



-Uplift our pride-



## PARENTS OF DISABLED CHILDREN IN MALAWI (PODCAM)

### EXTERNAL MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT

Prepared by  
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October 2008

#### ***Acknowledgments***

“... there is no special or "disabled" society. Disabled persons belong to the mainstream society ...” -  
*Dr E G Pahad, 2002.*

This review is about children who are part of our society, but only denied the opportunity to enjoy their rights and lead fulfilling lives. PODCAM and NFU and other partners in Malawi want to touch the lives of each of those disabled children to ensure that they too become part of the mainstream society. This however comes as part of the struggle. And this is what PODCAM is doing.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all that have made this evaluation exercise possible. Although it is not possible to mention all the names here, I feel a few names deserve mention, namely; Manuela, the Program Officer in NFU responsible for Malawi, Ms. Mirriam Namanja and her staff at PODCAM.

My special thanks also go to parents from Mzimba, through Ntcheu, Mangonchi to Thyolo who were willing to share with me their story, how they have come a long way from looking on as spectators, becoming empowered to take on the struggle to remove barriers that prevent their disabled children from enjoying their rights.

I would also like to thank all other partners that allowed me an opportunity to share your views about PODCAM. I am sure your contribution, will go a long way to contribute to the future growth of PODCAM.

To all of you mentioned and not mentioned who contributed to the success of this mission, I will always be grateful. This review would not have been accomplished without your input.

Basil Kandyomunda

## ***List of Acronyms***

ANDD	African Network for Developmental Disabilities
BPHCA	Blantyre Cheshire Home Parents' Association
CBR	Community Based Rehabilitation
CEF	Commonwealth Education Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWDs	Children with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
EASUN	East African Support Unit for NGOs
FEDOMA	Federation of Disability Organisations of Malawi
FFO	Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People
FY	Financial Year
IEC	Information Education and Communication
LHL	The Norwegian Heart and Lung Patient Organisation
MACOHA	Malawi Council for the Handicapped
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
NAD	Norwegian Association of the Disabled
NEC	National Executive Council
NFU	Norwegian Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OD	Organisational Development
PODCAM	Parents of Disabled Children's Association of Malawi
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound
SNE	Special Needs Education
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZPHCA	Zimbabwe Parents of Handicapped Children Association

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## Executive Summary with Key Recommendations

PODCAM, a non-profit making organization evolved out of the need for parents of disabled children to represent and support the interests of children with disabilities at all levels. It was also formed to lobby the government and private sector on the aspirations of disabled children, create awareness about the plight of their children and to advocate for a favorable learning environment for children with disabilities.

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The partnership between PODCAM and NFU started in 2004 with a study that assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of PODCAM. The assessment revealed the for capacity building to the organisation in order to become a stronger voice for children with disabilities. From 2005 it became an organisational development programme with funding from NORAD and Atlas Alliance, and this is the project that is being evaluated.

**Process and methodology:** This involved review of documents, meetings officials from government departments and other organisations and field visits to selected sites in 4 districts spanning across the country. A total of 206 participants in the various branches were met.

The process limitations included language limitations because most members of PODCAM are unable to speak English. The evaluation took place during a busy season (the disability movement was involved in its strategic planning, and in preparations for the International Disability Day). A delay in passing the budget was also causing anxiety as to how disability issues would be catered for.

### Evaluation of the findings:

**Consistency and Clarity of Objectives and Interventions:** Apart from the fact that program objectives have been changing over the years, PODCAM did not have a strategic plan from 2004 to 2007. The strategic plan 2007-2009 lacks clarity of objectives, program activities and their implementation. Even though the objectives have been inconsistent, the mission finds that they contribute to the original mission of building a strong and democratic parents' advocacy organisation.

**Relevancy of PODCAM interventions:** The assessment was made in view of the main goal of PODCAM to enable parents of children with disabilities to take an active role in advocating for positive change. There have been efforts to induct the PODCAM NEC members in their roles and get them involved in developing annual plans and budgets. The program has also facilitated branch elections and general assembly besides training the NEC and staff on advocacy and strategic planning, organizational development as well as reviewing the constitution.

It was found out that parents were critical in supporting the needs of their children and gaining access to services like education and health care. Even though PODCAM cannot meet such needs, there are efforts to link them up with organizations like MACOHA, MASAF and other service providers.

**Compliance with strategic principles:** The PODCAM interventions are mainly about increasing the visibility of the issues for disabled children and their families so that they can be addressed as part of the general development programmes (inclusion). PODCAM as a parents' advocacy organisation recognises and promotes disability as human rights issue. PODCAM is hence fighting for inclusion of disabled children in all public sector activities especially inclusive education. However, PODCAM has not yet succeeded in other advocacy areas stressed by the MDGS and the National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

**Programmatic Performance Findings:** The mission has revealed that PODCAM has developed into a strong democratic member-based organisation. Parents and communities have been massively mobilised

and are participating in the community based activities of the organisation. The mission was able to ascertain that PODCAM has mobilized over 5500 parents into 90 functional parents support groups. However, the effective participation of some of the NEC members is largely hampered by the inability of some the members to read, write and understand English.

In terms of promoting a socially inclusive society for children and parents is concerned, PODCAM has been organizing campaigns targeting parents and their children and communities; training communities, children with disabilities and parents; linking youth with disabilities to employment institutions, as well as lobbying government to involve children with disabilities and their parents. However there has been lack of planning and setting targets and most of the public awareness initiatives are still by word of mouth. Not much is being done to develop printed IEC materials as part of the public sensitization strategy.

As far as promoting social economic empowerment is concerned, PODCAM has been linking parents to other service providers including financing lending institutions and lobbying government to develop pro-disability policies.

Although associated more with promoting access to basic education that is inclusive, PODCAM's role is not clear, because its advocacy agenda is not defined in terms of targets.

### **Impact of PODCAM Interventions**

The mission revealed that the program has made strides in changing attitudes and integrating disabled children in activities at family and community levels through awareness campaigns. At the organizational level, PODCAM is seen as the model DPO and has increased opportunities for collaboration between PODCAM and DPOs as well as government departments. At policy level, there was evidence of PODCAM participating in policy work albeit at a minimal level due to lack of skills in policy analysis and advocacy.

### **Program Efficiency**

PODCAM has been effective in book keeping, has progressively improved in accounting, satisfactory auditing and commendable financial decisions given the organisation's limited resources.

### **Program Sustainability**

At Institutional level, PODCAM is a democratic parent's organization with key instruments such as a constitution human resource policy and financial manual guide the day-to- day operations through the NEC and board of trustees. Worth mentioning is that its strength lies in the established district and local branches.

At programmatic level, PODCAM has already influenced decision making processes at both local and central government levels and has created public awareness about disabled children through local branches (parent's groups).

However, financially PODCAM is in a vulnerable situation because its budget is 100% funded by NFU which creates a situation of "putting all one's eggs in one basket".

### **Mission recommendations**

The key recommendation from this evaluation is that given its age PODCAM has made very good progress in terms of building a mass parents organization and therefore deserves further and more support to enable her to become better and leading advocacy organisation in the country. The following specific recommendations are therefore meant to contribute to this effect.

- There is need for supporting PODCAM to go through a full scale OD intervention to ensure that her mission and goals are well articulated but also streamline strategies, linkages, leadership, roles definition, values and policy, identity, structure and resources.

- The mission also recommends that instead of expanding branches to new districts, PODCAM should consolidate and support the development needs of the current and more local branches to enable them become strong and viable entities. This recommendation however, does not deter PODCAM from opening more local branches in the current districts. It should also establish a northern region coordinating office with at least one staff member who could be on voluntary terms to support the activities in the region.
- The mission also recommends that PODCAM needs to be supported to develop an advocacy strategy which should be change-focused with clear objectives, indicators and outcomes. Its development should be participatory involving the national and district branches. In addition, PODCAM needs to dedicate and train one of the three staff members as an Advocacy Officer whose role will basically to focus on training PODCAM grassroots structures in advocacy, work with stakeholders in pursuing the PODCAM advocacy agenda and take charge of the implementation of the PODCAM advocacy strategy especially at the national level.
- There is need for PODCAM to undertake a comprehensive capacity needs assessment / competency mapping exercise upon which PODCAM should develop an organisational capacity building strategy. This organisational capacity building strategy should be aligned to the OD strategy being supported / funded by NFU.
- PODCAM should be supported to develop a sustainability / fundraising and resource mobilisation strategy with clear set goals and strategies which is developed in a participatory manner. For financial stability, PODCAM should constitute a fundraising committee composed of members from the Board of Trustees, NEC and management. But above all, PODCAM should diversity her funding base.
- For improvements in programming, reporting and documentation, there is need for mentoring the management in result based planning and reporting and documentation in general. There is also need to develop formats for capturing data and information periodically. For documentation, PODCAM needs to start compiling vital information and start publishing some of the good practices, manual developed out of practice such as on community mobilisation – a strong area for PODCAM.
- There is also need for PODCAM to start sharing her reports with other partners. This will enhance both her visibility as well as visibility of the entire disability fraternity. There is also need to develop professionalism in the way PODCAM approaches her work.
- Last but not least in order to adequately facilitate the district and local branches, the mission recommends increased funding to PODCAM to cover activities undertaken by the branches. The most sustainable way is facilitating the district branches to evolve into independent CBOs registered with the relevant government bodies, which can enable them undertake their own fundraising initiatives to sustain their branch activities.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction

This external midterm evaluation of the development cooperation between Parents of Disabled Children's Association of Malawi (PODCAM) and the Norwegian Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (NFU) was commissioned with the aim reviewing PODCAM's development as an organisation and assessing the scope and impact of its lobbying and advocacy work since 2005. The review was undertaken during the month of July and August 2008 by Basil Kandyomunda a development management consultant with a bias in disability programming. The findings in this report are a result of an intense field visit covering the three regions of Malawi and an array of interviews with key stakeholders. It also builds on the findings of the field visit that was undertaken by the review late 2007 as part of the NFU methodological evaluation. The report gives the background, objectives and methodology and the findings. It also provides a discussion of the emerging issues and recommendations covering relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability aspects.

## 1.2 Background to the PODCAM /NFU Cooperation

PODCAM is a non-profit making organization registered with Malawi Government under the Trustees Incorporation Act. PODCAM is also registered with Malawi Council for the Handicapped and is affiliated to Federation of Disability Organization of Malawi (FEDOMA).

PODCAM was started by parents of children with developmental disabilities, while other types of disability joined the organisation later on. The organisation evolved out of the Blantyre Cheshire Home Parents' Association (BPHCA) that was set up in 1996. BPHCA was formed to advocate for children with disabilities and mobilise parents to bring their children to the Cheshire Home for rehabilitation. PODCAM was established in response to a feeling amongst parents that the Cheshire Homes' constitution was too restrictive, and that parents could be more effective in their own association.

As parents of disabled children they have the first hand knowledge of how stigmatisation and exclusion affect their child and families lives and make them the most appropriate advocates for change. However, most importantly parents are the best to empower and mobilise other parents and their families, because they have been through the same process themselves.

The main objectives of the organisation are:

- To represent and support the interests of children with disabilities at all levels of social, economical, political and cultural activities.
- To mobilize parents of children with disabilities towards the improvement [sic] of their living conditions.
- To lobby the government and the private on the aspirations of children with disabilities.
- To create awareness on the plight of children with disabilities through provision of information on the development, protection and survival of children.
- To facilitate provision of conducive learning environment for children with disabilities.

PODCAM approached NFU through ANDD – African Network of Development Disabilities in 2001. A pre-study was done in 2003, which revealed PODCAM as a small committed organisation of parents of disabled children. The pre-study also revealed there was a great need of a parents' organisation that could both advocate for inclusive policies at the national level. The study also revealed that the parents of children with disabilities had limited knowledge about disability, but the majority of them were also



poor. There was need for an organisation to support and build the capacity of the parents to become a strong voice for their children.

