaining questions and comments centered on the cooperation, or lack thereof, of the government at various levels and in various sectors in NGO work. From the comments, this session appeared successful in giving participants ownership and in convincing them that policy advocacy was vital in the Malawi context.

Plenaries with Malawian Media and Governmental Representatives

The second day of the conference was devoted almost exclusively to the Malawian situation. Both in written and verbal comments after the conference, participants most often cited the dialogue initiated between media and governmental officials as the biggest success. In fact, all the participants declared their appreciation to NDI and CONGOMA for bringing the NGOs closer to "the real action" as one person said, and all vowed to continue the dialogue long after the conference. "They did not know us and we did not know them. These sessions made it possible for all sides to understand each other's point of view. It narrowed the gap between us," one person noted. Another said, "I found this part of the program exciting and the discussion very frank. I think there was a productive dialogue between NGOs and media and government officials, and I think these officials showed interest which I hope will continue on our dialogue." As the last comment indicated, the interest expressed in this dialogue was not limited to the NGO representatives. Almost every media and government official who acted as a presenter in the proceedings indicated their desire also to develop better mechanisms for communication between NGOs and the media and government. This is a hopeful sign, and at minimum the conference served the very useful purpose of providing a forum where introductions could be made, suspicions on all sides could be aired and exchange of ideas begun.

The media session was headed by three veteran reporters: the editor of the leading independent daily newspaper, the correspondent for Channel Africa and Reuters Wire Service

and a lead reporter for the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. All of the presenters delivered hard but fair critiques of what they viewed as the generally lackluster performance of NGOs with the media. They called up one-by-one the NGOs' inadequacies in not knowing how to deal with the media: not knowing what constitutes news, not respecting deadlines, not understanding that a newspaper has limited space, not submitting timely requests for coverage, not providing background information, failing to understand what makes good radio coverage and not aggressively pursuing coverage. While the media representatives were sensitive to the lack of resources within the NGO community, they urged all of the NGOs to assign one person the duties of handling the press as the single most important avenue to improving press relations. They indicated that even a person who focuses only part time on media would help the organization immensely in collecting and distributing background information, press packets and photographs. Not surprisingly the NGOs responded rather vigorously to the criticism. Most admitted that the media representatives were correct in their assessment, but the majority still felt the fault fell primarily with the media not NGOs. There was, again, the sense that this was the media's job and that NGOs should not do it for them. While this opinion held throughout most of the discussion, the media representatives were quite skilled in responding by saying that if that was the attitude, the coverage would probably not change, and therefore, NGOs would be failing to maximize the media in their work. In the end some participants admitted the value of having the frank discussion because "we now know better what to do with the media."

The session with the principal secretaries was not as lively, but perhaps more important. With all legislation originating from cabinet at the moment, most policy decisions have their beginning in the ministries. Principal secretaries are the senior civil servants in those ministries. Each of the presenters began by declaring their belief that NGOs were an integral part of the development process and by welcoming future interaction with the NGO community. While perhaps only lip service to a certain extent, this was still an important statement to be made by the representatives of the ministries and an important one to be heard by NGOs. Each presenter also listed the past and current activities in their respective ministries where the NGO community was involved. It was clear from this part of the presentation pointed out, though, that the ministries rely much more heavily on international NGO assistance than on indigenous groups. This prompted several questions from the audience and admission from the presenters that more help from indigenous groups would be sought if they could meet accountability and transparency requirements. On the whole, the exchange between the PSs and the NGOs was rather formal and did not always mirror the frank discussion throughout the rest of the conference. Nevertheless, it was critical that indigenous NGOs and the ministries make the first step toward building a mutually beneficial relationship.

