

# PEER REVIEW OF MALAWI NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

26-30 January, 2009



Republic of Malawi





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Vision of Malawi National Statistical System:  
*“Statistics at the finger tips of users”*

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### Peer Reviewers

Dr Joao Dias Loureiro, President, National Statistical Institute (INE), Mozambique  
Mr Fonseca Machaule, Senior Planner, Ministry of Planning and Development, Mozambique  
Mrs Radegunda Maro, Director of Statistical Operations, National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania  
Mrs Grace Moshia, Assistant Director, Macro-Economic Cluster, Planning Commission, Tanzania

### Secretariat

Mr Guest Charumbira, PARIS21  
Mr Tony Williams, PARIS21

The team was accompanied to all meetings outside the National Statistical Office (NSO) by Mr Shelton Kanyanda, the NSS Coordinator, NSO, Malawi

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## Abbreviations

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
BSS	Behavioural Surveillance Survey
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
GIS	Geographic Information System
LAN	Local Area Network
MASEDA	Malawi Socio-Economic Database
MEPD	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MTR	Mid-Term Review (Norwegian cooperation)
NAC	National AIDS Commission
NACAL	National Census of Agriculture and Livestock
NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of Statistics
NSO	National Statistical Office
NSO SP	NSO Strategic Plan
NSS	National Statistical System
NSS SP	NSS Strategic Plan
OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet
PHC	Population and Housing Census
RBM	Reserve Bank of Malawi
SCS	Statistical Common Service
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
WiFi	Wireless Fidelity

# 1 Executive summary and conclusions

## 1.1 Rationale for peer reviews

The Economic Commission for Africa's Committee on Development Information meeting in 2003 decided that African countries, supported by PARIS21, would carry out peer reviews to ensure that good practice passes from country to country, based on the first hand experience of peers, to help to accelerate the change processes in reforming statistical systems. The peer reviews can advise on processes to design and implement National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) which are central to implementing the 2004 Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics. Previous peer reviews have been carried out in Ghana (2005), Tanzania (2007) and Zambia (2007).

The focus of the peer reviews is on governance of the National Statistical System (NSS), its organisation, strategic planning, service to users and funding and sustainability – all against the backdrop of the African Charter on Statistics which sets best practice principles for professional independence, quality, mandates and resources, dissemination, protection of confidentiality, and coordination and cooperation.

## 1.2 Methodology

The peer review teams include both senior statisticians and senior policy makers from neighbouring countries to include the views of both producers and users of statistics. Malawi was reviewed by teams from Mozambique and Tanzania. The Commissioner for Statistics hosted the review and met the peer reviewers at the start and end of the review mission. The review was facilitated by consultants provided by the PARIS21 Secretariat.

Review meetings form the core of the peer review. The team met managers and staff of the National Statistical Office and with a selection of other producers and key users of official statistics within Parliament, Government, Reserve Bank, private sector and academia; as well as funders of the NSS, including the Ministry of Finance and Cooperating Partners. Interviews were guided by a discussion schedule but reviewers had the flexibility to deviate from this schedule and to pursue topics in depth. The schedule of meetings is at Annex A and the list of people met is shown at Annex B. Notes on the individual meetings form the main body of this report.

## 1.3 Observations

The peer reviewers made the following general observations:

- Statistics in Malawi are valued by policy-makers and generally the people met appreciated the work of NSO and were satisfied with what is produced, though they will always want more. The peer reviewers consider NSO is doing relatively well in delivering its programme, despite constraints of limited financial and manpower resources, an outdated Statistics Act, location in Zomba away from the political centre, and small number (46) of professional posts. High points include the successful conduct and quick results from the 2008 Population and Housing Census, upon which the team congratulated the Malawi government and Cooperating Partners, the re-basing of national accounts estimates and the

timeliness of the Consumer Price Index. NSO is trusted by Cooperating Partners to manage their funding.

- The NSS has well-developed strategic plans - NSO is implementing its third plan (NSO SP) and an NSS Strategic Plan (NSS SP) was completed in June 2008. These were produced with wide consultation. However, it seems that feedback has not been given systematically to those who commented on the draft plans, which could enhance their motivation and ownership. Also, dissemination of the plans could be extended - for instance, not all NSO staff have a copy.
- NSO has a good image but is fairly low-key in terms of visibility. The reviewers considered the handling of media enquiries to be rather ad hoc and could be more formalised. It seems that dissemination generally could be developed – for instance the reviewers were informed that not all MPs have copies of Malawi in Figures. This could be developed as part of an advocacy and dissemination strategy.
- Cooperating Partners commented that they would prefer to be approached together by NSO to support a long-term, costed programme to implement the strategic plans, rather than having to respond individually to piecemeal requests.
- NSO embraces new technologies carefully despite exogenous problems with their service provider. This has enhanced efficiency and electronic dissemination.
- 6. Only 12% on NSO's established posts are for degree-level statistical staff, which the reviewers considered to be a rather low percentage for the nature of NSO's activities. The roles of junior staff need to be spelt out to correct the perception of junior staff that they should be involved in the analysis of data. However, NSO enjoys relatively high staff retention rates, perhaps reflecting opportunities for field work, staff development opportunities, the location in Zomba and social interaction in NSO (staff seem content). NSO seems to be male-dominated, which was reflected more generally in the gender balance in most meetings.
- While NSO produces the national accounts, a national committee comprising MEPD, MOF, RBM and NSO is responsible for prior estimates and projections. The peer reviewers noted that this seems to work well as all involved seem happy with it.
- Concerns about data gaps, time lags and data quality issues were expressed by some users about several data series, including agricultural estimates. It is important that these perceptions are addressed and action taken to build and maintain confidence in the NSS. The reviewers noted the planned quarterly meeting with RBM to discuss such issues in respect of economic statistics and the planned capacity building programme in agricultural statistics.
- The review team noted that the location of NSO's headquarters in Zomba had both positive and negative impacts upon NSO's position. On the one hand, NSO is less accessible than it would be in Lilongwe; less well placed to lobby for its interests; and travel to Lilongwe is expensive and places a heavy burden on staff. On the other hand, staff retention is high and staff seem content; and the location seems to enhance the independence of the NSO and places it close to academic and research institutions. Most importantly, NSO has demonstrated that it can perform from Zomba.