PODCAM was in addition an interesting partner to NFU due to the presence of other Atlas Alliance organisations who were involved in partnerships in the country, such as FFO, LHL and more so NAD. Consolidating the efforts in the same country would give the Atlas Alliance greater possibility of making a greater impact on the work / programmes targeting people with disabilities, by cross-cutting all levels of advocacy. The exchanges of information between the Norwegian organisations also ensure that the understanding and efforts made in the country are even more appropriate.

NFU started the co-operation with PODCAM with a pre-study in 2003. Due to the positive outcome of the pre-study PODCAM received grants from Atlas to build up an office in 2004. From 2005 it became an organisational development programme with funding from NORAD and Atlas Alliance.

### **1.3 Approach and Methodology**

#### **1.3.1 Process**

The evaluation mission armed with the revised terms of reference developed the methodology and the evaluation tools that would assist in enlisting the necessary information from the target partners. The evaluation mission had to contact PODCAM management to agree on the evaluation schedule. The field visit to PODCAM was carried out from 26<sup>th</sup> July to 5<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

#### **1.3.2 Methodology**

##### **Literature Review**

A number of documents related to PODCAM / NFU relationship and those that are relevant to the operational context were reviewed to give the mission an understanding of what PODCAM with support from NFU has been doing and how it has been doing it. This was done selectively.

##### **Meetings**

A number of meetings were also organised to meet key informants (individuals) and on some occasions groups especially the NEC members and other key stakeholders in government, DPOs, NGOs and other. The meetings were meant to source for information on their assessment of the successes, achievements and challenges of PODCAM. An interview checklist developed by the consultant (core evaluator) was used to guide the discussions with the NEC and staff members of PODCAM,

In the case of government officials the interest was to pick views on how the PODCAM was engaging in policy influencing. For sister DPOs it was mainly to assess the relative strength and sphere of influence of the PODCAM in the context of disability work in Malawi.

##### **Field Visits to Branches**

The evaluation mission visited and met with members from 27 branches in 4 districts organised in selected sites spanning across the country, namely: Mzimba in the North, Ntcheu in the Central, and Mangochi and Thyolo in the South. A total of 206 members of PODCAM in the various branches were met in the various meetings with district branches. During the meetings, the objectives of the mission were explained and the members led by the branch leadership narrated the activities of the branches, the achievements and challenges before the members being animated into a discussion on their feelings and perceptions of what PODCAM means to them and what they would like it to be.

## **1.4 Process Limitations**

The mission had language limitations in as far as interactions with the majority of the members of PODCAM and the Chairperson NEC who do not speak English. Most of the time the mission had to rely on interpretations from the accompanying staff. This elongated the time of meetings, but also in Africa, "it is often construed as bad manners to speak negatively against your leaders when they are present".

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The evaluation took place during a very busy season for the disability movement which was involved in strategic planning, and beginning preparations for the International Disability Day preparations.

At the national level, the delays in passing the budget was causing anxiety and hence preoccupying the minds of the-would be respondents, needless to mention that not adequate and firm appointments were made by PODCAM with the relevant offices. This nevertheless did not affect the quality of information obtained as some officials had to be reached by phone. In all this, the reviewer's knowledge of the operational environment was made use of to optimise the results.

## 2.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 2.1 Introduction

This section discusses the findings of the review in terms of assessment of consistency and clarity of the program objectives and interventions; relevancy of interventions; compliance with the national strategic priorities; effectiveness and impact; efficiency and sustainability. The assessment is informed by the extensive review of documents and interviews and meetings with various stakeholders.

### 2.2 Consistency and Clarity of Objectives and Interventions

Although it was of part of the Terms of Reference, the evaluation mission felt it necessary to assess the clarity of the PODCAM objectives as these are the ones that reflect the desired impacts of the organisational programs. The decision to use the overall organisational objectives was taken against the backdrop of lack of consistency in programmatic objectives.

Since 2004 when NFU started funding PODCAM, every year the objectives have been changing, but to a large extent in most cases pointing to building a strong parents advocacy organisation whose focus is primarily to enable children with disabilities realise their rights.

From 2004 to 2007 which is the largest period subject to this evaluation, PODCAM did not have a strategic plan<sup>1</sup> and was therefore only preparing annual plans and budgets<sup>2</sup>. Even what is presented as strategic plan for 2007-2009 is just a long-term plan since it is designed purely for seeking NORAD / Atlas Alliance funding and lacks strategies for its implementation.

#### Box 1: PODCAM Objectives

- To represent and support the interests of children with disabilities at all levels of social, economical, political and cultural activities.
- To mobilize parents of children with disabilities towards the improvement [sic] of their living conditions.
- To lobby the government and the private on the aspirations of children with disabilities.
- To create awareness on the plight of children with disabilities through provision of information on the development, protection and survival of children.
- To facilitate provision of conducive learning environment for children with disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a long-term plan prepared for NORAD funding for 2004-2006 and another one 2007 - 2009. These are basically funding plans and based on what NFU wants to fund for PODCAM and not necessarily what PODCAM would want strategically to achieve of the strategic periods. A strategic plan gives a big picture of what the organization is doing and where it is going. A strategic plan gives you clarity about what you actually want to achieve & how to go about achieving it, whereas a long term plan is simply a plan of action for day-to-day operations prepared for a long period. A strategic plan enables you to answer the following questions: a) Who are we? b) What capacity do we have/what can we do? c) What problems are we addressing? d) What difference do we want to make? e) Which critical issues must we respond to? And, f) Where should we allocate our resources?/what should our priorities be?

<sup>2</sup> There is one plan which is named Strategic Plan 2004 but it looks like an annual work plan and budget.

In table 1 below we attempt to align the programme objectives across the years to trace the consistence and possibly clarity. For the year 2005, the objectives were quite unclear as most of them were basically statements of tasks or activities to be undertaken rather than statements of the change or desired victory. Using such unclear statements of objectives makes it difficult to assess impact.

In 2006, the objectives are again mere statements without action verbs to give them the thrust and direction of the desired change. This however changes in 2007 when the result-based planning format was introduced. There is an effort to sharpen the objectives and make the whole planning more logical. The mission was however presented with two versions which are almost similar except that one is a 3-year strategic plan and the other is a specific 2007 annual plan which has 4 objectives as opposed to the strategic plan which has three, as represented in table 1 below.

Nevertheless, lack of clarity in the objectives notwithstanding, the mission finds that they are to a large still consistent with the original mission of building a strong and democratic parents' advocacy organisation. However, the mission recommends that PODCAM management needs further training in programming in general, and in particular to pay attention to issues like developing SMART objectives based on clear assessment of needs, differentiating between objectives, activities and indicators. This needs not to be academic but in a simplified way that makes planning and programming in general more realistic but also exciting.

**Table 1: Comparison of Strategic Objectives for PODCAM over the Years**

<b>PODCAM Strategic Objectives over the past 5 years</b>				
<b>2004 (041012 PODCAM STRATEGIC PLAN 2004MN.doc)</b>	<b>2005 (041012 PODCAM STRATEGIC PLAN 2005MN.doc)</b>	<b>2006 (Result based plan 2006 PODCAM Mithi.doc)</b>	<b>2007 -2009 (STRATEGIC PLAN - PODCAM 2007-2009.doc) 6</b>	<b>2007-2009 (Malawi national – NFU MWI 0225) Flerarig Plan 2007-09.doc</b>
To sensitize and mobilize the communities (advocacy meetings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To follow up the sensitization meetings</li> <li>To raise awareness through radio (on challenges e.g. constructions, transportation, education, entertainment)</li> <li>To raise awareness of PODCAM activities</li> </ul>	Advocacy for access to basic education for CWDs	Advocate for access to basic education	Increase and maintain enrolment at basic and secondary education levels
To lobby media houses on disability issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Branches at grass root (continuation)</li> <li>To establish branches in districts</li> <li>To mobilize more parents</li> <li>To coordinate activities at national levels</li> </ul>	Promoting inclusive society	To promote social inclusion targeting children with disabilities and their parents	Promote social economic empowerment of parents of children and their families
To fundraise for children with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To lobby for rights of children with disabilities</li> <li>To campaign on integration of children with disabilities in society</li> <li>To popularize the rights of children with disabilities</li> </ul>	Enhance advocacy and lobbying skills of PODCAM members	To promote a democratically based organization	Develop a strong democratic member based organisation and network
To evaluate activities of PODCAM	To raise funds		To develop a strong organization PODCAM	

### 2.3 Relevancy of PODCAM Interventions

To assess the relevancy of PODCAM interventions, the mission had to rely on the reasons why the organisation was formed. PODCAM was started by parents of children with disabilities to enable them take an active role in advocating for positive change. This is because as already noted earlier in the introduction, parents of disabled children have the first hand knowledge of how stigmatisation and exclusion affect their children and families. This therefore makes them the most appropriate advocates for change. Secondly and most importantly parents are in the best position to empower and mobilise other parents and their families, because they have been through the same process themselves.

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It is against this backdrop that NFU committed itself to support PODCAM to become a strong and democratic parents' advocacy organisation to enable them to enhance the living conditions for children with disabilities in Malawi.

Indeed, the assessment visit noted one of the three opportunities for NFU / PODCAM partnership to be the **“many areas where NFU can make a useful contribution: policy development, skills development, training on roles, organisational structure, branch development”** and the main notable challenge was the fear that PODCAM did not have other donors which posed “real danger of PODCAM becoming dependent on NFU” which necessitated NFU to be very cautious with levels of funding in the first phase of an eventual cooperation.

A critical assessment of the activities funded so far point to addressing the assessed needs then and the attendant challenges but mainly in the area of assisting PODCAM to develop into a strong and democratic organisation. For example there have been efforts to induct the PODCAM NEC members in their roles and get them involved in developing annual plans and budgets (see Visitation Report 2004), Training of Trainers for NEC members (Visitation Report January, 2005), facilitating the branch elections and general assembly and training the new NEC and staff on advocacy and strategic planning (Visitation Report 2005), organizational development – branches and secretariat including reviewing the constitution (Visitation Report January 2006)

There is no doubt that PODCAM is one of the leading advocacy disability organization among the DPOs affiliated to FEDOMA. This is acknowledged by both respondents from within the disability fraternity and the government departments that PODCAM works with or targets in their advocacy work.

On the ground however, the field visits to the local branches revealed that the parents had two basic needs which they looked forward to PODCAM to meet. These are a) supporting them to start income generating projects to improve their household incomes so as to be able to support the needs of their children, and b) supporting access to services, such as health care, education etc. To many a parent, their membership is expected to result into some positive results to the household. This of course is beyond what PODCAM as an advocacy organisation is able to offer. However, there were efforts to link parents with resource networks such as MACOHA for providing school fees grants, and MASAF for income-generating projects. PODCAM also refers the children with disabilities (mainly when doing field trips) to service providers. This is however not systematic.

Worth commenting on here, therefore, is that for an organisation whose target are disabled children working in a poor country where most of the disability referral services are scarce, to run purely as an advocacy organisation is rather like swimming against the tide. There is always pressure from parents to be provided with the services they need for their children. Advocacy does not bring quick results. Indeed, the vision founders of PODCAM actually wanted more say in what decisions were being taken to rehabilitate their children. They were still focused on organising service delivery that would be more exemplary and less of advocacy. The advocacy agenda was mainly an NFU agenda and a precondition

for funding, which an organisation of PODCAM's calibre could not resist. With time, the PODCAM leadership and management have embraced the advocacy option. But this is not easy to market to the parent who is engulfed in poverty and probably excluded from the general anti-poverty interventions.