If the PS session was a bit stilted, the session with Members of Parliament was raucous. The MPs performed superbly, giving animated, but very useful presentations on the role of NGOs in contributing to the legislative process. The panel for this discussion was made up of one MP from each of the parliamentary parties and a legal drafter from the Ministry of Justice. The ministry representative presented the "How Laws Are Made" pamphlet which was given to participants upon registration. Her skill and knowledge were immediately evident to those in attendance and the participants questioned her extensively, obviously thirsting for any information to demystify the law-making process, which in Malawi has a very complicated executive branch component. Many questions focused on how and when NGOs could have input

into laws that were being drafted. Other participants requested that the government, both the executive branch and Parliament, work on better ways to keep the NGO community informed on pending legislation and demanded that the government honor the twenty-one day rule which requires that bills be published for that amount of time before they are presented to Parliament. The MPs of all three parties were excellent in their admonitions and encouragement to NGOs to become actively involved in the legislative process. One of the most revealing moments came when one participant thanked the MPs for their comments and noted that before NGOs had been afraid to approach MPs and it was still hard for them to get over that psychologically. Each MP was uproariously funny in their responses which helped ease the tension and which established a rapport that is sure to last beyond the end of the conference. The session ended with each of the MPs personally inviting the NGOs to visit them in Parliament and asking them to be active in submitting their concerns to them and to Parliament as a whole now and in the future when a stronger committee system is established where NGOs will have easier access.

The session with representatives of local government completed our attempt to expose NGOs to the media and to each level of government. Local government is the level upon which most of the indigenous NGOs operate, so the discussion focused on how to improve the relationship rather than how to establish one which was the case with the other sessions. A prominent District Commissioner (districts are Malawi's primary administrative boundaries) and a chief chaired the session. Traditional authorities, while not elected, play important roles in the various development committees and as advisors to the DCs. The discussion on all sides centered around the need for better communication. The DC expressed his irritation at NGOs who embark upon development work without coordinating with his office; the chief indicated that since traditional authorities are the primary governing entities at the village level, prior consultation with them was essential to effective development; and NGOs told stories of long and unnecessary delays in initiating development projects because of lack of response by the DC's office and by traditional authorities. The session was useful in helping the NGOs place all of their problems on the table and in allowing the DC to invite them to be more active participants in the various development committees as a way to alleviate some of the frustration.

Working Groups

Working groups were interspersed throughout the program to provide practical guidance on many of the issues we were discussing in the plenary sessions. After hearing the discussion in the plenaries, we decided to narrow the focus of the groups to only the most important and relevant points of advocacy. The first group required each of the NGO representatives to participate in a roundtable which would identify and develop a message for an advocacy campaign. This proved to be one of the most popular exercises of the conference. Participants were enthusiastic and were truly challenged by the task. In their concluding remarks in the session, NGOs took with much greater weight their responsibility to carefully identify, research and present the issue upon which they want to influence policy. Comment after comment noted that the participants had realized the difficulty of that task and of developing a coherent and effective message. The NGOs responded almost as enthusiastically to the working group on compromise and coalition building. From this group came the proposal that CONGOMA set up networks by sector. Evaluating another group, participants noted that while the information presented during the "Generating Public/Grassroots Support," session was interesting, there

could be complications in trying to implement the lessons presented in the Malawi context. The final two groups presented a wrap-up and rehashing of the elements of advocacy which was a special request of the participants and a preparatory group (for later sessions) which outlined the major problems the NGOs faced with each level of government and the media.

EVALUATION

The staff evaluation of the success of the conference in achieving our stated objectives is given throughout this report. We also developed an evaluation form for participants to determine the level of comprehension of the material presented; to measure the value the participants placed on the training they received; and to direct future NDI activities in this area. Thirty-six of the 44 participants completed the evaluation.

