



CONTINUED SOCIO-ECONOMIC MISERY AMID POOR STEWARDSHIP

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Good stewardship in governing democratic societies entails the duty and obligation to care and protect citizens in times of crisis and need. Malawi is currently going through a socio-economic crisis; the signs are clear that both macroeconomic and micro environment is causing an untold harm on the majority poor. Generally, the socio-economic well-being of Malawians has deteriorated, and yet, the political governing seems lost and clueless on finding solutions to the numerous challenges rocking the country. The country is at crossroads; citizens are like the lost sheep whose shepherd has lost grip of the ethos of servant leadership. The cries of Malawians are now louder, but unfortunately fail to attract the much-needed attention of political leaders as they fall on deaf ears. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) is deeply concerned with the prevailing social injustice and prays that Malawi's political stewards regain their moral enlightenment and become sensitive to the wailing Malawians. During its quarterly meeting, CCJP Diocesan Coordinators discussed and analysed the prevailing social economic issues in the country and came up recommendations.

2.0 DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS WORTH NOTICING

It is important to state that whilst the Tonse Alliance Government may be failing to deliver on the socio-economic front, there are certain positive attainments registered in some respects. Noticeable is the even distribution of infrastructural developments across the country in order to ensure the acceleration of national development. The road construction projects in all the regions of the country is one positive aspect that should be commended. It is thus the expectation of the citizens to see such good infrastructural development projects being completed timely without any element of politicisation. As the people of Malawi commend the Government for these admirable milestones, they also expect the authorities to be as accountable and transparent as possible as funds are involved.

3.0 BITING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION: HOPELESS CITIZENRY

The undesirable macroeconomic environment facing Malawi today is the core cause of the misery of many Malawians. Incessant devaluation of the Kwacha leading to biting inflation and failure to cushion the poor through proper price regulation and fair trading as well as lack of meaningful strategies have thrown many into acute poverty. Coupled with the looming hunger situation due to the effects of Tropical Cyclone Freddy, draught in some parts of the Northern Region and continuous fuel shortages, many people will have difficulties to recover from the socio-economic tragedy anytime soon. What was expected from a caring and

sensitive government was putting up concrete and effective measures to bail out the poor from these dangers.

4.0 FOOD INSECURITY AND THE HUNGER SITUATION

A healthy population effectively and efficiently contributes to the development of the nation. Malawi faces a looming hunger situation looking at the increasing pricing of the staple food, maize, on the market and the unavailability of the grain in some areas in the country. The institutional gulfs and rigidities surrounding the operation of ADMARC on the grain market have been a concern. Resuscitating ADMARC to regain its lost glory needs to be done with urgency. The staple food is still not available and accessible in some ADMARC markets across the country. Resultantly, private traders particularly have taken advantage of the situation to exploit the unsuspecting poor Malawians. The prevailing scenario is a recipe for a manmade humanitarian calamity unless the Government takes bold measures to arrest the danger. Most households have already started feeding on wild tubers for survival and this is no acceptable.

5.0 AFFORDABLE INPUT PROGRAMME: SAME OLD DEPLORABLE STORY

Malawi's economy banks on agriculture. Thus, there is a direct relationship between the Affordable Input Programme (AIP) and household food security in the country. Unfortunately, we see the Government repeating the same mistakes committed in the 2022 farming season in the procurement of fertilizer under the AIP. This is of serious concern and worry. There is still much uncertainty regarding the procurement, distribution and availability of the invaluable commodity to the economically vulnerable farmers. The hiccups in the implementation of the AIP this year is a huge setback to realization of food security at both household and national levels. This is inviting more troubles to the already frail and limping Malawi's socio-economic environment.

6.0 CYCLONE FREDDY, RECOVERY AND UNCERTAINTIES

Disasters are a common occurrence in Malawi as year in year out the country experiences different types of hazards. Frequent occurrences of disasters in Malawi call for effective and strategic Disaster Risk Management systems in Malawi, in terms of preparedness, response and recovery. For instance, a well-planned recovery programme that is socially inclusive would be the panacea to the suffering of the many Malawians affected by the Cyclone Freddy, particularly in the country's southern region. Although the Government may be implementing the recovery interventions presently, coordination and collaboration elements are clearly weak. It is not clear how various government agencies are operationalising the recovery programme in conjunction with other partners at the district and community level. Complaints are not uncommon from vulnerable Malawians, especially the elderly, persons with disabilities, poor women and children, on the uncertainties regarding recovery programming. The Government needed to rescue the vulnerable and households with weak resilience by implementing an effective and sustainable recovery programme.

