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MISSION REPORT
LILONGWE, MALAWI

7 - 14 September, 2003

prepared by

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I. Introduction:

1.1 Background: in 1997, a UNECA team visited Malawi at the request of the country UNDP, to identify and agree on key areas that the ECA would provide technical advisory services to the government of Malawi. It was agreed that gender and development would be one of the key areas in which technical advisory services would be provided. During the exploratory mission, key activities of the Ministry of Gender, in which the advisory services would be provided, were identified. However, due to some major changes within the Ministry, it was not possible to carry out the activities as planned. The Ministry has now indicated its readiness to embark on a gender mainstreaming exercise and requested the UNECA for technical advisory services in this area.

1.2 Objective of the mission: given the time lapse since the last mission, it was agreed that an exploratory mission be fielded. The major objective of this mission was to meet with the senior officials of the Ministry, to discuss and agree on the specific areas in which advisory services would be provided in future.

II. Specific mission tasks.

2. The first task of the mission was a planning meeting between the Regional Advisor and the Director of the Department of Gender in the Ministry of Gender and Community Services. In this meeting the tasks to be carried out during the mission were agreed upon as follows:

- The regional advisor would review and provide comments on the draft National Gender Programme document, which has been prepared by a group of consultants.
- The regional advisor would carry out consultative meetings with the staff of the Department of Gender, as well as selected partners, in order to identify areas in which the Ministry will require technical advisory services. The issues highlighted in the consultative discussions would then provide a basis for recommendations, on how UNECA would provide further technical advisory services.

III. Mission accomplishments

3. Review of the National Gender Programme document: As requested, the document was reviewed, and my comments and recommendations are as follows:

3.1 General comments:

- i. The introduction is well written, articulating clearly the current status of gender inequality as justification for a comprehensive national gender programme.
- ii. However, the programme subsequently proposed is more of a general national development, rather than a gender mainstreaming nature. The Department of Gender will have to invest more time to streamline the objectives and the proposed activities so that there is a direct focus on addressing gender inequality through a clearly spelt out gender mainstreaming strategy.
- iii. A more user friendly presentation should be considered, for example:
 - First, it is important that the reader is able to look at the logical framework, not as an annex, but as an important integral component of the main document. The logical framework, after-all, is the most important tool for guiding implementation.
 - Secondly, there is need to make a clear transition from one section to another. Within each section, it is also necessary to make a distinction between different components. For example, page 10, para. 1.7 should be separated from the introductory section. As it is 1.7 is a proposed framework, whereas the earlier sections are on context and principles.
 - There should also be an introductory statement between the different components of each section, in particular, the recommendation component in each section needs to be clearly labelled and distinguished from the earlier component, e.g.: page 16, para.2.1.2 at the bottom of the page contains recommendations, it should be separated from the 2.1.2 at the top of the page. Also note that the numbering is duplicated.

3.2. **Specific Comments:** reading through the document, there are certain questions that emerge and which must be answered. Answers to these questions will go further in helping to articulate a well-focused gender programme. Some of the questions that should be applied in each thematic area are as follows:

- i. Do the policy objectives derive from /relate to the issues that have been identified.
- ii. Do all the policy objectives and strategies recommended contribute to gender equality? For example, under the Education and training theme, how do policy objective three and the recommended strategy contribute towards gender inequality in the long run, rather than simply balancing numbers? A review of the suggested activities does not provide a clearer picture, either, and the

identified outputs under this objective also show that the outputs are not related to gender equality.

- iii. In relation to the above question, perhaps of the starting points would have been a review of the National Gender policy, since this is the framework within which the National Gender programme has been developed. The review of the Gender policy would focus on refining and prioritizing objectives on the basis of their effectiveness in addressing gender inequalities.
- iv. Another very important question to apply is; how would the Ministry, as lead national gender machinery ensure implementation of the gender programme? What activities would the Ministry have to carry out in order to ensure that partners play their roles effectively? These activities would then have to be reflected under the section on institutional framework.
- v. **The Institutional Framework:** is this the most effective institutional framework for managing the implementation of this programme. Although this is the framework proposed in the Gender policy document, its inadequacy shows clearly that there is need to review and revise the Policy document. There is an overlap in roles, which is likely to cause confusion. Under the current proposal, what is the separation of roles of C and D? A more effective Gender Management System, based on clearly identified roles of all relevant partners in implementing a gender mainstreaming programme should be defined under the institutional framework section. This would then provide a framework for defining activities that would have to be carried out to strengthen the institutional framework capacity for gender mainstreaming.
- vi. **The logical framework:** this needs to be revisited for several reasons, but most importantly: There is a lack of clarity in distinguishing between outputs and outcomes. My general observation is that in almost all cases, what is listed as outputs are results that one would expect over mid-term to long term (outcomes). There should be clearly identified, immediate to short-term tangible results (outputs) to match each of the proposed activities. It is on the basis of these outputs that programme implementation would be monitored.
- vii. A constant question that should be applied is; to what extent will the proposed activities yield the results necessary for reducing gender inequalities?
- viii. Paragraphs 1.5 and 1.6 need to be revised. In paragraph 1.5, what is defined as good practices maybe results of good practices, but cannot be described as good practices. The guiding principles are not clearly expressed as guiding principles; they seem to be more of recommendations on how to implement the Gender Programme.