Of course the argument here is not to encourage PODCAM to position itself to play a dual role of being both an advocacy organisation and service provider. What the mission recommends is for PODCAM to develop effective partnerships with service organisations to which it can refer the disabled children to obtain the required services such as corrective surgery, assistive devices, medication, and rehabilitation therapy. The current practice of referral without follow up is not effective. In most cases, parents do not even have the means to travel the distance. For instance travelling from Karonga to Cure Children's Hospital in Blantyre is not an objective proposition for a poverty stricken family. In this case, PODCAM would need to take such options as:

- Tell the parents that there is a possibility to have their child obtain a service that can improve life
- Obtain a thorough assessment by a professional in the nearest facility (may be a medical officer if it is the case for surgery)
- Contact Cure Hospital about the potential referral to obtain acceptance
- Connect with MACOHA or any other possible grant maker such as Liliane Fonds to provide a grant
- Prepare the family for the referral (this can be done by the local branch members or a MACOHA Community Rehabilitation Worker),
- Follow-up with the family and the Cure Hospital to ascertain whether the referral has been honoured.

This sounds casework, but from experience, a child focused organization like PODCAM has to devote some resources to give this kind of support. This does not turn it into a service organization, but rather it facilitates and enables positive change to happen in the lives of its primary beneficiaries. But to do this it requires PODCAM to fundraise and employ some staff that have to be devoted to this kind of work.

The other option would be for example to lobby and encourage Cure Hospital and service providers to run outreaches to the remote districts targeting the numbers of children that need their services. But it could be also be a mix of options.

## **2.4 Compliance with strategic principles**

Poverty, which is defined as the lack of productive means to fulfil basic needs such as food, water, shelter, education and health, is prevalent among persons with disabilities. Like in many other parts of the world, disabled people in Malawi, experience discrimination and are widely excluded from the social, economic and political life of the community.

This exclusion is the basic cause of high rates of poverty among disabled people in Malawi and this unfortunate situation has been recognised in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). The sub theme on economic empowerment observes that:

*“people with disabilities are usually the most affected in terms of access to assets and other facilities required to become economically empowered. They experience difficulties accessing financial services and capital, skills development programmes, and technology developments. They are also the most affected by poor infrastructure such as roads, communication, and buildings not designed to accommodate or meet their special needs.”*

Our assessment of the objectives and interventions of PODCAM to a large extent do recognise the MDGS observation about exclusion as the major contributor to the poverty situation the children with disabilities and their families find themselves entangled in. The PODCAM interventions are mainly about increasing the visibility of the issues for disabled children and their families so that they can be addressed as part of the general development programmes (inclusion).

Furthermore, our assessment of the interventions revealed that to a large extent they conform to the majority of the guiding principles for disability programming in the country<sup>3</sup>. The PODCAM interventions recognise that all disabled children are not the same and therefore need different intervention at the level of addressing their needs. PODCAM as a parents' advocacy organisation recognises and promotes disability as human rights issue, and hence fights for inclusion of disabled children in all public sector activities. Furthermore, PODCAM has positioned itself as a mass organisation of parents which allows full participation of disabled children (as self advocates) and parents as the best representatives of their children. The children and their parents are given an opportunity to participate not only in the organisational programmes but also in the national CBR activities. The field visits to different districts revealed that the PODCAM local structures (local branches) were being used by the National CBR Programme to promote CBR interventions.

In spite of all these positive observations, the evaluation mission observes that PODCAM has not deliberately taken a move to build its capacity in understanding and aligning her advocacy strategy with the MDGS. Apart from focusing on inclusive education<sup>4</sup>, PODCAM has not yet developed other complementary advocacy packages that address other exclusion areas raised by the MDGS and the National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

## 2.5 Programmatic Performance Findings (Effectiveness)

Under this section we assess the effectiveness of PODCAM intervention based on the stated program objectives. Effectiveness refers to the extent to which PODCAM has achieved the objectives (targets) in terms of quantity and quality within the time frame. However we need to note here that in the absence of consistent strategic objectives (as indicated in section 2.2 above), the mission has opted to use the reorganized organizational objectives as benchmarks for the assessment of the interventions (refer to Box 2). But even then, it is still rather difficult to tell what the overall target outputs for the period were for purposes of comparing with what has achieved been achieved.

### Box 2: Organisational Objectives 2007

- a) Mobilising parents and building a democratically based organization
- b) Promotion of a socially inclusive society children with disabilities and their parents
- c) Advocacy for access to basic education for children with disabilities
- d) Promoting economic empowerment

Furthermore, there was no baseline information against which the planned targets were based for the quantifiable targets. For example one of the expected results in the 2007 plan is "80% increase in the enrolment for children with disabilities". Without baseline data on the number of CWDs enrolled in

<sup>3</sup> Refer to National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, pp.7-8

<sup>4</sup> PODCAM is recognized as leading DPO articulating issues on inclusive education. However, she has not yet developed requisite competences to undertake targeted advocacy on the issue. Currently it is doing more awareness raising about the issue (see section 2.5.3 below for detailed analysis).



schools at the time planning it makes the expected result very difficult to measure let alone it being rather unrealistic most especially when this is an advocacy indicator.

### **2.5.1 Developing a strong democratic member-based organisation**

This component of PODCAM strategy aims to mobilise parents of children with disabilities into a strong and democratic organisation with a strong grassroots representation including children and youth. A number of activities were planned and have been undertaken, including: mobilisation of parents through meetings, organisational skills training at provincial and branch level, training of trainers (committee members, youth etc), youth and self advocacy training, civic education, conducting elections at branch, district and national level, training in budgeting, report writing, narrative proposals and follow-up structures. Others include; meeting with other NGOs working on disabilities issues and other stakeholder; production of NGO directory; training parents on how to advocate to stakeholders, and reviewing the PODCAM constitution and manifesto.

The mission therefore finds the mobilization of parents of children with disabilities and communities to respond to the cause the most singular greatest achievement over the past 3-4 years of PODCAM/NFU partnership. The mission was able to ascertain that PODCAM has mobilized over 5500 parents into 90 functional parents support groups (local branches) in 19 out of the 28 districts in the country (68% of the country). The mission field visits also ascertained that these local branches work as parents support groups and have had large influence in the community in terms of raising public awareness but are also actively raising public awareness on the need (advocating) for inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Furthermore, the PODCAM has embarked on training the youth with disabilities (especially those with developmental disabilities) into self advocates with the assistance and as part of the ANDD strategy. In the medium and long term this is going to enable the youth with developmental disabilities to participate in the programs as active participants.

There is also no doubt the parents were in control and playing a big role in the management of PODCAM. As members of the National Executive Committee, they have been actively involved planning and budgeting. They meet quarterly to plan and approve budgets. The secretariat then implements and reports to the NEC. At the district and local branch level, the implementers of most of the activities that take place in the community, are undertaken by members and are not necessarily documented in detail in the organizational work plans.

In terms of practicing democracy, there are mechanisms for mass participation and periodic changing leadership. At each of the levels (local branches, district branches and national level) there have been periodic elections for taking important decisions for the organisation but mainly for the leadership to report back to the membership – an important element of democracy.

However, the effective participation of some of the NEC members is largely hampered by the inability of some the members to read, write and understand English. Some of the NEC members also feel they are not playing a big role. They want to participate in the implementation of activities, but a close look at what this demand may tantamount to a demand to micro-manage which is a major problem affecting indigenous CSOs in Africa. Therefore although there is a feeling among some NEC members that the Secretariat is too powerful and beyond their control, this mission found no convincing reason to allude to that conclusion.

Nevertheless, the mission was happy with the level of participation of the different structures, although the recommendation is to continue with the process of educating the various structures about their

roles. In addition, there is need for PODCAM to start standardizing the awareness and sensitization materials / information used by preparing booklets and / or posters.

## 2.5.2 Promoting a socially inclusive society for children and parents

The very reason for the existence of PODAM as a parents' organization is the realization and appreciation that children with disabilities do not have a voice and therefore parents are the best representatives for their children.

The aim of this component of the program is to sensitize children with disabilities and their parents about their rights and responsibilities, but also to target the communities, policy makers and the general public to be more responsive to the needs and concerns of people with disabilities. To achieve this, PODCAM has been organizing campaigns targeting parents and their children and communities; training communities, children with disabilities and parents on the existing documents; organising career talks to youth with disabilities; linking youth to with disabilities to employment institutions, as well as lobbying government to involve children with disabilities and their parents.

### Box 3: Impact on Inclusive Education

“PODCAM is an important partner. Their advocacy is having impact . . . . When working with us, they are instrumental in advocating for the needs of children with disabilities to be integrated in overall planning. .. the parents are however not yet effectively mobilized in all parts of the country. Their pressure is not yet felt at policy level”.

- *Director of SNE (also Blind)*

It is important to note here that the planning has been lacking in terms of setting targets which would be used by the evaluation mission to assess the level of achievement in this area of promoting inclusion. Nevertheless, there is anecdotal evidence to testify to activities being undertaken aimed at contributing to this objective. For example, the mission was able to establish that PODCAM has become the leading DPOs in lobbying government at the various levels to include issues of children with disabilities in their development planning. In a number of branches, the evaluation mission was given testimonies of engagement with school authorities for instance to address the barriers that prevent children with disabilities from enrollment and learning. At the district level, PODCAM has been lobbying for increased recruitment and training of SNE teachers.

At the personal level, the mission was also able to establish the majority of parents involved in PODCAM activities, do acknowledge and appreciate their roles and responsibilities as parents. They know roles and rights of their disabled children in spite of the fact that the majority of them are chocking under excruciating poverty.

PODCAM has been good at putting the issues of children with disabilities into the public domain at various levels. PODCAM is a regular visitor on the media talking about disability issues. PODCAM has however, not yet done much in terms of lobbying the private sector to support pro-CWDs initiatives.

Most of the public awareness initiatives are still by word of mouth. There is not much being done to develop printed IEC materials such as posters, flyers and other printed material as part of the public sensitization strategy. The danger here is that on some occasions different people in PODCAM might be giving contradicting information. In order to promote systematization in public awareness / education, there is need to develop a public awareness strategy based on the assessed information needs / gaps.

Secondly, the members of the public on occasions need resident literature in easy to read and interpret formats such as posters to keep referring to. This is particularly also important for children with developmental disabilities and parents and other members of the public who are non-literate.

### **2.5.3 Promoting social economic empowerment**

This component aims to sensitise parents and their families about the availability service providers to enable them increase their access to loans and other benefits to parents of children with disabilities so as to improve their livelihoods. To achieve this PODCAM has been organising meetings with other stake holders, linking parents to service providers including financing lending institutions and lobbying government to develop pro-disability policies.

At the district level, PODCAM has also organized district executive committees, which are engaging with district officials and other organizations on disability issues at the district level. There is evidence of these committees playing a vital link between children with disabilities / families and resource networks such as MACOHA mainly for grants for assistive devices and school fees; MASAF for income generating projects and FEDOMA /Firelight for school fees.

As a result of these initiatives, money lending institutions are slowly opening up to parents of children with disabilities. For instance 80 parents were successfully linked to financial lending institutions for financial assistance.

### **2.5.4 Promoting access to basic inclusive education**

The interventions for achieving this objective are not clear. What specific activities would PODCAM offer to facilitate the provision of conducive learning environment for children with disabilities? Nonetheless, PODCAM has mainly focused advocating for improvement of accessible education to children with disabilities. The aim is to increase and maintain enrolment at basic and secondary education levels. PODCAM believes that this can be achieved through changing attitudes of parents, teachers, learners, and community members. Indeed, PODCAM has been spot on as far as awareness raising targeting parents, teachers and community members is concerned. PODCAM is well known and the leading DPO promoting inclusive education.

According to PODCAM, as a result of this awareness 1756 children with disabilities who were not going to school enrolled. Out of these 222 have dropped out leaving 1534. This is however difficult to verify, as there is no proper and systematic professional assessment done in schools. These reports are based on returns from branches. But what is certain is that there is anecdotal evidence that more disabled children are going to school. The Director of Special Needs Education, estimates the number of properly assessed children with disabilities enrolled in school at 70,000 out of the 3.2 million children going to school. This is however contested by other respondents from the disability movement.

