

**Children as economic investment  
-an analysis of *Malawi's Growth and  
Development Strategy Paper II* and the  
hegemonic development discourse in  
Malawi**

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**Master Thesis in Social Work**

**Oslo and Akershus University College, Department of Social Studies**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyses the development discourse in Malawi through interviews with relevant stakeholders, and an indebt review of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS2).

The MGDS2's participatory and consultative process, combined with the authority it enjoys as the overarching policy framework for development makes it a representation of the hegemonic development discourse in Malawi.

Inclusion in the Malawian developmental discourse is restricted to moments justifying their inclusion by granting the possibility of economic growth.

My informants justified strengthening children's rights based on two different arguments based in two different discourses; Children as bearers of rights which is founded in a rights based discourse, and children as economic investment which is founded in the Malawian development discourse.

My analysis shows that children are included in the Malawian developmental discourse on the basis of being "a good financial investment in the future".

It further show that it can seem as though elements which are generally not seen as economic in nature in other discourses have been 're-written' as economic beneficial in order to gain access to the Malawian development discourse.

UNICEF has successfully argued for more a more prominent placement of children's rights in the MGDS2 by emphasising the future economic value investment in children's right will yield in the future.

The thesis also discusses this UNICEF strategy and other forms of donor influence on the discourse, questioning the premise that the MGDS2 is locally produced and owned.

Lilongwe, Malawi. 15.05.2012. Andreas Fostervold Stordahl

## Forord

Denne masteroppgaven analyserer utviklingsdiskursen i Malawi gjennom intervjuer med elleve relevante aktører, og lesing av den Malawiske Utviklingsstrategien II (MGDS2)

Den deltakende og konsulterende prosessen som ledet frem til formuleringen av MGDS2, sammen med autoriteten MGDS2 nyter ved å være et overhengende rammeverk for utvikling gjør at den representerer den hegemoniske utviklingsdiskursen i Malawi.

Inkludering i den malawiske utviklingsdiskursen er reservert til momenter som rettferdiggjøres gjennom mulighet for økonomisk vekst

Mine informanter rettferdiggjorde styrking av barnerettigheter via to forskjellige argumenter basert i to forskjellige diskurser; Barn som rettighetsbærere som er fundert i en rettighetsbasert diskurs, og barn som økonomisk investering som er fundert i den malawiske utviklingsdiskursen.

Min analyse viser at barn inkluderes i den malawiske utviklingsdiskursen på bakgrunn av å være “en fremtidig god økonomisk investering.”

Analysen viser videre at det kan se ut til at elementer som vanligvis ikke ses på som økonomiske av natur i andre diskurser blir omskrevet som økonomisk gode for å få tilgang i den malawiske utviklingsdiskursen.

UNICEF har med hell argumentert for en mer fremtreden plass for barnerettigheter i MGDS2 ved å understreke den fremtidige økonomiske verdien av å investere i barn.

Oppgaven diskuterer denne UNICEF-strategien, samt andre former for påvirkning fra donorer på diskursen, og stiller spørsmål om MGDS2ens premiss om nasjonal produksjon og nasjonalt eierskap av MGDS2.

Lilongwe, Malawi. 15.05.2012. Andreas Fostervold Stordahl

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# 1. Introduction

## ***Choice of Theme and Problem Statement***

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II 2011-2016 (MGDS2) is a comprehensive Policy framework that all stakeholders in the field of development in Malawi needs to adhere to. The MGDS2 is formulated through a highly participatory and consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders. It is supposed to be nationally produced and enjoy a high degree of national ownership. Children's rights and issues have been prominently placed in the MGDS2 despite the emphasis on economic growth in the document.

In this thesis I want to examine the making of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy Paper II 2011-2016 (MGDS2), in regards to its enhanced emphasis on children and children's rights. Can the changes in the MGDS2 and the enhanced emphasis on children's rights and issues compared to earlier Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) be said to derive from a more pro-child atmosphere in Malawian policy making than before? Or are there other reasons and causalities at work?

The MGDS2 is the main policy framework outlining all development work in Malawi in the medium term. It's participatory and consultative process, combined with the authority the MGDS2 enjoys makes it a representation of the hegemonic development discourse in Malawi. One of the main stakeholders in the creation of the MGDS2 when it comes to children is the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). As a well regarded, international institution with strong funding, and a strong mandate to fight for the wellbeing of children they are one of the most important partners of The Malawi Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development (MoGCCD) which is the main ministry regarding children's issues in Malawi. In my thesis I will use the MGDS2 and the data collected through interviews to analyse the developmental discourse regarding children's rights. Further I want to examine the nature of the relationship between government and donors, especially MoGCCD and UNICEF, and look at the possibility that the MGDS2's child friendlier aspects might be a result of not only national political will, but also due to donor influence and the longstanding partnership between MoGCCD and UNICEF. I also want to examine whether the partnership between MoGCCD and UNICEF in some way opens up for an influence on the discourse that is not apparent at first glance.



To accomplish this analysis I will use the discourse theory set forth by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The MGDS2 as most of the other Poverty Reduction Papers (PRSPs) used in developing countries, can mainly be said to be firmly set in an economic discourse. The main targets, goals and parameters are economic in nature as the naming of the strategies imply; Malawi Growth and Development Strategy; Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. What then of the matters of children?

Using discourse theory I will analyse forth the elements, moments and nodal points in the Malawian development discourse regarding children's rights. By this analysis I seek to uncover in what way children are viewed and appreciated, and furthermore what place children are given within the Malawian development discourse.

My problem statement is;

How are 'children's rights' included into the Malawian development discourse?

- What place has children's rights in the Malawian development discourse?
- How is 'children's rights' justified within the Malawian development discourse?

I have for this thesis conducted eleven interviews with various stakeholders in Malawi, mainly in government, but also UNICEF and other non-governmental organisations. As I will show in later chapters the informants' answers, insight, and interpretations of the processes described above and their own roles in it will provide further answers as to the main question of this thesis.

### ***Relevance of Thesis***

The MGDS2 is, as shown below, an overarching policy document encompassing all development work and all stakeholders in Malawi. The harmonization and alignment to this document is a precondition for all relevant actors. Furthermore the MGDS2 can be seen as a representation of the development discourse in Malawi, an analysis of this discourse and policy framework therefore is in interest of all stakeholders. This is especially true for those operating within the area of this thesis' focus; social development and children's issues.

Also interesting for a wide range of stakeholders would be the analysis of donor influence over the discourse. The consequences of low capacity and funding likewise. It constitutes an area where government and donors alike should tread carefully.

Stakeholders involved in rights based development and children's issues should benefit from the analysis of the various arguments put forth regarding children's rights.

On an educational note I believe this thesis can also be relevant. Social Work is often associated with the work conducted in the front line services, be it in social service offices, kindergartens, schools, institutions etcetera. The workers in "the field" are often thought to be overworked, underpaid, and more often than we would like lack the formal education of their vocation. So it is of great importance to acknowledge that the days of social work education being an education which constricted itself to creating only hands on workers within different professions of social work is long gone. It used to be, and often still is, that the social worker job was to maintain the primary contact with the individual client in question, and that the role of the overseer, the policymaker and the bureaucrat was left to other professions; lawyers, psychiatrists, psychologists, economists and other supposedly better equipped educations. The demand for social workers is high. The education of social work is changing, claiming its own place amongst the others. And so the role of the social worker and the student must too. Therefore it is my opinion that subjects of master theses in Social Work should just as easily be of the making of policies by international organisations and foreign governments, as of different diagnoses or other aspects more directly concerning clients.

## 2. Background in Malawi

### *Policy frameworks for development*

#### **Structural Adjustment Programmes**

Since the early 1980ies economic policies for developing countries known as Structural Adjustment Programmes have been promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The developing countries would be granted loans provided they adopted these policies<sup>1</sup>. The Structural Adjustment Programmes reflected neoliberalism with its trust in free markets and self-regulation. The aim was to enhance economic growth in developing countries by restructuring the economy and limiting the government's ability to intervene<sup>2</sup> (Ellingseter 2006, 44). As a precondition to access economic funding from donors the Government of Malawi started implementing Structural Adjustment Programmes in the later half of the 1980ies. The majority of the conditions set forth in the SAPs forced the Government to allow for market forces to be the key determinants of the economy. (Magolowondo 2007 in Patel and Svåsand 2007, 16).

#### **Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers**

In the late 1990s the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), found themselves in a legitimacy crisis due to increasing criticism and evidence that the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) had not alleviated poverty in developing countries as hoped, and that the top-down development blueprints structure of the SAPs contributed greatly to this lack of results. The IFI's answer was a new development approach called *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* (PRSPs). Most, if not all, developing agencies including significant bilateral donors, large NGOs and the different UN agencies are aligning their development efforts with the PRSPs (Caroline M. Robb 2000 in Malaluan and Guttal 2003, 2).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers describe the macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty in a country, and also external financing needs to be associated with these. The PRSPs are supposed to be prepared by

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story084/en/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story084/en/index.html>

governments using a participatory process that involves civil society and development partners, including the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Assistance from the World Bank and IMF is provided on the basis of the PRSPs, so is debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. PRSPs are supposed to be country-driven, comprehensive, partnership-oriented, and participatory.

### **Malawi Growth and Development Strategy Paper**

Malawi's third and fourth generation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, called the *Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I (2006-2011)* and the current *Malawi Growth and Development Strategy Paper II (2011-2016)*, have an overriding philosophy that poverty reduction shall be obtained through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development<sup>3</sup> (MGDS I, MGDS II).

An important difference between the Structural Adjustment Programmes and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers is the latter's emphasis on national ownership of the policies. According to the World Bank there has been a significant increase in the Government of Malawi's ownership of the MGDS, as well as use of stakeholder participation, compared to earlier Malawian PRSPs<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore the MGDS is also said to recognise the need to invest in social development through education, health, good governance and the need to protect the most vulnerable<sup>5</sup>.

### ***UNICEF: brief history***

UNICEF was created in December 1946 by the United Nations in the aftermaths of World War II. Their objective was to provide food, clothing and health to European children who faced disease and famine the war. The UN General Assembly extended UNICEF's mandate indefinitely in 1953, and UNICEF began a successful global campaign against yaws, a

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<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/MALAWIEXTN/0,,menuPK:355886~pagePK:141132~piPK:141123~theSitePK:355870,00.html>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

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<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/MALAWIEXTN/0,,menuPK:355886~pagePK:141132~piPK:141123~theSitePK:355870,00.html>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

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<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/MALAWIEXTN/0,,menuPK:355886~pagePK:141132~piPK:141123~theSitePK:355870,00.html>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

disfiguring disease that affected millions of children, and could be cured with penicillin. The UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* in 1959, in which children's rights to protection, education, health care, shelter and good nutrition was defined<sup>6</sup>.

The setbacks in health, education and child nutrition arising in many developing countries became an increasing concern for UNICEF in the early 1980s<sup>7</sup>. The 1987 UNICEF study, *Adjustment with a Human Face*, started a global debate on how to protect children and women from the malign effects of the economic adjustments and reforms taken to reduce national debt in poor countries<sup>8</sup>. The report detailed the negative impact and results the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) inflicted on health and education. There is general acceptance of this negative impact, and SAPs are now largely replaced by PRSPs, and in the case of Malawi; the MGDS. The World Bank requires impact analyses of how adjustment programs affect vulnerable people and in many countries compensatory measures have been introduced. In response to this critics argue that this is an approach that does not regard social services as a part of the state's normal primary functions<sup>9</sup>.

