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Working Paper

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Working paper ICTD, No. 03/24

Suggested Citation: Makoza, Frank (2024) : Unpacking assumptions on social democratic developmental state in the Malawi Vision 2063: A critical approach, Working paper ICTD, No. 03/24, ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, Kiel, Hamburg

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/285317>

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Unpacking assumptions on social democratic developmental state in the Malawi Vision 2063: A critical approach

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2024

Abstract

Malawi has faced slow progress in social and economic development for the past five decades. In 2021, the country developed a national development vision to promote wealth creation and self-reliance. This study attempts to unpack the assumptions about the social democratic developmental state as a philosophical underpinning of the Malawi Vision 2063. The study analysed the Malawi Vision 2063 document using concepts from Critical Social Theory. The findings showed that the assumptions on developmental state concentrated on the role of the state, leadership, public sector involvement, and partnership discourses. The assumptions about social democratic developmental state emerged from the strategic level of government and the elite. The espoused views on the developmental state were linked with the promotion of capital and the market. Some of the statements in the thematic areas of Malawi Vision 2063 had no robust local philosophy that was well known to guide the thinking and actions of policy actors and beneficiaries (e.g. politicians, individuals, government officials and communities) in development processes and programmes. The study highlights some of the areas that require attention for the Malawi Vision 2063 to achieve successful outcomes.

Key words: Malawi Vision 2063, Development philosophy, Democratic developmental state, National development.

1. Introduction

Malawi, like other countries that are categorised as having very low-income economies, experienced slow economic growth and an increase in poverty for a large part of its population. The annual GDP growth for 2023 was 0.07% from 0.9% in 2022 (World Bank, 2024). Some of the reasons for slow social economic growth are low productivity in the economic sector, overreliance on donor aid and external loans, high public debt, mismanagement of public funds, rampant corruption, a high unemployment rate, poor public service delivery, poor state of infrastructure, the inability to cope with the effects of climate change shocks and the global economic downturn (Chinsinga, 2010; Cammack, 2017; Dzama, 2003; Mangani, 2023). The government of Malawi, through the National Planning Commission, developed the Malawi Vision 2063 to guide the country in its national development efforts and address some of the challenges that the country is facing.

Malawi Vision 2063 was launched in January 2021, and the main objective is to support inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance (MW2063, 2021). The national vision has three main pillars: agricultural commercialization, industrialization and urbanisation. Unlike the past national development vision and other short-term development strategies, the Malawi Vision 2063 adopted the concept of an inclusive democratic developmental state as a national development philosophy (MW2063, 2021). Despite the growing popularity of the concept in studies conducted in Africa (see Chinsinga, 2010; Hwedi, 2001; Maserumule, 2012; Mkandawire, 2001), to the knowledge of the author, studies that have analysed the assumptions of an inclusive democratic state in the Malawi Vision 2063 have received limited attention (Chavula, 2022). This study aims to address part of this knowledge gap.

The study used concepts from Critical Social Theory (Deetz, 2004) to assess the assumptions on inclusive democratic developmental state presented in the Malawi Vision 2063. The study used the concept of discourse, which can be ideal for understanding how a concept is presented, legitimized and informs the actions of actors or subjects in a social context (Barniskis, 2016; Deetz, 2004). Our study showed that discourse on social democratic developmental state fitted the narrative emerging from external actors and the elite, with the potential to marginalise the local interests of those affected by poverty in rural areas. The Malawi 2063 vision lacked a local development philosophy to guide the thinking, beliefs, and actions of those involved and affected by the national development processes and programmes.

The rest of the paper is presented as follows. Section 2 summarises the background to the study. Section 3 highlights the theoretical perspective of the study. Section 4 presents the research methodology of the study. Section 5 summarises the research findings. Section 6 discusses the research findings, and this is followed the conclusions drawn from the study.

2. Background to the study

2.1. Defining national development

National development are the aspirations of the country to improve the lives of its citizens through improvements in the spheres of economic, social, cultural, political, and natural environment (Bathelone, 2023). National development is an evolving concept that has been

used for many decades to indicate the status of economies and the living standards of people living in a particular country (Ezebuilo, 2023). For instance, after the Second World War, the United States described countries with limited resources, a low standard of living, a high level of unemployment, and poverty as low-developed countries. Governments that had maintained high living standards with the availability of resources and improved access to employment opportunities, health, and public services were categorised as developed countries (Kutor, 2014; Pelizzo, Kinyondo & Nwokora, 2018). The United Nations, countries with rich economies, e.g., the Group of Seven, and international development agencies and financial institutions, e.g., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, assumed the responsibilities of supporting low-developed countries. Often, binary terms are used to differentiate the economic status of countries based on their economic status, e.g., developed/under developed economies, rich countries/poor countries, global north or global south, etc. (Ezebuilo, 2023; Suleiman, 2016).