Furthermore, partly due to the persistent lobbying of PODCAM, 37 schools have received special needs education teachers. The Directorate of Special Needs Educations puts the total figure of SNE teachers in the country who are deployed at 586 in total.

One of the reasons for disabled children not attending school has been lack of assistive devices. For that matter, PODCAM has lobbied service providers and as a result 672 children with special needs in various schools have received assistive devices mainly to aid their mobility and other needs. There is evidence of schools also trying to make the school infrastructure especially the built area more accessible with for instance construction of ramps etc.

The mission however, wishes to observe that the PODCAM efforts here were not well integrated with the national CBR Programme efforts. The CBR Programme in Malawi was taking a mainstreaming approach and the education sector was one of those actively being targeted. A number of initiatives have been undertaken as a result aimed at improving the school environment and urging government

to train and post more SNE teachers. As a result, the Government of Malawi has agreed to step up the numbers of teachers being enrolled for SNE training.

The Directorate of Special Needs Education also revealed that PODCAM was not yet very systematic and proactive in their advocacy strategy. PODCAM was not proactively engaging with the Ministry. The biggest achievement for an advocacy organisation should be to influence policy. PODCAM's efforts are not yet directed and affecting this level.

PODCAM needs to build its capacity to direct its advocacy work at the policy level. It is at this level, where it needs to identify and work with allies. The allies need the presence of PODCAM to be present at that level to represent the interests of their children, - and not only representation, but working out alternative policy options that can effectively address access issues for disabled children.

It is also recommended that PODCAM takes an initiative to increase its organisational learning on Inclusive Education, by linking with some organisations like TAMH which has a relatively long experience in this area. PODCAM should also subscribe and access information from EENET ([www.eenet.org.uk](http://www.eenet.org.uk)) which is probably the leading network promoting inclusive education.

## **2.6 Impact of PODCAM Interventions**

Impact in this context is taken to mean “**what has happened as a result of the program in terms of benefits and effects**” felt at various levels. While assessing the impact of PODCAM interventions over the last 3 years it is very difficult to isolate it from the overall impact arising out of the PODCAM's life span since it was formed, and possibly the impact caused by interventions of other disability focused organizations, such as MACOHA.

Important to note, is that the evaluation team considers this programmatic period to be too short a time for assessing impact and therefore we treat it at this stage more as outcomes rather than long term effects arising out of the project. Secondly, in terms of programming, PODCAM has not developed a clear purpose and goal and neither indicative impact indicators<sup>5</sup> which could be used as basis for assessing impact. In the absence of such indicators, the evaluation mission relied on technical experience and proxy indicators, such as; change of attitudes, increased participation and involvement, policy change, increased positive response in addressing disability issues at programming level, and others.

Nevertheless, it is also important to trace the impact from program implementation for instance in terms of changing the attitude and practices of the family members, the community, the media and the extent to which the project is challenging systems at organizational level and influencing their practices in planning, programming and packaging. The mission considers these levels to include; the individual beneficiaries and their families / caregivers, the community, DPOs and other organisations involved in the disability programming, and the government structures and policy in general.

### **Beneficiary Level**

The biggest problems facing people with disabilities and in particular those with developmental disabilities is non-supportive attitudes and practices (social barriers). They are considered less human, not cared for and left to survive by default (social exclusion). These non-supportive attitudes further

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<sup>5</sup>In Programmatic evaluation, assessment of impact is guided by the planned and anticipated changes the program is expected to contribute to in terms of indicators developed at purpose and goal level. Hence, impact indicators are those developed at goal and purpose levels when using a logical framework approach or its variants.

compound the problem of disabled children especially those with developmental disabilities. These attitudes and practices limit the possibilities of basic survival for these disabled children as full human beings that have and should enjoy their basic rights. These are part of the social barriers that are faced by disabled children and therefore which PODCAM was founded to challenge.

The evaluation team was able to receive testimonies from parents about how their attitudes towards their children had changed. They love and care for their children. The case for self advocates had even gone a long way to show that given an opportunity children with disabilities can rise to the challenge and speak for themselves. Although this evaluation was done shortly after the self-advocacy training, the training had boosted their self-esteem and self-worth.

Parents also narrated how the level of participation and integration of children with disabilities in the family and community activities had increased. There were many examples of such cases now contributing to the family welfare activities such as gardening, washing dishes, cleaning the compound, gardening and many others.

### **Family level**

Perhaps also important to note was the extent to which the program was increasing the level of knowledge of the family members in how to manage the problems associated with their children's disabilities. Although not directly undertaking training in management of disability, through sharing knowledge and experiences at local branch level, the parents were learning basic tips in how to care for their children.

### **Community level**

Just like at the family level, the children with disabilities suffer exclusion at the community level due to the non-supportive attitudes. They are therefore excluded from participation in community social activities; are not accepted at school, those who succeed to be enrolled, they often drop out sooner than later because the teachers do not have know-how and technical teaching and learning materials for effective teaching and learning.

The evaluation team would like to note that at the community level, there is increased awareness and appreciation of the problem of disabled children as their problem too and are willing to provide support where possible. There is no doubt that increased public awareness about the problem of disability in the communities in the targeted districts has contributed to increased understanding and appreciation of disability issues. The traditional leaders (Village heads) for instance in Thyolo were vehement in their request to be trained on how they can be helpful to children with disabilities because they now feel that every person (disabled or non-disabled) under their authority is their responsibility.

### **Organisational Level**

There is no doubt the program has resulted into one of the strongest and vibrant DPO. PODCAM is seen as the model DPO with a wider coverage which every other DPO should emulate. To a large extent, PODCAM is overshadowing other DPOs especially those that have not yet received funding and hence limited in coverage. This is of course an un-intended outcome.

Be it as it may, the program support has increased opportunities for collaboration between PODCAM and DPOs and other disability focused NGOs as well as government departments. "PODCAM is one of the most respected DPO", observed a leader of a sister DPO.

### **Policy Level**

There was evidence of PODCAM participating in the development of policies and important legislations such as the National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, Disability Bill,

and the development of curriculum for SNE. According to the Director of Special Needs Education in the Ministry of Education, “... **through continued lobbying and advocacy efforts of PODCAM, children with disabilities are being given increased attention at policy level**”. Inclusive education has been the main focus of PODCAM’s advocacy agenda.

Be it as it may, PODCAM is still lacking in terms of resident competences and capacity to effectively play an effective role at this level. The staffing levels are very low. Three staff cannot be everywhere doing everything. They too indicated that they need knowledge and skills in policy analysis and formulation to enable them play a meaningful role at this level.

## **2.7 Assessment of Program Efficiency**

In assessing the issue of efficiency, the major question to ask is, ‘*have the outcomes been achieved in a cost effective and cost efficient way?*’ Could these resources have been used differently to achieve the same or better outputs within the same or less timeframe?

The key resources reviewed for purposes of this evaluation are financial and human. Regarding financial resource management in PODCAM during the period under review, the mission’s views are structured in a simple framework of financial management practices, as articulated below:

- **Book-keeping:** For an organization of the size and age of POCAM, this has to a large extent been effectively done. During the period under review there has been adequate compliance with basic administrative good practices. The voucher systems, journals, and ledgers have to a large extent been satisfactorily kept. This has been confirmed by the independent opinion of A.M Tarmohamed and Company Public Accountants who audited PODCAM’s financial statements, for the period ended 1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007.
- **Accountancy:** That has to do with interpretation of results of book-keeping, so as to derive information on trends, relationship and decisions taken. The accounting practices and performance in PODCAM have progressively improved over the period. This has been achieved with practical support from NFU program staff. As a result, useful information is generated to inform programming, and key management, and even NEC and Board of Trustees decisions.
- **Auditing:** The mission established that auditing of books of accounts has been diligently covering the entire strategic period except the current FY that is not yet completed. For the audit reports available, the auditors, A.M Tarmohamed and Company Public Accountants, basing themselves on international accounting standards produced unqualified reports expressing satisfaction that the financial statements provided a true and fair view of PODCAM’s state of affairs during the period. However, management needs to take note of two important accounting issues raised by the auditors regarding: a) ensuring that travel allowance forms are always completed, and b) maintaining petty cash control account on a regular basis.
- **Financial decisions:** Apart from major decisions taken on the basis of established information and trends on financial management already mentioned above, other management decisions of financial nature and implication have been competently taken in PODCAM, for instance;
  - ✓ Acquisition of major assets in form of motor vehicle, furniture and other equipment such as computers;
  - ✓ Maintaining a lean management structure aimed at minimizing overhead costs;

The mission finds that PODCAM is funded 100% by NFU as an Organisational Development project. The funding is used to pay for the office overhead costs, administration and programmes. This is a dangerous trend as it makes POCAM not only complacent but also vulnerable. It puts them into a comfort zone which is not a motivator for sustainability.

NFU also retains part of the funding to support OD support – directly by funding trips by staff from Oslo and Harare<sup>6</sup> for monitoring and support supervision as well as organisational capacity building.

### Cost Efficiency

*Cost efficiency* is used to mean ensuring maximum possible returns from every unit of resource input in program planning and implementation. In other words, it has to do with maximizing value for money.

At the programmatic level PODCAM has had a very fast growth rate. Over the last 3 years, PODCAM has spread from a few districts in the south to cover 19 districts spread all over the 3 regions of the country. In each of these districts, there are committees that have been established and below them local branches. One can say that the biggest achievement of PODCAM therefore is the opening up of branches. However, it is of interest to question the issue of coverage. Is opening a branch enough? Certainly not! It should be followed up with mentoring / coaching of the members of the branches into the PODCAM mission, building them into strong advocacy groups with the necessary tools to enable them operate as semi-autonomous groups able to engage at their level.

For purposes of building a mass movement (grassroots organisation) PODCAM is on the right track. However, the fast growth is overstressing the structures. The staff of three is simply too few to match the task at hand. They are not able to offer the necessary mentoring and follow-up.

Furthermore, with the modest budget covered by NFU, it is obviously constrained. With an office located in Blantyre, covering the north comes at a huge cost. For instance it takes about a day and a half of driving to reach Karonga district.

#### Box 4: Recommended Steps towards funding Branches

These are a few steps that need to be followed as part of the preparations to start funding district branches. Basically, this requires the branches to start transforming themselves into legal entities (CBOs).

Step 1: The branches should to a large extent be assisted to become registered with the relevant authorities as CBOs so that they gain the legal status of handling public funds.

Step 2: PODCAM should then develop and enter into MOUs with each branch spelling out the terms and conditions

Step 3: On a quarterly basis, the district branches should prepare plans and budgets against agreed lines of expenses such as;

- Travel
- Meetings
- Monitoring visits etc

Step 4: PODCAM should prepare formats for planning, budgeting and reporting which they can then distribute to branches and train them on their use.

Step 5: On a quarterly basis the approved budgets should then transfer funds to the branch bank account.

Step 6: The branches should then compile and submit quarterly reports and accountabilities should be used as a basis for the next quarter's transfer.

Step 7: On period basis, the District Branch Accounts should be subjected to audits by the PODCAM branches as well as strict financial monitoring as part of the program monitoring visits.

<sup>6</sup> NFU maintains Ms.Lilian Mariga as a Regional Advisor / Consultant based in Harare.

Hence, one day of activity in Karonga would mean spending taking a week and this means an expense of 5 days for one day's work.

Currently, PODCAM is largely dependent on the district structures (Executive Committee members) to do the main work of organising and following up the local branches and then reporting. However, these members are not facilitated to do the work. The PODCAM secretariat does not facilitate the district branches even to do the reporting. When they meet, or do follow-up of the local branches they foot their own bills. The mission was informed that there are no resources in the budget to meet the expenses of the district branches. Whilst the mission finds this a good measure of sustainability, looked at from the flip side, it can be equated to exploitation. When the committee members for instance have to use their own resources to meet to write a report which then PODCAM secretariat uses to report to the funding partner, they should then be refunded their expenses as the budget has a line for reporting / monitoring and evaluation.