Overall, the participants had high praise for the conference, both organizationally and substantively. "The program was well-planned and covered skills that NGOs in Malawi desperately need," one person noted. Another praised the general atmosphere of the conference, "the debates were free and very educational." One participant marveled at the "spirit of openness with three different parties sitting together addressing the conference and answering questions," proof that the actual practice of democracy is still new and startling to some. Perhaps the most important accolade came from the participant who cited NDI's role in facilitating (or in some cases initiating) a relationship between the nascent NGO community and government and the media. "I am very thankful for this workshop for breaking the ice between NGOs, and media, the ministries, the MPs and other government officials. This marriage should continue." The only universal criticism, indeed practically the only criticism, was the call for more time to be devoted to each of the topics. A full week seminar was the request of most.

When participants were asked to list the most useful lessons learned from the conference, it was clear that our decision to include government officials to address the Malawi-specific situation was a success. The vast majority of participants listed those discussions as the most significant and educational. Some marveled at how far the session went in helping them to feel comfortable approaching government officials, "we can now approach MPs without fear." Others placed greater importance on what they learned. Those participants noted that the "Overview of the Legislative Process" session was the best "because NGOs were ignorant of the legislative process and therefore were suspicious of what the politicians were doing," and "because if you want to change laws, you must know how it works." As a secondary lesson from the conference, participants often focused on what they learned about coalition building and clearly saw it as the most likely avenue for success in the policy advocacy efforts. Participants indicated that they also left the conference with a much stronger sense that it was "important for us as NGOs to be good advocates in order to be an effective voice for the rural poor."

In answer to the question whether it was appropriate, at times, for NGOs to criticize government, the answer was a resounding "yes" from almost all participants, suggesting that the conference was a success in communicating this idea. "If the policy does not suit our targets [in terms of development], we have the right to say so," was the response of one participant. Another noted that criticism could take place even through the media. Still, there was evidence

that this idea is new and some NGOs noted that they would rather not criticize the government publicly or that criticism should be "diplomatic" and done through committees rather than individually.

Participants cited the "Identifying and Focusing on an Issue" and the "Compromise and Consensus Building" working groups as the most useful. It was evident that the practical exercise of identifying an issue was very revealing to the participants. One wrote, "this exercise was not easy, but it is important because that is where everything starts." Others called the session an "eye-opener" because it taught them that "if you cannot identify the issue and focus on it, you don't have a reason for advocacy." Most commented that after the session they understood the importance of being fully prepared before launching an advocacy campaign. On the coalition building workshop, the comments focused on networking. Many NGOs saw an opportunity through the conference to establish formal and informal networks within sectors. Most saw it as critical, citing "a concerted effort" as necessary for real influence on government policy. The only working group which came in for mild criticism was the one focused on generating grassroots support. While all saw it as an important component of advocacy, some were concerned about how to truly mobilize the grassroots in the Malawi situation. One person summed up some of the group's feelings by saying, "this will be most difficult under current levels of poverty. It will be hard to convince the masses to participate without compensation and it will also be hard to convince them that they have something to offer to such an effort."

The amount of comments we received on the materials we produced for conference was overwhelming and unique from any other conferences we have done in the past. Many comments verged on an emotional reaction usually reserved for evaluating oral presentations. Every participant indicated that materials were "very useful." One participant referred to the contact information for government and media, saying the NDI document "admirably replaced the telephone book." Others noted that they will use the materials when they want to access and understand government, "For the first time, I came home and felt good that I knew the legislative process, especially the formation of bills." All of the comments were an indication that the time and effort spent by NDI Malawi in producing the materials was appreciated.

Finally, the evaluations of the participants gave high ratings to our one international trainer, Dr. Katini Ombaka. Words most often used to describe her and her presentations were: eloquent, clear, calm, and intelligent. Many participants also noted that Ombaka was able to provide relevant examples from the Kenya situation and that she "knew what she was talking about." However, some male participants expressed mild displeasure with her response on questions regarding women's issues. Although Dr. Ombaka did not initiate the discussion, she felt obligated to respond to questions by female participants. Some male participants were unwilling to accept Dr. Ombaka's explanations of her view of equality for women and thus a few noted that she "didn't listen to our arguments with an open mind." This was an aside at the conference, however, and even participants who had this criticism thought she brought a unique and useful perspective to the discussions.