Different developmental approaches have been applied to support low-income countries in improving their economic status. For instance, neoliberal development approaches, sustainable development approaches, social development, etc. (Kutor, 2014; Ziai, 2012). The different approaches are often embedded in international relations, trade and commerce, cultural exchanges, education, and political systems. As such, Malawi is not immune to the influences of its development partners and other countries in the global economic system (Carbone, 2023; De Weerd & Duchoslav, 2022).

2.2. Philosophies for national development

There are views that philosophy is just a discipline that has speculative theories and no practical relevance (Ezebuilo, 2023). For a better understanding of the concept of philosophy beyond this argument and the context of the study, we attempt to provide a definition of philosophy for development from literature. National development philosophy is the integration of human life (e.g., socioeconomic, cultural, political, religious, and moral) into national development vision, mission, and objectives that inform ideologies, ways of thinking, attitudes, understanding, beliefs, and acting on problems and ensure that solutions to problems prevent loss or harm and support human values, culture, and identity (Bartholomew, 2023; Galafa, 2022; Ezebuilo, 2023). Hence, any national development may have underlying philosophies that can be clearly written down, or sometimes not written down, in policy documents and strategies.

Development approaches have evolved over time. For instance, modernization was popular in the 1950s and 1960s (after the Second World War), World Systems Theory and Dependency approaches to development and Developmental states in the 1970s and 1980s. Neo-liberal economic approach to development in Africa emerged in the 1990s to 2000s (Bartholomew, 2023; Ezebuilo, 2023). Developing countries continue to explore different approaches to development. For instance, post-independence African states championed pan-Africanism and non-western development philosophies in nation development (e.g., conscientisation by Nkwame Krumah in Ghana, Ujama by Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and African humanism by Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia) (Kayuni, 2011; Zak, 2016). Very few countries continued to pursue African-centric development philosophies after attaining democracy,

e.g., the African Renaissance in South Africa by Thambo Mabeki (Bongmba, 2004; Vale & Maseko, 1998). Other countries that have been successful in using an external-centric development philosophy, e.g., Botswana, Mauritius, and Rwanda, have adopted a developmental state philosophy (Hwedi, 2001; Mann & Berry, 2015). The majority of African countries still face challenges in the progress of national development because of complex internal issues, e.g., political conflicts, wars, poor governance, corruption, mismanagement of resources, adverse weather conditions due to the effects of climate change, etc. (Fagbadebo, 2019; Haile, Tang, Hosseini-Moghari, Liu, Gebremicael, Leng & Yun, 2020; Ogbuabor, Orji, Manasseh & Anthony-Orji, 2020). At times, some of the issues are beyond their control, e.g., the dotcom crash in 2001, the global economic class of 2008, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020–2022, geopolitical tensions between global powers (e.g., the USA and China), and wars in Ukraine and Israel in 2023 (Akhtaruzzaman, Benkraiem, Boubaker & Zopounidis, 2022; Carbone, 2023; Cassimon & Mavrotas, 2021).

The approaches to development involve human life, which is part of philosophy. This study supports the argument that philosophy in the context of national development can be viewed in relation to the environment, social, cultural, political, economic, religious, moral, and ethical spheres (Elechi, 2020; Ezebuilo, 2023). These dimensions can support the understanding of human values that individuals and society can pursue to achieve improvements in standard of living and well-being (Bartholomew, 2023; Keita, 2004). Hence, national development can not only focus on material or resources but rather consider the virtues that individuals and communities aspire to attain and become responsible to themselves, others, and the environment so that national development activities can minimise harm or loss. Bartholomew (2023) suggests five dimensions of philosophy in relation to national development beyond an understanding of the national vision, mission, and objectives for development. The dimensions are summarised as follows:

- **Rational foundation:** development has a philosophical basis that provides a foundation to support substructures, project agents, their environment, and the supply of resources.
- **Roadmap:** development guides activities, and philosophy provides a direction so that there is continuity from substructure to superstructure that is visible.
- **Roof:** development activities can go wrong, and philosophy may support activities to ensure that they are on the right track in consideration of morals, economic, religious and cultural levels.
- **Moral lens:** consideration products of development that are relevant to humans and limit harm to support happiness for all humans.
- **Stimulant:** philosophy supports development ideas and activities but remains unchanged when development goals have been achieved.