The mission recommends that proper planning and budgeting that takes care of all structures supporting the secretariat to perform its work should be supported by the budget. Furthermore, as a sustainability measure, district branches should be supported to develop into semi-autonomous community based organisations which can start raising their own funding to sustain their activities. A good example is the Mangochi district branch which has evolved into a CBO with her own building which also houses a day care centre. The construction of this building was funded by MASAF. Similar cases can be found in Zimbabwe, where some provincial branches of ZAPHCA are raising their own funding some of them with a higher income than their mother organisation ZPHCA.

Another practice that needs addressing by management is the field trips which are always undertaken by two officers. Given the level of human resources at hand, it does not require two officers to move together to do sensitisation. Even if it involved training, resource persons would be outsourced from the close by districts. Field travels should be done more by the programme officer, to free the Executive Director to attend more to strategic issues. Of course this does not mean that the Executive Director should not be moving to the field at all, rather, she should balance her field work with other strategic roles.

By and large, one of the key areas that PODCAM could still work on to further improve their efficiency is to re-organizing the human resource available to share the available and changing needs. This needs reviewing the job descriptions and aligning job specifications. For instance one of the most urgent needs is to allocate the fundraising function to the Executive Director. The Executive Director, by the nature of her office and status, currently it is her that can do effective local fundraising from the corporate sector. She has to be the "door opener" because it is easier for Executive Director to seek and obtain an appointment from a Chief Executive of a business corporate than an officer at a lower level. Other officers then get involved in writing proposals once the "door has been opened". This is simply a common practice with CSOs in Africa.

## **2.8 Program Sustainability**

### **2.8.1 Sustainability Benchmarks**

The sustainability of an NGO like PODCAM is dependent on a number of inter-related elements. These include:

- PODCAM's reading of, internalization of and responsiveness to changes in needs, interests and priorities - the changes arise from shifts in the broader social, political and economic environment;



- the need to develop a diverse range of organisational forms (e.g. alliances) to meet needs and interests in a strategic and ethical manner;
- the importance of building strong relationships with central and local government, the private sector, the media and the beneficiaries;
- the availability of appropriate support and resources;
- the need to attract, develop and retain appropriate human and financial resources; and
- the importance of creating an enabling environment and fiscal framework.

This mission therefore examines the sustainability of PODCAM at several levels; namely:

- a) Institutional sustainability which refers to the ability of PODCAM, to continue its operations after leadership transition.
- b) Programmatic sustainability which refers to the ability of PODCAM to constantly shift interventions to keep in line with the changing needs of beneficiaries within a given programme.
- c) Financial sustainability which refers to the ability of PODCAM to finance its operations – PODCAM is totally dependent on donor funding.

## 2.8.2 Institutional Sustainability

### Governance

PODCAM is a democratic parent's organization with key instruments such as a constitution and systems that guide not only the day-to-day operations but also the transition from and change of power. The NEC is the day to day managers of the organization while there is a Board of Trustees which is in charge of policy and custodian of the organization in as far as ensuring that the organization is governed and it operates in accordance with the law. PODCAM organizes General Assembly every 3 years where elections are conducted. This has been done in a transparent manner where every member has equal opportunities to be elected<sup>7</sup>. Elections are also conducted at different levels to allow participation of the membership in the governance of their organization.

Furthermore, it is plausible to state that the strength of PODCAM in the long term does not lie in the National Secretariat, but rather in the established local branches (grassroots parents support groups). The mission found these branches practicing a high level of democracy. They elect their leadership and participate in decision making. Even with little contact with the secretariat, they are able to move on with their own advocacy initiatives, supporting each other and recruiting new membership. A number of local branches keep forming with support from the members of the local branches. This means that even in the absence of a formal structure, these branches can continue supporting and speaking on behalf of children with disabilities.

### Policies, Systems and Procedures

As a young organisation PODCAM has in place the basic policies like the human resource policy and the financial management manual. The organization has a system for managing its operations since it is small and not yet complex. Of course as it develops it will need a constant review of these systems and new policies being developed such as a fleet management policy, office procedures and practices and many others. What is missing however and not in practice now is a staff appraisal system. This is urgently needed. The system should involve a mechanism for annual appraisal of staff performance for the employees of PODCAM. The performance based on the staff job descriptions should be the basis for renewal of their contracts.

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<sup>7</sup> This is now changing to allow the key 5 positions to be held only by those who have a certain level of education to ease likely complexes that arise from having a non-literate NEC.

### Membership to the Disability Fraternity

PODCAM has been allowed full membership to the Federation of Disability Organisations of Malawi (FEDOMA). Membership to FEDOMA can be perceived as a big achievement for a parents' organization, but it also augments its opportunities for sustainability. PODCAM can use its membership ticket for fundraising but also it means it can use the structures of other disability organizations on the ground to advance their agenda even without their presence. Of course the reverse is also true. PODCAM should also allow other DPOs to use their own branches to leverage their work at the grassroots.

Currently, the major work with the local branches is being done by the district branch committees without financial support from the secretariat. Of course this should not be taken for granted as they are likely to encounter fatigue at some point unless they are supported to start raising their own income to sustain their activities.

### **2.8.3 Programmatic Sustainability**

PODCAM's is a new program which the evaluation team finds that in spite of the challenges, it has created some impact on the lives of children with disabilities and their families. It has already influenced decision making processes at both local and central government levels. The benefits that are accruing to these individuals and their families are sustainable because of the following reasons.

There are a number of positive changes happening in the lives of children with disabilities and their families because of the public awareness PODCAM has raised and the opportunities it has created through the establishment of local branches. These local branches can be ably called Parents Support Groups. These local branches are self organized and motivated to continue being a platform for exchange of information, encouragement, counseling and reference.

Secondly, the branches (local and district) are basically doing their work not because PODCAM is giving them money but rather, because they believe in the cause.

PODCAM has been effective at raising public awareness about issues of disabled children. This is very vital for influencing positive attitude among the public. This change is vital for continued support for program interventions for disabled children. However, the reliance on word of mouth as a means for sensitization and public awareness-raising means that there is no reference left behind in the community. PODCAM needs to develop IEC materials such as information flyers, posters and others which they can leave the community for future reference as part of creating community based resident literature.

Furthermore, PODCAM being an advocacy organisation is working within the framework of the disability fraternity and to a large extent trying to open up linkages with other programs such as the national CBR program, Feed the Children Malawi, CURE Children's Hospital and government service outlets. In this way, the parents can continue seeking support from such programs and service outlets even if PODCAM is not available.

PODCAM with support from NFU have invested in capacity building of the organisational structures especially the district branches. The program has been training the national and district branch leadership in leadership and management skills, advocacy, planning and OD in general terms. This means the knowledge and skills acquired will continue being accessible beyond the NFU / PODCAM partnership.

## 2.8.4 Financial Sustainability

That said and done, the financial viability of PODCAM in case NFU stops funding is still in question. NGOs like PODCAM depend largely on fundraising from development partners especially those in the North (Europe and America). Currently, PODCAM is depending on funding from NFU as the sole funder. There is therefore need to address issues of diversifying funding, but most importantly building internal capacity in fundraising and resource mobilization.

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There is however evidence that in the past, PODCAM has been able to attract some short-term funded projects from UNICEF, CEF and Firelight / FEDOMA. This is an indicator that PODCAM has potential of attracting other funding partners.

It is important to note here that NFU's funding has catapulted PODCAM from being another small DPO with a few branches and interventions in the districts around Blantyre to a DPO with a nationwide coverage. The funding however is restricted with specific targets. NFU practically funds 100% of PODCAM administrative and program costs. NFU also besides the direct funding has been sending missions to Malawi to support the capacity building needs as part of the partnership agreement. Being the only funding partners NFU has influenced the staff structure. For instance, according to management, PODCAM cannot increase staffing from the current 3 senior staff, although there is a feeling that there is need for more staff to cater for the growing demands.

As a good practice, NFU as a northern partner should support PODCAM to develop a sustainability strategy to address the potential negative effects that come with the exit of a good funding partner like NFU. NFU should encourage and assist PODCAM to get a diversified funding base by insisting on:

- developing a fund raising and resource mobilisation strategy
- engaging a dedicated staff as fundraising officer from the onset of the collaboration, who could assist branches as well as head office
- setting fundraising targets from other sources as part of the partnership agreement
- include discussions on the exit strategy already at the initial planning stage

## 3.0 EMERGING ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 Organisational Effectiveness

As already acknowledged in many parts of this report, PODCAM is a young organization with a very fast growth rate. In three years PODCAM has expanded its programme coverage cover 19 districts out of the 28 districts. This expansion however, is not matched by the growth in staff levels. It has remained the only three staff who have to cover the great expanse as well as do planning. There is heavy reliance on the district and community structures to undertake the activities with minimal support from the secretariat. Furthermore, the mission was not convinced that there is a proper matching of jobs and tasks arising out of the program and dictated by the mission, with the resident competences of staff.

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- There is need to organize a comprehensive capacity / competence mapping which could not be done effectively as part of this evaluation (leave alone it being outside the scope of this evaluation). This mapping should then recommend appropriate ways of sharing the roles, any extra human resources that would be needed to make PODCAM perform optimally, recommend the necessary training required for the staff to enable them perform optimally their assigned roles.

### 3.2 Organisational Learning

Since inception and most especially after getting into partnership with NFU, PODCAM has been engrossed more in program implementation to enable be felt as an organization by its constituency. There has been little or no time set aside for reflection and learning which is not good for the organizational health, as there is no time to learn and integrate the lessons and improve programming. It leaves little room for POCAM to position herself as a learning organization. The question that may arise here could be why should organization learning be an important element for PODCAM?

Organisational learning is widely recognised as an essential requirement for enabling NGOs to respond to the new and often unpredictable challenges that face them in a complex operational environment. Investment in organisational learning is a good input for improved programming and effectiveness. Hence *“improved organisational effectiveness is increasingly seen as the ‘bottom line’ for learning – for investment to be justified in many organisations, learning must be primarily a means to an end rather than an end in itself”*<sup>8</sup>.

It is therefore important for PODCAM staff to recognise that learning is not just about developing innovative new programme designs or policies, important though these are. Learning is equally importantly about what may seem like simple matters, such as identifying the small but important improvements in project effectiveness that come about by paying careful attention to the data from project monitoring which they do on a quarterly (and obviously continuous) basis. In this case, learning provides a real purpose for gathering this monitoring data. Learning directed at creating immediate improvements to project implementation constitutes the most important purpose for monitoring.

The mission therefore recommends that PODCAM is supported to go through a full OD intervention to enable it strengthen its internal capacity to enable it be equipped to accomplish its current goals and plan for the future. The full OD intervention for PODCAM should examine:

- How well the mission and goals of PODCAM are articulated

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce Britton, 2005, Organisational Learning in NGOs: *Creating the Motive, Means and Opportunity, Praxis Paper No. 3, Intrac, March 2005*

- Whether PODCAM is pursuing the right strategies to achieve its mission
- Internal harmony of the organisation with regard to relationships, leadership, roles definition, values and policy, identity, structure and resources.

The OD approach should involve facilitating PODCAM to become a learning organisation, by challenging it to confront those areas which are unclear and unresolved in such a way that it is enabled to consciously and in a skilled fashion, learn from its practice and develop the necessary capacities required to take control of its future. This needs to be done through a series of interventions as part of a process which involves staff, the NEC and Board members.