CONCLUSION AND FOLLOW-UP

While there is certainly more work to be done with policy advocacy and NGOs in Malawi, the conference had several significant successes and achieved, at minimum, the basic objectives we had set with our partner, CONGOMA. The progression of the debate during the conference made it clear that NGOs had a much better sense of policy advocacy and their role in civil society as advocates toward the end of the workshop. For example, the NGOs' initial reaction was to assert that it was government's role to know what policies were good for their constituents, but by the end of the conference, each NGO was attempting to identify and focus an issue within their sector upon which they would undertake an advocacy project. In fact, several NGOs were spearheading an effort during the conference to present a petition to Parliament on a piece of pending legislation. While it is more difficult to measure concretely the skills which NGOs take away from a conference like this, the evaluation forms indicate that certain basics which were not known were communicated clearly and that they will be of use to the NGOs in the future. Even relatively simple concepts which were presented--such as know your position, know whom to approach, know whom to choose as a partner--were appreciated and listed as important lessons learned from the conference.

NGOs were much more comfortable and confident about their role as advocates by the end of the conference. The dialogue between the government officials assisted the NGOs in feeling that they were equal partners with government in developing the nation. When asked on the evaluation forms what action the NGO would take in implementing what they had learned at the conference, it was evident that the conference was successful in not only promoting a dialogue between NGOs and government officials, but also in instilling a sense among the NGOs that they should directly participate in policy decisions. Many NGOs wrote that they would not hesitate to contact principal secretaries, MPs and other government officials on their future concerns. One participant noted, "we plan to bring our concerns to the government's attention through MPs, ministers, even their spouses, on issues where we need to see a change in policy."

NDI Malawi has chosen one democracy and governance NGO with which to work on establishing a better information system on pending legislation and policy decisions. In addition, although we do not regularly work with the development NGOs who were invited to this conference, we devised a question on the evaluation form which will determine future work with the participants. Each participant was asked to list a small advocacy projects with which they would like to have NDI's assistance. We are reviewing those requests currently and will determine which, if any, are appropriate. One almost unanimous request was that NDI and CONGOMA host a forum to continue the budding relationship between NGOs and MPs. The conference also suggested that CONGOMA convene a meeting twice a year on overall NGO strategy to tackle common issues/problems with the government. Pending CONGOMA's request, NDI may assist in organizing those meetings.

Civil Society in a Democracy: The NGO's Role as Advocate

Sponsored by CONGOMA and NDI
Malawi Institute of Management (MIM)
October 25-28, 1995

October 25, 1995

3:00-6:00 p.m. **Registration**
MIM Entrance

October 26, 1995

8:00-8:30 a.m. **Official Opening**

8:30-9:00 a.m. **Keynote: The Role of an NGO in a Democracy**
Plenary Session: MIM Auditorium
Dr. Katani Ombaka, Kenya Nongovernmental Council

9:00-10:00 a.m. **Policy Advocacy: The Definition, The Need,
The Key Components**
Panel Discussion: MIM Auditorium
Dr. Katani Ombaka

10:00-10:30 a.m. **Question & Answer**

10:30-11:30 a.m. **Tea Break**

11:00-Noon **NGOs in Malawi: Who are they? What is their
future? Who do they represent?**
Panel Discussion: MIM Auditorium
*Hestern Banda, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief; & Godfrey
Chisanthi, Christian Services Committee*

Noon-1:00 p.m. **Lunch**

1:00-3:00 p.m. **Working Group A: Identifying & Focusing
on an Issue**
MIM Room #: Lecture Room #1
Martine Renee Galloy