- The review team noted positively that the NSO has an HIV/AIDS awareness and support programme and that 2% of NSO's allocation from Government is earmarked to supplement the income of AIDS sufferers. The National AIDS Commission has approved an AIDS awareness project with NSO.

#### **1.4 Suggestions**

The peer reviewers suggest that NSO and partners consider the following:

##### **1.4.1 Governance**

- Fast-track updating of the 1967 Statistics Act, consulting widely and highlighting to stakeholders the main proposed areas of change, e.g.: NSO's professional independence and political integrity; coordination arrangement, including NSO's coordinating role within NSS and role of a higher coordinating body, e.g. National Statistics Council; qualifications of the Commissioner; etc. While this is intended to serve national purposes it should be in tune with the African Charter on Statistics.
- Set up a National Statistics Council as the highest policy body guiding coordination across the NSS.
- Re-open discussion about the NSO acquiring semi-autonomous status, as recommended by SADC.
- Establish a donor group for statistics to coordinate support to implement the NSO and NSS Strategic Plans.

##### **1.4.2 NSO SP and NSS SP implementation**

- Set in place arrangements for updating of the strategic plans as living documents and align the two plans to the same time scale.
- Build on the success of the 2008 Population and Housing Census in raising the profile of statistics and statistical awareness, and in the areas of capacity building, analysis, dissemination, etc.
- Address the issues of real and perceived data gaps, time lags and data quality issues as well as communicating clarifications and reasons for amendments to enhance further the relevance and credibility of NSO and NSS.
- In particular, the NSO should address perceptions arising from delays in publishing reports from the National Census of Agriculture and Livestock (NACAL).
- Publish a data release calendar and address the timeliness of data in line with IMF GDDS recommendations.
- Capitalise upon administrative data sources to supplement survey data, particularly to produce statistics to assist local-level structures.

##### **1.4.3 Advocacy and dissemination**

- Develop an advocacy and dissemination strategy, building on experiences gained through the 2008 Population and Housing Census.
- As part of delivering this strategy, strengthen feed-back to data providers and extend dissemination to more users.

- Make the NSO more visible, e.g. through a logo and more visible office signs and by developing the NSO website with links to other relevant sites.
- Continue to use opportunities to build and maintain confidence of the general public e.g. by communicating directly and through the media, as was done successfully in the case of the Population and Housing Census.

#### **1.4.4 Financing**

- Hold another donors' meeting to recast future support from Cooperating Partners in the context of the NSO and NSS Strategic Plans.
- Explore collaborative efforts with other bodies.

#### **1.4.5 Staff development**

- Continue efforts to strengthen the national in-service training programme in conjunction with partners.
- Provide more frequent and formalised fora for non-management staff in NSO to express views freely and feed them to NSO managers for the good of the institution.
- Make transparent to staff the criteria used by the Training Committee in selecting staff for training.
- Continue efforts to encourage female statisticians to join, stay and progress within NSO/NSS.

#### **1.4.6 Location**

- Fast-track implementation of plans to build the structure and terms of reference of regional offices; and improve staff conditions in regional offices to empower and motivate staff to deliver more on behalf of NSO.
- NSO's location in Zomba should be reviewed, while taking care to avoid unsettling staff.

#### **1.4.7 Sharing of experiences**

- Continue to make good use of expertise from neighbouring countries and expertise from the South, such as the south-south cooperation (with Uganda and South Africa) in the case of the Population and Housing Census.

## 2 Meetings with stakeholders

### 2.1 Commissioner of Statistics

The Commissioner welcomed the review team to Malawi. The peer reviewers thanked him for the warm welcome and congratulated him on the successful Population and Housing Census and speedy production of preliminary results. The team briefed the Commissioner on the purpose of the review, which was about learning from each other and contributing to statistical development. This was not an enquiry or evaluation. Following discussion it was agreed to revise the draft programme to place more emphasis on the users of statistics, including the private sector and Parliamentarians. Internal NSO meetings were held with the wider management team, led by the Deputy Commissioner, and with less senior staff without a management presence.

In discussing the independence of the NSO, the Commissioner advised the team that the NSO is viewed by both the media and government as a neutral body. Statistics which reflected badly on government policy were published by the media supporting the opposition. The NSO has its own budget, answers directly to Parliament and relates directly to the Civil Service Commission on human resource and other issues. The NSO operates on a split site with the National Accounts and Balance of Payments sections located in Lilongwe, close to their main clients. The NSO also has three regional offices. The issue of further relocation to Lilongwe is no longer live because the NSO has shown that it can deliver wherever it is based. Revisions made to the National Accounts based on Supply-Use tables impressed government and since then the NSO's budget has been increased. NSO's parent ministry, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development has been praised for NSO's successful handling of the 2008 Population and Housing Census. Despite the 1967 Statistics Act being outdated, the NSO manages to maintain its independence.

The NSO is implementing its third Strategic Plan (NSO SP), covering 2007-11 and recently completed the design of an NSS Strategic Plan (NSS SP), covering 2008-12. This work started with the launch of the NSS on African Statistics Day in 2006. The aim is for better coordination of programmes, methodology and concepts. Resources are limited so the Plan relates to NSO and six core sectoral ministries who have statistical staff who are part of the Statistics Common Service, which has a common payroll comparable to other professional groups across government. The Commissioner advised that the positioning of the statistics units within sectoral planning directorates enhances collaboration and he sees no conflict of interest. Other statistical-related work is done by others, e.g. poverty work in MEPD, working directly with NSO. The NSS SP was produced through a bottom-up approach, based on individual sectoral plans, which increased awareness and ownership of the NSS in line ministries. There has been no formal launch of the Strategic Plans but they have been adopted by government.

The Population and Housing Census has constrained other activities and progress towards the objectives of the Strategic Plans will be monitored by the NSS Secretariat (in NSO) during February 2009. One sticking point is that for budgetary purposes NSS activities (e.g. harmonisation) cannot be attributed to a particular ministry otherwise those funds would be transferred to that ministry. The NSS budget for capacity building has therefore been

subsumed into NSO's budget. Donor support for this programme is provided by ACBF and DFID. Other parts of the NSS now look to NSO as a type of donor.

Access to data ("Statistics at the finger-tips of users") is enhanced through websites, the MASEDA on-line database and by the proximity of regional offices to statistics users. The Commissioner advised that the regional offices do not have power to authorise resources.

