

# **The Role of Information Education and Communication (IEC) in Poverty**

## **Reduction Efforts:**

The Case of the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF)

**Blessing Chinsinga**

### **Abstract**

This article is based on a research study undertaken to assess the impact of MASAF's IEC interventions in facilitating grass root poverty alleviation efforts. Its argument is that the waves of democratisation extending to all possible corners of the African continent challenges IEC to reclaim its catalyst role in poverty reduction efforts. The political rebirth, or more precisely said, renaissance gives advocacy, social mobilisation and communication programme activities a new lease of life to deliver the desired maximum strategic impact on poverty alleviation but, of course, within the context of participatory development strategies. The underlying assumption is that the dynamics of a liberalised political milieu are not only to be reflected but also replicated within organisations operating within the borders of democratising polities. This would, *inter alia*, substantially contribute to the cultivation of a culture of transparency and accountability, which are critical ingredients for engineering the possible success of poverty alleviation efforts.

### **Setting the context**

MASAF is one of the worldwide World Bank supported social fund initiatives that are closely linked to the attempts to cushion the adverse effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Most developing countries were, due to perennial disappointing economic performance, either systematically induced or coerced to adopt SAPs as their overarching policy framework beginning mainly in the early 1980s. The negative effects of SAPs, have, thus, by far, outweighed their positive effects, if any (Clark, 1991 & Chinsinga, 1995). Unemployment has soared; prices of essential commodities have skyrocketed; and expenditures on social services, especially health and education, have progressively declined. However, in the popular mind, the origin of MASAF in Malawi is intimately linked to the change of government following the first ever post independence plural electoral contest in May 1994 in which the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) regime was, peacefully and largely outside the international limelight, ejected from the corridors of power to give way for the United Democratic Front (UDF) government (1)

The opening up of the political system following the democratisation process which set in motion in 1992 provided, *inter alia*, a rare window of opportunity to re-examine the country's socio-economic status with entirely bias free analytical lenses. Naturally, policy makers and analysts are being challenged to quickly awaken from a deeply entrenched culture of lack of open and critical policy debates and forcefully take up their *bonafide* role as vanguards and catalysts of

accelerated socio-economic transformation. The reforms are also expected to shake the very foundations of the culture of docility and submissiveness that was, for three consecutive decades since in 1964, systematically cultivated by the one party state apparatus among the already predominantly politically naïve citizenry. During this period, Dr Banda's MCP regime's official view was that as long as every Malawian was well fed, lived in a house which did not leak and had adequate clothing, the question of poverty did not arise at all. In fact, it was a taboo to consider poverty as a public social problem requiring urgent policy action. It, therefore, came not as a surprise at all that the issue of poverty was hotly debated and contested in the run to the first ever-plural electoral contest (Chinsinga, 1995).

The MCP regime was visibly at pains to admit the widespread of poverty at household levels given the slogan of self-sufficiency orchestrated by its leadership especially in the context of rather fairly impressive economic performance in the honeymoon years of independence and its consequent depiction as a star performer by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Savings as a proportion of GDP rose from a modest level of 0.3% in 1964 to 19.7% in 1979; industrial output expanded at the rate of 8.2 % per annum between 1964 and 1978; employment increased at the rate of 10% per annum; and domestic exports rose from U\$48million to about U\$ 285 million (GoM/UN, 1993 & Kalemba, 1997). The paradox is that the majority of the Malawians did not enjoy the benefits of the seemingly uninterrupted post-independence macro-economic property, which lasted about close to two consecutive decades. The welfare of individual households has progressively declined over the years and the projected future outlook does not offer even the slightest glimmer of hope for possible recovery.