The dimensions of national development philosophy address crucial elements that can support a better understanding of issues beyond infrastructure and resources. Policymakers can view these dimensions when developing their national development plans to ensure that their plans have the necessary areas of philosophy (Elechi, 2020; Bathelonew, 2023; Keita,

2004). The next subsection summarises the developmental state as an example of a national development philosophy.

2.3. Concept of developmental state

Chalmers Johnston proposed the concept of a developmental state to denote a state that is more independent and has autonomous power to engage in development planning and industrialization (White, 2006). The concept of developmental state was implemented in East Asian countries (e.g., Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, etc.) in the 20th century to achieve development and industrialisation (Fritz & Menocal, 2006; Singh & Ovadia, 2018). The concept has become popular among developing countries as an alternative form of development for achieving growth (Singh & Ovadia, 2018).

In the context of African countries, post-colonial states established state-led economies with authoritative regimes. These states did not promote human rights and civil freedoms, and states had total control over markets and property (White, 2006). Some states assumed the socialist development approach to development with a focus on economic growth. Others preferred their own post-colonial development approaches (Zak, 2016). However, the alternative development approaches did not address issues of poverty and vulnerabilities for the majority of the countries (Kayuni, 2011). In the 1990s, there was a wave of change to democratic governments in Africa that saw countries adopting a liberal-economic development approach. The African states changed their political and economic development approaches towards capitalism, where privatization, liberalisation and opening up the markets to be integrated into the global system (Ovie, 2019; Poku & Whitman, 2017). Hence, there are variations between the social developmental state and the democratic developmental state in literature based on the political conditions of a country (Prado, Schapiro & Coutinho, 2016).

Mkandawire (2001) proposes that developmental states in Africa concentrated on the role of the state to lead in development activities to achieve economic growth and reduce poverty. The developmental state has two perspectives: ideological structure and state/structure. The ideological/structure approach views the government's role in supporting development activities by creating policy, providing resources, and engaging the elite and external parties to support development programmes. The state/structure relates to the role of the government in supporting capacity to enable development activities to happen. The state promotes collaboration with the private sector to engage in development programmes and the delivery of services to citizens (Mkandawire, 2001). In other words, in a developmental state, the government leads in directing resources towards development activities in potential sectors of the market that would otherwise not improve. There is consideration of the state in its functions beyond regulation, protection of property, and markets to improve bureaucratic efficiency, autonomy of institutions, and embeddedness (mutual alliances between government and private sector players). The state draws its legitimacy from political ideologies (e.g., capitalism or communism) (White, 2006). Further, the state supports the capacity to use resources in the implementation of the development plans. The aim is to support economic growth, reduce poverty, unemployment, inequality, illiteracy, and promote industrialization (Effiom & Ubi, 2019).

The most recent successful countries that have applied developmental state include China, Brazil, Rwanda, and Ethiopia (Bresser-Pereira, 2019; Mann & Berry, 2015; Prado, Schapiro & Coutinho, 2016). Some of the factors that have contributed to their success are centralised role of the state, strong political ties between governments and capitalists, strong financial backing of the state in investments and good industrial policies for crucial sectors. Further, the countries have also developed state capacity in terms of efficiency in bureaucratic processes and pro-business-oriented policy development collaboration (Singh & Ovadia, 2018).

A developmental state is not without limitations. It is noted that the approach can lead to clientelism, patronage, and populism (Fritz & Menocal, 2006). Because of poor interactions between social and political structures in the context of developing countries, the developmental state may lead to patronage or clientelism by the state. The government may offer developmental state programmes to partners in exchange of good and services for political support. A developmental state is seen as a tool that has led development countries into debt from international financial lending institutions. Further, there are preconditions that are necessary for a developmental state to happen that are difficult to attain in Africa. These are state capacity and long-term goals. The state must have the capacity to mobilise resources (institutions, policy, human capacity, intellectual, bureaucratic efficiency, and investment funds) to collaborate with partners or non-state actors in development programmes. Resources and collaboration should facilitate the achievement of long-term development goals beyond the tenure of one political leader (Cai, 2010; Fritz & Menocal, 2006; Singh & Ovadia, 2018).