*The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC)* was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, entering into force September 1990. The CRC became the most widely- and rapidly-accepted human rights treaty in history. In 1990 a World Summit for Children was held where Heads of State and Government at the United Nations set 10-year goals for children's health, nutrition and education<sup>10</sup>. The campaign "Say Yes For Children" was launched in 2001, and the Global Movement for Children began mobilizing citizens of every nation to change the world with children. *The Say Yes for Children* campaign benefitted from this momentum, having millions of children and adults around the world pledging their support for critical actions to improve children's lives. A landmark Special Session of the UN General Assembly was convened in 2002. Their objective was to review the progress since the World Summit for Children in 1990 and also re-energize the global commitment to children's rights. It was the first such Session devoted exclusively to children and the first to include them as official delegates<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index\\_history.html](http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index_history.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X9190026E>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index\\_history.html](http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index_history.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story003/en/index.html>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index\\_history.html](http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index_history.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index\\_history.html](http://www.unicef.org/about/who/index_history.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

## **UNICEF in Malawi**

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world ranking 160<sup>th</sup> out of 182 countries surveyed in the 2009 Human Development Index. A large part of the population lives below the poverty line of 1USD per day, and 52% is under 18 years of age. Malaria, diarrhoea and other communicable diseases have a high incidence level, as well as the proliferation of HIV/AIDS which is estimated at 12% amongst Malawians aged 15-49 years. 46% of children are stunted, as one of many consequences of high malnutrition levels for more than a decade. These factors are not being helped by the fact that most Malawians have poor access to healthcare. Life expectancy at birth is 45 years<sup>1213</sup>.

By increasing the largest budgetary allocations to health, education and agricultural sector, including food security and nutrition, the Government of Malawi has shown a resolve to improve social service delivery. A more coordinated and coherent approach to the development, funding and implementation of programs impacting children is being sought by the Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAPs) in sectors like health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation<sup>14</sup>.

UNICEF has been operating in Malawi since 1964. The cooperation between Malawi and UNICEF is manifested in the current Government of Malawi/UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation (2008-2011) aiming to support national efforts to realise the rights of children and women through improved child survival, development, protection and participation. The Government of Malawi/UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation is guided by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Millennium Declaration. Through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) the Government of Malawi/UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation is also in line with the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, thereby aiming to contribute to sustainable economic development and food security, social protection and disaster risk reduction and management, access to equitable basic social services, HIV

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.unicef.org/malawi/children.html>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/malawi/overview\\_4360.html](http://www.unicef.org/malawi/overview_4360.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/malawi/overview\\_4360.html](http://www.unicef.org/malawi/overview_4360.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

and AIDS prevention, care and treatment, and good governance (The Government of Malawi/UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation).

### ***Brief History of Malawi***

Christian missionaries started entering present day Malawi in the beginning of the 1860, the well known David Livingstone the very first to arrive. The country was named British Central Africa Protectorate in 1891, joined in a federation with Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe). It was renamed Nyasaland in 1907 and was granted internal self-government in 1963. Ten months later the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was officially dissolved. Malawi attained independence in 1964, marking the end of colonial rule in the country. Following the republican status in 1966 in which President Hastings Kamuzu Banda was named Head of both State and Government, Malawi entered into a thirty year long dictatorial regime under Banda who was declared life long president in 1971. This period was characterised by repressive laws, detention without trial, imprisonment and “disappearances” of anyone found to be challenging the leadership in the country (Magolowondo 2007 in Patel and Svåsand ed. 2007, 10-15)

The beginning of the 1990s brought with it unprecedented political reforms in Malawi. In 1994 the first free election was held, seeing Bakili Mulizi as the first democratically elected president. This shift in paradigm was a result of a variety of both internal and external factors, amongst others the background for the Government’s implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the late 80s in order to access economic support from donors. The economic situation in Malawi was deteriorating which in turn undermined the regime that partly drew on neo-patrimonialism as a source of legitimacy (Magolowondo 2007 in Patel and Svåsand ed. 2007, 16). Bingu wa Mutharika took over as Malawi’s third president, and the second democratically elected one, in 2004, and was serving his second term until his death in the Easter of 2012. Succeeding the late Mutharika was the then ostracized from government Vice President Joyce Banda, now serving as the second female president in Africa. The first term of Mutharika was a success in for instance standing up to the IMF to ensure food security through subsidised farm inputs, and cutting significantly in Malawi’s foreign debt. Unfortunately his second term has been overshadowed by what can only be described as a crisis in Malawi’s foreign relations following the declaration of UK’s ambassador to Malawi persona non grata in April 2011. In the wake of the diplomatic fallout

most, if not all, donors have either drawn back or frozen their general budget support, leaving only the funds already allocated for different programs. On top of this the recent tobacco harvest was devastatingly poor leaving Malawi with precious little hard currency. This in turn influences Malawi's import ability, leaving the country with amongst other things constant fuel shortages, lack of medicine in hospitals, and prices of various commodities increasing. All of which affect the poor and vulnerable especially hard. The current situation under President Joyce Banda is slowly getting back to normal seeing government and donors once again cooperating better (interview).



### **3. Methodology**

As I in this thesis try to discover the discourses and meaning relating to children in Malawi's Growth and Development Strategy, it is important to stress that I consider truth to be socially constructed. I am not on a journey to find an essential truth given by nature. I do not believe that such truths exist. One can make the argument that essential truths can be found in the 'hard sciences' like physics and math, without discussing that argument it should be sufficient to say that it is not relevant to this thesis. In this chapter I will clarify my ontological and epistemological viewpoint. This chapter will discuss the choices I made in collecting data, the analysis made, and the theories used, in addition to my methodological and theoretical outset.

#### ***Scientific Positioning and Research Strategy***

Post-Structuralism asserts the notion that there is no essence or truth underlying the phenomena in the world, meaning in our social world is created by discourses (Søndergaard I Haavind ed 2000, 65; Bergstrøm and Boréus in Bergstrøm and Boréus ed. 2005, 22; Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 15). Reality exists, but for humans as socio-cultural beings it does not exist pre-discursive, since it is through discourses phenomena acquire meaning. (Butler 1993 in Haavind 2000, 65). These discourses are socially constructed, and both constitute and are constituted by the social world. This is not to say I believe all postulations and social truths to be of equal validity and value. It simply means I recognize that they are socially constructed.

Since reality therefore is presented to me through a variety of discourses, and these discourses in turn constitute my experience of reality, my ontological point of view is that the reality is influenced by socially constructed truths. These socially constructed truths are again influenced by the reality.

Epistemology deals with the question of what knowledge is and how best to procure it (Johannessen et al. 2005, 32, 55, 56). I regard knowledge as existing within the various discourses. I view knowledge as being constituted within discourses, as what is considered relevant and legal knowledge is a part of the discourse. This is done partly by prohibiting something from being seen as good and relevant knowledge, rendering the remaining knowledge as the only legitimate alternative. This is discussed further in chapter 4.

In the case of this thesis it means for instance that I consider the meaning assigned to the term “children” to be socially constructed through various discourses, and that this meaning can be different in the respective discourses. I hope to identify these discourses and decipher the meaning given by them through my analysis of the MGDS2 and my interviews. I furthermore believe that these meanings and discourses have practical implications as they can influence funding, what kind of work will be conducted, and finally have a physical impact on children’s lived and experienced reality.

## ***Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis***

### **Sampling**

Having lived in Malawi since 2009, the whole period of my Master Study, it is difficult to set a specific period as my ‘fieldwork’. Most of my interviews were conducted during the Spring and Fall of 2010, a few some time later. During the time up until I now can finally hand in this thesis, I have read, debated, met people with various background and ideas, all of whom have given me ideas and helped me see things in a new light, or made me reject an idea or concept I had been working on for a while. It is possible to identify a number of aspects that have brought more concrete thoughts, ideas, and data to the table, culminating in this thesis.

My invitation to, and participation in two different workshops held by UNICEF turned out to be the starting point of my search for both the subject of this thesis, and much of the data, both documents and interviews.

The first workshop was a quarterly meeting involving UNICEF and various partners from government and CSOs. It was held early in my stay in Malawi, and long before I had chosen a theme for my thesis, but this initial contact and participation with actors in the broad field of Social Work gave me a valuable first glance into the work sphere of the different stakeholders. The workshop did unfortunately not yield more contacts than the few people I already knew from UNICEF, nor was I convinced that any of the subjects raised during the workshop would end up being the basis of my thesis.

The second workshop was on ‘mapping child protection systems in Malawi’. It was led by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development, assisted by UNICEF, and the prime focus was the pending implementation of the new Child Justice and Protection Act that had recently been passed by the Parliament in Malawi. The workshop which comprised of

actors from various ministries, departments and representatives from CSOs, would in the months to come meet semi-regularly to discuss the matters of implementation and help the consultant provided by UNICEF to make the best possible roadmap to implementing the new law in all the different layers of government and society. The attending actors were mainly from middle to high level positions in government or NGOs and CSOs, and therefore very interesting as potential informants. The use of consultants is quite wide spread in Malawi, chapter 7 gives a more thorough discussion on possible implications consultants can have on the influence of the discourse.

I attended three of these workshops. Two of them lasted for 2-3 days, while one was a single day workshop. During my participation I was put in a working group most relevant to my experience and education, and I was for a while a member of the ‘Children and Justice working group’. Unfortunately I had to resign from this as it would take too much time and focus away from my studies.

Participating in the ‘Children and Justice working group’ over this extended period of time was what provided me with my first interviewees. Some of my informants could then put me in further contact with other possible interviewees. In addition I contacted other key stakeholders directly.

My informant base has therefore come forth as a result of both i) being picked from an already formed group of relevant actors in the broad field of Social Work, ii) a “snowball-effect” as my informants referred me to other people they thought might be of interest to me, and iii) my own strategically “hand picked” informants to fill possible gaps in my material or to balance out potentially one-sided data flow I might have gotten if I had only used informants through the “snowball-effect”.

My informants were forthcoming in adjusting their schedule to find time and venue for conducting the interviews with the privacy needed. Two of my informants expressed a wish of receiving a copy of the final thesis, and also underlined the importance of all and any theses to give added value in form of presentations or other means of routing the results back to possible beneficiaries in Malawi. One commented on the fact that there were often many students writing their masters or PhDs, and it would be welcomed to get an overview of their findings, analyses and conclusions.

This said, the process of actually finding a time and place for conducting the interviews was sometimes a lengthy process. Especially with the informants I looked up myself without reference from others, but also with some of the informants from the initial workshop and their recommended interview objects it could take weeks before the interview took place. Sometimes it was only after several emails and two or three cancelled appointments we finally met. I do not see this as a result from neither ill will, nor indifference towards me. It is in my mind simply how things are often done in Malawi because of many stakeholders, many agendas, and the general workload. My impression is that schedules change in the blink of an eye, and the most pressing ones overtakes the place of the least urging matters, as for instance an interview with a master student.

In addition I also acquired the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I and II. The latter sent to me by two different informants, as it is a final draft version and not yet published at the time of writing this thesis. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS2) is discussed further in chapter 5.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Within discourse theory one can argue that since both the interviewer and the interviewee draw upon a variety of discourses the interview situation is naturally discursive (Kvale and Brinkman 2009, 155). The discursive interview can also be said to differentiate itself from other forms of interviewing since variation is equally important as consistency in response, emphasis is put on interview techniques that open for diversity allowing for more informal conversations as the preferred method of interviewing, and lastly the interviewer is not seen merely as reading a questionnaire, but rather as an active participant in the interview (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 165 in Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 156). Attentiveness to confrontations between possible different discourses in play is important for a discursive interviewer. In line with the notion of being an active participant in the interview the interviewer will in some cases also stimulate this confrontation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 156).