It is against this background that in addition to campaigning for the restoration of human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law, the UDF also campaigned on the poverty alleviation platform. It, among other things, linked the widespread and deeply entrenched poverty to the fact that the MCP regime maintained a fee paying primary education in which total enrolment was less than 70% and a top-down management development system in which the genuinely felt needs, hopes, ambitions and aspirations of the people were not recognised, their voices not respected and given an appropriate place in the grass root development discourse. Urban and rural poverty are estimated at 60% and 65% respectively (GOM/UN, 1993). Fairly recently, the 1998 Integrated Household Survey (IHS) estimates the overall incidence of poverty at 65.3% or put differently, 6.3 million people out of 9.8 million people in the country eke their livelihood below the poverty line. And compared to the 1993 GoM/UN Situation Analysis, the IHS projects the incidence of rural poverty at 66.5% and 54.9% respectively which suggests that the levels of rural poverty have been steadily deteriorating over the past five or so years. It also gives a somewhat more detailed picture of the incidence of poverty estimating the regional variations in the incidence of poverty as well. In the South, the prevalence of poverty is estimated at 68.1%; 62.8% in the Centre; and 62.5% in the North. In addition, income inequality is one of the highest

in Africa; life expectancy is as low as 39.3 years; less than half of the population has access to safe and clean water; HIV/AIDS and child mortality rates are among the highest in Africa; and only two fifth of the population is literate. It is in this context that MASAF is widely seen as a vehicle for poverty alleviation by channelling money to poor communities as clearly espoused in the 1999 UDF's election manifesto:

“In contrast to MCP's top-down approach, the UDF government initiated the Malawi Social Action Fund. MASAF is a rapid disbursement fund that is community led and partnership driven. It is a central pillar in the government's poverty alleviation programme” (UDF 1999 p. 40)

Since its launch about seven years ago, the MASAF initiative has been evaluated from various standpoints. The purposes of the evaluations, of course, generally border on assessing and fine-tuning its performance wherever necessary with the noble intention of making sure that the MASAF initiative delivers maximum strategic impact on the livelihoods of mostly the rural poor. The focus of this paper, however, is on the MASAF's IEC activities. The underlying rationale for IEC being an integral part of the MASAF initiative is to ensure that its activities are accurately portrayed to its clientele and a hierarchy of stakeholders and to clarify misconceptions as and when they arise. Moreover, the evolving plural political order inevitably gives advocacy, social mobilisation and communication programme activities a fresh impetus and the much-needed new lease of life. The purposes of MASAF IEC activities as stated in its 1997 IEC Strategic Plan are as follows:

- Inform beneficiaries, stakeholders and the public about the purpose, procedures, operations, and benefits MASAF delivers to Malawians;
- Educate beneficiaries, stakeholders and the public about MASAF community development paradigm, project operational procedure, and benefits of actively participating in the project;
- Communicate to beneficiaries, stakeholders and the public the government of Malawi's objective to empower communities in designing, implementing community development project's to alleviate poverty, improve people's quality of life, and provides safety nets in form of cash transfer and infrastructure in most poor communities; and
- Invite all interested parties to participate in the development of Malawi.

### **Background of IEC activities in Malawi**

Malawi does not have a very long history of IEC. In fact, it is as short as its experience with the hitherto unfolding plural political dispensation. This brevity has, of course, to be understood in the context of Malawi's post independence political history in which it was transformed into a highly centralised and virtually closed society. Thus, prior to 1994, Malawians experienced arbitrary political interference and intrusion in all spheres of private as well as public life. The MCP regime

deliberately curtailed fundamental freedoms and human rights which consequently cultivated a political culture of fear, docility, suspicion, top-down unilateral decision making systems, total loyalty and obedience to authority virtually permeated all spheres of life (Nkhalambayausi, 1995 & Dzimbiri, 1997).

When Malawi became independent in 1964, it inherited a liberal Constitution, which enshrined the bill of rights (Chigawa, 1993 & Kaunda, 1994). However, the political events that followed within the next two years, largely triggered by the famous 1964 cabinet crisis, saw Malawi adopting a Republican Constitution in which the bill of rights and fundamental freedoms were abrogated altogether. Political pluralism was quickly outlawed in favour of the one party system politics. The non-inclusion of the bill of rights was justified on two accounts. It was felt it would be redundant because the country had already subscribed to the 1945 UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights. The provision of the bill of rights in the Constitution would therefore simply be tantamount to unnecessary duplication of efforts. A related concern was that the explicit provision of bill of rights would also disable and ultimately cripple the government machinery because it would engender unnecessary conflicts between the executive and the judicial organs of government (GoM, 1966). These sweeping constitutional amendments coupled with the Censorship and Control Entertainment Act (2) which empowered government to decide what people could hear, watch and listen, created an atmosphere in which IEC activities could not thrive or did not simply matter at all.