2.4. Context of the study: Malawi

Malawi gained its independence in 1964 from the British government. Since its independence, the country has aspired to improve the living conditions of its citizens and develop as a sovereign state that is self-reliant. The concept of national development has been evolving given the changes in political, trade and commerce, technology, industrialisation, globalisation, regional, and international relations (Cammark, 2017; Chavula, 2022). Soon after independence in 1964, the country pursued diverse development agendas and implemented development strategies. The following are examples of the development plans that the country implemented:

- Malawi development plan (1964–1969).
- Statement of Development Policy (DEVPOL I) (1971–1980).
- Statement of Development Policy (DEVPOL II) (1987–1996).

The state has always played a significant role in the planning and execution of national development plans. In 1972, the one-party state introduced a national development policy called Development Plan I, whose aim was to address poverty through agriculture and local industrialization. The government introduced state-owned enterprises and controlled most of the economic sectors with the limited participation of a small private sector (Record, 2007). This led to a decade of higher productivity, food security, high external earnings, and a

decrease in borrowing from external parties (Kayuni, 2011). Table 1 summarises the GDP performance of the country.

Table 1: Summary for GDP growth (annual %) of Malawi (Word Bank, 2024)

Year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
GDP	0.5%	16.2%	6.2%	2.3%	7.2%	6.1%	5.0%	4.9%	9.7%	4.4%
Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
GDP	5.7%	8.7%	-7.3%	9.7%	-10.2%	16.7%	7.3%	3.8%	3.9%	3%
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
GDP	6.9%	4.9%	1.9%	5.4%	5.6%	2.8%	2.5%	4%	4.4%	5.4%
Source: World Bank Open Data										

The prosperity of Malawi in terms of its annual percentage GDP growth declined in the 1980s. Part of the reasons were external shocks (e.g., the World Oil Price Crisis), poor trade performance, and a decline in agriculture production. The situation forced the country to rethink its development trajectory. The country accepted the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) led by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Despite the long-term efforts of SAPs, the economy of the country did not improve and failed to address issues of poverty and vulnerability (Kayuni, 2011). In 1987, the country introduced the Statement of Development Policy II, which concentrated on smallholder agriculture and local industrial production to increase exports. The policy did not perform as expected (Chirwa & Odhiambo, 2016).

In 1993, the country changed from a one-party state to a multiparty democracy. The first democratic elections were held in May 1994, and there was a new administration. The focus on development changed following international discourse on poverty alleviation, liberalization of markets, and participation of the private sector through privatisation (Cammack, 2004; Mangani, 2023). The country also prioritised the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. The following strategies were developed and implemented, drawing from external and internal development aspirations:

- Poverty Alleviation Programme (1995–2000)
- Malawi Vision 2020 (1998–2020)
- Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2002–2005)

In 1996, the government developed the Malawi Vision 2020. The development process drew stakeholders from government agencies, the private sector, non-government organisations, and international development agencies. The aim was for the country to graduate from a very low-income status economy to a middle-income status economy (Rompel, 2020). However, during the mid-2000s, the government began integrating short-term development strategies to accelerate development and localise the global development agenda. For instance, three

short-term development strategic documents were developed for the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, and these were:

- Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I (2006–2011)
- Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (2013–2016)
- Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (2017–2022)

The development strategic documents did not address all the objectives of Vision 2020 (Kampanje, 2022). Some of the reasons for development failure were poor management of public resources, high levels of public debt, ineffective fiscal and monetary policies, overreliance on exports, and moral hazards in the public sector (Mussa & Masanjala, 2015; Rompel, 2020). The country still faced challenges in transforming the economy from a consumption-based economy to a production- and export-based economy. There are inherent problems of poor services delivered for health, education, social protection, nutrition, and food security; youth unemployment; and cultural issues, e.g., gender-based violence, early marriages, human trafficking, etc. In January 2021, the government of Malawi released Malawi Vision 2063, which was developed through the National Planning Commission. The new development plan responds to the lapses of Malawi Vision 2020 (Kampanje, 2022).