Before I started interviewing I made an interview guide comprising of 8 questions to act as a map for the interview. The questions were important to the subject that I wanted to research further, but I did not bind myself rigorously to the guide. The questions were not only questions in themselves, but rather springboards into different issues and topics. This way I

could go where the interview took me, at the same time not being in danger of straying too far from the main topics. The interview guide also helped me in the few interviews that did not “live their own life”, but was rather slow moving and effortful. In those rare cases it made the interview setting much easier as I could simply go to the next question at hand. Mostly my informants seemed to find the questions and topic interesting. This meant that my job as the interviewer was to let the informant talk as freely as I could to get as much detailed and contextual information as possible. From time to time I would steer the conversation back on track if the informant had moved too far of topic. More often than not, though, I found that letting the informant explore and explain the different topics in his or her own way was a better and more productive way of clarifying and getting to the answers, than interrupting them and force the conversation in a particular direction I wanted. The interviewees would almost always end up there anyway, albeit it would take a little more time.

Against this background the interviews can be labelled as semi-structured, in the sense that the structure laid out a framework in which there was a route to follow in order to get relevant data for the subject of the thesis, but also that within this structure there was room to take “detours” and explore issues and angles that the interviewee brought forward. Sometimes it was also me who derailed from the topic out of curiosity of something that came up during the interview. This way of doing interviews can in my opinion lead to far better and more extensive data than just the asking and answering of questions. Instead of only responding to prefabricated questions my interviewees also got the opportunity to shape the interview, thereby contributing with more than I could have hoped to get from a stricter interview setup. Of course this also brings the risk that the interviewee can take some form of control over the interview process steering the conversation. This risk might be countered by the use of an interview guide which also works as a ‘checklist’ to make sure the interview covers all the topics.

I decided to use a tape recorder to record my interviews. This was done for mainly two reasons. First I would not have to take notes during the interview. This has many benefits, the most notable one probably that I as the interviewer could direct all my focus and attention to the one being interviewed, and not spend part of my attention on my pen and paper. I believe this decision helped create a good atmosphere for the interviews, making the informants feel that I was listening fully to what they had to say and giving stronger credibility to their role as interviewees. The second major benefit is that by using a tape recorder you are not in danger

of missing out on something that was said during the interview that you failed to take note of. By revisiting the recordings I had the opportunity to get a clearer picture of the meaning in context than I would have just writing it down.

In the process of making the interview appointment, either through conversations or email, about half of the interviewees asked if they could see the questions in the interview guide beforehand. The ones who asked for it were mailed the questions before the interview. For some of them I got the impression that they just wanted to be in the clear of what we would be discussing, but others had read the questions carefully and to a certain extent prepared themselves. My personal impression was that some of these did it for two reasons, to enable me to get as much out of the interview as possible, but also to not waste my time, to be the best interviewee they could, or maybe to be able to prepare themselves for potential questions that could be potentially difficult. Either way the semi-structured form I chose opened up for a number of topics not written down in the questions forwarded to them. That way even the best prepared interviewee would contribute even more than he or she had prepared for.

### **Relation between theory and data**

As the mediator between the theory used and the data gathered in this thesis, and also between the theories and data respectively, I have seen things through lenses with different labels. First my research has been both deductive and inductive. Theoretical input has given me a broader understanding of the subject in hand, and has led me to look at the data in new ways. On the other hand the data accumulated have sometimes led me back to the theoretical framework to look for explanation.

In much the same way the different aspects of the theory used has helped my understanding of the framework to a greater extent. The same applies to the various data, as one set of data could shed light on another, as for example the lack of capacity and low funding discussed in chapter 7.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The ethical aspects of collecting, analysing and presenting data is of utmost importance. In other parts of the methodology chapter I have discussed my scientific standpoint and outset, how I collected my data and how I went about analysing it. These are all ethical elements that support validity and reliability.

## **Confidentiality**

In the beginning of every interview I explicitly told my informants that they would be completely anonymous, I would not use their name in any way in my thesis. I explained further that for my analysis I might need to put their input in context to the various stakeholders in Malawi, but that this would be done by labelling the quotes and data to come from government, NGOs, civil society etc, and not be directly linked to their office or ministry. This approach might be considered too strict and somewhat lacking in transparency as it disqualify me from explicitly showing throughout my analysis that the information discussed derives from a specific ministry or department. Another critique can be that I am effectively stopping myself from being able to show for instance different opinions within government between ministry A and ministry B.

The reason for choosing anonymity in the strictest way I could without completely barring my possibilities of analysis was twofold; i) I truly do not believe it has diminished my chances of making good analysis of my data material. I can still highlight whatever disputes, agreements and various opinions put forth. I just can not pinpoint for the reader exactly where it came from. I can for instance report of a dispute between government and UNICEF, but I can not report that the information came from Ministry of Gender or Ministry of Education, nor the specific department, only that it came from a government informant. ii) The reason for this strict adhering to anonymity was the political climate in Malawi during my interviewing period. Even though the climate for challenging the authorities can be said to have been much better under president Mutharika than under president Muluzi, and the latter even better that under president Banda's dictatorship, it was still a major concern. President Mutharika's second term had at the time of my interviews shown a slide backwards to more dictatorial methods. I had no illusions that my thesis would bring forth potentially dangerous data or conclusions for the government, not alone the president. The most likely scenario was rather that few will even read it, at least outside the relatively small numbers of supervisor, seniors, friends and family. It was my fear though, however small the chance, that someone would pick up on something revealed to me by my informants, and act on it to stop the informant in question from getting a promotion, or even getting fired. The system in Malawi is still very much based on nepotism, and I will not like to see my thesis used in a game of positions. I have no doubt that many people in most of the institutions I visited know who my informants are. The coupling of data and ministry or other organisation would therefore in some cases be the same as to use their full names. In the case of this thesis I do not see that this infringes on

the analysis. With the new president the political climate seems to be rapidly improving, and I might have been more comfortable with less strict confidentiality had I conducted my interviews in the current situation. None the less there are still no guaranties that the internal climate within the ministries have changed, and the promise and confidentiality given to my informers at the time of their interviews must be upheld.

### **Anonymity**

About half of my informants explicitly stated that they did not need anonymity, and said I was more than welcome to use their names and offices in my thesis. Others did not seem to have a particular say one way or the other, except maybe voicing an understanding of the different regulations a thesis had to submit to. Even so I have a feeling that some of my informants would not have been quite so outspoken as they sometimes were if they had not felt the protection of the guarantee of anonymity discussed earlier. On a few occasions some of my informants halted when they were about to say something and said “*I really can’t say this.*”(interview) or “is it possible to speak off the record?”(interview) while glancing at the tape recorder. In those few instances the informants would always continue the sentence, saying it was ok that the recorder was on, even though I gave them the offer of talking off the record. To me this says that they hesitated because they knew what they were about to say was in some way controversial, but continued to say it anyways.

There are two immediate possible explanations to this; either the explanation can be that the informant(s) in question wanted to play the role (Goffman, 1959) as ‘informant’ so well that he or she created a scenario in which the data they provided was shrouded in secrecy. By giving me the sense that my data material was special and ground breaking, they would also imply to have done me a favour and helped me greatly with my thesis. The other explanation can be that the promised anonymity provided enough protection for the informants so that they felt they could say more than what they would if others could hear them. Based on all of the considerations above I decided to keep not only all names out of my thesis, but also the specific ministries or organisations the informants were affiliated with. One exception to this is that I sometimes refer to information stemming from UNICEF in order to more explicitly contextualize the data. The reason for making this exceptions are that the informants from UNICEF explicitly said that their names and affiliation could be used in the thesis, and that their situation is somewhat differing from most of the government and CSO informants, rendering them not likely to be suffering from consequences of their statements.



## **Off the record**

For the record my informants only got the offer of speaking off the record if they themselves brought the subject forth. I had originally planned to put it in my interview guide in the vain hope that using this as the last question in the interview would bring up new and interesting data. After considering it for a while and also taking the matter up with my supervisor I decided against it. This is a decision I am very pleased with as I think it would have made for an awkward situation, and maybe an ungrateful feeling as well since it would strongly imply to my informants that I did not think they had told me everything they could.

If some of my informant had taken me up on the offer and accepted speaking off the record, I would of course have had to treat that information differently. I would not have been able to use the off record information in my thesis, but it would not necessarily have been without value. If the off record information was relevant to my thesis I could have used it as a means to look at my data from a new perspective, or it could have given me the inspiration to look for answers or data in places I had missed or not thought of. As it turned out in the end none of my informants spoke off record, rendering the potential problem moot.

## **Informed Consent**

My informants were all informed of my master in Social Work and the reasons for my questions. At the time of the interviews I did not have a 100% grasp of exactly how I would use the interview data in context with other data or theory, but I knew enough to give my informants a broad picture of what I was after and what I intended to do with the data material. On the basis of this information my informants could make an informed decision.

## **The interviewer as observer or participant**

The view that the discursive interviewer should be an active participant in the interview can draw support from the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim. In his essay “Deltakar og tilskodar<sup>15</sup>” (Skjervheim 1957/2002) Skjervheim emphasises the importance of researchers in the “social field” not to emulate the methods of observation from the natural sciences. One can not treat a social phenomenon as a thing merely to be observed, as that would imply a disconnection from the social world the researcher is very much a part of. Research like this could end up being distanced and anti-humane. Treating others as merely facts we can

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<sup>15</sup> “Participant and observer”, my translation.

observe is equal to objectivising them, thereby not taking into consideration factors like values and experience. The answer according to Skjervheim is to engage in the social world of the other, and in that way making him a subject in his or her own right (Skjervheim 1957/2002 in Johannessen et al. 2009, 35; Skjervheim (1957/2002).

Skjervheim's view on participation and observation was the foundation of my choice to conduct my interviews in the semi-structured, discursive way. And it leads directly to the next part; reliability and validity of data.

### ***Reliability and validity of data***

Regarding reliability and validity of the transcriptions of my interviews ; I have first listened through the interviews, then transcribed them, and finally listened through relevant parts once again whilst checking the transcriptions for errors and that the transcriptions accurately captures what the interviewee said. When I quote from my interviews I have corrected some errors in language to make the quotes easier to understand, and I have omitted most of the "aah"s and "hmm"s. I have as much as I could tried to keep the original way the informants worded themselves even though it might be grammatically wrong. In doing so I believe I have transcribed the interviews as correct and accurate as I could. In the cases where I have rephrased the quotes into the text of the thesis, I have been very careful as to not miss some of the meaning from the interview, or add meaning that was not originally there (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 183).

One way of deciding the validity of a discursive analysis has validity is to consider if it has coherency, and whether it has potential to explain and create new explanations (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 133). The question of validity is also the question whether the research done is a good way to find the answers the research is looking for. Reliability can be understood as accuracy and being meticulous in dealing with one's data and the interpretation of it. To be aware of logical fallacies like confirmation bias etcetera (Bergström and Boréus 2005, 34-35) By making it clear in the methodology what my scientific outsets are, and how I have handled my data and gone about to reach my conclusions, I believe I have lived up to these standards.

## 4. Discourse Theory as theoretical framework

In this thesis I mainly make use of the discourse theory by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In the cases where I use other theoretical approaches I explain them directly in the text.

### **Discourse**

The term ‘discourse’ is being used in a wide variety of ways, some broad to the extent of being void of meaning, others in more precise, but rather different in different contexts. Most uses of the term ‘discourse’ covers in some way an idea that language is structured in different patterns that we follow with in different social spheres/arenas. One can for example talk about ‘medical discourse’, a ‘political discourse’ (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 9), or in the case of this thesis a ‘development discourse’. In short one can say that a discourse “*is a certain way to talk about and to understand the world (or a section of the world).*” (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 9).