## 2.2 NSO Managers

The review team met the Deputy Commissioner and managers within the five NSO Divisions. The current organisation chart is shown in the NSO SP together with the one to which NSO aspires. The managers outlined the range of their work areas and current issues. The team noted:

- Preliminary results from the Population and Housing Census, carried out in June 2008, were available quickly and the final outputs will be available by June 2009. 3.5million questionnaires were scanned using Optical Mark Reading technology in two months.
- Annual projections of agricultural production produced by the Ministry of Agriculture, based on the last Census in 1992/93, will be re-based using the results from the 2006/07 National Census of Agriculture and Livestock (NACAL).
- The NSO face networking problems (WiFi and LAN) because only one service provider covers Blantyre and Zomba. Viruses were also a problem and the Population and Housing Census and NACAL data were protected through back-ups and embargoes on using USB keys. All officers have access to a computer with access to the network.
- Implementation of the NSS SP has included carrying out the Population and Housing Census, review of the Statistics Act, training and preparing a compendium of statistical definitions, as well as profile raising of statistics in Malawi. The NSS Steering Committee, which includes Directors of Planning from central and line ministries, meets quarterly. There is a funding gap. Although no formal launch or donors' meeting has been held, the NSO SP and NSS SP are used as tools in discussions with government and donors. It was clarified that the costs of sectoral activities included in the NSS SP comprise the collation and analysis of information from administrative sources, but not the cost of the administrative processes themselves.
- Publications respond to the findings of user needs surveys in addition to the routine publications. Relations with the media are handled by the subject specialists rather than by a dedicated media specialist.
- The NSO website is updated monthly by the IT department based on new information released by the divisions.
- Activity plans and budgets are reconciled through monthly meetings and an Internal Procurement Committee meets monthly.
- A training committee looks at regular and ad hoc training, including proposals to implement EU/SADC proposals to enhance training programmes in conjunction with the Statistical Association of Malawi and Chancellor College.

- Both training opportunities and the possibilities to undertake fieldwork with the associated allowances are thought to contribute to a high degree of staff retention in NSO (as does the location in Zomba).
- NSO has an HIV/AIDS awareness and support programme and 2% of NSO's allocation from Government is earmarked to supplement the income of AIDS sufferers. The National AIDS Commission has approved an AIDS awareness project with NSO.

### 2.3 NSO Non-management staff based in Zomba

The staff were requested to present their views to the review team freely. They were further assured that individual remarks would not be linked to any officer by name. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit views of the staff regarding the drafting and implementation of the National Statistical Office Strategic Plan as well as the National Statistical System Plan.

In their initial responses, the staff indicated that no advance information was provided about the meeting with the review team. They also indicated that the concept of the National Statistical System was new to Malawi. They also indicated that they were not fully involved in the preparation of the NSS document. As such, they would not be able to offer substantive comments. Following these initial comments, it was agreed that the meeting would discuss the NSO Strategic Plan instead.

The staff noted that the first strategic plan was drafted by senior officers without inputs from junior staff. The junior officers were later provided an opportunity to comment on their respective sections. The second edition of the strategic plan was also developed in a similar manner. However, inputs were rather from a small section of the subordinate staff. Staff are not aware if their comments were taken on board in finalizing the plan.

Regarding implementation, staff noted that there are some bottlenecks. It was noted that there are insufficient printed copies of the plan. Some aspects of the plan are being implemented. For example, the finance section is now represented in regions. They would now like to see the training proposals being implemented. It was noted that linkages with other agencies of government are progressing well. In this regard, they are of the opinion that the NSO is doing a good job in delivering its mandate.

The Peer Review Team posed the following questions to the staff representatives:

- Apart from training constraints are there other constraints preventing improved service delivery?
- What is it that makes them feel they are outsiders?
- Is the workload sufficient or small?

In response to these questions staff feel they should be more involved. Staff should be involved in all aspects of statistical production from data collection to report writing, which suggests that the roles of junior staff need to be clarified. It was further noted that many officers are interested in data collection because it offers better financial rewards. In this regard it was mentioned that graduates of the diploma program of the EASTC continue to do data collection.

The review team was informed that the outdated Statistics Act was posing problems for data collection activities, particularly in business surveys. The fines provided for in the Statistics Act have become so small that offenders do not feel the pinch even if they are punished. The meeting recommended that the Statistics Act should be revised as a matter of urgency so that the statistical system can improve its efficiency.

#### **2.4 NSO Regional Office – Lilongwe**

The Peer Review Team had cordial discussions with staff of the Regional Office- Lilongwe. The Team was informed that each Regional Office has a staff complement of 20 officers and, of the three Regional Offices, Lilongwe was the most advanced. The staff complement is outlined below :

- 7 Professional staff (head of office is at Chief Statistician level)
- 2 Accounts Officer
- 8 Statistical Clerks
- 1 Secretary
- 2 Drivers
- 1 Adviser from Statistics Norway

The Blantyre and Mzuzu Regional Offices are headed at a relatively lower level and have a minimal staff complement. All Regional Offices have existed for the last 30 years. The Lilongwe office is responsible for the compilation of the national accounts and balance of payments statistics. It is also responsible for the price collection for Central Malawi and the updating of Economic Statistics. The office works closely with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and the Reserve Bank of Malawi. The head of the office attends departmental and ministerial meetings on behalf of the Commissioner of Statistics. Though the Regional Office is relatively large in terms of the number of staff and responsibilities, it still depends on the head office for most administrative issues including finance.

The staff noted that Lilongwe is a relatively more expensive place in which to work compared with Zomba. In recognition of this, Norway, as a lead cooperating partner of the NSO, introduced a living allowance for staff at Lilongwe as an incentive. The allowance was paid for one year.

The review team sought the views of staff regarding the location of the NSO headquarters in Zomba. The staff are of the opinion that advantages of re-locating to Lilongwe outweigh disadvantages. They felt that the NSO would be more “visible” if the headquarters shifted to Lilongwe.

#### **2.5 Office of the President and Cabinet**

The Director of Policy Research advised the review team that NSO’s handling of the Population and Housing Census had responded in a really timely way to the needs of Government to provide a framework for elections in 2009 and other important statistics. In some other areas time lags were noted. Also NSO needs to strengthen consultation, building

on their experience from the Census, through workshops, seminars and questionnaires, not only at the time when they are doing surveys.