7.0 CORRUPTION AND INSTITUTIONAL FAILURES: WHERE DO WE GO?

It would seem that corruption is deeply entrenched and institutionalised in the country despite the political and official speeches that the vice is being tackled. The graft busting agency, Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), and other collaborative bodies such as the Malawi

Police Service and the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP) have miserably failed Malawians in this regard. Much of the cancer is in the institutional failures within the bodies that are charged with the responsibility to combat corruption. Selective justice in the handling of the corruption cases has clearly crept in with those politically connected being treated as sacred cows. This is an insult to the justice system and the larger common good. It is, therefore, a foregone conclusion that these systemic shortcomings have potentially rendered the efforts in fighting the morbid levels of corruption ineffective. To this end, calls for the establishment of a special corruption prosecution agency should be supported.

8.0 STIFLING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

A healthy democracy is one in which the citizens enjoy fundamental freedoms and rights. Freedoms of expression and assembly and the existence of a free civic space should be the bedrock and hallmark of a growing democratic culture. Recent phenomena where political shenanigans have thwarted the enjoyment of freedoms of expression and assembly through people's staging demonstrations to demand accountability from duty bearers, are indicative of gagging and squeezing the civic space. This must not be tolerated in a free and democratic Malawi. One wonders why and how the Tonse Alliance Government has suddenly forgotten that it is a governing entity that is a product of people's power and active citizenship. True, honest and credible leadership should not run away from the demands of accountability.

9.0 REFUGEE PROTECTION AND INHAMANE CONSIDERATIONS

Refugees are human beings who are entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms. Despite the reservations that Malawi made in the ratification of the United Nations and continental treaties for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, it is imperative to recognize the widely accepted international standards in treating refugees and asylum seekers. Refugees and asylum seekers in the country have not been treated with dignity in light of the refugee relocation exercise. Several human rights violations have been suffered by refugees and asylum seekers orchestrated by state agencies as well as the country's citizens while law enforcers keep watching. This is unacceptable! Conditions at Dzaleka Refugee Camp to where these voiceless people are being relocated are appalling; and government's treatment of these helpless people in the relocation activity is quite inhumane. However, the Government is duty bound to protect refugees and asylum seekers as a matter of law, moral obligation and solidarity in humanity. And why is Malawi called the Warm Heart of Africa?

10.0 WEAKENING STATE SECURITY

Over the past weeks, Malawi has been marred by a disturbing series of murders, painting a bleak picture of the nation's security landscape. These incidents not only highlight the vulnerability of citizens but also underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive response. While the state has offered assurances, it is imperative to intensify investigative efforts to swiftly apprehend and bring the perpetrators to justice. Additionally, there is a pressing demand to bolster national security measures, addressing any systemic weaknesses that might contribute to such incidents. This multifaceted approach is essential not only for resolving ongoing cases but, more importantly, for preventing future occurrences and restoring a sense of safety and confidence within the country.

11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the foregoing, CCJP makes the following recommendations for urgent action:

- i) The Government to decisively address the macroeconomic hurdles facing the country and the continuous economic challenges like fuel shortages;
- ii) The Government to take bold decisions to address the hunger situation by, among other things, reorganizing ADMARC to play its rightful role on the commodity market and exploring other measures of producing the much needed commodity through irrigation in mega farms;
- iii) The Government should urgently roll out an emergency food distribution initiative to bail out the socio-economically marginalised and vulnerable households from acute hunger. Implementation of an inclusive social protection programme is needed;
- iv) There should be decisive action from the Ministry of Agriculture to expedite the distribution of fertiliser and other inputs under the AIP;
- v) Government should prioritise the poor and marginalised people in the implementation of the post Cyclone Freddy recovery programme. There is also need to adequately finance and effectively coordinate the recovery programme;
- vi) The Government, through wide and genuine consultations, should let Malawians decide the institutional arrangement that they desire for the effective fight against corruption in light of the failure of the anti-corruption institutions;
- vii) Political forces within the Tonse Alliance Government should desist from acts that potentially shrink the country's civic space. Harassment of citizens and victimisation of human rights defenders using the Police on the basis of dissent should be discouraged;
- viii) There is need to combat elements of impunity surrounding the victimisation of refugees and asylum seekers and the law enforcement agencies should do their work without any political interference.
- ix) The national security organs should coordinate and apprehend offenders behind the murders. There should be a comprehensive review of gaps that have caused a lapse in national security.

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