**Working Group B: Compromise & Consensus
Building**
MIM Room #: Lecture Room #2
Dr. Katani Ombaka

- 3:00-3:30 p.m. **Tea Break**
- 3:30-5:30 p.m. **Working Group C: Generating Public/Grassroots
Support**
MIM Room #: Lecture Room #1
Dr. Katani Ombaka
- Working Group D: Identifying & Focusing
on an Issue (cont.)**
MIM Room #: Lecture Room #2
Traci Cook
- 5:15-5:45 p.m. **Question & Answer/Close**
MIM Auditorium
Dr. Katani Ombaka & Traci Cook

October 27, 1995

- 8:00-9:15 a.m. **Working Group E: Common Problems/Goals
of NGOs**
MIM Room #: Lecture Room #1
Gillian Flies & Brent Preston
- Working Group F: Revisiting Advocacy**
MIM Room #: Lecture Room #2
Martine Renee Galloy
- 9:15-9:45 a.m. **Public Attention: Use of the Mass Media**
Panel Discussion: MIM Auditorium
*Martine Renee Galloy; Anderson Fumanlani, Reuters Wire Service;
Alfred Ntonga, Editor of The Nation; & Joel Nkhoma, Reporter
at the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation*
- 9:45-10:00 a.m. **Question & Answer**
- 10:00-10:30 a.m. **Tea Break**
- 10:30-11:30 p.m. **Working with the Executive Branch**
Panel Discussion: MIM Auditorium
*Lucious Chikuni, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Relief and
Rehabilitation; Esnat Kalyati, Principal Secretary of the Ministry
of Economic Planning and Development; Hannah Kwalewale,
Second Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Education; &
Dr. W.B. Mukiwa, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Health*

11:30-Noon	Question & Answer
Noon-1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00-2:30 a.m.	Overview of the Malawi Legislative Process & A Legislative View of the Role of NGOs Panel Discussion: MIM Auditorium <i>Louis Chimango, Member of Parliament; Francis Mpepho, Member of Parliament; Mponda Mkandawire, Member of Parliament and Minister of Works and Supplies; & Miriam Maluwa, attorney at the Ministry of Justice</i>
2:30-3:00 p.m.	Question & Answer
3:00-3:30 p.m.	Tea Break
3:30-4:30 p.m.	Working with Local Government Panel Discussion: MIM Auditorium <i>Lilongwe District Commissioner Mwanja & Chief Kaomba</i>
4:30-5:30 p.m.	Conclusion & Evaluation MIM Auditorium

NGO Conference on Policy Advocacy

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Council for Nongovernmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA) are co-sponsoring a policy advocacy training session for NGOs in late October. Policy advocacy is the process by which NGOs can influence decisions made by government at the executive, legislation and local government levels. In order to help us plan for the seminar, we would like for you to complete and return this questionnaire to our offices as soon as possible. Your effort will ensure that your concerns are incorporated into the seminar agenda. Please either mail for fax this document to: **NDI, Private Bag 38, Lilongwe; facsimile number 742 113.** If you have any questions, please call Traci Cook or Gillian Flies at 742 224. **Questionnaires should be returned in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided in this packet no later than Monday, October 9.**

Name of Organization: _____

Address: _____

Telephone/Fax Numbers: _____

Name of Person Completing Questionnaire: _____

Does your organization work with the government regularly?

Yes _____ No _____ Rarely _____

If so, how and in what areas?

What sector areas interest your organization the most? Mark all that apply.

Education _____ Health _____ Children's Issues _____

Human Rights _____ Transparency & Accountability _____

Issues that Affect the Disabled _____ Housing _____ Agriculture _____

Women's Rights _____ Worker's Rights _____ Rural Development _____

Environment _____ Freedom of the Press _____ Other (specify) _____

Please describe the areas you have highlighted in greater detail. For example if you chose health, please state what policy areas under health you are interested in, such as family planning, child survival, etc.