In response to questions from the team, the Director advised that OPC was not involved in drawing up the NSO and NSS Strategic Plans but were aware of them. They are collaborating in some areas of implementation, such as the Census. She considers that NSO is sufficiently independent professionally and not under political influence in its day-to-day affairs. She advised that NSO must produce a Statistics Policy to inform a revised Statistics Act. (The Commissioner later informed the team that the legal draftsmen has advised that a revision to the 1967 Act did not require a Statistics Policy, which would take a long time, and NSO is proceeding on this basis).

The Director's view is that NSO's location in Zomba affects relationships with the rest of Government because they are too easily forgotten when arranging meetings. The regional office in Lilongwe cannot compensate because it has too small a staff.

OPC asks Ministries to provide evidence in support of policy proposals and the Director thinks that capacity constraints are responsible for some conflicting information across Government. She said resource constraints affect all sectors but NSO should encourage other institutions to use NSO data and build its capacity. NSO has relied on Cooperating Partners but needs to develop demand within Government. If a good case is made more resources will follow.

The peer reviewers shared experiences from their countries on the profile and autonomy of their statistical agencies, their statistical legislation in relation to Strategic Plans – neither country has a statistics policy – and on challenges they face (e.g. staffing and small area statistics in Tanzania); as well as on international guidelines such as the African Charter on Statistics. The reviewers indicated that, based on their discussions with statistics users, they thought that the environment for statistics in Malawi is sufficiently mature to think about reforms. The Director advised that the Government's policy is not to create any more government agencies but to work instead on improving the efficiency of existing institutional arrangements. Deviation from this policy would require a logical proposal indicating what problems were being addressed. Proposals to review the structure, establishment and staff grades would require another Functional Review of the NSO (the last one was in 1999).

The Director said that Malawi is still developing its thinking on programme approaches to aid delivery (such as Sector Wide Approaches as opposed to projects). Sector Coordinating Groups are being set up under the Government's Development Assistance Strategy corresponding to MGDS sectors. Statistics is considered to be cross-cutting, but Cooperating Partners could set up a small group to discuss support for the NSO and NSS Strategic Plans.

The Director concluded that Government cannot do without statistics and needs to give them their proper place.

## **2.6 Ministry of Economic Planning and Development**

The Permanent Secretary informed the peer review team that as a Ministry, they find themselves as users and producers. They are part of the National Committee on National Accounts and Balance of Payments comprising the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of

Economic Planning and Development, the Reserve Bank and the National Statistics Office. The mandate of the Committee is to adjudicate on early estimates and projections of the national accounts and balance of payments. In general, the Ministry is happy with the quality of the data, save that timeliness should be improved.

The meeting was informed that a Supply and Use table for Malawi has been constructed. Following this exercise, it was discovered that GDP was under estimated. The underestimation is mainly in the telecommunications, transport and mining and quarrying sectors. The GDP series has now being revised so as to reflect a more accurate picture of economic activity in Malawi.

Regarding the implementation of the NSO and NSS SPs, the Ministry has not yet received any adverse feedback.

The position of the National Statistical Office in the government hierarchy was discussed and some comparisons were made with the prevailing situations in some neighbouring countries. The NSO is somewhat independent in its operations of any ministry. However, for resource allocation and relationships with the donor community, the NSO has to report through the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. Though their budget is determined independently, general ceilings that apply to the rest of government would have to apply to them as well. Human Resources Department is also consulted and may impose ceilings on growth targets. The current arrangement does not seem to pose any problems for the operations of the statistical system. However, in the process of revising the statistics act, the authorities may want to consider what prevails in other countries:

- In Tanzania, the National Bureau of Statistics is a semi-autonomous agency reporting to the minister responsible for statistics through an Advisory Board. The Bureau has its own budget, accounting systems and staff regulations
- In Mozambique, the head of the statistics office reports to Cabinet. She/he and the deputies are appointed by the President of the Republic. In terms of hierarchy, the head of the statistics office ranks relatively high; alongside head of the army, central bank and police. By virtue of sitting in relevant Cabinet meetings, the head of statistics is able to anticipate statistical requirements of the system at an early stage. The statistical system in Mozambique used the successful implementation of the 1997 Population and Housing Census to its advantage in terms of advocacy.
- The South African legislation provides for the head of statistics to sanction the publication of official statistics

The general trend on the African continent is towards making national statistical offices autonomous or semi-autonomous bodies.

## **2.7 Ministry of Finance**

The review team met the Director of Economic Affairs, the Division in Ministry of Finance (MOF) with closest links to NSO. The Division is developing a statistics section and depends on the National Committee for National Accounts and Balance of Payment for data.

MOF is satisfied with NSO's work which feeds into the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). The Director said that MOF, IMF and World Bank are comfortable with the re-based national accounts, built from a Supply and Use table incorporating medium and small enterprises. But more explanation of the increase in GDP is needed for the wider public. The Population and Housing Census is carried out ten-yearly without fail. MOF are happy with the CPI and use the figures in policy formulation. NSO carried out the FINSCOPE study of rural financial products, with a sample of 5,000 households, as part of the Financial Sector Assessment Project. The sponsoring firm were very impressed with NSO's work, saying it was the best organised in Africa.

On the way forward, MOF are looking to NSO to compile a Producer Price Index and MOF is developing its Government Finance Statistics, which are proving to be a challenge, as part of a robust Integrated Financial Management Information System by June 2010.

MOF were involved in developing the NSS SP and support updating of the 1967 Statistics Act. It is recognised that NSO needs more resources and are constrained, which shows itself through e.g. time lags in producing external trade data. The Director advised that statistics are viewed as a priority and NSO should push for more resources through their Minister. He offered to sit down with NSO, MEPD and RBM to discuss the trade data, which he thought RBM might be persuaded to help finance. It was noted that source data come from the Malawi Revenue Authority and arrangements are being made to share information collected at the border crossings with NSO and MOF. On the question of funding, it was noted that the Tanzanian Reserve Bank has funded industrial surveys.