The IEC phenomenon in Malawi is certainly an emerging sphere of endeavour within organisational frameworks, which, as already pointed out elsewhere in the paper, has to be understood in the context of the hitherto evolving political order (Chilowa 2000 et al 2000). Prior to 1994, many freedoms including the freedom of expression, access to and dissemination of information were virtually non-existent. The restrictive broader political culture was inevitably replicated within organisational settings since organisations are characterised as miniature polities and are as such dictated by the dynamics of the broader polity (Khwandalla, 1977). Osman (1997) makes a similar argument in a slightly different context though. He argues that the characteristics of democracy at the local level resemble to some extent those of the national level. This means that prior to 1994, organisational life hardly had any semblance of democratic orientations in their day-to-day business transactions. In that milieu, IEC activities were hardly a priority, or put differently, were virtually a non-starter.

Inevitably, the change in the political environment from a totally authoritarian to a democratic system of governance has had tremendous impact on routine management patterns of organisation in the country. The 1995 Constitution is especially important in this regard. In sharp contrast to the 1966 Republican Constitution it superseded, it, devotes the entire Chapter IV explicitly espousing the provisions of the bill of rights. This is certainly a very important constitutional safeguard for enjoying, protecting and promoting the fundamental and inalienable

rights and freedoms for all without regard to race, colour, sex, creed, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic, or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status. The attendant changes, particularly the competitive set up, means that organisations are now somewhat inclined to embark on IEC programmes so as to accurately present themselves to their clientele. There is, thus, need for organisations not only to clarify misconceptions about their operations but also to proactively influence their respective operative environments.

Many organisations, especially NGOs, have IEC Units mandated to clarify their missions, principles, values, procedures and ideals. These IEC units are in most cases designated as public relation offices. The government has equally reoriented itself to the demands of the unfolding political dispensation. It has, so far, floated some IEC initiatives although a comprehensive IEC policy is yet to be developed. An IEC task force was launched and based in the Ministry of Gender and Community Services to plan for progressive adoption of IEC programmes within the government's administrative machinery in 1996. A similar IEC initiative was undertaken within the parastatal sector at the beginning of 1997 (Chilowa et al, 2001). Not much has been achieved in both cases except that the pivotal role of IEC in the day-to-day management of organisations has been widely recognised. It is expected that the IEC field will continue to develop and flourish in response to the inherent demands of the liberalised and franchised political environment.

### **Inquiry techniques and study coverage**

The overall purpose of the study was to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the MASAF IEC strategies in effecting behavioural and attitudinal change among beneficiaries. The magnetic appeal of IEC programmes is that they engineer behavioural and attitudinal changes that induce innovative responses to development initiatives particularly in a setting in which the populace is still reeling from the aftermaths of an oppressive political milieu and its legacy clearly lingers on. IEC activities, especially in the context of grass root development initiatives, are in fact extremely vital in creating knowledge, skills and attitudes that are geared at developing people's capacity to assess, respond and initiate development interventions (Dwivedi, 1994).

The nature of the study necessitated a predominantly qualitative approach. It thus essentially sought to explore the extent to which people's views are consistent or contradictory with MASAF's intended development objectives and whether there are any barriers in the effective delivery of IEC interventions. The study also captured the perceptions of various stakeholders at national and district levels about MASAF, which, as a matter of fact, is widely perceived as a mechanism for poverty alleviation in democratic Malawi.

The information collection techniques used included Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and document reviews. Key Informant interviews were used for collecting data from

stakeholders at national and district levels. Focus Group Discussions were conducted at community levels. They targeted ordinary men and women as well as those holding positions in Project Management Committees (PMCs), Area Development Committees (ADCs) and Village Development Committees (ADCs). Every effort was made to ensure a reasonably gender balanced composition of the Focus Group Discussions. The Focus Group Discussions included at least a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 12 participants. At least four Focus Group Discussions were held at each sampled site. These included men's; women's; youths; and a mixture of representatives from different development management committees.

The main focus of the document reviews was on the design of MASAF IEC materials and the findings of preceding studies. The qualitative part of the study covered about 41 projects; 11 in the North; 12 in the South; and 18 in the Centre. The selection of the project sites visited was based on the following criteria: urban versus rural sites; the categories of projects (Public Works Programmes vs Community Sub Projects vs Sponsored Sub Projects); different types of projects (schools, clinics, water points orphanages etc); and projects at different levels of completion. A very brief survey was conducted but largely as a supplementary data collection tool.

