



## State of Civil Society Report 2019 dialogues Malawi

### 1. Background to the dialogue

#### Date and location of the dialogue

24 July 2019, St John of God Conference Centre, Mzuzu City, Malawi

#### Organisation/organisations convening the dialogue

Revolution Human Aid and Transparency Initiative (REHAAT-INITIATIVE)

#### Focus of the session

Consolidated Effort: Promoting Rights of Minority Groups and the Socially Excluded

### 2. Participants in the dialogue

#### Number of participants

28

### 3. Content of the dialogue

#### Key issues or problems identified during the dialogue

1. Prejudice against persons with albinism and other socially excluded groups. People have a prejudice against persons with albinism; they think that persons with albinism are different from people with dark skin. Persons with albinism are also thought to have a skin and bones with ingredients useful for the performance of rituals. Persons with albinism are no longer viewed as human beings, but as materials; this has affected their exercise and enjoyment of their rights. Most affected is their right to life.
2. Negative propaganda disseminated by anti-rights groups against progressive, right-oriented CSOs. This propaganda is disseminated particularly when progressive, rights-oriented groups demand rights on behalf of minority groups, socially-excluded groups and the general public.
3. Lack of involvement of minority groups in development activities. People in minority such as persons with albinism, sex workers, LGBTQ people and persons with

physical disabilities most of the times are not involved in development activities taking place at both community and national levels.
4. Lack of capacity building to the benefit of excluded groups. People in the 'excluded' category are isolated and left out in capacity building to effectively take part in activities concerning themselves and their communities.

### **Civil society actions identified during the dialogue to address these problems**

1. Civil society, and rights-oriented civil society in particular, is responding to these issues through protests. Protests have taken place frequently since the May 2019 elections
2. There also have been engagement meetings with duty-bearers and stakeholders in various projects and programmes concerning excluded groups
3. Some CSOs are implementing programmes that will help achieve inclusion, especially by containing the powers of anti-rights groups and raising awareness. Participating organisations isolated awareness programmes such as 'Sports for Change.'

### **Challenges encountered by civil society in responding to the problems identified in the dialogue**

1. Lack of skills and capacity to educate people on the growing power of anti-right groups and how these groups affect the promotion of the rights of the socially excluded.
2. Mind-set of people on both anti-right groups and socially-excluded groups: Many people have a wrong and negative perception of socially excluded people. This undermines these people's ability to effectively contribute to social and economic development through active participation in decision making. This situation is worsened by anti-right groups, which carry contradicting messages to the communities and sometimes bring duplicate projects that render progressive, rights-oriented groups irrelevant.
3. Political will: Much as the government pretends to be concerned with the plight and rights of the minority and socially excluded people through its numerous policy documents, its effort on the ground is not that pleasing.
4. Lack of funding: Civil society has some brilliant ideas to solve social problems and deal with anti-right groups but lack financial muscle, which hinders them to do their work effectively.

### **Recommendations for civil society to address the problems identified in the dialogue**

1. Step up the fight against propaganda by anti-rights groups against progressive, right-oriented CSOs.
2. Engage more with anti-rights groups. These engagements can bring these two sides together and weaken the growing power of anti-rights groups.
3. Embark on field research rather than desk research. Lack of proper research leads to difficulties to recognise anti-right groups, and it also makes it difficult to implement programmes that neatly respond to the needs of socially-excluded people and those in the minority.
4. Involve beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of programmes. The people targeted by interventions should be involved in making decisions on the

kind of interventions needed in their lives for the programmes implemented by CSOs to be relevant and of value.

#### **Additional information about the content of the dialogue**

Discussants proposed that civil society should enhance the inclusion of socially excluded people in its programmes. This inclusion would create a sense of ownership of the programmes so that trust is built between the beneficiaries of the programmes/communities and progressive, rights-oriented civil society. Civil society should also do proper research on the growing power of anti-rights groups across Malawi. Networking and collaboration are also strategies to be promoted if civil society is to effectively respond to the drivers and enablers of anti-rights groups. Civil society should make a thorough study of its stakeholders so that it is able to design programmes that are responsive to specific needs of the targeted socially excluded groups.

#### **4. Further material**

##### **Relevant quotes from participants**

“Rural people take people with albinism as materials and not humans”