C. Recommendations for finalisation of the document: in addition to the suggestions already made above, I would strongly recommend the following:

- i. The Department of Gender invests more time in providing guidance in finalising the logical framework, and in particular in redefining the gender objectives and related activities, and in developing both the outputs and outcome and their indicators. The partner institutions in implementation should be actively involved in defining the indicators, as these will be used in monitoring and evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Gender Programme.
- ii. On institutional Framework: The department, in collaboration with key partners, should define an effective Gender Management System, which would provide the institutional framework. This should be based on a clearly defined and common understanding of what gender mainstreaming is. It is this well-defined institutional framework, which will enable the Department of Gender to ensure adequate capacity and effective implementation of the Gender programme. Otherwise, it will be difficult to implement the National Gender Programme if the roles of the key partners, including the national lead machinery, are not clearly defined and agreed upon.
- iii. Once the Gender Management System and the different roles of its component structures are defined, this should be clearly articulated under the section on Institutional Framework. Under this section, proposal for strengthening the gender mainstreaming capacity of the lead agency and its key partners should also be highlighted.
- iv. The Ministry should initiate a process for the review of the National Gender Policy, since this is the framework within which the National Gender programme will have to be implemented. The review of the Gender policy would focus on refining and prioritizing objectives, especially on the basis of their focus in addressing gender inequalities.

4. Consultative discussions with the Ministry of Gender and key partners: discussions were held with the senior officers of the Ministry as well as representatives of selected partner institutions. The discussions focused on highlighting the main challenges that the Ministry and partner institutions face in developing and implementing gender focused programmes.

4.1 Current structural arrangements: the Department of Gender is the key department in the Ministry, charged with the responsibility of implementing gender programmes. There are four programmes within the Department, namely: the Gender mainstreaming programme, the Economic Activities Programme, the Reproductive health and Gender Programme as well as the Food utilization and Dietary diversification programme. Currently, donor funding supports all the programmes, except the gender-mainstreaming programme. The Department commissioned a consulting firm to develop a National

Gender Programme and this process is now in its final stages. Once the document is finalised, it will provide the framework for implementing a gender-mainstreaming programme. I have reviewed the draft document and provided comprehensive comments above, as requested.

4.2 Challenges and issues in programme implementation. In general, the discussions showed that there are many challenges; the most important being the inadequate technical capacity, weak structural arrangements (within the ministry and between partner institutions) for gender mainstreaming, and persistent weak commitment/activism for gender equality within the NGO community. All this indicates a need for strengthening capacity of partner institutions for implementing the comprehensive National Gender Programme that is in the process of being developed.

4.3 Of equal concern is the fact that the gender programme that is being developed has not integrated the existing programmes. At this stage, the question that the department should be seeking to answer is, what role will the Department play in implementation of the programme, and how will the existing programmes be incorporated into the National gender Programme?

4.4 Structural and technical challenges and issues: it was revealed that although the Ministry is well staffed, in terms of numbers, it does not have an effective structure, and the necessary expertise for gender mainstreaming. Some of the major concerns are that:

- The roles of the Ministry, and the Department of Gender in particular are not yet clearly delineated.
- The way in which the Ministry is structured does not correspond with the roles defined by the Gender Policy. The view of the staff is that the Department should focus more on Coordination, advocacy, monitoring and capacity building for gender mainstreaming and less on field level implementation. This will require a clearly articulated gender mainstreaming strategy, as well as a Gender Management System.
- Most of the staff members, according to discussions, have been brought into their current position with skills other than those of gender mainstreaming. Yet today, gender mainstreaming has now become the major focus of work in the Department of Gender.
- There is no defined career path within the Department of Gender, and this does not encourage staff retention. As a result, there is constant mobility of staff and weak institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming.
- Different categories of staff have different levels of gender sensitivity and awareness and this is a source of frustration for technical staff in their efforts to

implement gender equality programmes. This also combines with the fact that most times, heads of programmes are in most cases in an acting capacity.

- The general environment, for gender equality, in Malawi is still negative. Gender equality is still viewed with antagonism, while gender issues are still largely viewed as women's concerns.
- A strong observation made in several meetings is that although Malawi government has been quick to ratify instruments and policies for gender equality, it has been slow to implement and to meet the agreed targets.

4.5 The discussion with NGO's revealed that while there is close collaboration between NGOs and the Ministry, NGOs are still not able to offer strong partnership in implementing programmes. It was noted that there couldn't be a vibrant gender focussed NGO support group because the NGOs are themselves constantly struggling to stay in business. As a result, the NGOs tend to lack focus, always shifting direction on the basis of available resources. The impact of the NGOs is generally low for other reasons, such as:

- Because of the weak political will for supporting implementation of gender equality programmes, adequate resources are not allocated to implementing agencies. Donor agencies have not yet shown leadership in supporting NGOs that are active in gender equality programmes.
- Public institutions are still suspicious of gender related NGO work.
- There is still very weak NGO activism for gender equality, so that gender issues, which are of general concern, tend to be dealt with at an individual level. As a result, the individual activists are isolated and victimised.
- NGOs have yet to demonstrate strong team spirit and democratic practices.

