

REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF MCM NATIONAL GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON REVEREND P. SEMPHERE DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF A CONFERENCE ON DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM AT ANNIES LODGE IN ZOMBA

- The Vice Chairperson of MCM National Governing Council and also Executive Director of CONGOMA, Mr. T. Nandolo
- MCM Member of Board of Trustees who is also Dean of Education and Media Studies at the Polytechnic Mr. G. Mang'anda
- The Interim Chairperson of MCM Ethics, Complaints and Disciplinary Committee and also Managing Director of Capital Radio Mr. A. Osman.
- The Executive Director of Media Council of Malawi, Mr. Baldwin Chiyamwaka.
- Professor Chris Kamlongera from the University of Malawi.
- Professor Jack Makhaza from the Share World Open University.
- Distinguished Executive Directors from both Public and Private Media Houses.
- Mr V. Chinyama, Communications Manager from UNICEF Our Conference
- Ms S.Muguro from UNDP
- Distinguished Invited Participants
- Members of the Press
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel greatly honoured to be part of this auspicious occasion, where I have been given the opportunity to inaugurate this Conference on *Development Journalism* for Media Executives and College Deans here at Annies Lodge in the City of Zomba.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, I presume as you were coming to this meeting were you might have been asking yourself, why should we gather to discuss Development Journalism. Personally I feel this gathering is very important to us, because among other things it will accord us the opportunity to explore how as nation we have fared in terms of handling Development Journalism. Generally speaking, although there is no empirical data, it can always be argued that our nation has experienced a general decline in the coverage of development news. The fact of the matter is that the public, civil society, development partners and government ministries have on several occasions at different foras expressed dissatisfaction in the way the media in Malawi cover development and economic issues. Accordingly, the media has been accused of concentrating on political news, which dominates front page headlines in most of our newspapers and top stories on radios and television. Unfortunately, this is done at the expense of development as well as economic news.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, MCM having noted this negative trend, wrote a concept paper to World Bank for financial support to hold a conference so that as media executive and college deans we could come together so that we can chart the way forward, as a way of changing the status quo. Interestingly, the media has not denied these accusations and claims. The media does admit that political news does dominate news coverage in both the electronic and print media. The media accepts them, with reasons of cause. On its part the media claims that political news sustain newspaper circulation and attracts large listenership. Interestingly, the media strongly advance this argument also in spite of lack of proper empirical evidence. Although media in Malawi continues to play a crucial

role of educating, entraining and information the nation, I am of the view that development journalism should not just be treated as an appendage to their work. It must be acknowledged that development journalism is supposed to provide constructive criticism of government and development and at the same time inform readers, listeners and viewers about how development in their local and wider communities affects them.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, seen in this light, development journalism is therefore relevant today and perhaps or the more reason why we need to rethink about it and promote it. For this reason, it need not be over-emphasized that development journalism could make a positive contribution to the development of our communities and the nation at large. In fact the Republican Constitution of Malawi does, encourages the media to facilitate and promote public participation in all national social and economic development endeavours, which is very crucial for the success of both individual initiatives and government development programmes.

It is in this respect that I would like to call upon both training institutions and media houses in Malawi to do more on development. Of cause I do realize that most of our media the media houses have policies that include development journalism. However, more can be done to ensure that development journalism is given is not only given prominent position in our media houses but is put vehemently into practice. We need to give development journalism a prominent place it deserves. Our communities and Malawi as a developing country stands to gain more if more attention is also given to development journalism apart from the political news. This view is equally shared by many institutions and organizations in the development and economic industries.

Furthermore, I would like to call upon our private sector to come up with Awards for journalists and media houses that will cover extensively development news. I am of the view that such award could spur our journalists and media houses to write more of development and economic news. In fact I am looking forward to a time when the cover stories in the newspapers and top headlines on the radio stations shall dwell more on development stories.

My message equally goes to our development partners in this country. We would like to encourage them to strengthen their offices that deal with communications in their respective organizations so that the Communications Officers are able to share their knowledge and skills with our journalists in the media houses. Such an interaction would motivate our journalists to write more on development news.

Lastly, I would like to thank you most sincerely once again inviting me to be part of this momentous occasion. Furthermore, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the World Bank thorough their Civil Society Grants Program for their financial support to Media Council of Malawi which has made us to gather here today. It is my sincere hope that the friendship which has been established between the World Bank and MCM shall grow for the mutual benefit and betterment of the profession of journalism in Malawi as a whole and media practitioners in particular. I personally wish you fruitful discussions and every success during this conference.

With these few remarks it is my privilege and singular honour to declare the Conference on Development Journalism organized by MCM officially open.

I thank you for your attention

May God bless us and mother Malawi