3. Theoretical perspective to the study

Critical Social Theory aims to highlight problematic social issues in society that prevent individuals or communities from achieving their full potential and presenting their interests (Deetz, 2004). There are many approaches that are applied in critical social theory-informed studies. Their aim is to analyse power relations and issues related to inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation that are often taken for granted in practices and social settings (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). In line with Critical Social Theory, the aim of the study was to unpack the assumptions on social democratic developmental state as a development philosophy presented in the Malawi Vision 2063. This was consistent with similar studies that have interrogated the concept of developmental state using a critical approach (e.g., Maserumule, 2012; Mkandawire, 2001).

The study concentrated on the concept of discourse, which can be used to assess how a concept is presented, legitimised, and informs actions in a social context (Deetz, 2004). The concept of discourse also forms part of the construction of social reality by shaping ideas, ways of thinking, ideologies, knowledge, and politics as an exercise of power (Foucault, 1980). Discourse can shape national development plans that guide what actions are taken to achieve development goals. The documents represent the consensus of stakeholders that are engaged during the policy development phase. However, the stakeholders have different interests related to national development (Bacchi, 2010; Ball, 1999). Hence, an assessment of the text in the national development plan can reveal hidden issues related to control, power relations, and marginalisation of some views presented in the development plans (Deetz, 2004; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The study focused on three aspects of discourse related to the social democratic developmental state: normalised claims, silences or hidden agendas, and power structures or power relations (Deetz, 2004). Table 2 summarises the

operationalisation of the concept of discourse and the guiding questions for each aspect of discourse.

Table 2: Summary of concepts used in the study.

Concept	Description	Guiding questions
Normalised claims	Claims or statements that have been legitimised or appear to be widely accepted without questions	What appears to be normal for inclusive democratic developmental state?
Silences or hidden agendas	Claims or statements that have hidden intentions or motives; or left out	What are the hidden agendas of inclusive democratic developmental state?
Power relations/power structures	Strategic interactions between stakeholders that maintain control or influence interest of others	How do power structures affect inclusive democratic developmental state?

Normalised claims are statements that have become legitimised over time to represent a certain position or view that stakeholders accept without question (Deetz, 2004). Normalised claims can be assessed through defamiliarization and looking at the interests of the stakeholders they represent. Silences or hidden agendas are issues that are no longer visible in a statement or claim but have implications for the actions and practices of stakeholders in a social system (McBride & Stahl, 2010). Hidden agendas can be assessed by checking the intention presented in claims or statements and noting what is taken for granted in the representation of the claims. Power structures, or power relations, are strategic interactions between stakeholders where actors influence each other to act and advance their interests. Power structures or power relations can lead to certain actors maintaining control or the status quo to constrain the interests or actions of others without power (Makoza, 2017). However, the exercise of power is not absolute and moves like a wave among the stakeholders (Foucault, 1980).

4. Research methodology

The study used discourse analysis of the documents to unpack the assumptions on inclusive democratic developmental state as a development philosophy in the Malawi Vision 2063. The qualitative research approach (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011) fitted well with the aim of the study, which was to understand discourse on national development and the historical context of the Malawi Vision 2063. Data for the study was sourced from government departments and ministries and government websites. The documents were purposely selected where:

- a) Documents provided information that was relevant to the study.
- b) The documents were related to the national development of Malawi.
- c) The documents outline the planned activities of the government of Malawi, e.g., procedures and processes, policy programmes, and initiatives.

The corpus included past national development plans and short-term strategies to appreciate the changes in national development focus. Table 3 summarises the documents that were analysed in the study.

Table 3: Summary of documents analysed in the study.

Title	Source	ID
Malawi Vision 2063	National Planning Commission of Malawi	#MW2063
Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I (2006 – 2011)	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning	#MDSG1
Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (2013 – 2016)	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning	#MDSG2
Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (2017 – 2022)	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning	#MDSG3
Malawi Vision 2020	National Planning Commission	#MW2020

The data for the study was analysed using content analysis (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik, & Wyatt, 2020). The process began with reading the text of the documents to become familiar with the text and key ideas. The text was re-read, noting important words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. These were assigned codes, and the codes were grouped into categories based on their similarity. The categories were further grouped into key themes related to the concepts of discourse outlined in Table 3. At the end, a report was produced to address the research objective and answer the theoretical guiding questions. The process was iterative to improve the quality of the findings (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik & Wyatt, 2020).