As part of learning PODCAM should take advantage of her membership in ANDD to identify which partners can offer a learning opportunity for her and go ahead to start learning from their history / biography. For instance two of the organisations that can provide good learning to PODCAM are LSMHP and ZPCHA. LSMHP provides good learning opportunities for a excelling in professionalism, such as how to do advocacy, preparation of manuals, research and many others. On the other hand ZPCHA provides a good opportunity for learning about growing branches into sustainable and independent organisations.

The mission therefore recommends strongly that PODCAM undertakes study visits to learn from these two organisations.

Internally, branches should also be facilitated to take inter-branch study exchange visits to learn from each other. For instance Mangochi branch is good destination for learning about how to develop a branch into a sustainable CBO, while Ntcheu branch is good at advocacy on inclusive education as well as external fundraising.

### **3.3 Ambitious Expansion**

Over the last three years, PODCAM has expanded her program to cover more than 60% of the country making it a truly national organization. Indeed there are many calls from other districts asking PODCAM to extend her program to them. However, this expansion has not been matched by the increase staffing and budget. This means that much as PODCAM has expanded, it is thin on the ground. In fact a good question to ask is: what does coverage mean for PODCAM? A close scrutiny reveals that:

- The secretariat has less contact with the branches
- Many parts of the districts covered have branches concentrated in a few areas meaning there is still more work to do.
- Leadership of the branches still need training in leadership and management skills
- A number of the mushrooming local branches and parents come with different expectations which PODCAM is in no position to meet

Obviously, PODCAM located in Blantyre with three staff, one vehicle and a limited budget cannot satisfy the pressures that come with this expansion. In fact the current expansion in the Northern Region increases PODCAM visibility but at the expense of efficiency. It leaves the management (read secretariat) with little or no time to engage at national level but also for engaging in other vital functions like fundraising, strategic thinking, networking and many others. The mission therefore recommends the following:

- PODCAM should in the next three years stop expansion into new districts. It should instead consolidate and support the development needs of the current and more local branches being formed in the existing districts to enable them become strong and viable entities structures.
- Establish a northern region liaison office with one staff member or initially relying on volunteers (this should be subject to an increase in funding portfolio). The volunteer(s) obviously with less powers to take independent decisions committing PODCAM, should be able to receive and link

with the district and local branches. The costs to cover the movement and maintenance of this volunteer officer may not necessarily translate into program budget increases as this could mean less travels to the Northern Region by the management staff from Blantyre.

### **3.4 Positioning PODCAM as an Advocacy Organisation**

The NFU assessment mission in 2004 made this observation:

***“PODCAM regards itself as an advocacy organisation ... It was difficult to assess the extent and type of advocacy work being done, but at local level branches are clearly lobbying for their children to be included in mainstream schools, raising awareness amongst teachers and members of the community, and moving away from providing primary education themselves. At a national level, PODCAM has participated in the formulation of the draft Disability Policy and successfully lobbied for the inclusion of issues affecting children with disabilities.”***

This observation is still true. This mid-term evaluation has however found no convincing evidence of PODCAM building her capacity to become an effective advocacy organisation. The interview with staff revealed that PODCAM is not clear as to what advocacy entails. To a large extent, most of the activities undertaken under the banner of advocacy were basically “public awareness” activities, which essentially is a mere component of advocacy. PODCAM has not yet developed an advocacy strategy with clear advocacy objectives and targets, and activities. PODCAM’s stated advocacy has largely focused on promoting inclusive education. However, the organization does not have a clear definition of what their advocacy victory entails. Is it a government policy statement, or is it an environment problem at school level which would enable every disabled child admitted and accessing quality education in mainstream schools? In short, PODCAM is an advocacy organization that is not yet positioned and built her capacity to do advocacy. It lacks capacity and competency to do targeted issue-based advocacy.

The mission therefore recommends the following actions that can transform PODCAM into an advocacy parents’ organization:

- PODCAM needs to be supported to build her capacity in PODCAM by training the staff and members of the governance structures (possibly combined with other NFU partners in the region). This training should cover the following elements: policy analysis formulation process and analysis; problem identification, developing advocacy objectives, indicators and activities, advocacy strategies, developing advocacy messages; action planning; stakeholder analysis; building effective alliances and coalitions; monitoring and evaluation.
- PODCAM also needs to be supported to develop an advocacy strategy for probably the next 3 years. This strategy should be change-focused with clear objectives, indicators and outcomes. The development of this advocacy strategy should be participatory involving the national and district branches.
- PODCAM needs a dedicated Advocacy Officer whose role will basically focus on:
  - Training PODCAM grassroots structures in advocacy
  - Work with stakeholders in pursuing the PODCAM advocacy agenda
  - Take charge of the implementation of the PODCAM advocacy strategy

This does not necessarily mean employing a new officer, but re-organising the current staff and get one of them, especially the Public Relations Officer to take on this portfolio (see sec.3.6 on staffing and human resource management issues).

### **3.4 Capacity Building and Mentoring**

Capacity building is a core element in the funding agreement of NFU to PODCAM. So far this has been done through the workshops organised as part of visits from the NFU headquarter staff and the regional advisor. Indeed, NFU is reputed to be knowledgeable about issues of disability, especially developmental disabilities, DPO management, advocacy and policy influencing. It was credited for

highly skilled staff in Norway and even the Regional Advisor whose expertise in inclusive education, training and advocacy.

However, as noted in NFU Methodological Evaluation, the NFU strategy for organisational capacity building was rather outdated and not developmental in approach. For instance, it was observed that NFU has not done a critical capacity building needs assessment to base their capacity building interventions.

In spite of the existence of a regional advisor who is quite knowledgeable and skilled in organisational development this mission found out that she is perceived as an “inspector” by the organisation and therefore in such circumstances, she cannot be an effective capacity builder. She can at best assist PODCAM to identify capacity needs.

As already recommended in another evaluation<sup>9</sup>, it is also not possible within the developmental sense of capacity building for a northern NGO like NFU to build capacity of a Southern DPO. They do not understand the context! For instance, even if they did, how can a staff of NFU train branch committee members on issues of lobbying and advocacy in Malawi? What could be possible is for staff to mentor fellow staff in some areas. A few attempts made for instance, revealed that some training sessions in lobbying and advocacy were being done in one day or one afternoon. This basically is flawed and cannot achieve much.

The mission therefore recommends that:

- PODCAM should undertake a comprehensive capacity needs assessment / competency mapping which should identify all the capacity needs in their order of priority.
- Basing on these assessed capacity needs PODCAM should develop an organisational capacity building strategy, with clearly defined objectives and targets. This organisational capacity building strategy should be aligned to the OD strategy being supported / funded by NFU.
- With support from NFU OD practitioners and facilitators should be identified for within the region (who understand the context of NGOs/ DPOs in the region) to support PODCAM to build her capacity. One such credible organisation that is involved in OD and Organisational capacity building is East African Support Unit for NGOs (EASUN). This should be through a series of events (processes) and not merely a one-off event (workshop).

### **3.5 Sustainability**

NFU is so far PODCAM's sole and main funding partner. NFU is currently supporting 100% of both administrative and programmatic budget, save for in 2007 when PODCAM was implementing CEF and UNICEF projects. This pushes PODCAM into a comfort zone. The mission revealed that PODCAM is not making adequate efforts to identify and diversify funding. Although one of the staff was contracted to undertake fundraising as part of his roles, so far not much is being undertaken.

There are two reasons for this. The staff is not well qualified to undertake effective fundraising because it is not his specialisation. Secondly, he is also mainly involved and overwhelmed by other tasks such as reporting and communication as well as advocacy activities [read awareness raising].

Based on experience, in Africa the most effective fundraisers are females, but also fundraising alone is quite consuming and therefore needs to be as a stand-alone role for a qualified staff but above somebody with a passion in the role.

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<sup>9</sup> This point was discussed thoroughly in the NFU Methodological Evaluation in which the author of this report was a member of the evaluation team.

The mission therefore recommends the following:

- PODCAM should be supported to develop a sustainability / fundraising and resource mobilisation strategy with clear set goals and strategies. This could have a 5-year span. This strategy should be developed in a participatory manner involving the management, NEC and Board of Trustees. Some areas should be included in the strategy are:
  - Diversifying sources of funding beyond NFU
  - Setting annual fundraising targets from other sources
  - Progressively creating strategic alliances with the local funding institutions and the corporate sector
- In the current state of funding, the Executive Director besides taking on the management docket should take on the role of chief fundraiser most especially focussing on the corporate sector in Malawi. She can be supported by the other staff in identifying other potential donors outside the region and the writing of proposals.
- PODCAM should constitute a fundraising committee composed of members from the Board of Trustees, NEC and management (Executive Director) to steer the fundraising and resource mobilisation initiatives.
- The Board of Trustees being largely professionals and members of the public with connections to the corporate sector should be engaged in fundraising largely as “door openers”. It is a more realistic role they can play with minimum effort.
- PODCAM staff should be facilitated to participate in short training workshops in fundraising and resource mobilisation organised in the East and Southern African region by Resource Alliance, through which PODCAM can start creating linkages and sharing knowledge as well as building their skills base. An alternative to this could be for NFU to support such training as a dedicated activity for ANDD members where PODCAM would benefit. In such circumstances, NFU would contract an organisation like Resource Alliance to organise it as a tailor-made activity.
- A funding vote should be set aside for purposes of implementing a sustainability and fundraising strategy – which should be regarded as part of organisational capacity building

#### **Box 5 : Mangochi District PODCAM Branch**

Mangochi District PODCAM branch was started in 2005 with the help of Mama Abiti Theresa Sabiti, who is also a member of PODCAM NEC. With her (mama Sabiti) inspiration the branch has established 40 local branches in the district with a total membership of over 300 (3/4 of whom are paid up members).

Through the local branches 710 children with disabilities have been identified of whom 410 are girls and 300 boys. Of these 210 are enrolled and attending school, while 59 are attending nursery school run by the branch.

Driven by the instinct for survival, Mama Sabiti, the Chairperson the branch decided to transform it into a CBO which is now fully registered as Kachere Community Based Organisation, has attracted several partnerships including MASAF, National AIDS Commission and many others . With funding from MASAF, the branch has constructed its own building which hosts its offices, a nursery school, a carpentry training workshop and meeting space which is hired for meetings.

As part of her community programmes, the CBO is involved in identifying children with disabilities and mobilizing the parents, community sensitization, counseling and community level advocacy as well as referrals to service institutions. The CBO plans to start more income generating projects, work with schools in the district to make them more accessible, supporting referrals for children with disabilities that need special assistance.

In spite these successes, the branch still has challenges such as household poverty which makes parents fail to meet the basic needs of their children. The other two big challenges include: handling the needs of disabled orphans and accessing assistive devices.



- PODCAM should also learn from a good practice of Mangochi district branch which has transformed itself into a CBO – Kachere Community Based Organisation which is now able to fundraise and sustain her own branch activities to some extent. For that matter, PODCAM should encourage other district branches to learn from the example of Mangochi.

### **3.6 Staffing and human resource management issues**

As already stated above, NFU funds 100% of the PODCAM budget and given the scenario, NFU is interested in keeping the administrative costs as low as possible [at least as set under NORAD funding requirements]. On the other hand, PODCAM has been expanding the program coverage at a rate that now overstretches the few staff in the organization. What this means is that PODCAM is hugely understaffed. Three staff cannot provide adequate oversight to 19 districts.

Although this evaluation was not required to do a competence mapping, the mission would like to make a few observations and throw some light on how PODCAM can reorganize and improve management efficiency and effectiveness.

First, the job descriptions for the three staff have not been properly matched with the staff competences and the job specifications to be able to gain optimum value. For instance all the three staff members (the Executive Director, Program Officer, and Public Relations Officer) are working as if they were all program officers. This means that the strategic leadership roles are not being adequately attended to by the Executive Director.