The sample survey covered about 8,264 household members across the country. It drew 25% of the respondents from the North, 32% in the Centre and 43% in the South. The survey respondents were disproportionately rural based. Up to about 89% of the respondents came from rural areas, which closely reflected the urban rural population distribution at the national level (3). The respondents were almost equally distributed in terms of gender. Male respondents made about 49.8% of the survey sample while female respondents constituted the remaining 50.2% also closely reflecting the national population distribution in terms of gender. The main objective of the sample survey was to capture the basic elements of the MASAF development initiative and its IEC interventions so as to provide the context for substantive qualitative inquiry.

### **Empirical results**

This study was conducted between August 2000 and February 2001. It was carried out at a time when several studies had established that there were widespread misconceptions about the MASAF development initiative (MASAF, 1997). It was, therefore, imperative for this study to establish whether the misconceptions about MASAF as reported in the previous studies had been clarified and rectified following the systematic intensification of IEC efforts. According to Dwivedi (1994), the success of IEC interventions is measured in terms of the extent to which the target groups become aware of the institutions, activities and issues being promoted. The findings of the study are presented under three headings: knowledge of MASAF; politics threatens the efficacy of MASAF; and coordination is a very big problem.

### *Knowledge of the MASAF*

The findings of the study show that MASAF is a widely known development initiative. Up to about 97.2% of the respondents reported to have at least heard about MASAF. It is, however, important to note that a larger proportion of the respondents indicated to have heard about MASAF between 1997 and 1998. This, coincidentally, turned out to be the period during which MASAF adopted the strategic plan for a robust IEC framework to actively promote its activities to the wider clientele.

MASAF as a poverty alleviation initiative has three different programmes. It is involved in Community Sub Projects (CSP) (4); Public Works Programme (PWP)(5); and Sponsored Sub Project (SSP) (5) . CSP interventions were widely known (88%); PWP (66.2%); and SSP (23%). SSP were understandably least known because they only become an integral part of the MASAF initiative during its second phase launched in 2000. The other components have been part and parcel of the MASAF initiative since its launch in July 1995.

It was, at the time of its inauguration, emphasised that the MASAF development initiative was adopted in the spirit of institutionalising a radically new approach to rural development as provided for in the 1995 liberal Constitution. This Constitution provides for good governance and development as rights (7), which inevitably calls for the empowerment of the poor people for effective popular participation and decision-making in their respective areas. The popular view is that if poverty will have to be significantly reduced, then, development interventions have to be based on the aspirations, hopes, ambitions and fears of the target groups (Chinsinga, 2000 & Chilowa et al, 2001). This means that the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), which has been the operative development philosophy of the incumbent regime since 1994 thrives on participation as a launching pad for fighting the widely entrenched poverty. As part of the broad based poverty alleviation initiative, MASAF is expected to strengthen health; education and economic infrastructure for poor communities; improve access to social and economic services such as drug supplies and desks; revive the spirit of self help and increase a sense of community ownership and empowerment; create income-earning opportunities through employment; and improve food availability in food deficit areas (Chilowa et al, 2000).

It was, consequently, of great interest in the study to find out whether the target communities feel that MASAF implementation strategies are any qualitatively different from the earlier development interventions they have been exposed to. This was further motivated by the existing documentation which emphasises that prior to the adoption of the poverty alleviation policy framework, development interventions were implemented in a characteristically top-down fashion (Kishindo, 1997 & Kalemba, 1997). About 49% of the respondents indicated that MASAFs implementation strategies are different; 30% were indifferent; and about 21% felt that MASAF's strategies were essentially similar to those utilised in previous development initiatives. More detailed subsequent responses indicated that 87% felt that MASAF is different because it

involves target communities throughout all stages of the project cycle; 85% observed that MASAF responds to development needs raised by beneficiary communities; and about 9% felt that MASAF impose projects on target communities.