Across the wider NSS, the NSS Steering Committee provides a means for better coordination, as do linkages within the Statistics Common Service. It was clarified that staff development of SCS members is mainly the responsibility of NSO. The professional independence of the NSO, free from political pressures, has evolved because of the multi-party system and democracy; as well as the desire by users to avoid bad figures affecting policy actions. The Director said that this independence should be addressed in the updated Statistics Act and that proposed amendments should be highlighted in consultations with stakeholders. The peer reviewers shared their experiences of handling issues of independence in their countries.

## **2.8 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology**

Following the general introduction of the peer review process, the Director of Planning at the Ministry of Education informed the Review Team that the Ministry is mainly interested in the statistical information of the school-going population from the population census figures and population projections. This information is used for computing gross enrolment ratios, net enrolment ratios and other measures of interest to education planning. The ministry itself conducts school censuses every year. The ministry is interested in calculating margins of error between figures from censuses and surveys and those from the school censuses. Information from censuses and projections is usually at variance with that obtaining from school censuses. This is usually because the enumerated school-going population may not necessarily be enrolled in the areas they were enumerated during the census. In some cases age reporting will be different in the two systems. Poor response to the annual school census also presents additional problems for data comparison.

The processing of educational statistics follows the recommended international procedures, particularly those developed by UNESCO. The ministry prepares an annual publication based on its school census and publishes an annual publication. The 2008 publication will be released shortly.

The National Statistics Office provides personnel for the statistical unit at the ministry in line with the principles of the common services cadre. The rotation of statisticians from one ministry to another poses problems for the ministry, because they have to train any newcomers in the techniques of educational statistics.

Regarding general collaboration with NSO, the meeting was informed that there is strong professional collaboration with the various educational institutions. The ministry was involved in the design of the Population and Housing Census questionnaire.

Future plans for improvement of the system include preparing district education statistics publications and improvement of record keeping in schools.

## **2.9 Chairman: Parliamentary Economic Committee**

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Economic Committee is an economist. He has held several portfolios including Minister of Finance in the previous government.

He started his presentation by indicating that statistics are important and that everybody needs good statistics. He noted that the NSO is operating under constraints but does its best to provide information. However, he noted that not enough people know about the National Statistical Office. He further noted that the NSO is endowed with professionals who know what they are doing but wondered if many people know about their products. He also noted that statistics is a difficult subject. As such, not many people are capable of criticizing the statistical output. In supporting his assertions, he noted that the Government publishes the Government Gazette on a regular basis. The Gazette contains very useful information but he wondered how many people actually read it. The same applies to the NSO publications, he asserted.

On the question of quality, he noted that lack of adequate resources may jeopardize the quality of the output. He asserted that in some cases a small sample may produce biased results. The following scenarios were presented to the review team:

- Crop estimates: He thought that both the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Statistics Office were doing crop estimates. Both had no resources and were doing poor sampling because of lack of resources. The crop estimates lacked credibility. (The Commissioner of Statistics clarified that NSO was responsible for crop estimates only in 2003/04 and, at that time, had adequate resources and expertise).
- Gross Domestic Product: The method of determining GDP estimates was flawed. There was some evidence of under-estimation. The IMF raised concerns and the authorities sought the assistance of the Norwegian Statistical Office to review the methodology. This led to the discovery that GDP was under-estimated by about 40%. The Honourable member informed the team that he has observed the

Reserve Bank of Malawi continues to publish the old GDP series although they are aware that the series has been changed. However, following enquiries with the Bank, the review team has been informed that the Bank published both the new series and the revised series in parallel for two years but is now using the new estimates.

Regarding the use of data generated by international organizations, the Honourable Member wondered why local professionals tend to trust such data at the expense of data generated locally. He said such tendencies should be discouraged. He took the opportunity to query some data collection methodologies and consultation processes.

In response to a question regarding the need for constituency data, the Honourable Member noted that such data are very important but are very expensive to generate. He mentioned that efforts should be made to devise alternative methods of data collection at the local level such as registration systems at the village level. Other information could be provided to Parliamentarians in the form of fairly portable leaflets or pocket size booklets that contain pertinent demographic and economic indicators. A pocket book of that nature from Mozambique was handed over to him. He appreciated its size and wondered if the NSO could produce the Malawi in Figures publication in a similar format.

The Honourable Member noted that he had taken some initiatives in the past to publicize the work of the NSO. He had invited the management of the NSO to make a presentation to the Parliamentarians. The presentation was well received and the Parliamentarians indicated that they would welcome further collaboration in the area of advocacy.

The location of the NSO headquarters in Zomba was also discussed. He noted that when he was Minister of Finance he had approved a project to move the NSO to Lilongwe. These ideas have since been shelved. He indicated that there are advantages and disadvantages in the NSO being in Zomba. The advantage is that the management of NSO would not be open to manipulation due to the distance involved. In turn, their being far away was a disadvantage for purposes of lobbying.

The Honourable Member informed the team that a Budget Office of Parliament would be established in the next two months. The purpose of this office would be to produce information of relevance to Parliamentarians regarding finance issues. This office will be reporting to the Finance and Audit Committee of Parliament.

### **2.10 National AIDS Commission**

The Peer Review Team was informed that the National Aids Commission relies substantially on the NSO figures. The data sources include:

- The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)
- The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
- Behavioural Surveillance Survey (BSS)
- Population and Housing Census
- Sentinel Surveillance (Ministry of Health)

- The last DHS incorporated blood tests for the HIV. The BSS targets high risk groups (e.g. sex workers, drivers). The DHS is normally carried out once every four years. The NSO still relies on Macro Systems International in the execution of this survey. The BSS is a new system that was introduced in 2005. It is executed once every 2 years.

An interesting observation is that the estimate of HIV prevalence obtained from the 2004 DHS and Sentinel Surveillance of 2007 was 12%.

The NAC also uses the Estimation and Projection Package (EPP) and Spectrum to derive prevalence rates of HIV. Resource allocation for persons affected by the scourge is based on prevalence rates by area. NAC does not estimate mortality due to HIV/AIDS. This is done by the Ministry of Health.

### **2.11 Reserve Bank of Malawi**

RBM views the NSO as the coordinator of essential statistics and there is regular collaboration between them, including conducting business interviews together and, with RBM as a major user, discussing shortfalls of statistics. RBM produces monetary statistics, but faces problems in collecting some information from commercial banks, and in complying with the latest IMF Balance of Payments manual because of these information gaps.

