



MALAWI

A STATEMENT BY
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GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI

at

The Hague Forum

The Hague, The Netherlands

8 -12 February, 1999

Mr President,

Distinguished delegates

Representatives of International Organisations and NGOs,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to begin by thanking the organisers of this Forum for the opportunity to address this august gathering. In my brief remarks I will address population and development issues in Malawi, which are typical not only of most other sub-Saharan African countries but also of many other developing countries.

Malawi has placed increasing importance to population issues over the past few years, and in particular since 1994 when our first democratically elected Government assumed office. Soon after the Government was voted into office, Malawi had the opportunity to participate in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) which was held in Cairo in September, 1994. I am proud to report that our unfailing commitment has yielded results and has been recognised and appreciated by international organisations and donor agencies.

Mr President, Malawi adopted a comprehensive National Population Policy in March, 1994. Immediately after ICPD, the policy was reviewed and was found to be consistent with the provisions of the Programme of Action. Hence, revisions to the Policy were not considered necessary and it was decided that the new initiatives and emphasis agreed upon at the ICPD could be incorporated into the Action Plan for the implementation of the Policy. The Policy and the subsequent Action Plan for its implementation have formed the pivot of Malawi's population programme.

This framework, together with the establishment of a formal capacity for population programme formulation, planning and implementation continues to provide an enabling environment for adhering to the ICPD Programme of Action. We have made all efforts to introduce changes recommended at the Cairo Conference. Our policies and plans have been aimed at promoting the integrated reproductive health culture, emphasising gender concerns in development and enhancing advocacy efforts to ensure widespread support for the implementation of the National Population Policy. In addition, population factors now receive considerable emphasis in all major policy and programme documents and have come to figure prominently in the Poverty Alleviation Programme which started in 1994. I am pleased to report that since 1996, the Government introduced a separate budget line for population co-ordination activities.

The implementation of the National Population Programme has been constrained by lack of trained personnel and weak institutional capacity. Related to this have been inadequate funds allocated to the implementing institutions. To-date, there are no institutional structures for co-ordinating the implementation of population activities at the district and local levels. Availability of desegregated demographic data necessary for district level planning has also been limited. The proposed Local Government Act which will facilitate the formation of District Assemblies which will be used to implement population activities. The 1998 Census is expected to remedy to a large extent the inadequacy of data. Current estimate puts the population of Malawi at 9.8 million as opposed to the projected (based on 1987 census) 11 million.

Mr President, great strides have been made in the area of Reproductive Health. A Reproductive Health Policy is currently under preparation. The Family Planning Policy and Contraceptive Guidelines which were adopted in 1992 were reviewed in 1996. The revision was aimed at liberalising family planning services to accommodate all individuals within the reproductive age group who need the services. The new contraceptive guidelines removed limitations on use of specific methods on the basis of criteria such as parity, age and marital status. The new Family Planning Policy also promotes new approaches for accessing and expanding family planning services such as Community Based Distribution of contraceptives and social marketing. In addition Family Planning has been integrated with STD/HIV/AIDS management and is being taught in all training institutions. A Safe Motherhood Plan of Action is being implemented. Following the adoption of the National Youth Policy in 1996, a Youth and Adolescent Programme for Reproductive Health has been put in place.

Awareness campaigns have succeeded in having the desired impact. Recent studies indicate that awareness of family planning methods is well over 90 per cent and the contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods has increased from 7 per cent in 1992 to 14 per cent in 1996. Malawi is facing a serious HIV/AIDS pandemic and a great deal of our financial and technical resources are being devoted to offset its adverse consequences. The fight against HIV/AIDS appears to be an uphill task but the Government is committed to bringing the situation under control.

Mr President, gender equality and equity have been recognised as the *sine qua non* of healthy reproductive decision-making. Gender attitudes are usually ingrained in deep-rooted cultural values which are difficult to change. The same is true in Malawi. To

achieve gender sensitivity in all walks of life and ensure the upliftment of women's status in traditional societies like ours is a daunting and time-consuming task. Nevertheless, I can assure you of our unwavering commitment to empowerment of women and elimination of gender discrimination. In this regard, a number of actions have been undertaken to address gender issues. Legal reforms have been introduced to amend laws which could allow gender discriminatory practices. These include the Affiliation Act, the Marriage Act and the Wills and Inheritance Act.

Malawi's new constitution of 1995 offers constitutional guarantees of human rights. Under the constitution, women have the right to full and equal protection of the law and the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of their gender or marital status.

In an effort to institutionalise gender and development, Malawi has drafted a National Gender Policy with a view to provide guidelines for recognising and addressing gender concerns and for mainstreaming gender in all development programmes.

With regards to education, a number of interventions are being implemented to protect the girl child. After the advent of multi-party in 1994, the Government of Malawi introduced free primary education. As a result of this, girls' enrolment has risen by 50 per cent. At secondary level, Government waived tuition fees for girls. Related to this, a policy change has been effected allowing girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy to be readmitted into school. A Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) Social Mobilisation Campaign on the importance of girl's education is conducted nation-wide since 1998. Population education is being

incorporated in the formal school curriculum. In addition gender balancing is being done so that books and materials portray balanced images of men, women, boys and girls in all aspects of life.

To address some of the economic disparities between men and women, micro finance institutions have been established to promote economic empowerment by providing credit facilities to women.

The implementation of gender and development programme has been constrained by various institutional and structural problems including a weak resource base, lack of gender desegregated data; and cultural practices and beliefs, traditions and social norms.

Mr President, Malawi recognises the potential contribution of the civil society including NGOs and the private sector to the formulation and implementation of population policies and programmes. The NGOs have participated and continue to participate in the formulation and implementation of all national policies including population policy. They are also involved in the implementation of the policy and programme in areas such as family planning provision and counselling, youth and adolescent reproductive health services, and motivation training. Despite these efforts, there is lack of a clear national strategy for harnessing the full potential of the NGOs and the private sector in this area.

Mr President, a number of lessons can be drawn from Malawi's experience in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action:

1. **A clear policy framework is needed to provide guidance in its implementation. The policy should be consistent with other development policies and promote the overall development goals.**
2. **All segments of society need to be sensitised to understand the population issues and ensure that the policy is culturally sensitive and acceptable.**
3. **An appropriate institutional framework for implementing the policy and ICPD Programme of Action should be well defined and acceptable.**
4. **There is need for sustained political will and commitment for successful policy implementation. I am testimony to that commitment as Minister responsible for Population activities.**
5. **Clear information flow systems for effective strategies for implementing, monitoring and evaluation of the population policy and ICPD Programme of Action should be put in place.**

Mr President, Malawi is of the view that implementation of the National Population Policy and ICPD Programme of Action would be facilitated by having a prioritised implementation plan put in place. This means the involvement of various governmental and non-governmental institutions in the planning and implementation of various population sectoral services and therefore calls for co-ordination as well as allocation of responsibilities. Although institutional and administrative arrangements proved

adequate for policy formulation, the implementation of the policy and ICPD-PA needs more financial and human resources.

I would like to conclude by pointing out that the Government of **Malawi's** efforts in the population field have received considerable support from international donors. Malawi appreciates this assistance and I would like to thank all donors for supporting the Government's efforts and look forward to continued Cupertino in maintaining our commitment to tackling population-related issues.

I thank you for your attention.