4.6 Meetings with UNDP and NORAD: Both the UNDP and NORAD have provided substantial financial support for gender programmes. The objective of the meetings, therefore, were to brief the institutions and solicit support for some of the planned activities. During the discussions with the ministry staff and NGO partners, it became clear that there is a need to define the roles of all the partners in implementation of the gender programme, and agree on a comprehensive capacity building strategy to strengthen the institutions' gender mainstreaming capacity. The discussions with the two donor agencies focussed on the nature and process of advisory services for building capacity, in particular, the proposed technical workshop for the Ministry staff and key partners (NGOs and sector Ministries).

- At UNDP, it was revealed that most of the money that was allocated to the gender programme had already been reallocated to other programmes. If the technical advisory services are to be provided, with the support of the UNDP funds, the office will have to explore possibilities of re-allocating the funds gender related advisory services. If this is done, these funds can only be used to cover the costs of the ECA regional advisor and a consultant. The funds cannot be used to pay for participants. **The UNDP will discuss with the Ministry of Gender, as soon as possible, and inform the ECA about the availability of funds for future technical advisory services to the Ministry.**
- At NORAD, the Gender Programme Officer was briefed on the proposed activities that are likely to be carried out under the advisory services. She reiterated NORAD'S willingness to support the Ministry, but emphasised the need for the Ministry to finalise the Gender Programme document, and to ensure that the document captures fully the needs of the Ministry, including the institutional capacity building needs. The programme emphasised that there is strong will among donors (e.g. DFID and CIDA) to support institutional capacity building activities. She welcomed the suggestion that a technical workshop will be organised to define the structure and roles of an effective institutional framework for gender mainstreaming. The workshop would also articulate an institutional capacity building programme. The Ministry was urged to make sure that the Gender Programme document is completed as soon as possible.

5. Way Forward and recommendations:

5.1 The discussions showed clearly that the Ministry is in urgent need of further advisory services to support the Ministry's role in gender mainstreaming. The conclusions from various discussions are that the roles and structures of the different actors in gender mainstreaming have to be clearly defined. Once this has been done, there will be need to strengthen the gender expertise of the institutions involved, in particular, the Department of Gender, as well as the thematic sector Ministries and NGOs.

5.2 A recommendation proposed by the Ministry staff is that a gender-planning unit should be established in the Departments of Planning within the thematic sector ministries. This would ensure that each of the partner Ministries has internal monitoring systems for gender mainstreaming.

5.3 As a way forward, the technical advisory services to be provided by ECA should focus on strengthening the capacity for gender mainstreaming. It is recommended that as a starting point, the Ministry should organise a technical workshop, to be facilitated through the UNECA Regional Advisory Services. The workshop should be attended by the staff of the Department of Gender in the Ministry of Gender and Community Development Services, representatives of the thematic sector ministries and selected NGO partners. The main objectives of the workshop will be:

- To define and establish a common understanding of the key gender mainstreaming processes,
- To define an appropriate gender Management System as well as the roles of the different structures of the system, and
- To identify some of the gender capacity gaps.

Given that the work of the NGOs dealing with gender issues is complementary to that of the Ministry, it will be prudent to ensure that the NGOs understand their position and roles within the Gender Management Systems. The NGOs should therefore be actively involved in the process of defining the Gender Management systems and roles.

As a way forward, it was agreed that the Director of the Department of Gender would be discussing with UNDP and NORAD the possibilities of funding the proposed workshop. After the workshop, the Ministry will renew its request for further technical advisory services to UNECA, to support its capacity building requirements.

List of officials met:

Ministry of Gender and Community Services: Telephone: 01774105

Mr. R Mwadiwa, Permanent Secretary,
Ms. Isabel Matenje, Director, Department of Gender,
Mr. P. Msefua, Acting Head, Gender mainstreaming programme,
Mr. Sajeni, coordinator, Economic Activities Programme,
Mr. A. Mpunga, Acting Head, Reproductive Health and Gender Programme,
Ms. M. Mkwamba, Acting Head, Food utilization and Dietary Diversification Programme.

Non-governmental Organisations:

Ms. Makhambera, Gender Project Officer, Human Rights Resource Centre, and member of the Law Reform Commission,
Ms C. Munthali, Executive Director, Society for Advancement of Women. Tel. 265-01757476/01758781, Fax: 265 01 757080,
Ms. E. Kaliya, Project Officer, Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre, an Vice Chair, NGO Gender Network. Tel. 265 01 752629, Fax: 265-01751390.

United Nations Development Programme: Tel. 265-1 773500/ 011773114

Ms. Daphne I Casey, Deputy Resident Representative.
Mr. Peter Kulemeka, Assistant Resident Representative