The MASAF IEC strategic plan identifies several channels that are used to reach out stakeholders which, *inter alia*, include radio, newspapers, posters, calendars, workshops, face to face meetings, diaries, orientation workshops, community drama, poetry, song and dance. Very few respondents reported to be familiar with the whole range of IEC channels beyond the radio and the newspaper. In fact, about 69.4% of the respondents reported to be familiar with radio compared to about 10.9% who reported to be familiar with the newspaper as MASAF IEC channels. The other channels on the menu were virtually unknown and therefore insignificant. There are, however, other channels, which, though not officially recognised, play a very significant role in MASAF's IEC activities. These, for example, include meetings with village heads (14%) and political meetings (7%). For political meetings to serve as MASAF's IEC channel is quite inevitable. The reason is that the MASAF development initiative is often largely presented as if it is the ruling party's programme and not a government one. Thus, the very same mentality of the one party era has strongly persisted in which the party and government are indistinguishable. They are more or less one and the same thing. It was thus observed that no politician, especially from the government side, can hold a rally without making any reference to MASAF's instrumental role in facilitating grass root development.

### *Politics threatens MASAF's efficacy*

The study found out that politics presents a formidable challenge to the ultimate success of MASAF IEC interventions. The possibility of excessive political interference in the MASAF initiative had been anticipated and consequently engendered a heated debate about its appropriate institutional blueprint. On the basis of the debate, the most attractive institutional design was the one in which politicians could have absolutely no role. An institutional structure of that nature was, however, virtually inconceivable for the simple reason that MASAF operates using loan funds ratified by Parliament. This inevitably gives politicians an open invitation to exercise legislative oversight particularly in how the funds are disbursed and ultimately utilised. Moreover, it is a widely shared consensus that politics cannot practically be totally divorced from development (Gibbon, 1995; Hulme & Turner, 1996; Chinsinga, 2000).

At all levels, the respondents acknowledge that the involvement of politicians in the MASAF development initiative is inevitable but their major concern is the extent to which politicians have, in process, abused their oversight role. Instead of facilitating MASAF IEC efforts, most of them have fallen prey to using the MASAF initiative as the springboard for gaining sheer political mileage. Hence, most politicians end up, deliberately for that matter, misconstruing MASAF's objectives, principles, procedures and ideals. The ripple effects of the resultant distortions, of

whatever magnitude, are quite substantial mainly because of the pathetically low literary levels in the country. The 2000 SADC Human Development Report, for example, estimates that the country's literary level is about 42.9%. The self-interest tendencies of the political cadres are particularly perverse because Malawi is yet to reach stage in which issues and not mere sentiments play a critical role in influencing the voters mind in the electoral process. The common practice, especially for the majority of politicians belonging to the ruling party, is to simply use MASAF as a platform for lashing at the failures of the MCP regime and not as a basis for debating strategies that would effectively bail the country out of current development impasse. This happens despite sensitising the politicians to the objectives, procedures, ideals and values of MASAF immediately after general elections with regular follow-ups whenever opportunities to do so arise.

Much as most stakeholders have reservations with the compromising tendencies of politicians, they, however, as already pointed out above, do not think that their involvement *per se* is a bad idea. It is, in fact, very vital as it gives MASAF the very much-needed publicity mainly because politicians are closer to the people than MASAF's institutional framework, which does not extend down to the grassroots where development initiatives for possible implementation are hatched and mobilised. To some extent, the findings of the study confirm the pivotal linkage and coordinative role that politicians play within the MASAF initiative. When asked to evaluate the IEC Channels in terms of consistency and timeliness, the respondents (63%) and (75%) respectively indicated that political meetings are consistent and timely to have the desired strategic impact.

Owing to the deeply entrenched treacherous tendencies of most politicians, the majority of grass root Focus Group Discussions' participants demonstrated preference to work closely with chiefs than politicians in MASAF funded development initiatives. This should not, however, be interpreted as a total negation of the possible role of politicians but that it should instead be largely perceived as being merely complementary. The centrality of the role of the chiefs in MASAF funded development initiatives is equally borne out by the results of the sample survey. Up to 91% and 96% of the respondents considered chiefs to be consistent and timely as MASAF IEC channels respectively. Their roles could, on the basis of the findings of this study, be further enhanced if they could effectively collaborate with frontline staff of various sectoral authorities stationed within their respective areas of jurisdiction.

