

NGOs squeezed financially

Written by Suzgo Khunga

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Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the country claim they are on the verge of closing because funding towards projects and activities has gone down recently.



Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (Congoma) and Malawi Watch executive director Billy Banda have attributed the dwindling support to civil society organisations to the global economic crisis but also remarks President Bingu wa Mutharika has made on a public podium accusing donors of supporting NGOs' plans to oust him from power. But while admitting that NGOs are struggling to survive, Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC) chairperson Undule Mwakasungura differed with his colleagues on Mutharika's statements being responsible for dwindling donor support to civil society.

Banda said in an interview Sunday that Mutharika has bad mouthed civil society at various public meetings and he feared this might have contributed to the reduction in donor funding because donors were afraid.

"The president at several occasions accused donors of supporting civil society and opposition to oust him. As a result some of our programmes have been affected adversely. Some NGOs like Malawi Carer, Civil Liberties Committee and Women's Lobby are on the brink of closure," Banda said.

He said it was important for donors to redouble efforts to ensure NGOs continue to hold government accountable.

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Congoma chairperson Voice Mhone said NGOs were operating on lean budgets because they were struggling to get resources because donors have scaled down supporting NGOs, especially those working in the area of advocacy.

“NGOs in the advocacy field are the most hit because donors have developed cold feet because of statements from government claiming NGOs are fighting the president to take over power which was not true,” Mhone said.

He said the global financial crisis had also affected donors’ level of support to NGOs and this could not be disputed. Mhone said he was worried that when civil society who fails to carry out their advocacy work to provide checks and balances to government could be susceptible to government bribery.

“We ask donors and development partners to keep on supporting NGOs so that they survive this period. If they don’t support us, Malawians will be the ones to be affected,” Mhone said.

But Mwakasungula said funding has dwindled in the governance sector of NGOs but he was sure that it was a result of the global financial crisis which has affected a lot of countries with development arms supporting civil society activities in human rights, education and governance.

“Yes, NGOs are struggling but I don’t believe remarks the president makes can stop donors from supporting us. There are some NGOs who are closing down but others as well who are still surviving because they have taken an innovative and interactive approach to sourcing funds,” Mwakasungula said.

He disclosed that NGOs in Malawi with support from donors are coming up with a basket fund to coordinate donor funding so that donor funding goes to the right sectors.

But presidential spokesperson Hetherwick Ntaba said the accusation was premature because it was clear the donors did not have substantiated evidence to indicate which NGOs have closed and how many did not get funding.

He said government departments are the ones adversely affected due to the lack of budgetary support following the pull out of Britain and other development partners.

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Ntaba argued that government of Britain has said funding to Malawi has increased but not through budgetary support meaning the funding was going to NGOs to carry out development and social work.