The main idea of discourse theory is that social phenomena are not completed or ‘set in stone’. Their meaning can never truly be 100 percent anchored, and consequently this gives room for constant social battles regarding the definitions of society and identity. The outcomes of these battles in turn have social consequences. Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory is built on moderate and rethought versions of structuralism, post-structuralism and Marxism. These traditions have then been merged into their theoretical framework where the social field is seen as a net of processes that form and create meaning (Jørgensen og Phillips 1999, 34-35)

### **Social-Constructionism**

Discourse theory is founded social-constructionism. Theoretical approaches based on social-constructionism are diverse and different from each other, and do not necessarily define themselves as discourse theories. According to Burr (1995 in Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 13-14) the field of social-constructionism does share four premises;

i) a critical view of knowledge that is taken for granted

-our knowledge about the world cannot necessarily be taken as an objective truth. Reality is only accessible to us by means of our categories and language. Our knowledge and world view is not a reflection of the reality 'out there', but a product of our way of categorising the world.

ii) Historical and cultural specificity

-We are in essence historical and cultural beings, thus our view and knowledge of the world will always be embedded in history and culture. This means that our ways of understanding and representing the world are cultural and historical specific and contingent. Our world view could have been different, and it can change over time. Discursive action is therefore a form of social action, which in turn is contributing to the construction of the social world, and thus contributing to maintaining certain social patterns. This view is 'anti essentialist', and the fact that the social world is constructed socially and discursive means that its character is not determined 'by 'outer conditions' or predestined.

iii) Correlation between knowledge and social processes.

-Our ways and methods of understanding the world are created and maintained in social processes. Knowledge is produced in social interaction where common truths are made, and what is true and what is false is fought about.

iv) Correlation between knowledge and social action

-Within a certain world view some forms of action becomes natural, and others unthinkable. Different social world views therefore leads to different social actions, and the social construction of knowledge and truth thus leads to concrete social consequences. (Burr 1995 in Jørgensen and Phillip 1999, 13-14). It is important to take note of that even though knowledge and identity in principle are contingents they are always relatively fixed in the concrete situations. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 14).

### **Discursive battle and Influence in discourse**

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is based on the poststructuralist outset that discourse constructs the meaning of the social world, and because of the inherent instability of language this meaning can never fully be cemented in a fixed position. Rather discourses are transformed constantly in contact with other discourses. This discursive battle occurs whenever different discourses, who each represent a certain way of understanding and

discussing the social world, fight each other to attain hegemony, that is to lock the meaning of the language in their own way. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 15).

### **Structuralism, post-structuralism**

Structuralist and poststructuralist language philosophy says that our access to reality is always transferred through language. By means of language we create representations of reality, these representations are never mere reflections of an existing reality, but are contributing to create that reality. This is not to say that language necessarily creates the phenomena in question, but it is through the language we give the phenomena meaning. The different discourses that can be in use in regards to the phenomena will point to different possible and relevant actions to be taken in response, thereby creating social consequences. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 18).

The language is thus not only a mediator, but also constitutes the social world. Change in discourse is thereby one way of changing the social reality. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 18). Ferdinand Saussure claimed that the relation between language and reality was arbitrary in the sense that we give meaning to the world through social conventions where certain things are associated with certain 'signs'; "The word 'dog' has for example no natural connection with the animal we refer to by using the word." (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 19). Saussure distinguished between two levels in the language; *langue* and *parole*. 'Langue' is the structure of the language whereas 'parole' is the concrete use of the language. In post-structuralism the idea that 'signs' or 'terms' do not get their meaning from reality itself, but from each other in a structural networks, is preserved. Post-structuralism, though, does not maintain the notion of language as an unchangeable structure, and argues for a less strict division between *langue* and *parole* (Jørgensen and Phillip, 19).

A common way of depicting language in structuralism was as a metaphorical fishing net, highlighting that the idea of all the terms in the language was given meaning in relation to their differences from each other. The poststructuralist critique to this is that the meaning of the signs cannot be determined unambiguous and final. The meaning of the different 'signs' are very well given meaning by being different from each other, but in our use of language we put the 'signs' in various relation to each other thereby giving them new meaning. The use of language in post-structuralism therefore becomes a social phenomenon. Through conflict, conventions and negotiations in the social sphere the structures of meaning are challenged and

fixed. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory follows this post-structural thinking, but says that the social process of creating meaning is about fixating meaning "(...) as if there was a sausserian structure." The constant battle of fixating meaning is impossible because every concrete fixation of the meaning of a sign or a term is contingent; it is possible, but not necessary. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 35).

### **Relevant discourse theoretical terms**

A discourse can be understood as the fixation of meaning within a domain. All the 'signs' within the discourse are called moments, they are knots on the 'fishing net', and they receive their meaning in relation to the other moments in the discourse. This meaning is given by being different from each other in certain ways. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 36) The discourse is established by meaning being centred around 'nodal points'.

These nodal points are privileged signs around which the other signs, moments, in the discourse are structured and derive their meaning in relation to. For example can 'the body' be said to be a nodal point in medical discourse. The discourse is established as a unity where every sign is fixated as a moment in relation to other signs. This is being done by excluding all other possible meanings the sign could have, and all other possible ways they could relate to the other signs. In this aspect a discourse can be understood as a reduction of possibilities. The discourse is an attempt to stop the signs movement and possible relations to each other in an attempt to create an unambiguous representation. All the possibilities the discourse excludes is called the 'field of discursivity'. The field of discursivity is a reservoir of all meanings that the signs had earlier, or that they have in other discourses, but that are being ignored in the specific discourse to create unambiguity. (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 37)

In discourse theory it is not clear cut if the field of discursivity is an unstructured field containing all possible different meaning closed of from the specific discourse, or if the field is structured by competing discourses. Relevant to this thesis is the field of discursivity "between" the economic development discourse represented by the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II and the Rights Based discourse used by UNICEF. The meaning given to 'children's rights' in the respective discourses are quite different, the use of arguments and possible influence on the economical development discourse will be the main discussion further in the thesis.

## 5. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II 2011-2016 (MGDS2)

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II is the overarching medium term strategy through which Malawi seeks to attain its long term goals of being a middle-income country by the year 2020 (MGDS2). It is directly succeeding the former Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I, and can be seen as the current continuation of Malawi's former Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP) which in turn grew out of the Structural Adjustment Programmes. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II, as well as its predecessor, was produced through a highly participatory and consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders;

(...) the Executive, through and Central Government Ministries and Departments and local authorities across the country; the Legislature; Civil Society Organizations; Donors and Cooperating Partners; Non-Governmental Organizations; Private Sector; the Academia; Youth; Children; Women Groups; Faith Based Organizations and the general public. (MGDS2, xi).

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy represent the consensus on how to achieve development goals in Malawi and all stakeholders operating in Malawi are expected to align and harmonize their various programmes and activities to the MGDS2 (MGDS2). *“It [the MGDS2] represents a decisive and strategic single reference document to be followed by all stakeholders to achieve the goal of wealth creation through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development.”* (MGDS2, ii)

Being a “single reference document” means that the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II guides all forms of development in Malawi during its time span. Plans, mandates and frameworks regarding all aspects in Malawi, including social welfare, are based on, and in line with, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (interview). As one of my informants put it;

A single reference document, it means it guides development for Malawi for 5 years. So it guides Malawi, it guides government, it guides development partners, it guides

CSOs, it guides the private sector in terms of development in the medium term. So in terms of importance, that's how important it is. Because it is guiding, it is like a bible for development in the medium term (interview).

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II also directly affect the national budget which is “MGDS coded” (interview):

The budget codes for our national budget come from the MGDS. For example social development you have children issues there, in the budget, for example ‘implement child issues’ will be an item in the national budget. And if you have something outside that it means you are not being coded in the national budget. It's that important (interview).

### ***The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy as Discourse***

Seeing that the formulation of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy is a process where all relevant stakeholders are consulted and many of them directly involved in the Sector Working Groups, the MGDS2 is best understood as representing the written discourse of development in Malawi. This discourse encircles the nodal point “economic growth”. As I will show in this chapter this is also true for the aspects under the heading Social Development and the relevant key priority areas.

The MGDS2 guides what is being done in Malawi regarding development, it is therefore of utmost importance for stakeholder to get their areas of interest included in the MGDS2 and thereby into the discourse. Elements outside the discourse are rendered invalid as both political will, budget lines, and even the stakeholders own mandates and work plans must be harmonized with, and aligned to, the MGDS2. As I will show in chapter X this in turn means that children's rights must be argued for in a way that makes them fit into the development discourse. This is done by framing children's rights as a good economic investment, thereby playing to the nodal point of “economic growth”, and achieving access into the discourse.

### **Objective of the MGDS2**

The main objective of MGDS2 is poverty reduction through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development, and its underlying philosophy is wealth creation (MGDS2). In line with the World Banks statement presented in the Background chapter, the MGDS2 also underlines the local production and ownership of the MGDS, and the emphasis on not only economic growth, but also the importance of Social Development (MGDS2). The matter of



ownership and formulation of policies, including the MGDS2 and influence on the discourse, will be discussed further in chapter 5 and 7.

Further in this chapter I will take a closer look on the Social Development part of the MGDS2, and show that the division the MGDS2 makes between economic growth and social development might not be that different. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2 is built around six thematic areas;

Sustainable Economic Growth; Social Development; Social Support and Disaster Risk Management; Infrastructure Development; Improved Governance; and Cross-Cutting Issues (MGDS2, xii)

In addition the MGDS have isolated nine key priority areas (MGDS2, xii):

- Agriculture and Food Security;
- Energy, Industrial Development, Mining, and Tourism;
- Transport Infrastructure and Nsanje World Inland Port;
- Education, Science and Technology;
- Public Health, Sanitation, Malaria and HIV and AIDS Management;
- Integrated Rural Development;
- Green Belt Irrigation and Water Development;
- Child Development, Youth Development and Empowerment;
- Climate Change, Natural Resources and Environmental Management.

Relevant to this thesis is mainly the thematic area *Social Development*, and the key priority areas *Education*, *Public Health*, and *Child Development*, *Youth Development and Empowerment*.

In the following I will show how these areas are closely linked to the nodal point “economic growth”, and can therefore not be seen as different from the other areas which might be more intuitively economic in their nature.

## **Social Development**

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy recognize social development as a “major pillar” for the improvement of Malawians well-being (MGDS2, 38). The justification and arguments for Social Development though, is not heightened well being in itself, but economical improvement for the nation. Social Development is portrayed as contributing to poverty reduction and enhanced economic productivity (MGDS2, 38). The various aspects of

Social Development such as good health and education are not portrayed as valuable in themselves as they would be in a rights based discourse where the fulfilment of these rights could be said to be a goal in it self, not a means to an end.

All of the goals and justifications regarding Social Development in the MGDS2 are economical arguments, supporting the claim that the whole discourse of development in Malawi, represented by the MGDS2, centres around the nodal point “economic growth”. It also supports the notion that all elements seeking to be included in the discourse must first and foremost be founded in an economic rationale. Different arguments for children’s rights, both economic arguments and rights based ones, will be discussed further in chapter 6.

## **Education and Health**

To achieve socio-economic development, Malawi requires a healthy and educated population that grows at a sustainable rate (MGDS2).

Both education and health are strongly linked to economic growth in the MGDS2, and are seen as necessities for sustainable development. Even though it is emphasised that basic education will “develop the child’s full cognitive, emotional and physical potential (MGDS, 93) the main goal is increased enrolment in secondary education followed by increased employment rate (MGDS2). Good health in the population is seen as the key to increase productivity, and thereby sustainable growth; *“The goal is to have a well nourished population that effectively contributes to development of the country”* (MGDS2:45). Health is correlated with development by an emphasis on the increased benefits in productivity resulting from good health, and the costs to the economy that poor health can result in (MGDS2). This economic correlation seems to be the whole basis of the inclusion of education and health in the discourse. Under the heading “The Population Argument” further evidence to support this claim of the need for economic correlation is given by an example given on girl completion rate in primary school combined with enhanced sexual health.