### ***Coordination is a very big problem***

Although the country has a very long history of decentralisation, the adoption of the 1995 liberal Constitution created a firm legal basis for devolution of authority and decision making powers to lower level administrative units. The previous attempts at decentralization, which date back to as early as 1964, were, *inter alia*, intended to signify discontinuity with the notorious colonial past

and herald the dawn of a new era of freedom and prosperity. Up until 1995, the efforts at decentralisation were characteristically geared at deconcentrating government activities, which essentially means the process of shifting decision-making power within the central government structure from central government officials in the capital to central government officials that are located outside the capital, at the regional or local level. Put differently, it simply refers to the spread of central government functions and staff into the field (Boex, 1999 & Chinsinga & Dzimadzi, 2001)

A draft National Decentralisation policy was mooted in October 1996 as a follow up to concretise the provisions of the 1995 liberal Constitution on good governance and development. The policy was effectively adopted exactly two years later and paved way for the enactment of the Local Government Act in December 1998. The Act came into effect in March 1999, which in essence, sealed the legal framework for the possible institutionalisation of a fully functional local government system. Suffice it here to note that the current decentralisation institutional and policy reforms primarily aims at establishing a highly harmonised institution to coordinate grass root development efforts. MASAF is expected to function and deliver its services under the aegis of the decentralised planning and governance framework.

The findings of the study are somewhat mixed in this regard. The perceptions of MASAF personnel and the other stakeholders within the sphere of grass root development are contradictory. MASAF perceives itself as being at least fairly integrated into the evolving decentralised planning and governance system. On the contrary, the rest of the stakeholders working alongside MASAF, argue that the reforms have hardly reoriented MASAF's *go it alone* disposition. It is thus, on the basis of the foregoing, very difficult to articulate a concrete picture of the reality on the ground especially in view of the qualitative procedure of inquiry that the substantial part of the study adopted.

The dust somewhat settles when the focus switches to the respondents at grass root levels. When they were asked to evaluate MASAF's IEC activities in terms of providing details pertaining to how various agents work together in their facilitatory role of the grass root development process only 20% of the respondents indicated that MASAF was effective in this regard. MASAF IEC initiatives further registered dismal levels of effectiveness in promoting the participation of vulnerable groups (31%) and in fostering financial accountability and reporting (25%). They were thought to be reasonably effective in promoting the participation of women (83%); informing and educating the general population on environmental protection, natural resource management and rehabilitation (57%); promoting gender education (56%); and promoting project sustainability (42%).

The contradictory perspectives of MASAF on one hand and its partners on the other serve to underline the inherent nature of politics of development. At stake in the engagement and disengagement is the desire to protect, promote and safeguard self-interest. The easiest way out

is, therefore, to counter shift the blame to each other. MASAF would want to be absolved of the blame because it has a reasonable amount of resources at its disposal. The other stakeholders are very forthcoming to blame MASAF because they want to have a fair share of the resources that MASAF controls. This is, however, not the real problem. It is, in fact, just a tip of an iceberg. In a recent study commissioned to evaluate Malawi's decentralisation efforts since 1993, Chinsinga & Dzimadzi (2001) found out that the local government system is, *inter lia*, failing to get fully institutionalised because of heavily entrenched politics of identity. The evolving local government system proposes that stakeholders facilitating grass root development efforts should pool their resources in the District Development Fund (DDF). The pool nature of the DDF fund invariably means that credit for grass root development interventions is not attributed to individual stakeholders but rather to the DDF. Some stakeholders, therefore, deliberately ignore the decentralised planning system because they want labels attached to grass root development interventions that have benefited from their resources.

A related challenge is that sectoral authorities are at widely varying levels of devolving their decision making powers and authority to the district levels which makes coordination within the evolving decentralised governance and planning system further difficult. Very few sectoral authorities, for example, education and health, have the mandate to make decisive decisions on the spot whilst the majority cannot do so without first taking recourse to Capital Hill for ratification. The findings of the study also point out to the urgent need for enhanced cooperation among various partners in grass root development. They should not look at each other as competitors but rather as partners in the process of facilitating grass root development. Corroborative IEC initiatives, among other things, clearly detailing out how as stakeholders within the sphere of grass root development relate and complement each other's efforts could be a useful starting point.