5. Summary of findings

5.1. Normalised claims on social democratic developmental state

Malawi had previously developed nation vision and other short-term development plans. However, explicit philosophy for development was missing in the previous documents. It is acknowledged that political parties in the country that assumed the roles of as part of legislature and executives do not have a clear political philosophy and ideology. This situation partly explains why previous national development plans did not have any statement or claims for developmental philosophy and that politicians, individuals, government and communities failed to articulate their identity, being, beliefs, attitudes and position they took to inform their ideas, opinions, arguments and practices for understanding development and the vision for the country.

The philosophy of development presented in the Malawi Vision 2020 was presented in the following statement: *“As a nation, we enjoy the freedom brought about by the struggle for independence and democratic governance. However, the growing dissatisfaction emanating from our failure to attain economic freedom remains a big concern. Drawing our goals of*

inclusive wealth creation, we shall adopt an inclusive democratic developmental state” (#MW2063). Malawi as an independent and democratic country will attempt to lead its national development vision. The key assumptions for the developmental state are highlighted in five areas related to role of the state, private sector involvement, bureaucratic capacity, leadership, long-term planning and governance.

There are claims that the state will lead in development programmes and intervene in the market when there are adverse events that affect the function of markets e.g. economic crisis, pandemics, terrorism and climate change. This position the state to move from its roles relating to implementation of laws, regulations, policies and standards to be a collaborator in the development programmes. It is assumed that the state will collaborate with private sector organisations and state-owned enterprises in development programmes:

“Development trailblazer parastatals running on business principles in greenfield and concessioned investments like mining, tourism and strategic manufacturing will operate tapping on quick wins in wealth creation while guaranteeing sustenance of favourable investment” (#MW2063).

From the statement, it is assumed that parastatals will support the state in providing resources and capacity towards implementation of development programmes. It was stated that development finance institutions will be established to support parastatals. The country had about 108 parastatals and some were performing better while others were not productive and on the verge of closure.

There were assumptions that leadership was crucial in leading institutions that would support the implementation of development state. The claim places emphasis on the leadership that was visionary and ability to champion policies and strategies. Further, leadership responsibility in managing collaborations that would exist between the state and partners in the implementation of structures and mobilization of resources to achieve developmental state goals e.g. economic growth, transforming economic sectors and become a self-reliant country. The leader would also support transforming the public sector to perform its role in programmes and processes effectively and enhance services that can attract new investors: *“By 2063, we will have created and sustained a business environment that is rated among the top three in Africa with regard to an enabling private investment, both domestic and foreign” (#MW2063).* Additionally, the leader would also champion the efforts to address moral hazards and support governance to thrive within public institutions.

Another area of leadership was continuity of development programmes through capacity improvements of institutions so that they are not affected by leadership or government turnover as highlighted in the following statement: *“To ensure that the sustenance of our development is not built around individual leaders, our country shall have a development focus that strengthens institutions” (#MW2063).* There was expectation that leadership in developmental state would also support the overall goals on national vision that was seen as a new development ideology: *“Our leaders shall ensure that all interventions by the state and non-state actors aim at catalysing and sustaining the inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance agenda. These values and objectives shall provide an explicit development ideology of growth with equity” (#MW2063).* This contrasted with situations where ideologies were

driven by political parties. Table 4 summarises the themes for the key assumptions for developmental state.

Table 4: Summary of themes on assumptions for developmental state

Themes	Description	Example of statement
Role of state	Government leading in development programmes and coordinating interventions in the market	“The state shall play an active role while forging a strong alliance with the private sector in the implementation and realization of MW2063” (#MW2063)
Private sector involvement	Private sector engaged in government programmes for development	
Bureaucratic capacity	Government agencies that are effective in running public services	“We shall have competent and disciplined and professional public sector” (#MW2063)
Leadership	Inspiring leader to lead development with national values	“We shall have a visionary, benevolent development oriented leadership that will rally each and every citizen around national values on unity, integrity, patriotism and hard work, which promote inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance” (#MW2063)
Long-term planning	Development plans that cover a long period of time	“Our inclusive democratic developmental state will prioritise long-term growth and structural change, mobilizing people around the shared vision of inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance” (#MW2063)
Governance	Having transparent public service processes and procedure that prevent moral hazards	“The public sector service shall adhere to meritocratic principles in recruitment and promotions, free from political interference and predatory corruption that erodes and retards the nation’s development gains” (#MW2063)