RBM believes that it is due to financial and manpower constraints that NSO no longer produces some statistics, such as on employment (last compiled in 1995, now planned from 2010). Gaps exist, such as quarterly national accounts and balance of payments estimates (RBM makes its own quarterly estimates) and RBM needs a Producer Price Index. Other statistics are produced with time lags and they disagree on some trends. RBM and NSO have agreed to meet quarterly to discuss such issues, starting during the first quarter of 2009. A questionnaire to collect information for the national accounts on real estate has been agreed with NSO.

On the positive side, the CPI is comprehensive (urban and rural) and is produced by the 15th of each following month; and the national accounts methodology has been improved. RBM has used the old and new series in parallel for 1-2 years, but the new series is now used in e.g. discussion with IMF and in RBM publications.

On independence, RBM has been criticised by IMF for working too closely with NSO on the business surveys, rather than providing a check on results produced by NSO. RBM believes that the CPI (and other NSO products) are “integrity-driven” and free from political influence. On financing, RBM has worked with NSO on the business surveys and on a private sector capital flow analysis.

### **2.12 UNFPA**

The Peer Review Team met with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative to discuss various issues pertaining to statistical development as well as to follow up on the outcomes of the Population and Housing Census carried out in June 2008.

The Population and Housing Census had been planned for September 2008. However, the Government directed that enumeration be brought forward to June of that year. The UNFPA (as the lead organization for the development partners) collaborated with the Government of Malawi for the past few years in the preparations for the census. The total budget for the census (to completion of all major activities) is \$18.4 million. The Government contribution is 20% of this amount. The Cooperating Partners that contributed to the funding of the census included the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and UNFPA. Other donors (EU, African Development Bank and GTZ) are expected to fund subsequent phases of the Census.

The UNFPA provided a Chief Technical Adviser, a Finance Officer and an Auditor for the project; and they procured equipment for the enumeration. The commitment of the Malawi Government was demonstrated by direct funding of the enumerators and the questionnaires, and of the scanners and software procured for data processing.

The development of the census questionnaire was very inclusive. All major sectors in Malawi were consulted. However, as is the usual practice in census taking, the final choice of the questions to be covered was finally decided upon by the competent authorities as it is not possible to include the desires of everybody in such a mammoth exercise.

Regarding data processing and analysis, the following reports are planned:

- |                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| ▪ Full report       | June 2009       |
| ▪ Analytical Report | September 2009  |
| ▪ Thematic Report   | Before year-end |

The enumerated population of Malawi is 13.1 million. The cost per person of the Census is estimated at US\$1.4 per person, making it one of the cheapest in the SADC region. Preliminary results were released three months after enumeration. This is a commendable achievement.

The census analysis program is expected to run until the year 2011. A number of Cooperating Partners have expressed a desire to be involved in the analysis program. This will feed useful information into the UNDAF process and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. Teams will be assembled to handle the thematic reports. It will be a collaborative effort involving the statistical system, the university and its colleges, research institutions, the Economic Association of Malawi and the Statistical Association of Malawi. Funds have been set aside to involve professionals from outside Malawi in case there is a shortage of in-country professionals. An elaborate dissemination program has been designed. This will be in the form of national workshops, discussions with traditional authorities and so on. The UNFPA is eager to disseminate the results of this census to the maximum.

Capacity building was included in the programme. This includes retraining officers involved in previous censuses to enable them to participate in the current census; training in GIS and data processing; as well as study tours. The African Development Bank has also promised some resources for capacity building.

The UNFPA is involved in other programmes in Malawi. They have supported the Malawi Socio-Economic Database (MASEDA) and the Demographic and Health Survey of 2004. They will also support the planned 2009 Demographic and Health Survey. Based on the results of this census, the UNFPA will also support the development of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS).

There has been an excellent experience of working together between UNFPA and the National Statistical Office. As regards statistical delivery, the UNFPA has full faith in the statistical system of the country.

The Peer Review Team congratulated the Government and the Cooperating Partners for a Census that was well executed and the cordial working relationship that exists between the parties.

### **2.13 Royal Norwegian Embassy**

Norway cooperates with Malawi in the areas of Agriculture, food security and climate change; Health; Budget support and financial management (including support to NSO); and Gender. Norway has assisted NSO since 2003 through an institutional development programme incorporating a twinning arrangement between NSO and Statistics Norway. As part of this programme Norway works also with MEPD on developing the use of macro-economic statistics. Within NSO, Norwegian support includes a long-term expert in economic statistics, short-term experts, short-term training in Malawi and study visits, as well as some upgrading of infrastructure including the library. Norway also supports the annual Welfare Monitoring Survey and Annual Economic Survey and they funded the 2006/07 National Census of Agriculture and Livestock (NACAL). The Embassy considers that NSO's capacity is improving to the extent NSO is taking on tasks formerly done by Norwegian experts. However there are problems of sustainability because capacity is thin and more staff are needed on national accounts. Norway has just completed a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the second phase of its assistance. A third phase was recommended by the MTR.

Norway considers NSO to be an important institution with capable staff; and all Cooperating Partners rely on its data, which are considered to be of good quality. One example of this capability is the implementation and quick results from the 2008 Population and Housing Census. On the other hand, some results from NACAL have not been published yet, and there are problems in getting data disseminated and used in planning and decision-making. NSO is working on a Data Release Calendar and the MTR recommended that Statistics Norway should be more involved in supporting the area of dissemination.

There is currently no forum for donors to discuss support to the NSO. The Government's Development Assistance Strategy envisages 16 Sector Working Groups which would meet quarterly but a lighter donor group could be envisaged for statistics. Currently NSO approaches donors in a piecemeal fashion for assistance. While the requests are within the framework of the NSO and NSS Strategic Plans, Norway would like NSO to approach donors to fund implementation of the Strategic Plans as a whole. The Norwegian representative said that Norway would happily pay their support into a common basket. The MTR recommended that Norway should be ready to take the lead among Cooperating Partners in coordinating their assistance in a more formal way. Mozambique and Tanzania shared their experiences of using Common Funds and donor groups.

The MTR recommended relocating the NSO to Zomba because, as a credible and strong institution, it deserves to be more visible but the government does not have a budget line for this relocation and Norway will not finance it. Location in Zomba involves a lot of travel for NSO staff but the Embassy has no difficulty in maintaining contact with them.