As far as NGO management is concerned, generically, the basic roles of an Executive Director for an NGO like PODCAM include, but are not limited to:

- Creating a vision - strategist
- Leading and managing
- Engaging the external Community
- Managing Financial/Fundraising Affairs - the executive director is still responsible for making daily and monthly financial decisions
- Support the NEC and Board of Trustees

A quick assessment revealed that apart from doing an excellent job in engaging the external community, she needs to build her competences in the area of strategic thinking and planning (strategic programming) and fundraising. A short course in NGO management is recommended to sharpen these competences.

Administratively, the Program Officer, who is playing the role of Human Resource and Financial management is doing a good job. He is to a large extent effectively handling both program and financial planning and reporting besides being involved in field work. He has grasped the program essence and content and is able to communicate with branches and the membership. This is an opportunity for PODCAM since it can use him in that capacity too.

The Communications Officer though was originally employed as an administrative secretary his position has since then transitioned to that of public relations and fundraising. There is no evidence of returns on the side of fundraising from this portfolio yet, and neither does the mission believe that he has the requisite competences to excel in this area. Strategically, however, the mission recommends that he should instead also be positioned to take on the advocacy docket which can assist PODCAM to effectively engage at the national level. In this case, the officer will of course need to be assisted to build his knowledge and skills in the area of policy analysis, lobbying and advocacy. This is a portfolio the Atlas Alliance should also be interested in as far as the disability movement in Malawi is concerned and has been thoroughly discussed in the recently developed Strategic Plan for FEDOMA.

The suggested staff reorganisation should be able to assist PODCAM do and achieve more in terms of programming but also making it more professional in the way it approaches its work.

Furthermore, none of the PODCAM staff has had his / her terms and conditions of service regularised through a properly signed contract. This is an anomaly which needs correction. Staff contracts are supposed to spell out contractual obligations and in the case of breach of the terms on either party they provide the basis for the resolution of the situation.

The evaluation mission therefore recommends that staff contracts should be prepared and negotiated as a matter of priority. The Board of Trustees should sign the contract for Executive Director while the Executive Director signs contracts for the other staff. Since currently, PODCAM is wholly funded by NFU the contractual period should be aligned to the NFU funding periods. In future and in case of any other funded projects, project staff contracts should also be based on the lifespan of such projects.

### **3.7 Preparing for the future transition**

The current Executive Director also happens to be the founder of PODCAM, a parent, and activist (advocacy role). This means that she is driven by passion and indeed this can be seen when she is engaging with fellow parents. So far she is combining these roles very well given the level of development of the organisation.

A closer look at PODCAM with Organisational Development spectacles places it in transitional stage from a pioneer phase to a rational phase of development. The pioneer phase is characterised by clear goals and controls; human centred, charismatic leader, improvisational unifying force; rigidly defined lines of communication; few standardised procedures or methods; minimal forward planning, and little or no formal management development. On the other hand the rational phase which on the other hand characterized by: growth in size; the need for specialist techniques; lack of capital; a need for better planning; and a need for professional management.

It is important to note, however, that the transition from one phase to the other never distinctive. It presents a mix of two phases which sometimes can result into some turbulence in the organisation otherwise known as a crisis in OD terminology. In the case of PODCAM this quick transition has come forth as a result of the support from NFU especially in terms of funding support to make it democratic and hence put in place differentiated structures including staffing.

This transition is however in some cases marked by what is known as a “crisis” in organisational development terms and is characterised by among others: chaotic growth, ineffective decision making, need for specialists, and many others.

The mission, based on experience, and supported by views from the respondents beyond staff, perceive PODCAM to be a fast developing organisation, but mostly hinging around the Executive Director – as charismatic leader. And like other DPOs in Malawi and elsewhere in Africa, this is likely to lead to the case of founder syndrome in future. This can be a real threat and occasionally creates turbulences at some point when there is need to change leadership. It is therefore important for PODCAM structures to discuss this issue early enough and put in place strategies to stem off such likely conflict in the future.

### **3.8 Strategic Planning**

One of the observations made earlier is that to date, PODCAM has not had a clear strategic plan with strategic objectives. The objectives have been changing from year to year. Even where a long term plan for 2008 – 2010 has been developed with support from NFU, this is not strategic. It is meant for

NORAD / Atlas Alliance funding purposes and not a strategic plan for PODCAM that envisions and pushes it to the direction and growth it wants.

- It is important therefore for resources to be committed to support a participatory strategic planning for preferably 5 years. This strategic plan should address the growth needs of PODCAM, redefine the mission and vision as well as identifying clear strategic directions as well as clear strategies. As an affiliate of FEDOMA, the strategic plan should take into consideration of the issues that have an implication on what the members are supposed to do as part of their responsibilities.

### **3.9 Programming, Reporting and Documentation**

With the assistance of the NFU Program Officer, PODCAM has been preparing annual plans and budgets which are used as basis for quarterly planning and reporting. The mission noted that the quality of plans and reports was rather lacking. The plans lack precision and in some areas the components of the plans, that is; objectives, expected results, and indicators are not logically synchronised. The annual work plans and reports are also not well linked.

The reports on their part are scanty and do not provide a clear picture. They do not tell the story of what is actually happening at change level. The reports are mere narratives, giving little of results – definition of change or victory resulting from implementation of activities contributing to the attainment of strategic objectives. The mission was informed that the reporting guidelines have been changing over time and these are largely provided by NORAD.

That said, however, the mission noted improvements with the introduction of “Result-based-planning and reporting” in 2007.

Furthermore, the mission noted that reporting is largely done to satisfy primarily “donor” requirements and not as a function for gathering information to inform decision making and further programming.

As part of the strategy for improving professionalism and quality programming, the mission recommends the following:

- Mentoring the management in result based planning and reporting and documentation in general. This should not be done at the time of planning only. Management needs time when not under pressure. This could be facilitated by local resource persons who are also using similar formats such as MACOHA.
- For documentation, there is need to develop formats for capturing data and information periodically (monthly and quarterly). This should be evidence based including audio, pictures, and written. Once this has been collected it should be processed to give a global (PODCAM) report. In all this documentation the number one target beneficially should PODCAM and others as secondary. The principle is; if it does not make sense to PODCAM then it won't make sense to others.
- For documentation, PODCAM needs to start compiling vital information and publishing some of the good practices, developing manuals basing on good practices such as on Community Mobilisation – a strong area for PODCAM.

### **3.10 Building Strategic Partnerships with other DPOs**

During the NFU Methodological Evaluation, PODCAM was assessed by her partners in Malawi as not paying attention to involving her partners in her work / programs. This same observation was repeated during this evaluation and the management seemed confused on what all this means. The issue here is not for PODCAM to allocate her program activities and resources to her partners to do her work. It is not about delegation or abdication. It is about identifying areas where partners can “push you an extra mile” probably at their own cost while maximizing returns for PODCAM. An example that was cited by

partners was on occasions when invited to the media (radio and TV), PODCAM often goes alone and quite often will be talking about education for children with disabilities. According to the partners, the language is also always in first person “we in PODCAM” and not “we in the disability fraternity”. In such circumstances, inviting some officers from sister DPOs who also have education for disabled children especially focusing on disabilities on which PODCAM does not have competences such as blindness and deafness would optimize results and boost the disability agenda.

Another scenario cited was the situation where PODCAM undermines other DPOs with such statements as: “that organization is only existing on paper ...”. Such kind of language is not progressive and helpful in building partnerships.

The mission therefore recommends that:

- PODCAM makes an effort to start sharing her reports with her partners as well as deliberately inviting some partners strategically to participate in some of her activities which can enhance both her visibility as well as visibility of the entire disability fraternity.

### **3.11 Building a democratic DPO**

Building PODCAM into a strong democratic parents’ organization is at the core of the NFU / PODCAM partnership. To ensure that PODCAM appreciates how a democratic parents’ organization runs, PODCAM was invited to participate in the NFU General Assembly 2006, but also supporting the General Assembly for PODCAM for periodic change of leadership (NEC) and revising the PODCAM Constitution and Manifesto. Unfortunately building a democratic organization in a society beset by poverty, illiteracy and corruption is a challenge.

One of the key ingredients for democracy is information flow between structures. This means that the various participants should be able to read and understand the official language used to conduct organizational business (in this case English). This of course excludes the majority.

Nevertheless, PODCAM has tried and is learning from the experience and continues to improve.

Two recommendations are made here:

- PODCAM continue being funded to organize periodic activities that promote democracy and participation. This should not only be national level activities but also district level.
- Secondly, for purposes of ensuring that the majority of the membership is informed, resources should be allocated to translation of key documentation such as the constitution, manifesto, manuals, Annual Reports (at least summarized versions) and other key documents into vernacular.

### **3.12 Professionalization Vs Ambition**

PODCAM over the last 3 years has been confronted with issues of growth and moved with passion and ambition to meet the expansion needs. However, this growth has not been matched with an equal amount of professionalism to address quality issues in programming and reporting. This is reflected in the quality of plans and reports. This is however not deliberate on the part of the organization. In fact, NFU should have supported this professionalism to be nurtured since the program officer and Advisor have been making frequent monitoring and support supervision visits. Such would be of the mentoring process.

Nevertheless, it is not too late to start addressing quality and professionalism in programming. The mission recommends the following to improve professionalism and quality:

- Quality indicators should be developed for every area such as plans, reporting and documentation, training, communication / awareness raising etc.

- PODCAM staff can also learn from some sister DPOs such as LSMHP which to a large extent is more advanced and has attained that kind of quality touch in their programming.
- More coaching / mentoring support should also be extended to PODCAM at strategic times such as planning and reporting times.

### **3.13 Facilitating the District and Local Structures**

The mission was impressed by the dynamism, passion and commitment of the district and local branches. Indeed it is that makes PODCAM a unique and successful DPO. The branches at the district and local levels are involved in mobilisation of parents, community awareness raising, engaging in community level lobbying and advocacy, meetings, monitoring and reporting. Currently this is being done on a voluntary basis. There hardly any funding that goes to the district and local branches apart from training. Of course, the current funding is not adequate to finance the district branches. Whilst this is acknowledged as a good practice for sustainability, it is important that if the work they do is important for the organisation, then there should be some form of budget facilitation to back it. The current part of the membership fees retained at the local and district branch levels is too little to do anything. In some branches in Mzimba district, the committee members contribute to support transport of some of their colleagues that come from afar in order to attend meetings which are necessary for monitoring and reporting. The mission was informed of the dwindling numbers of members' attendance at meetings. This is an indicator that things might worsen and the members lose interest in taking leadership roles.

The mission recommends the following:

- There is need to increase funding to PODCAM to cover activities undertaken by the branches. Even if most of this funding is in form of cash transfers to district branches for instance, at least a mechanism for refunding expenses on agreed activities should be worked out. This is also builds a case for opening up regional / field coordination offices initially starting with the Northern Region.
- For purposes of effective field monitoring, support supervision, mentoring of the local branches, and public awareness, the district branches should be assisted with bicycles to facilitate their travel in the field.
- But a more sustainable solution lies in facilitating the district branches to evolve into independent CBOs registered with the relevant government bodies. These should then be mentored and start fundraising for themselves independent of PODCAM. A good example is the Mangochi District Branch which is now a CBO and has through the efforts of its chairperson raised funds and constructed a building accommodating its offices, runs a day care / nursery school and rents out its meeting hall to generate income for the branch. Another good example can be drawn from the way ZPCHA has organised their regional branches to run as independent organisation to the extent that some branches are better resourced than their mother organisation.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This mission has noted the great transformation of PODCAM from a small parents organization based in the Blantyre area of Malawi to a truly leading national democratic parents' organization with representation in 19 districts (more than 67%) spread across the three regions of the country. This proves that the NFU / PODCAM partnership is bearing fruit, and very fast. Among the notable achievements is the success in mobilizing parents of children with disabilities and rallying communities through sensitization / awareness campaign (meetings and the media) to support the cause for the rights of children with disabilities. In a business language, this mission would like to assert that the partnership has proved a good return on investment.