## **The Population Argument**

High rates of population growth have far reaching implications on social and economic development of a country. Provision of social services such as health and

education in the country is greatly affected by the prevailing population dynamics (MGDS2, 39).

The argument that population growth and demographic development in Malawi is costly and must be taken in to account is in line with arguments given by my informants to give economical justifications for enhancing children's rights. This is further discussed in chapter 6. Achieving a lower population growth is therefore one of the goals outlined in the MGDS2 (MGDS2, 40).

A telling example of the prevalence of economic argumentation and justification in the MGDS2, and the economic development discourse in Malawi, is how successful enhancement of sexual awareness combined with more girls completing school during the implementation of the first MGDS (2006-2011) is framed in an economic argument of sustainable population growth; Increased provision of sexual and reproductive health services raised awareness and led to an higher percentage of contraceptive use in the population. At the same time there was a reported increase in the primary school completion rate amongst girls (MGDS2, 39). These factors are not being seen as values in their own right, but rather as a contribution to a slight reduction in the fertility rate. Sexual protection for the individual or girl's primary school completion is therefore not seen as intrinsic values, but rather as steps on the way to national economic growth.

Around 54%<sup>16</sup> of the population in Malawi is under the age of 18 years. The MGDS2 expresses concern that with such a young population the dependency ratio is high. The economic burden is placed on the working population, and puts the provision of basic needs and social services under pressure. This argument was also taken up by my informants and is discussed in chapter 6, the goal of turning this situation around is the basis of why it has been included in the MGDS2;

In order to protect and harness potential of young people, Government has included Child Development and Youth Development and Empowerment as a priority in this development strategy (MGDS2)

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<sup>16</sup> The % of children in Malawi varies slightly between different reports. The MGDS II operates with 54%, others with 57% or 58%

## **Child Development and Protection**

Children are the future of every nation. In Malawi children, aged 0 to 9 years, constitute a significant proportion of the population. Investing in child development guarantees future human capital and productivity (MGDS2, 42)

The MGDS2 puts emphasises on the vulnerable aspect of children by stating that they are “*vulnerable to abuse, violence, neglect, malnutrition and subject to harmful cultural practices*” (MGDS2, 42). The MGDS recognises children’s need for special protection in order for them to grow into responsible and productive citizens. As seen within the sectors of health and education this argument is not based on fulfilment of rights or international agreements like the Convention of the Rights of the child, but rather as ensuring that the future generation of adults will contribute to the national economy by being mainly productive instead of consuming. Again, this argument was brought forward by some of my informants, and is discussed further in chapter 6.

The rationale for putting child issues as one of the nine priority areas in the MGDS2 is the number of social, economic, political and cultural challenges they face. These challenges threaten the children’s “*individual potential and the future of the nation in general. It is in this context that addressing child issues is one of the priorities of Government’s development agenda*” (MGDS2, 42)

Taking note of the lack of rights based argumentation in the MGDS2, and the overwhelming emphasis on economic growth as shown earlier in this chapter, and discussed further below, it seems appropriate to conclude that the inclusion of child issues as a priority area in the MGDS2 can be perceived as a means to secure future benefits for national economic development rather than to ensure the individual child’s potential benefits of thriving.

## **Youth Development**

The Youth population in Malawi, defined as being between 10 and 29 years of age, constitutes about 40% of the nation’s total population. The main reason given in the MGDS2 for investing in this group is their potential value as labour force. Investing in Youth Development is said to improve productivity and reduce health costs. The argument behind

the inclusion of youth in the MGDS2 thus lies in the fact that the government recognizes the potential that youth have for playing a nurturing part in economic growth (MGDS2);

The youth, aged 10 to 29 years, constitutes a significant and growing labour force for the country. They provide a vast human resource potential, which, if properly nurtured can greatly contribute to sustainable economic growth and development. The youth are energetic, industrious, and willing to learn and adopt new innovations (MGDS2, 43)

The MGDS2 does not raise the potential problem for a nation to have a fairly large and unemployed young population in terms of civic unrest. This argument is mentioned in chapter 6.

### ***Summary of chapter 5***

The MGDS2 is an overarching policy framework for development in Malawi. All stakeholders must harmonize and align their efforts, work plans, policies and implementation according to the MGDS2. The emphasis on economic growth in the MGDS2 is obvious, and all inclusive parts emphasise economic growth as their rationale for being in the MGDS2.

Seeing as the formulation process of the MGDS2 was highly participatory and consultative, including all relevant stakeholders in Malawi, and seeing the need for every stakeholder to work in line with the MGDS2, it can best be understood as representing the development discourse in Malawi. Being the written discourse on development it is clear through its strong emphasis on economy, it seems clear that the nodal point in Malawi's developmental discourse as it is presented through the MGDS2, is 'economic growth'. This claim is further strengthened by the evidence that all moments included in the discourse have rationales strongly founded in economic benefits. It can seem as though elements which are generally not seen as economic in nature in other discourses, like for instance a discourse based on fulfilment of rights, have been 're-written' as economic beneficial in order to gain access to the Malawian development discourse. This will be discussed further in chapter 6.

The MGDS2 is portrayed as being locally produced by the Malawi government, and it is highlighted that the national ownership of the MGDS2 is high, thereby having greater chance of being implemented, and more unspoken; lower chance of criticism of being forced upon Malawi as a developing country, by donors.

## **6. Informants' Arguments for Children's Rights**

In this chapter I will show that children's rights are figuring in two separate forms of arguments set forth by my informers; the Rights Based argument and the Economical Investment argument. Furthermore that these two arguments can be best understood as belonging to two different discourses in Malawi, as opposed to being seen as two discursive elements in a discursive battle in one of the discourses, namely the Rights based discourse and the Economical Development discourse represented by the MGDS2. I will look at how these two discourses can be said to influence each other, and I will discuss whether there is basis to say that the respective discourses are experiencing discursive battles.

My analysis will further show that the Rights Based Discourse's use of an economic argument for emphasising children's right can be viewed as a strategic move to get a foothold in the economic development discourse. And vice versa that the inclusion of children's rights in the economic development discourse might not be evidence that the rights based argument is gaining strength, it can also be seen as i) simply an inclusion of a perceived growth enhancing strategy, and ii) a strategic move to please donors and the international community.

### ***Two ways of arguing for Children's Rights***

The notion of children as bearers of rights here and now was only brought up by the interviewees themselves in three interviews. Although all of my informants emphasised that children's rights was important, most of them would only refer to children's rights in the context of either future economic investment or as part of the strategy to develop Malawi.

### ***Children as Bearers of Rights***

The arguments and rationale my informants gave for children's rights as something a child is automatically granted from birth, and not to be disputed or in need of extra credentials in form of economical justification could be placed within three areas; the Ethical argument, the Legal argument, and the Political argument.

#### **The Ethical argument**

The justification for children as bearers of rights were mainly ethical. Either stressing that children should have extra protection because of their young age and vulnerability, or

pointing out the fact that children too were citizens and thereby should enjoy their constitutional given rights;

The other justification will be a more ethical one. You know, in order to that children are also a part of the civil society, or that they are citizens, their citizenship does not happen only after we have reached a certain age, but if we, human being is citizens, so the government or the country has the responsibility to fulfil the rights of each citizen and including the children so that's another argument, (interview).

This argument draws on a rights based discourse by invoking the child's rights as a citizen, and the government's duties of fulfilling their rights.

Well, I think its both ways, children should have rights now because they are children, so they should have rights to a good education, you know, for example, right to express the you know, freedom of speech as children, now, yeah..so.. its both now and for the future because if a child is empowered now, if a child is given the right to education now, you are ensured that he is, that child is well educated, so that child will be able to take a key position when he is, grows up, because if you deny the child a right to education now, then in future you have ruined the child's future.(interview)

The most obvious part of the second quote is not necessarily that it too works within a rights based discourse claiming various rights for children, but the contrasting view on the right to education compared to what the rationale was in the MGDS2 in chapter 5.

### **The Legal argument**

By ratifying and signing the CRC Malawi is bound by international law to abide the convention. This argument was brought up by some of my informers. In this argument the rights is not given because of possible benefits in the future; *"I am not calling a child should be extra protected. I mean they were born with those rights."* (interview).

Further more my informants underlined the value and importance of national and international laws saying; *"But we are not talking of good heartedness of an individual. We are talking of the laws which are supposed to be enforceable to make sure that those, the primary duty bearers, the government is supposed to take care of its citizens. A child is a citizen."*(interview).

As I will discuss later in this thesis all of the arguments presented in this part, Children as bearers of rights, is ultimately linked to a rights based discourse with strong foundation in the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

### **The Political argument**

Only one of my informants mentioned politics as a reason for working towards a strengthening of children's rights;

and also politically its important, political justification on investment in children is like.. the children that, their parents are the part of the political arena having the capacity to vote and everything so in order to have like a political linkage with those adults its also important to fulfil the rights of the children. So that is the those are the like major studies established ah justifications.(interview).

The lack of seeing children's rights in the light of politics and elections in Malawi might derive from the fact that Malawi is a fairly young democracy. After the end of colonialism and holding their first ever multiparty elections in 1964, Malawi was ruled by 'lifetime president' Kamuzu Banda up until 1993. Malawi returned to the multiparty system of government in 1994 when it held its first competitive elections for President and Parliament (Rakner et al. 2007, 175). In addition to being a young democracy the election system and politics are characterized by nepotism and patron-client relationships. This lack of history of political rights might be a contributing factor to why so few of my informants commented on it.

### ***Children as economic investment***

Most of my informants would argue for more emphasis and funding for children's rights in a way that left little room for doubting that this investment was a sound economic one. Either my informants referred to unnamed studies, or they would simply state that this kind of investment would lead to a better future for Malawi. A typical example of the latter came from one of my government informants; *"I think the general emphasis is; lets go to children or to the younger group, because [if] we capacitate this group then we are assured of a better kind of future, a better Malawi."* (interview).



During the interview(s) a distinct pattern of economic arguments usually surfaced. These arguments, mainly from government stakeholders, could be placed into three categories; Economic investment, Population, and Consumerism.

### **Economic investment**

There are several justifications. One powerful, powerful towards policy makers, is the high economic return of the investment in children, there is a very good study done that ah.. Investing in children or particularly on, there are many studies around early childhood education on children. For each one dollar of investment the return is about 4 dollars, so it's 4 times higher return is guaranteed for the early childhood development, investment in the early childhood development (interview).

This argument that there is a great possibility for earning or minimizing expenditure in the future if children's rights are funded today seems to have great foothold in the Malawian development discourse, especially amongst government stakeholders. This argument could also be seen in the MGDS2 in the discussion in chapter 5. One informant exemplified it by an argument that there is an inverse relationship between the investment made in children and future investment in prisons (interview). Making this economic argument the informant emphasised the benefits not only for the society, but also for the individual child.

(...) investment returned on education, health and all that is pretty much studied so.. its strongly, the evidence is there, it is very important highly, highly in children, starting from the prenatal care all the way up to the adolescence in order to guarantee good capital base to achieve the development of the country, so that is like the economic justification, the strong one.(interview).

These arguments that investing in children would almost undoubtedly lead to capital earnings in the future were never disputed by any of my informants. This leads me to believe that the economic argument of children as sound economic investments is unchallenged in the Malawian economical discourse. The economic argument seems to serve as a basis, and maybe as the only justification for emphasis on children's rights in the economical discourse. In discourse theoretical terms 'children as economical investment' is a 'moment' as it has got a fixed position in the discourse and is not subject of challenge through discursive battle.