### **2.14 UK Department for International Development**

DFID is one of the largest donors in Malawi with a programme of around £70 million per annum. Around one-third of this is in the form of Direct Budget Support and DFID funds big programmes in education and health. Malawi Government and DFID need data to show evidence of change, outcomes and impact. DFID's support to NSO and NSS capacity building is funded under a programme called Performance, Evidence and Accountability which has the aim to support better decision-making and transparency. DFID had funded technical assistance and made financial contributions to activities such as the Population and Housing Census (£3 million) to support provision of quality statistics as a public good. DFID considers NSO to be a reliable source of data, based on rigorous analysis, as opposed to other information gathered through e.g. case studies by NGOs.

DFID helped to fund the design of the NSO and NSS SPs and they would welcome an opportunity to sit down with NSO and other Cooperating Partners to discuss a coordinated programme of donor support for their implementation. So far DFID have been “silent partners” in implementing the Strategic Plans with Norway more fully engaged, apart from support of the Census.

On independence of NSO, DFID has seen the debate in the media about the inflation rate but had no information to confirm or contradict the CPI figures. It was noted that NSO could manage this through communication directly to the public and through the media. DFID has confidence in NSO's financial and procurement procedures and NSO has delivered what was expected of them, including notably the quick production of summary Census results.

The peer reviewers shared information on the experiences of their countries, in the case of Mozambique in relation to the consolidation of donor contributions into a Common Fund, which has reduced the administrative burden, focused donor support on the strategic plans and empowered staff of the national statistical office. In Tanzania and some other countries (e.g. Mali, Zambia) there are donor groups on statistics which help to coordinate assistance. DFID leads the group in Tanzania.

### **2.15 The World Bank**

The World Bank is one of the major users of NSO products. In fact it may be considered the biggest user given the multi-sectoral nature of the Group's operations. They are generally pleased with the services offered by the NSO. The services of the NSO in terms of accessibility and responsiveness have improved considerably over the past few years. Statistical information is available in hard copies and online. In general data from the NSO are trusted.

However, there are a number of concerns that have to be addressed to further improve the performance of the NSO. A major issue to be addressed is the funding of statistical services. The government is generally not able to fund all statistical activities. Therefore NSO has to

depend on substantial donor funding. At the same time the availability of donor funding is never assured well in advance.

Discussions touched the issue of crop estimates derived by the Ministry of Agriculture. It was noted that estimates of crop production for 2007 have taken time to be released. The Bank informed the meeting that a new project – Agricultural Development Support Programme - would be launched soon. It will have a component of developing Agriculture Statistics. There will therefore be some considerable pressure for timely and relevant data in this sector. (As mentioned already, NSO was responsible for crop estimates only in 2003/04 and, at that time, had adequate resources and expertise for this purpose).

The availability of Foreign Direct Investment Data was also discussed. These data are usually generated by the Malawi Investment Promotion Agency. It has been noted that the information available refers to pledges rather than actual investments. It has also been noted that bank lending to the private sector has been rising over the recent past. It is not clear whether this lending is financing consumption or investment. The Bank noted that these two pieces of statistical information are not in the operational sphere of the NSO. The issue was raised because it is significant for development planning.

Finally, the location of the NSO headquarters was discussed. The Bank would wish the NSO to re-locate to Lilongwe to facilitate consultation.

#### **2.16 National Bank of Malawi headquarters – Economics Division**

The meeting was informed that there is a good working relationship with the National Statistical Office. The Bank obtains most of the information it requires direct from the NSO or through the Reserve Bank. They also obtain data through the internet or hard copy publications. There are also regular interactions through meetings convened by the Economic Association of Malawi to discuss issues of economic interest.

The Bank is of the opinion that the data produced by the NSO is of good quality. However, regarding timeliness, they noted that most of the statistical publications are not released in a timely manner. The only exception is the monthly Consumer Price Index that is usually released about 20 days after the reference period.

The Bank also obtains statistical information from the Ministry of Finance but they are of the opinion that this information is not very reliable.

The Bank produces monthly, quarterly and annual publications on issues pertaining to the economy.

Regarding general cooperation with the NSO, the Bank feels that they should be consulted whenever a new survey is being planned. This would help address user needs in a satisfactory manner. It may also be possible for the private sector in general to provide some resources to assist in the collection of statistical information.

#### **2.17 Centre for Social Research**

The Director of CSR informed the review team that CSR covers four areas of research:

- Poverty and sustainable livelihoods
- Public health and socio/ cultural dynamics
- Governance and democracy
- Environment and natural resources
- for which they write research proposals and do consultancies. This work generates income but they receive their salaries from Chancellor College, where the Fellows also teach.

CSR both works collaboratively with NSO (e.g. in sample design and methodology in the area of primary health care) and gets information from NSO. CSR Fellows find NSO data very useful in terms of reliability and timeliness (e.g. Population and Housing Census), and therefore don't need to collect it themselves. The main clients are UNICEF and UNFPA. Statistics are now demanded more than in the past as a basis for policy.

It was notable that CSR has no demand for anonymised data for analysis, but prefers instead to collect fresh data through surveys. CSR can publish its results without reference to NSO.

### **2.18 Economics Association of Malawi**

The major activities of the Economics Association of Malawi include educating the public about economic issues; advising the government on economic policy, capacity development, economic growth and development; and pre-budget activities. They have an informal association with the National Statistical Office. The National Statistical Office assists the association in preparing position papers to enable the association to fulfil its mandate. The NSO also provides relevant data sets to the association for their general use.

The association made the following observations:

- The framework for data collection and analysis is fairly robust.
- Some series come out with a time lag, but the Consumer Price Index is always produced in a timely manner.
- The NSO has a large data base. However, development partners seem eager to commission new surveys when data already exist at the NSO.
- The 1998 and 2005 Integrated Household Surveys had different frameworks. This made it difficult to derive comparable estimates of some variables.
- Estimates of food production by the Ministry of Agriculture are not scientifically based. This is due to a general lack of understanding of statistics.
- The media in Malawi sometimes distort information to boost circulation of their newspapers.
- Politicians should be encouraged to use statistics to substantiate their statements.

### **2.19 Statistical Association of Malawi**

The President of SAM told the review team that SAM was founded in 2002 and has more than 100 members. SAM's aims are to propagate the good use of statistics and to provide

training in statistics, for which they work with NSO and set Royal Statistical Society examinations.

