

**PAPER ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL
SYSTEM OF MALAWI**

**CHARLES MACHINJILI
NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICE
P.O. BOX 333
ZOMBA
MALAWI**

February, 2007

EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM OF MALAWI

Introduction

Malawi is a small landlocked country in south eastern Africa situated between Zambia to the west; Tanzania to the north and Mozambique to the south and east. It has an area of 118,484 square kilometers of which 94, 276 square kilometers is land. The mid-year population estimate for 2007 is 13.4 million people.

From 2002 the country's policies and programs have been based on the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP). The country's PRSP has now been transformed into the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). It was realized as early as 2002 that in order to monitor progress of attaining the goals of the PRSP there had to be a framework for collecting and disseminating data.

Hence in July 2002 a stake-holders workshop was held with assistance from PARIS21 at which it was agreed to set up the Poverty Monitoring Master-plan (PMMP) within the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. The PMMP would have a National Statistical System Strategic Plan as a sub-set. Since the NSO already had a Strategic Plan expiring the same year it was agreed to develop subsequent strategic plans in parallel with the NSS Strategic Plan.

Institutional Set Up

The NSO of Malawi was set up soon after the country attained independence in 1964. It is a Government department currently under the Ministry of Planning and Development. However, over the years it has moved between the office of the President and Cabinet, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Planning. The NSO has a workforce of 300 officers with 50 of these posted to its three regional offices in the cities of Blantyre (south), Lilongwe (centre) and Mzuzu (north) of the country. The Headquarters is located in the town of Zomba in the south eastern part of the country. Efforts to make it semi-autonomous have not been successful though this recommendation was put forward by the team that did the functional review of Government Ministries and Departments in 1999.

The NSO also operates the Statistical Common Service. This involves the creation of statistical units within other Ministries and Departments in Government and placing statistical officers to work there. Such officers are career-wise and professionally under the NSO.

Mandate

The NSO operates under the Statistics Act of 1967. The Act empowers the Commissioner of Statistics to collect, process, analyze and disseminate all socio-economic information for the country. The Act also gives the Commissioner powers to authorize or not any other public body to conduct surveys.

Strategic Planning

The first five year Strategic Plan was developed in 1995, with assistance from the Department for International Development (DFID), and became operational from 1996 to 2000. The Plan set out among others the NSO's mission, operating principles, human resources plan and budget for the entire five years. The Plan was used as a basis for seeking both Government and donor funds for its implementation. Since then a second Strategic Plan has been in place up to December 2006.

The second Strategic Plan has largely been implemented with financial support from the Government of Norway and technical support from Statistics Norway. Phase One of the support amounting to US\$2.3 million covered activities related to National Accounts and Economic Statistics and the development of a regular monitoring tool through the Annual Welfare Monitoring Survey. Phase Two of the Project, which is expected to commence from April 2007 complements DFID and the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) support. However there are a number of other donors supporting specific aspects of the Plan, notable among these are UNFPA, UNICEF, USAID, Family Health International, World Bank and IMF.

Even though the NSO operates a Statistical Common Service the first and second Strategic Plans have not covered this service. Consequently there has been weak coordination between NSO and the Statistical Common Service. NSO has also not been well placed to offer professional support in terms of harmonization of concepts and definitions and rationalization of activities. The third Strategic Plan which is under development is geared to address these shortcomings.

The National Statistical System

Towards the end of 2006, NSO has with support from DFID and the ACBF, started developing a Statistical Development Plan for the National Statistical System (NSS). The DFID, ACBF and the Government of Malawi are contributing a total of US\$2.7million over a period of three years from mid 2006.

The NSS comprises the NSO at the centre and the Statistical Common Service around it. The first and second steps have been to recruit from within NSO the National Coordinator and set up the NSS Steering Committee which is made up of members of the NSS. The Committee meets every quarter or earlier if the need arises. It is chaired by the Commissioner of Statistics and its secretary is the NSS National Coordinator.

The activities under the NSS include coordination amongst the stakeholders; harmonization of concepts and definitions; formal training with more focus on the middle and lower cadres; statistical literacy especially on the use of the Malawi Socio-Economic Database (MASEDA) for users including the media, enhancement of computing equipment and data dissemination.

The NSS Statistical Development Plan is fully supported by the Government of Malawi, DFID, the Norwegian Government and the ACBF and other donors in Malawi since it addresses the information requirements of the MGDS, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other International Conventions.

References

1. Ajayi. O.O., **Support for Malawi National Statistical System, ACBF Consultant's Report**, October 2004
2. Ben Kiregyera, Mwase Alimon, Keen Mark, **Malawi NSS Framework Main Report**, July 2004
3. National Statistical Office, **NSO Strategic Plan 2002-2006**, July 2002
4. Government of Malawi and ACBF; **Grant Agreement between the Government of Malawi and the African Building Foundation Regarding Support to the Malawi Statistical System Project (MSSP)**, October 2006.