The next two areas of arguments that could be identified, Population and Consumerism, are closely linked to this view of children's rights as economic investment and good for economic

growth. Population and Consumerism is also so closely linked that they could possibly be considered to sides of the same argument. Even so I have chosen to outline them separately.

## **Population**

The most recent population census conducted in Malawi shows that the percentage of under 18 years of age citizens is over 50% (interview). This can lead to two population related problems in Malawi. A disproportional portion of the population is under age, leading to various challenges in education and health centres. Second, when this population comes of age the employment market will also be under severe strain. One informant sums it up like this; *“In terms of the link [between children and development], as you are aware from the 2008 census the population profile for children for Malawi is about 54%, and in terms of development if we don’t invest now it means our development will not be sustainable in the future.”* (interview).

As I have already said the main justification be in terms of the population profile and size, if we mess up now in terms of development of children. This country will have social and economic problems in the near future. So there is need for efforts to be made in terms of children’s rights and development in this country. (interview).

Supporting this argument of needing to avoid potential social problems, another informant related the emphasis on empowering youth to economical growth saying that there was *“very much a sense of having to get young people jobs because that will be a drive of growth”* within the government (interview). The informant also underlined the potential for civic unrest as a concern amongst government stakeholders as they *“(…)don’t want a large unemployed youth rioting as we saw yesterday.”* (interview), referring to demonstrations held by civil society organisations on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June(??) 2011 that ended up with 18 people being killed in the riots by the police<sup>17</sup>.

These arguments are closely linked to the arguments and rationale in the MGDS2.

Development regarding children is seen as a way to counter future problems caused by a potentially large population without the skills and means to cater for themselves. On the other side the emphasis is on the potential of economic growth if the working power of this segment of the population can be harnessed.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14231251>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

## Consumption

Closely linked to the arguments of population size and based on the argument of children as economic investment that will yield considerable profit in the future, is the argument of the need to invest more in children's rights to prevent too much consumption of services.

The basis of this argument is that the amount of money government earns in various ways is heavily strained by the amounts needed to be spent on children. One informant used an allegory of "*having holes in the pocket*" (interview). Children making up over 50% of the population also means that children makes up over 50% of the consumer section, in sheer numbers, not necessarily in consumption. The argument centres around the 'problem' being that whatever money is made from producing sectors like agriculture is quickly dissolved by the different sectors catering for children, most notably health and education (interview). The 'solution' put forth by the argument of Consumption is that the consumer section, which has a majority of children, need to be invested in. By investing in consumers the idea is to stabilize, or reverse, the situation. To transform consumers into producers. In other words to 'plug the hole in the pocket' by reducing the need for children's services and by empowering the consumers to become a part of the productive sector and thereby contribute to 'filling the pocket' (interview).

In one interview the interviewee underlined the argument by stating that this is not only a strategy applied to children, but an empowerment they are trying to accomplish with other vulnerable groups too. As with children the main idea for these other vulnerable groups is to make them able to contribute towards wealth creation (interview).

Now, as we were moving to do the MGDS1 or whatever it is after the PRSP, we discovered that whatever wealth we create, is overburdened by too much consumption by the same children because children needs services: education, health, nutrition and things like those. And those are very costly to fund. (interview).

The Consumer argument was also being brought forward as one of the reasons there has been a shift in the new MGDS2 focusing more on children's rights. Up until the first MGDS1 children's rights were not emphasised to the extent it is in the current MGDS2, but with the realisation that 57% of the population were underage and thereby consuming more than they produce also came the realisation that something had to be done (interview). The solution according some of my informants was to have a paradigm shift by empowering the 57% that

does not produce so that in the future they will not continue to be net consumers, but be able to produce and contribute towards economic growth. As one of my informants said; *“And that is why you see that there is now a lot of emphasis on children coming out in the MGDS2. (...) That is the simple rational.”* (interview).

### ***Children as ‘bearers of rights’ and ‘economic investment’ in a discursive context***

The two main arguments for enhancing children’s rights in Malawi are quite different; The Rights Based argument based in a discourse centring round the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the nodal point ‘fulfilment of rights’, as opposed to the Economic Investment argument from the economic development discourse represented in writing by the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS2) which centres around the nodal point ‘economic growth’.

What can these two quite different arguments tell about the situation for children’s rights in Malawi? And how do they relate to each other?

The discourse on economic development, hereby referred to as the ‘developmental discourse’, or ‘discourse of development’, is clearly reflected in the MGDS2, as the name of the strategy itself implies. The MGDS2 is the overarching policy document which government, donors and other stakeholders and partners have agreed on. It outlines the way forward for Malawi’s development and as discussed in chapter 5, and later in this chapter, it is fairly economically rooted, emphasising economic growth, and centres around the idea of economic development and economic growth. The rights based discourse, hereby referred to as the ‘rights based discourse’ or ‘the discourse of rights’ is based on thoughts, ideas and ideals dominant in the UN Charter of Human Rights<sup>18</sup> and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child<sup>19</sup>. This discourse sees human or children’s rights as an inseparable part of the individual. The discourse of rights centres around ‘the fulfilment of rights’. This thesis does not fully analyse the rights based discourse, this is due to the scope of the thesis. Further more the rights based discourses role in this thesis is to be a counterpart to the more emphasised economic development discourse in order to show certain differences, rather than being an equally analysed discourse in itself.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, lastet ned den 14.05.2012

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/crc/index\\_30177.html](http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30177.html), lastet ned den 14.05.2012

The argument could be made that the two arguments for children's rights, 'economic investment' and 'rights based', should be seen in discursive terms as two elements in a discursive battle within one discourse. The two arguments give very different meaning to the term 'children's rights'. Since they so clearly derive their meaning in relation to two very different nodal points, 'economic growth' and 'fulfilment of rights', and since these two nodal points belong to two very different discourses, it seems better to understand the two arguments as belonging to two different discourses. The view of children as bearers of rights is then best understood as being a part of a discourse concerned about fulfilling children's rights; the rights based discourse. The view that investing in children's rights is a good economical investment which will pay off in the future is best understood as a part of a discourse focusing on growth; the economic development discourse.

It is therefore best to look at these two ways of viewing children not as a discursive battle within one discourse, but rather as two distinctly different discourses. That being said they share parts of their discursive field with one another, and seems to have influenced each other to a certain degree. One could say that both of the discourses are experiencing a discursive battle within, caused by influence from the other discourse. The reasons for the respective discourses having changed to accommodate impulses from the other might not be a direct result from influence from the opposite discourse however. This will be discussed further in this chapter. Chapter 7 will discuss more on outside influence on the MGDS2 formulation and the economic development discourse.

### ***Discursive battle in the rights based discourse?***

The rights based discourse are firm in its view of children as bearers of rights, but have additionally adapted the argument that investing in children is not only a good investment because it will realize children's rights, but it is also a good investment because in addition to realising their rights, this investment is also a good economic investment. One of my UNICEF informants explains how this argument of children as economic investment has been included;

I would say it's by necessity. Because as I said, it's more powerful to have a change in the policymakers. They, yes, if we keep on talking about this rights approach then its very difficult to get into or open the door for us or we.. First of all we have to open the door of them, and then we put one foot and then we just sneak in. For me this, the

economic argument, is to put our foot into their door, and after once they open eyes and "oh oops, its important to invest in children", and then we say not only economic point of view but also ethically it is their responsibility, its their obligation, because if we just talk about the right and obligation its quite difficult, it has been quite difficult. (...) for me its the reason for putting the economic argument first and then put the ethical argument second, but not because which one is more important, but its just a strategy. (interview)

The rights based discourse seems to have adopted the notion and importance of economical incentives from the economic discourse and included it in its own discourse. In a way this signifies that a discursive battle has taken place since the economic arguments from the one discourse, or from the field of discursivity, seems to have won a foothold in the other.

The rights based discourse have incorporated the economic argument into its discourse not because the economical argument was so strong that it gained entrance in the right based discourse, but because the argument serves as a strategic tool to get children's rights into the economical discourse in its own right. The economical discourse accepts only economical arguments, therefore children's rights must also be turned into an economical argument.

The economical spin in on children's rights in the rights based discourse does not seem entirely as only a strategy by UNICEF. They seem to believe in the argument that investing in children will bring economic growth, but they use it mostly when they need it. This can be because the meaning given to the moment 'children's rights' in the rights based discourse is so strongly based on values like equality and being born with rights, that the economic perspective would alter the meaning of the moment.

### ***Discursive battle in the economical discourse?***

The argument of children's rights as 'good economic investment' seems to have a fairly solid place in the economical development discourse. One could argue that in the economical discourse children's rights is considered equal to any other economical investment, and therefore just as 'cemented' as a moment as the others.

Children's rights as economical investment is a fairly new addition to the economical development discourse, one can argue that it has still not had the time to properly manifest itself in the discourse; The moment 'children's rights' which gets its meaning in relation to the rest of the discourse, might not be established enough for other moments to derive their

meaning from it. There are two obvious ways the argument can be subject to challenge and discursive battle; i) new studies or research can offer ‘evidence’ that children’s rights is not a good economic investment in the future, thereby rendering the very foundation of the economic argument for children’s rights virtually useless. The repercussions of this happening would in all likelihood be that children’s rights completely vanishes from the economic development discourse, since the very existence of the economic argument for children’s rights is based on the assumption that it is a good economic investment.

ii) The second way the economic argument could be challenged is if children’s rights as economic investment is modified through policy work and advocacy to lessen the emphasis on economic benefits from the investment, over to enhancing the emphasis on children’s rights as a value in itself as in the case of the rights based discourse. This could be the result if UNICEF’s strategy discussed over is successful.

On the other hand there seems to be some dissent on the reasons for including children’s rights into the economic development discourse. One of my informants suspected that the inclusion of children’s rights into the MGDS2, and thereby into the development discourse, was not driven by government itself. Rather the informant pointed at the lack of capacity in government due to amongst other things downsizing of government during the Structural Adjustment Programmes. The donor dependency derived from this and the general poverty level in Malawi opens the Malawian development discourse and the formulation of policies like the MGDS2 open for both direct and indirect influence. This is discussed further in chapter 7.

### ***Summary of chapter 6***

When justifying the importance of strengthening children’s rights in Malawi my informants gave two different types of argument. These two arguments are moments in two different discourses, namely the economical development discourse and the rights based discourse.

One argument was a rights based argument which emphasised the ethical, legal and political aspects of children’s rights. This type of argument belongs in a rights based discourse is highly influenced by the UN Charter for Human Rights and the Convention for the Rights of the Child, and is centred round the nodal point ‘fulfilment of rights’.

The other type of argument was the argument of ‘children as economic investment’. This argument emphasises the future benefits to economic growth as the main rationale for children’s rights. The ‘economic investment’ argument for children is closely linked to the MGDS2 and the Malawian economic development discourse which centres around the nodal point ‘economic growth’.

The two moments ‘children as economic investment’ and ‘children as bearers of rights’ can be said to be a result of discursive battle with in the respective discourses. There is evidence though, that the inclusion of children’s rights in the MGDS2 is a result of donor influence and UNICEF strategy more than coming from the Malawi government itself. Likewise the inclusion of children as economic investment into the rights based discourse used by UNICEF might be best understood as part of a strategy to get a foothold in the economic development discourse in Malawi, since it seems that economic arguments are a prerequisite for inclusion in the MGDS2.