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Nevertheless, PODCAM remains with ambition to do more to change the situation of disabled children and their families in Malawi. They need to be helped to strive to become better and leading advocacy organisation of parents of children with disabilities. The capacity of parents and all structures of PODCAM still needs to be built to be able to truly advocates for positive change for inclusion of children with disabilities.

There are also a number of other areas where PODCAM still needs to improve such as strategic planning, reporting and documentation, fundraising and the entire are of sustainability. PODCAM is beckoned from all corners of the country but there is a limit to which an organization with only 3 staff members can be stretched.

All this makes a good case for continued support for PODCAM for not only the next three years but probably another 10 years to be able to improve its professionalism in playing its mandate, and expanding to reach more parents and children.

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PODCAM, (2008), First Quarter Report on Activities, 2008

PODCAM, (2008), Second Quarter Report on Activities, 2008

**Annex 1: List of Persons met**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Branch / Organisation</b>
1. Chipembere Soko	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
2. Robbins B. Nhlane	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
3. Collings Nyirenda	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
4. Loyce Nhlane	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
5. Roda Banda	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
6. Alice Kasalu	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
7. Albert P. Moyo	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
8. Ayiris Sara	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
9. Lewis Banda	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
10. James Sawira	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
11. Koleta Chisi	Luviri, Mzimba
12. Funnex Longwe	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
13. Shelton S.N.Chima	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
14. Tiaz Mdson Nhlane	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
15. Rose Mwase	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
16. Alice Phiri	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
17. Elube Chilonje	Luviri, Mzimba
18. Alex J. Mtonga	District Executive Committee
19. Washington Nyasalu	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
20. Notledge Mwanuka	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
21. Lustica Nkhoma	Luviri Mzimba
22. Angellina Mgabadere	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
23. Regina Shaba	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
24. Tereza Manda	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
25. Martin Mwanuka	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
26. Emelida Nyasulu	Luviri, Mzimba
27. Angelina Mutonga	Luviri, Mzimba
28. Blandina Lungu	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
29. Crywell P. Zimba	Luviri, Mzimba
30. Salayi Shawa	Luviri, Mzimba
31. Elvin Shaba	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
32. Luwiza Theu	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
33. Joshua J.C.Chirwa	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
34. Olive Banda	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
35. Gloria Banda	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
36. Ketase Chisi	NEC Secretary
37. G.S Mazwini Nhlane	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
38. Lafuton Nyangulu	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
39. V.D. Nkhoma	Luviri, Mzimba
40. Margaret G.Nyemba	Luviri, Mzimba
41. Mary Chirwa	Luviri, Mzimba
42. Eluby Chilenje	Luviri, Mzimba
43. Rodrex M.Phiri	Kasambankholi, Mzimba
44. Francis W.Jere	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
45. Juliet Zuba	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
46. Tandulenji Mgemezula	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
47. Jessy Mirazie	Chimwemwe, Mzimba



48. Mary Mbale	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
49. Idah Zgambo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
50. Lucia Nyirongo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
51. Anna Zimba	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
52. Joice Mphande	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
53. Kackreen Ngalande	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
54. Queen Chulu	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
55. Miliam Moyo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
56. Ruth Mkandawire	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
57. Sellah Phiri	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
58. Efulna Chavula	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
59. Fair Banda	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
60. Eveless Mvula	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
61. S.Banda	Muyezo, Mzimba
62. Juliet Nyirenda	Muyezo, Mzimba
63. Clement Shawa	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
64. Brenda Kamendo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
65. Blessings Nkhata	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
66. Alex J.Mtonga	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
67. Nathan Shaba	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
68. Lited Tembo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
69. Agatha Ngonya	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
70. Agness Nkhonjera	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
71. John Kamanga	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
72. France Chisi	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
73. Ethel Langa	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
74. Juliyete Mhango	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
75. Gloliya Njinko	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
76. Thoko Shudumayo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
77. Mercy Kanyasko	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
78. Olive Phiri	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
79. Fidess Milanzie	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
80. Elina Zimba	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
81. Lincy Banda	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
82. Julitah Phiri	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
83. Tonny Lungu	Kanyeke, Mzimba
84. Thokozire Chidumayo	Chimwemwe, Mzimba
85. Maina Nkosi	MACOHA Volunteer
86. David Dzaidi	Director, Special Needs Education
87. x	Chief Rehabilitation Officer
88. Ethel Khota	Ntcheu
89. Henry Katondo	Ntcheu
90. Hastings Kandota	Gumbu, Ntcheu
91. Florence Wanje	Ntcheu
92. Eliza Steven	Gumbu, Ntcheu
93. Prince Mwale	Gumbu, Ntcheu
94. G.Kamulaka	R.C.Ntcheu
95. Mac Banda	
96. Lucy Masamba	Gumbu, Ntcheu

97.	Esmie Magombo	Mthandizi, Ntcheu
98.	Stonden Sinosi Osumani	Gumbu, Ntcheu
99.	Meble Chikhumba	Nthandizi, Ntcheu
100.	Felisita Wanje	Gumbu, Ntcheu
101.	Esmie Chimutu	Gumbu, Ntcheu
102.	Estely Kasenda	Gumbu, Ntcheu
103.	Lucy Mbite Kalawangoma	Gumbu, Ntcheu
<b>Mangochi District</b>		
104.	Rose Bakali	
105.	Saudiya Jaiosi	
106.	Patuma Bile	
107.	Tereza Sabiti	NEC Member
108.	Lukia Ajisa	
109.	Elesi Wisiki	
110.	Writer Mkuta	
111.	Abiba Piyasi	
112.	Mina Yakiti	
113.	Patma Roda	
114.	Dalia Afadi	
115.	Sweet Mpelemende	
116.	Sainabu Yusuf	
117.	Asigasyeje Amidu	
118.	Agnes Issah	
119.	Janet Lesita	
120.	Judith Kayenda	
121.	Glesi Asibu	
122.	Laisa Yusuf	
123.	Dija Jamali	
124.	Rose Juma	
125.	Layadye Alick	
126.	Patuma Malaya	
127.	Ruse Juwao	
128.	Hawa Jangiya	
129.	Hawa Ali	
130.	Esi Afiki	
131.	Sainabu Saidi	
132.	Jika Buladye	
133.	Patuma Anusa	
134.	Amina Disi	
135.	Ibrahima Juliasi	
136.	Abudu Misi	
137.	Getrude Umayi	
138.	Margreti Ali	
139.	Amna Benadi	
140.	Sana Ali	
141.	Agness John	
142.	Emily Ajibu	
143.	Monica Chiwaya	
144.	Amusa Mimadi	

145. Makawa Gomani	
146. Mary Kadango	
147. Jeneti Issa	
148. Niya Kasibeki	
149. Eni Issa	
150. Dunia Ali	
151. Esnart Ibrahim	
152. Patuma Alisa	
153. Daima Twaibu	
154. Rose Jawadu	
155. Joce Sanudia	
156. Analingo Mkwapatira	
157. Esnart Idriss	
158. Wena Klli	
159. Linda Kadaya	
160. Bilanga Labana	
161. Estery Bwanali	
162. Mary Mdala	
163. Patuma Mussah	
164. Hawa Yusufu	
165. Eliza Atibu	
166. Lusiya Mdala	
167. Laika Mdala	
168. Manesi Waisoni	
169. Sainabu Mussah	
<b>Thyolo District</b>	
170. Malita Njolinga	Mithanda
171. Cicilia Mthole	Mithanda
172. Usita Waita	Milonga
173. Ema Mukhuna	Milonga
174. Loney Kabudula	Milonga
175. Jonathan Mukhito	Mithanda
176. Damiton Mitsuli	Mithanda
177. Kapolo Kalayton	Mikombe
178. Lawrence Khoviwa	Kadzuwa
179. Jackson Gundani	Kadzuwa
180. Madalitso Lichelo	Milonga
181. Frank Kennedy	Mithande
182. Andisankha Down	Mithande
183. Mary Chimimba	Mithande
184. Alinafe Samson	Milonga
185. Jinney Chinthalo	Kadzuwa
186. Liveness Khoviwa	Kadzuwa
187. Felista Kasitom	Kadzuwa
188. Chrissey Mithochi	Mikombe
189. Mun'derangi Samson	Mikombe
190. Alfred Chingaipe	Milonga
191. Abigelo Magaleta	Mithande
192. Edina Mpalatsa	Kadzuwa

193. James Makwiti	Kadzuwa
194. Agness Namakwa	Kazuwa
195. Aida Nachongo	Kadzuwa
196. Meliya Beto	Kadzuwa
197. Mayeso Mankhwala	Mikombe
198. Jesten Ngaluwe	Kadzuwa
199. Francis Loti	Mikombe
200. Dalitso Malamulo	Mikombe
201. Mabuto Muleva	Kadzuwa
202. Feth Kambwiri	Mikombe
203. Vilet Muluwesi	Mikombe
204. Valess Kachingwe	Kadzuwa
205. Mr.Savala	Village Head
206. Mr.Namagonya	Village Head
207. Kachingwe	Village Head
208. GreyKunthan	Kadzuwa CBO Coordinator
209. Isaac Chitokoto	Kadzuwa
210. Franetion Thamas	Chairperson, Dist Exec. Committee
211. Mr.Chafuwa	Chairperson, Board of Trustees
212. Mr.Chimombo	Vice C/person Board of Trustees
213. Stephen Msowoya	Executive Director, MCOHA
214. Mussa Chiwawula	Executive Director, FEDOMA
215. McTonic Phiri	Vice Chairperson
216. Suluma	Former Chairperson
217. Mussa Salif	Chairperson
218. Hanneck Mdoka	Communications Officer
219. Enock Mithi	Programme Officer PODCAM
220. Mirriam Namanja	Executive Director, PODCAM
<b>Others</b>	
221. Manuela Rorfeldt	Program Officer, NFU
222. Alf Anvedsen	NFU Vice President
223. Kari Lindemann	NAD
224. Bettina Thorvik	Former NFU Program Officer
225. Geir Ambro	Development Advisor, Atlas Alliance

## **Annex 2: Key Notes of Interest from the Dissemination Workshop**

As a standard practice, PODCAM organized a dissemination workshop for purposes of receiving and discussing the Evaluation Report. The dissemination workshop was held in Lunzu Trading Centre on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2008 and attended by The Board Chairperson and his vice, members of the NEC and district branch representatives. In attendance also was the NFU Program Officer.

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His annex presents on the key salient issues that emerged from the workshop that need to be followed up.

### **Turning District Branches into CBO**

The evaluation had recommended that as part of sustainability strategy, district branches should be assisted to evolve into CBOs along the ZPCHA model. According to PODCAM staff, this was not feasible in the case of the laws of Malawi. It was therefore resolved to study the issue further and take action based on informed minds.

### **PODCAM Expansion**

Although the mood of PODCAM was that the expansion into more districts since it was allowed to operate as a national NGO, it was to a large extent resolved that this was not good and in the interest of PODCAM in short term as it puts the quality of the program into question. It was however clarified that expansion within the current 19 district to open more local branches was not affected. That was partly the gist of consolidation.

### **Issues of Staffing**

Although not extensively discussed, the Board promised to discuss and take action on the issue of staff contracts. This should be done as part of the competence mapping and job analysis recommended.

### **Strategic Planning**

It was recommended that PODCAM should undertake a comprehensive strategic planning exercise that should guide the PODCAM program for 2010 onwards. The NFU Program Officer revealed that NFU had resources for that purpose and therefore called upon PODCAM management to apply for the funds.

### **The Way Forward**

The following was agreed as way forward on the evaluation process. PODCAM structures should meet and discuss thoroughly and internalize the report findings and recommendations. Thereafter PODCAM management should make a written response to NFU on how they would like to proceed with the issues raised and the recommendations in the report. This should be part of the future negotiations and programming for PODCAM.