There are two streams of professional statistical training:

- Degree courses run by Chancellor College. There are few statistics graduates but at least one per year joins NSO/NSS.
- NSO/NSS junior clerks who pass a Certificate course can go to EASTC in Tanzania for a diploma course and later qualify for a Bachelor's degree in Malawi or overseas. Also the EU/SADC training programme will be implemented and SAM members participated in a training of trainers course in Gaborone in Nov/Dec 2008. NSO staff can assist as trainers.

It is planned that an MSc degree will be offered by Chancellor College from 2010.

SAM members also run - on a pro bono basis - workshops and short courses in e.g. sampling methodology, data management, and monitoring and evaluation. Income from these courses accrues to SAM.

SAM has a good relationship with NSO, finding most of the data they need despite NSO's resource constraints. The data are accessed mainly through the NSO website.

## ANNEX A: SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

### Monday 26th January - Zomba

Time	Activity
09:00 – 10:30	Commissioner of Statistics – NSO - Mr. C. Machinjili
10:30 - 11:30	Deputy Commissioner of Statistics and all heads of Divisions
11:30 – 12:30	Meeting with other NSO staff
14:30 – 15:30	Centre for Social Research
15:30 – 16:30	Statistical Association of Malawi
17:00 -19:00	Reception at Hotel Masongola

### Tuesday 27th January – Blantyre and Lilongwe

Time	Activity
09:00 – 09:30	National Bank Headquarters Economics Division
10:00 – 11:00	Economics Association of Malawi
11:00 – 15:30	Travel to Lilongwe
15:30 – 16:30	PS – MEPD – Mr. T. Sitimawina

### Wednesday 28th January - Lilongwe

Time	Activity
08:00 – 09:00	Ministry of Education -Head of Planning
09:30 – 10:00	Director of Economic Affairs – Mr. P. Ligoya (MoF)
10:30 – 11:30	UK Department for International Development
12:30 – 13:30	Chairman: Parliamentary Committee on Economy: Hon F. Jumbe
14:30 - 15:30	Director of Research and Statistics – RBM -
16:00 – 17:00	Country Representative – UNFPA

### Thursday 29th January - Lilongwe

Time	Activity
08:30 – 11:00	Peer reviewers meeting
11:30 – 12:30	Norwegian Embassy
14:30 - 15:30	National Aids Commission – Monitoring & Evaluation
15:30 – 16:30	NSO Central Regional Office, Lilongwe
16:30 – 17:30	World Bank

### Friday 30th January - Lilongwe

Time	Activity
09:00 – 10:00	Office of President and Cabinet
10:30 - 12:00	Debriefing meeting – NSO Lilongwe
14:15	Departure for Maputo

## ANNEX B: MEETING PARTICIPANTS

### **National Statistical Office**

Mr Charles Machinjili Commissioner of Statistics

### **NSO Managers**

Ms Mercy Kanyuka Deputy Commissioner  
Mr Deric Zanera Chief Statistician  
Mr Shelton Kanyanda Chief Statistician  
Mrs Lizzie Chikoti Chief Statistician  
Mr Alick Mphonda Principal Statistician  
Mr Medson Makwemba Statistician  
Mr Frank Matumula Assistant Statistician  
Mr Maynard S S Kandoje Principal Accountant  
Mrs Maggie Chinsinga Principal Administrative Officer  
Mr Masozi Kachale NSS Project Officer  
Mr Clement Mtengula Senior Statistician  
Mr M P Namwera Principal Human Resource Officer  
Mr Malwi Yute Chief Assistant Statistician  
Mr K Jabu Banda Head of Administration

### **NSO non-management staff**

Mrs Dalitso Chabwera Assistant Statistician  
Mr Benson Mvula Assistant Statistician  
Mr C D Chida Senior Assistant Statistician  
Mrs M Chakanza Senior Statistical Clerk  
Mr Blazio Haleke Assistant Statistician  
Mr Chikondade Accountant  
Mr Benson Ponyani Assistant Statistician  
Ms Ngina Thyangathyanga Statistical Clerk  
Mrs Esmay Dandaula Statistical Clerk  
Mr Frank Matumula Assistant Statistician  
Mr P D Kasowanjete Senior Statistical Officer  
Mr Hastings Manda Stores/Procurement Officer  
Mr L T Ng'anjo Assistant Human Resource Officer  
Mr Ernest R Msukwa Assistant Statistician  
Mr Beston T Chiwaya Senior Assistant Statistician

### **Office of the President and Cabinet**

Mrs Patricia Zimpita Director of Policy Research  
Miss Marjorie Chisambo Assistant Clerk to Cabinet

### **Ministry of Economic Planning and Development**

Mr Ted Sitimawina Permanent Secretary  
Mr Hamilton Kamwana Economist

**Ministry of Finance**

Dr Perks Ligoya	Director of Economic Affairs
Mr Fletcher Chilumpha	Programme Manager
Mr Stanley Langwe	Economist
Miss Emily Zita	Principal Economist
Mr Henry Oloooketch	UNCDF Country Adviser

**Ministry of Education, Science and Technology**

Dr August Kamlongera	Director of Planning
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**Chairman, Parliamentary Economic Committee**

Hon Friday Jumbe	Member of Parliament
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**National AIDS Commission**

Mr Davie Kalomba	Head of Planning, M&E and Research
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**Reserve Bank of Malawi**

Mr Neil Nyirongo	Executive Director
Mr Efford Goneka	Director of Research
Mr Eric Hanjahanja	Senior Economist – National Accounts

**UNFPA**

Ms Esperance Fundira	UNFPA Representative
Mr Jason Onsembe	Chief Technical Adviser

**Royal Norwegian Embassy**

Ms Britt Hilde Kjolas	Country Economist
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**UK Department for International Development**

Mr Jimmy Kawaye	Project Officer, Governance
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**The World Bank**

Mr Khwima Nthara	Senior Economist
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**National Bank of Malawi headquarters**

Mr Shadreck Malenga	Economics Manager
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**Centre for Social Research**

Dr Charles Chilimampungu	Director
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**Economics Association of Malawi**

Dr Charles Mataya	Principal, The Polytechnic
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**Statistical Association of Malawi**

Dr Lawrence Kazembe	President of SAM
Dr Jimmy Namangare	Former President of SAM