Members of Parliament: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?*

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

Senior civil servants in the Ministry in your sector: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?*

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

Members of the Cabinet: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?*

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

The President or the Office of the President: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?*

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

A District Councillor: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?*

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

Members of a District or Area Development Committee: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?*

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

Staff in an administrative or other government body: *How often have you contacted them, if ever?* Specify the body: _____

Once _____ Several Times _____ Often _____ Never _____

Please describe these contacts. How were they useful or not useful in obtaining the results you desired?

Have you ever influenced or tried to influence a policy decision made by any of the government bodies listed above?

Yes _____

No _____

If so, what was the result?

Has the government at any level ever consulted your organization on a policy decision?

Yes _____

No _____

If so, did you respond? Please describe the circumstances.

Does your organization have an immediate problem or concern about current government policy around which you would like to develop a plan to influence the government's decision on that policy? (One example would be a health NGO's concern that the government put more of its resources behind a health education campaign.)

Yes _____

No _____

If so, please describe that problem or concern.

Does your organization now receive, or has it in the past received, funding from the government?

Yes _____

No _____

If so, what type of funding?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. This document will help us shape an agenda which responds to your specific abilities and needs. Please do not hesitate to contact Traci Cook at NDI at 742 224 if you would like to have more input on the workshop agenda. We welcome your input.

Please enclose this questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope you were provided or if you have misplaced that envelope, please forward the questionnaire as soon as possible to:

**THE DIRECTOR
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE
PRIVATE BAG 38
LILONGWE**

Questionnaires are due in this office not later than Monday, October 9.

EVALUATION FORM

Civil Society in a Democracy: The NGO's Role as Advocate

To better plan our future work with NGOs, NDI would like to have your evaluation of the conference proceedings. Please be honest and elaborate on the reasons behind your opinion. The second part of the form is intended to record your recommendations to NDI for improvement and future training activities.

Please detail your overall impressions of the workshop. Be specific in your praises or criticisms.

List the three most useful lessons you learned from the conference.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

After hearing the presentations, do you believe your organization will undertake advocacy efforts which seek to influence the government? What will those efforts be?

Do you think it is appropriate for NGOs to criticize government policy decisions at times? Would your NGO ever publicly criticize a government policy? Explain your answer.

Do you feel that you understand the basic elements of policy advocacy? Elaborate on which you feel will be most useful to you or which you believe are most relevant in the Malawi context.

You attended four working group sessions on the basic elements of advocacy: Identifying & Focusing on an Issue; Compromise and Consensus Building; Generating Public/Grassroots Support; & Targeting--Who & How. Which group did you find most useful and why?

Which session was the least useful? Why?

Did you find the sessions with Malawian journalists & government officials useful? Please explain your answer in detail.

Which session with the government officials did you find most useful: Working with the Executive Branch, Overview of the Legislative Process, Working with Local Government? Describe your reasons.

Which of these sessions were the least useful? Why?

Do you feel that you better understand how to access the government? What part of the program assisted you in this regard—materials provided, discussions with government officials, information from international participants?

Do you feel there was a productive dialogue between NGOs and government officials at the conference? Do you feel this dialogue will continue?

Please record any comments you have on the working group entitled "Common Problems/Goals of NGOs."

Did you find the sector consultations and study groups useful? Why or why not?

Please rate the presentations given by the international participants on a scale of 1-10. The top rating is "1" and signifies that you felt the trainer was excellent and provided extremely helpful information to you. Ratings leading up to "10" signify that you felt the trainer was not as good and that the information was less helpful. Please explain your reasons for each rating.

Dr. Katani Ombaka: rating _____

Martine Renee Galloy: rating _____

Did you find the materials given to you at the beginning of the conference useful? Specifically, did any of the materials developed especially for Malawi, such as the media and governmental contacts or the "How Laws are Made" assist you in understanding how to better access government?

Recommendations

What type of training would you like for NDI and/or CONGOMA to conduct in the future?

What could assist you further in working with the government?

How could the conference have been improved?



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