### **Concluding reflections**

The emerging democratic order certainly makes IEC activities in Malawi imperative particularly for most service delivery organisations. The opening up of the political system has tremendously transformed the operative environments of organisations mainly in terms of the profundity, intensity and scales of competition they are now exposed to. The underlying assumption as posited by Khwandalla (1977) is that organisations as miniature polities are, to a very large extent, driven by the dynamics of the broader polity. This means that changes in the broader polity are not only bound to be reflected but also replicated in organisations operating within the polity concerned.

The study has shown that IEC activities are very crucial especially in fostering development interventions since quite often development innovations requires reengineering and reorientation of behaviours and attitudes. There is, however, need for proper research regarding IEC channels

to be exploited in order to achieve the envisaged maximum strategic impact among the target beneficiaries. The MASAF IEC strategic plan, for instance, identifies a whole menu of channels yet only two or three have proved viable enough. The need for prior research is further reinforced by the fact that the study identified some unofficially recognised channels and they yet enjoy remarkably significant credibility among the target beneficiaries. No IEC activities can be expected to succeed without prior thorough understanding of how the people to be affected by an initiative perceive their own problems and the innovations being proposed, what they aspire to achieve, how they obtain and exchange information, which media sources and interpersonal channels enjoy most credibility and so on (Dzimadzi et al, 2001). This information is very vital since it determines the message design, the most appropriate media sources and channels to use and how and when to use them.

The major challenge facing MASAF IEC interventions is politics. Since issues are hardly the driving force for politicking, the majority of the politicians are, inevitably, tempted to use MASAF as sheer political bait. The drawback is that this deeply and widely entrenched practice greatly distorts principles, procedures, values and ideals of MASAF. Little wonder that the grassroots expressed preference for chiefs as opposed to politicians to serve as primary facilitators of MASAF funded development interventions. The development agents themselves complicate the situation even further because they are often embroiled in the politics of identity. This adversely constrains working relationships among stakeholders, which are key to the possible institutionalisation and consolidation of a harmonised decentralised planning and governance system.

## **Notes**

- (1) Since the attainment of independence in July 1964, Malawi was an autocratic state one party state. There was no any other party apart from the MCP, which exercised very tight control over the citizens virtually in all spheres of life. Malawi, just like the majority of countries within the Southern Africa sub-region, caught up with the waves of democratisation in the beginning of the 1990s, which culminated into the first ever post independence multiparty elections in May 1994. The UDF, which won the elections and constituted Malawi's second republic was retained into power in the subsequent 1999 general elections. Its current term is expected to run up to 2004.
- (2) See Laws of Malawi CAP 21:01. This Act has now been amended to reflect the realities of the unfolding democratic order. It regulated and controlled the exhibition of cinematograph pictures, the importation, production, dissemination of undesirable publications, pictures and records, the performance or presentation of stage plays and public entertainments in the interest of safety, and to provide for matters incidental thereto or connected therewith.

- (3) Note that Malawi is divided into three administrative regions, namely, South, Centre and North. Between 1964 and 1997, these administrative regions were subdivided into 24 districts: 10 in the South; 9 in the Centre; and 5 in the North. Following presidential directives between 1997 and 2000, the Southern region now has 12 districts and the Northern region has 6 bringing the total to 27. This study was carried out in Karonga and Mzimba in the North; Ntchisi, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Dedza and Ntcheu in the Centre; and Chikwawa, Mwanza, Mulanje, Phalombe and Mangochi in the South. The 1998 Population and Housing Census estimates that about 86% of the country's population lives in rural areas and as little as 14% in urban areas. The population distribution across the three administrative regions was reported as follows: 12% in the North; 41% in the Centre and 47% in the South.
- (4) CSP aims at the creation of social and economic infrastructure, which should be requests coming from communities and not individuals. The implementing agency is the local community and aims more at capacity building.
- (5) PWP aims primarily at cash transfer to the poor in exchange for labour on economic infrastructure. The implementation is meant to be through government staff at district level but in close consultation with local communities in deciding on which projects to be given top priority. Its main aim is immediate poverty alleviation of areas threatened with famine.
- (6) SSP aims at vulnerable groups such as orphans, street children or the handicapped. The implementing agencies are non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It aims at building the capacity of NGOs to realise social inclusion of the vulnerable groups in society.
- (7) See section 30 and chapter XIV of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi.

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