## 7. Influencing the Discourse

The main discourse framework in Malawi is the economic growth and development discourse, represented in writing by the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II 2011-2016 (MGDS2). As I have shown most, if not all, arguments for children's rights has to in some way align itself to this discourse and promote economic growth if the argument is to be included in the framework of the MGDS2. The MGDS2 *“represents a decisive and strategic single reference document to be followed by all stakeholders to achieve the goal of wealth creation through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development”* (MGDS2: ii). The importance of this single reference document is highly emphasised;

A single reference document, it means it guides development for Malawi for 5 years. So it guides Malawi, it guides government, it guides development partners, it guides CSOs, it guides the private sector in terms of development in the medium term. So in terms of importance, that's how important it is. Cause it's a guiding, its like a bible for development in the medium term. So all plans, sector plans, would be made in line with the MGDS.(interview)

The MGDS2 states that the implementing of the various programs and strategies outlined in the MGDS2 shall be championed by government, and goes on to underline that all stakeholders are expected to align and harmonize their programmes and activities to match the MGDS2 (MGDS2). Even though the process of formulating the MGDS2 has been both consultative and participatory, involving “all stakeholders across the country” (MGDS2, ii) it is considered to be locally produced and to have a high degree of ownership in government.

There could be some challenges, but there are minor challenges, because if we had big challenges we should not have had a lot of partners assisting us, ok? So the cooperation between partners and the government, the ministries have been excellent, yeah, (interview).

This quote from one of my interviews serves as a fairly accurate description of the initial responses my informants gave when asked about existing or potential challenges regarding the work for children's rights in Malawi, and their cooperation with donors and CSOs. The benefits of using a semi-structured interview form which allows for the interviewer and interviewee to jointly follow up on topics and lets the interview run its own course served me well in these circumstances. The relatively free form of conversation combined with my intent

of ‘going with the flow’ and keeping the informant as a fellow subject and the different topics of the interview the joint object (Skjervheim 1957/2002) gave cause for the informants to trust my confidentiality, and also room to circle in on various challenges in his/hers own pace and comfort. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this is where some of the informants paused and considered going off the record.

In this chapter I will take a closer look at how mechanisms in the process of policymaking together with challenges regarding funding, capacity, and implementation can be said to render the MGDS2 more open for outside influence than intended

### ***Equal partnership***

The cooperation between government and donors in Malawi in the area of children’s rights is reported to be a good one by most of my informers. The emphasis is on equal partnership and for each stakeholder to stay within its mandate. UNICEF as the most important partner for government when it comes to children’s rights, contributing close to 90% of the funds going to child development (interviews) is considered mainly to be helping government achieve its goals, and is given quite a lot of credit for their engagement in Malawi;

(...) because all these things we are talking about even the child care protection and justice act it has all been because of the support from UNICEF. And the current emphasis of children in the MGDS2 is because of, yeah, our relationship with UNICEF. It is UNICEF that has helped us continue talking to these things. Either by way of doing studies, evaluation of programmes, and then to bringing all the experiences UNICEF is able to draw from across the world. (interview).

Also from UNICEF’s side the equality of the relationship between UNICEF and government, especially Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development (MoGCCD), is strongly emphasised. They both recognize each other as important partners and have a somewhat clear understanding of their different roles and mandates.

Well as they [the MoGCCD] are important partners for us [UNICEF], we are always there. And our mission is not to substitute the ministry or the government, but our role is to strengthen the government, and strengthen the capacity of the ministry of gender is one of the very important roles we play. In that sense in all the meetings we have to make sure that it’s the equal stance between them and us (interview).

Even so the government and the MGDS2, which represents the economical development discourse they work within, are challenged and subject to influence from various sides and

through different mechanisms. This has ramification on the discourse itself by influencing the policymaking in Malawi, and on the actual implementations of children's rights on the ground.

The most obvious, open, and welcomed by government, form of influence is exerted through the sector working groups in the revision and making of the MGDS2. The process of formulating the MGDS2 has been a participatory and consultative process. It has included consultations from district level to national level, and includes input from district councils, development partners, Civil Society Organisations, the private sector, academia, and children themselves. A variety of studies is also taken into account in the process, including the before mentioned population census<sup>20</sup> (interview; MGDS2). The result of this process gave *“an insight to say children are very important, in terms of development. But also looking at the future of Malawi, there is very need for investment in children. As already indicated earlier on, this country is made up of children right now and there is need for much more effort in terms of investing in children.”*(interview). In this participatory and consultative process outside influence is regarded as legitimate advocacy, input and cooperation.

Seeing that Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development is fairly weak in terms of capacity and funding compared to UNICEF, the question can be asked whether UNICEF has been using its financial clout and strong mandate to force children's rights into a more favourable position in the MGDS2.

### **Advocacy**

Discussing the possibility that the enhanced emphasis in the new MGDS2 could be a result from overly strong advocacy and coercion from UNICEF, one of my informants denied the possibility of the government being pressured:

No, I wouldn't say. I would say yes and no, in terms of the yes, we consulted UNICEF as part of the development partners, their group, where they echoed the need to include children in the next strategy, I mean this strategy [the MGDS2]. But also from our side we have been looking at studies in term of children so the two made up, made us to think of putting children issues in the MGDS2 with much more emphasis than the MGDS1.(interview)

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<sup>20</sup> See chapter 6; Population

Even if the advocacy role of CSOs and development partners like UNICEF does not seem to be considered as “too much”, their role in making the MGDS2 more child friendly is both noted, and appreciated: “(...) *it was really a push from the ministry, but more from the partners of the ministry NGOs, civil society, and I must say on the record including UNICEF, these guys where really pushing to see children’s issues being prominent within the MGDS.*” (interview).

Emphasising the need for being honest, the informant continued by underlining that the government also had seen the need for having children featuring prominently in the new MGDS2, but that the government had not put enough effort into realising that goal. The reason for this was that inside government one is aware of the different challenges in funding and capacity that can limit the government’s room for action. Since NGOs and UNICEF were outside government they “(...) *where able to make a lot of noise which fortunately made some positive changes.*” (interview). According to the informant there would have been far less emphasis on children’s rights in the MGDS2 had it not been for the strong advocacy role taken on by UNICEF and other CSOs (interview).

This corresponds with UNICEF’s analysis of their own role in the making of the MGDS2. UNICEF was active in most of the sector working groups making sure that all the child rights aspects such as health, education and nutrition were emphasised. UNICEF was also working closely with other CSOs combining their efforts for children’s rights (interview). This cooperation between UNICEF and other CSOs were commented on by one of my government informants saying that one big difference in terms of their respective areas of influence was that UNICEF has money, while CSOs have the voice. While the process of establishing the MGDS2 was ongoing UNICEF supposedly mentioned that a stronger emphasis on children’s rights in the MGDS2 would most likely be followed up with considerable investments. As my informant put it; “*Now for me, that is a huge carrot for government to say ‘maybe we need to go the way these guys are telling us to go’ ok? It’s a good thing, but I think you understand my drift now. They promised us that they are going to give us the money if we make this very prominent, and I hope they are going to keep that promise*” (interview). This comment on financial support from UNICEF is first of all not collaborated by other informants. Secondly assuming there has not been a misunderstanding between UNICEF and the government official in question, it can certainly be understood as simply a statement that UNICEF is backing the idea of children’s rights figuring more prominent in the MGDS2 and that donors

will most likely be willing to fund the various programs. None the less it also supports the possibility that UNICEF's financial clout might serve as a powerful tool in the efforts of strengthening children's position in the Malawian economic development discourse, as will be discussed further in this chapter.

Advocacy in different forms is a major part of the negotiations that leads up to the policy formulation of the MGDS2. Various CSOs were very active in arguing for more emphasis on children's rights during the formulation process. *"Now for the NGOs, for the NGOs it's not like they have the money per se. But they have the voice. They really make a lot of noise. You can ignore them today, tomorrow they are going to maybe publish a press release, the other day they are going to be on the radio planning this and that(...)"* (interview). This advocacy in collaboration with UNICEF who is considered to have used both advocacy and hinting about increased funding are considered by my informants in UNICEF, CSOs and government to have influenced the making of the MGDS2 into its current form (interview).

## **Cooperation**

The cooperation between UNICEF and the relevant CSOs is considered mutually benefiting for both parties. The cooperation between UNICEF and government has already been discussed as a positive relationship by both sides. This relationship has also contributed to achieving a more prominent role in the MGDS2 for children. Ministry of Gender, Children, and Community Development is generally the most important partner of UNICEF, but also the good relationship between UNICEF and Ministry of Development, Planning and Cooperation, who are the lead ministry in the formulation of the MGDS2, was given as reason for success in putting more focus on children.

And I think, it's my personal opinion, but UNICEF over the years we have been working very strongly with the Ministry of Development, Planning and Cooperation that is the ministry which have a leading role for the accommodation of the MGDS2, so as we really had a very strong alliance with is particularly important ministry for the policy making. So that also, that's my personal view, also helped to position all the issues around children in the new MGDS2. And the I think the work this ministry of development and planning is has been a lot stronger over the last few years compared to the period before the current MGDS 2006-2011, so maybe that's another factor that influenced positively (interview)

## **Capacity and expertise**

The general view of capacity in government amongst my informant was that there is considerable room for improvement. First of all this was not to be taken as if there are no capable people working within the government structure. The problem was rather reported to be that capable people had a tendency to leave government to work abroad or in service of donors and NGOs that generally pays a larger salary (interview).

Ahm... Expertise. Malawi is not a green pasture. People are always leaving the system, specially the government system. People are always leaving the government system, so it's a bit difficult to continue within, and also we are losing a lot of expertise cause our pasture is not green. As I have already said. So that has had an impact in term of our human resource capacity. We have few people, and when you train the few they leave. (interview).

It was underlined that people in the various ministries often had a lot of experience and expertise. This expertise however was often reported to be narrow in the sense that they tend to be experts in their field, but lack a wider appreciation of the work (interview). It was also pointed out that their expertise could be restricted to local knowledge and experience;

We don't have like the big picture in which we are working in. Because we are so much focused with the lessons that we've learned, the local knowledge that we have and all that, in which case your kind of scope is very, very narrow ok. so in terms of capacity one of the issues that I think needs to be addressed within the ministry, and probably most of our local partners here, is to widen the scope of their knowledge in their subject area (interview).

Informants both inside and outside of government raised the issue of capacity gaps in government. While government informants recognized this, they also seemingly felt the need to point out that their developing partners, including UNICEF, also experienced capacity gaps themselves. One of my informants said government had a tendency to overlook capacity gaps in UNICEF due to them being the most important partner bankrolling much of the ministry of genders programs;

Yes that is very true, I mean just as I said most, even maybe 90% of moneys that go into child development in this ministry comes from UNICEF. Its big, big amounts of money relative to what we get from government. Now, you know there are these issues of capacity with UNICEF and all that, but then you still think that you need the money that is coming from UNICEF, so what you do? You ignore the capacity gaps that UNICEF has, they will keep on bashing you and tell you that you don't have the capacity, but then you also ignore that. I mean... But I mean seriously where we need

to improve in government UNICEF also needs to improve. I mean big time they have to improve. (interview).

Other informants from the government also made similar remarks regarding the capacity in their own ranks as well as in partners. These statements could be interpreted as an attempt to balance the relationship between the government and UNICEF. By admitting capacity gaps within, they also admit to weaknesses in the system. So far the discourse has been dominated by the equilibrium of equal partners, an equal stance between government and its development partners. With the introduction of capacity gaps in government this equilibrium is shattered. As shown earlier, the MGDS2 can be construed as the embodiment of the overarching development discourse in Malawi. As the MGDS2, and by default then the discourse itself, is seen as locally constructed by the government, admitting weakness in capacity can be viewed as destroying this picture. If government is weak, and developing partners are strong, the discourse is clearly open for influence, and even the question of who is really in charge can be posed. To reconstruct the image of government in the forefront of the processes, and donors and CSOs as equal partners, the development partners too must suffer from gaps in their capacity.

The attempt to uphold the notion of an equal relationship is also in UNICEF's interest and agenda;

(...) we have to avoid that we are doing everything for them, definitely because otherwise there is no chance for the ministry to build up their capacity. But neither is it correct for us to give them directions, in them do what we say, that's not the case either. So it's really important to foster the relationship like 50/50. (interview).

The mandate and role of UNICEF, and Malawi's other developing partners as well, is not to overtake the responsibility of the government, but to aid and abet in their efforts. It is therefore important that they are seen as equal partners engaged in an equal relationship. A relationship dominated by one part is not equal.

The partnership again is not always easy, and also depending on the person etc it is not easy, but we have really clear understanding that is our role, and nothing else. So, sometimes its easier that we just pick up and do it and give it, no, that happens too, and there is sometime pressure etc etc, and sometimes we help a little bit more than we usually do, or we should do, that also happens but within the limit we are managing I will say, and we really are trying hard not to overtake, the government and ministries' work. (interview).

By acknowledging the gaps in capacity in their partner, and at the same time emphasising that advantage is not taken by this, UNICEF upholds the discourse and their respective mandates and places in it. UNICEF's role in the economic development discourse is to work towards betterment of children's rights and situation. One of the ways they do this is to enhance capacity in government. The fact that the government has a lack of capacity is therefore a part of the justification for UNICEF's involvement in Malawi.

By referring to equally severe gaps in other partners within the discourse, and focusing on the importance of capacity building and advisory role, the stakeholders yet again enjoy a 50/50 partnership. Thus the premise of a locally controlled discourse is preserved. Further in this chapter I will look at the notion of the MGDS2 being locally produced, and shows that issues of funding and the recently discussed capacity gaps might undermine this premise.

### **Policy formulation**

Despite the expertise in various aspects held in government, one particular gap in capacity was highlighted by my informants; the ability to produce written material like formulation of policy, extensive plans and reports of substance in a timely manner;"(...) *it takes an awful long time for government to write things like that because there isn't capacity to formulate that kind sort of plan easily*" (interview).

I'd say a lot of people in government are experts , I mean because they've been involved in these programs for 20 years, like my director knows a lot of about social protection in many ways probably a lot more than or as much as the consultants that are paid to write these documents, what my director can't do, and to a certain extent other people in the division, what they can't do is write good things quickly (...) is all about drafting briefings drafting policy reports and can you write quickly something well? That reflects your main ideas, and that basically what's lacking in government , that's not what they're trained to do, the school system trains them to remember things, so they tend to know things that can be very useful, and so you know they make good comments to a document, but they don't have.. They're very scared typically to write something from scratch. So that's kind of the main capacity weakness, or one of the main capacity weaknesses, that's why consultants and other people are employed. (interview).

The result of this lack of ability amongst many government employees can be increased influence on the written discourse. There are mainly three ways this indirect or 'hidden' influence can occur. First of all in lesser documents a copy and paste strategy may be applied



where the supposed writer takes smaller or larger elements from similar documents into his own. As we shall see, these documents have a tendency to have been written by donors or consultants, and will therefore in a higher degree represent the viewpoints of the authors rather than that of the government (interview). Second, the writing is being done by someone in government who is funded by a donor; *“(...) people who that can write well and quickly and formulate good policy don’t work for government cause government doesn’t pay, or they work for government funded by donor, so we have someone very competent in our division he is paid for by UNICEF”* (interview). It stands to reason that these donor-funded employees in government are both hired for their skills and the fact that they align with the donor’s way of thinking. In the cases where the donor funded government employee is given the task of doing the actual writing, one can assume that ideas from the donor’s discourse are transferred, or at least contributing to the end result and thereby influencing what is supposed to be a government owned and produced product (interview). The third way the written discourse can be influenced is through the extensive use of outside consultants;

(...) so it [the policy formulation etc] tends to be done by consultants and consultants tend to be paid for by donors, so essentially the way, well one of the main ways that , yeah children’s wide rights will seep into .. so... as with most things I mean including nutrition, including agricultural policy, everything is funded by some donor paying for some consultant that’s the way things get written. (interview).

This way it can seem that even though government is in charge of the formulation process, donor-language and discourse seep into the MGDS2. Not necessarily through advocacy, but through the government of Malawi’s failure to formulate their own policies.

## **Funding**

You see programming in Malawi, maybe to start with, issues in Malawi, basically, lifestyles, are characterized by a lot of poverty around. And for government to operate there is quite a lot of, as usual, dependence on donor support (interview).

The national budget for catering to children’s issues in Malawi is quite small, while donor contribution to the funding is relatively large. The funding from government is almost negligible. When informally looking at the budgets and performance within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development, one of my informants found that the funding from government did not necessarily go into program implementation; *“Not because people don’t want to do it, or not because people think they are satisfied with UNICEF, but because*

*it's just too little to make any kind of impact.*" (interview). The government budgets are not substantial enough to create an impact. The resources from government are used for salaries, stationary etcetera, but is not going into actual implementation of issues regarding children's rights (interview).

This supports the claim that work on children's rights is highly dependent on donor funding. Furthermore, this dependency might open up for both direct and indirect influence from donors;

So you get quite a good response from government officials working with UNICEF officials. Because, eventually, we are going to do activities because resources don't become an issue at all, as opposed to depending on the government budgets that we get. They are too small. The same amount that we get, as to cater for our own salaries, and to cater for the stationary and so forth, so very little is left for programming. So when you get somebody who has the money for programming, they become a better partner than anybody else. (interview).

There are mainly two ways the unbalanced funding in favour of donors can influence the discourse in Malawi. First, a stakeholder who carries that much financial clout might be in a better position to be listened to than if the finances were not an issue. Second, government is in no position to say no to the funding offered. There is always a gap to be bridged (interview). This means that donors can fund programmes and projects which they deem interesting, while ignoring other areas where the funding would be equally appreciated.

The reliance on funds from donors is appreciated by both government and UNICEF, and similar to the points on capacity gaps discussed earlier, the importance of cooperation and consensus is emphasised; *"the amount of money that UNICEF uses for children activities in Malawi is so enormous, as opposed to what government puts into children activities. So naturally, because of that disparity there must be consensus so you agree on what to do and what not to do."* (interview).

And it is very important that a so... our cooperation is not... The financial type of cooperation is not the most important part. But our... The value added we can give is the technical expertise, so we really have to make sure that .. the.. those value added part of cooperation, no?... it's not always easy but that's the way we have to keep on pushing ourselves to be perceived as like the allies important partners in terms of the technical assistance, and not just financial assistance.(interview).

In general my informants from government were positive to UNICEF's funding. The advocacy for children's issues was not necessarily considered too much but was justified by the informants by the large monetary contribution; *"Yes they push the way government policies are done on children, but they adequately support that, which I think is a good wish. So you can see how UNICEF using its resources and its technical know how has helped government shape its policies on children and child protection."* (interview). It is difficult though not to take in account the influence that can accompany being a considerable donor. A telling example was given regarding implementation;

Again at the district level they are lucky because UNICEF also is supporting them to an extent. There are some districts that are having issues with UNICEF, now those, they are finding it tough, but those that are ok with UNICEF they are getting some money and they are implementing a number of programs. (interview)

The situation in Malawi sees both national level and district level government without proper funding. Having external funding from donors can mean the successful running of an office. Since there is need for funding in most areas it is perfectly natural for donors like UNICEF to concentrate their distribution of funds to districts that follow the guidelines given by UNICEF such as implementation plan, proper monitoring and evaluation and the like. It does pose the question if the influence donors have in this matter might override the statement in the MGDS2 of government championing the implementation in Malawi. The example in the last quote clearly shows the importance for the districts to be aligned with donor requirements in order to get access to funds. It is thus not enough to be aligned with the developmental discourse represented by the MGDS2. Rather, UNICEF is able to include a discourse of children's rights, when they decide whether to support projects in Malawi. Even if this is not put forward as a specific demand, the fact that UNICEF make priorities in its funding must therefore been taken into account in the assessment of the developmental discourse in MGDS2.

### **Summary of chapter 7**

The MGDS2 guides the development work in Malawi. Influencing the MGDS2 is thereby influencing both the discourse, and the actual work being implemented. Much of the influence donors possess seems to be taken as positive by the government. The advocacy during the MGDS2 formulation process pushed the government to shape an agenda they would not

necessarily have done by themselves, this agenda is met by praise from the relevant government stakeholders involved in the area of children's rights.

UNICEF's financial clout is most likely helping them in getting their message across to government. The low funding for children related issues opens up for an indirect influence both on the formulation stage, and on implementation. Districts who manage to uphold a good relationship with UNICEF have a better chance of seeing funding for programme implementation coming their way.

The capacity gaps in government also open up for influence by donors. Donor discourse and language is recycled and reproduced by filling the capacity gaps with donor funded government officials or consultants.

## 8. Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the MGDS2 and eleven interviews of relevant stakeholders in the field of social development in Malawi. I have shown that the MGDS2 as the overarching policy framework for development in Malawi has its main emphasis on economic growth. The MGDS2 can best be understood as representing the development discourse in Malawi based on its wide participatory and consultative formulation process, and that all stakeholders must harmonize their policies and effort according to the MGDS2.

Being the written discourse on development it is clear through its strong emphasis on economy, that the nodal point in Malawi's developmental discourse as it is presented through the MGDS2, is 'economic growth'. This claim is further strengthened by the evidence that all moments included in the discourse have rationales strongly founded in economic benefits. It can seem as though elements which are generally not seen as economic in nature in other discourses, like for instance a discourse based on fulfilment of rights, have been 're-written' as economic beneficial in order to gain access to the Malawian development discourse.

However when justifying the importance of strengthening children's rights in Malawi my informants gave two different types of argument. These two arguments can be viewed as moments in two different discourses, namely the economical development discourse and the rights based discourse.

Within the rights based discourse the emphasis is on ethical, legal and political aspects of children's rights. These types of arguments in the rights based discourse is highly influenced by the UN Charter for Human Rights and the Convention for the Rights of the Child, and can be said to centre around the nodal point 'fulfilment of rights'.

The economic development discourse emphasises economic gains of investing in children. This argument emphasises the future benefits to economic growth as the main rationale for children's rights. The 'economic investment' argument for children is closely linked to the MGDS2 and the Malawian economic development discourse which centres around the nodal point 'economic growth'.

The two moments ‘children as economic investment’ and ‘children as bearers of rights’ can be said to be a result of discursive battle within the respective discourses. There is evidence though, that the inclusion of children’s rights in the MGDS2 is a result of donor influence and UNICEF strategy more than coming from the Malawi government itself. Likewise the inclusion of children as economic investment into the rights based discourse used by UNICEF might be best understood as part of a strategy to get a foothold in the economic development discourse in Malawi, since it seems that economic arguments are a prerequisite for inclusion in the MGDS2.

Much of the influence donors possess seems to be taken as positive by the government. The advocacy during the MGDS2 formulation process pushed the government to shape an agenda they would not necessarily have done by themselves, this agenda is met by praise from the relevant government stakeholders involved in the area of children’s rights.

UNICEF’s financial clout is most likely helping them in getting their message across to government. The low funding for children related issues, and gaps in government capacity opens up for an indirect influence both on the formulation stage, and on implementation.. Donor discourse and language is recycled and reproduced by filling the capacity gaps with donor funded government officials or consultants.

My analysis has shown that children is included in the Malawian developmental discourse on the basis of being “a good financial investment in the future”. The aspect of rights is not considered a value in itself, but rather as a means to an end to achieve economical growth. UNICEF as the most important donor in regards to children’s rights have responded to this by arguing for the economic benefits deriving from investment in children’s rights. This is mainly done as a strategy to firmly place children’s rights within the development discourse, as all justifications for inclusion in the development discourse must be economic in nature to gain access.

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