It was interesting to note that the developmental state claims highlighted transformation as an area that required attention beyond trade, investment policies, institutional mechanisms and inclusivity. Two areas of transformation were also normalised in the developmental state philosophy, and these were mindset and economy. Mindset was related to the view about development: “our development narrative and mindset must change from poverty to wealth creation” (#MW2063). This meant that development was to be considered as a means of creating wealth. The country had focused on poverty in the previous decades, but the level of poverty continued to grow among the vulnerable members of communities. Transformation of the economy was related to changes “from predominantly importing to an industrialised exporting economy” (#MW2063). The country relied on exports for materials and goods (e.g. fuel, fertilizer, machinery and medicines) used and consumed in the various

sectors of the economy and with limited products that were exported. Hence, there were more financial resources spent in acquiring goods and services from abroad than earnings from exports. It was believed that inclusive approach to development would underpin the success of transformation of the economy and society. Inclusive approach meant “*working together with shared mandate and values*” (#MW2063) where all members of society would take part in development activities. The emphasis on the participants of developmental state was on the state, private sector and international development partners.

5.2. Silences and hidden agenda on developmental state statements

Silences and hidden agendas related to developmental state were analysed looking at thematic areas and noting areas that were not complete or missed clear evidence. Hidden agendas were statements or claims that would attract certain actions that was advantageous for some stakeholders while marginalising or disadvantaging other stakeholders. The analysis will on the role of the state, private sector involvement, bureaucratic capacity, leadership, governance and transformation.

While there was emphasis on the leading role of the state in implementation of development programmes, there was limited reflection on dealing with the current limitations of institutional arrangements. Issues related to political leadership in collaboration with other institutions like parliament and judiciary were silent. Political leadership may influence collaboration with legislature and judiciary to ensure that policy programmes and processes that require legislative reforms and regulations can be implemented without delays. Enhancing the collaboration mechanisms to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in functions and processes supporting developmental state approach.

Bureaucratic capacity was addressed in the inclusive democratic developmental state of Malawi Vision 2063. However, current challenges of waste of resources in developmental trailblazer parastatals lacked clarity. Details on the role of Monitoring and Evaluation Desk in the Office of President and Cabinet could also be considered to ensure that issues of waste of resources and underperformance of parastatals are addressed and introduce consequence management in line with public governance frameworks.

Governance was highlighted as one of the enablers as highlighted in the following statement: “*Good governance - This will be tenable through service oriented political leadership, commitment to champion the fight against corruption; and working towards achievement of sound economic governance. An inclusive wealth creating and self-reliant vision is possible through a clear focus on accountability and efficient public expenditure management system that protects the nations interests and aspirations*” (#MW2063). While this statement emphasize on the role of the political leaders, the public is assigned roles for supporting efforts for governance:

“This will be achieved by tapping into the drive to harness active citizen participation and engagement in the affairs of Government. It entails the effective protection of whistle blowers and sustenance of safe civic spaces for demanding strict adherence to the rule of law” (#MW2063).

This means that of responsibility on governance was also placed political leaders and policy beneficiaries to demand transparency and accountability. However, bureaucratic capacity did not articulate well on remedial strategies and actions of moral hazards (e.g. state capture and clientelism) in policy programmes and processes beyond reward for good ethical conduct. Other areas missing details were integration of governance in areas of public finance administration, accountability and oversight, performance management.

Ideas, attitudes, beliefs and ways of thinking about developmental state were new in Malawi Vision 2063. The key ideas about developmental state had ideology rooted in capitalism where the state assumed the enterprise model and supported government interventions were geared towards promoting the function of capital and markets. However, there was a need for ideology coherency from national development strategies to political ideologies so that there was consistency and continuity in the developmental state implementation. Current thinking about Malawi Vision 2063 was limited to strategic level and not ideology level as noted in the following statement: *“Unlike current practice, all political party manifestos will be aligned to MW2063. The difference will lie in defining how soon and the strategies that the respective political parties will develop to meet each of the aspirations under our inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance vision”* (#MW2063). Further, the development ideologies should also reflect social and cultural values of local communities and not only politicians and the elite.

Developmental state implementation would attract development partners with diverse interests. The Malawi Vision 2063 attempted to highlight the stakeholders that will be engaged in development activities. For instance, non-state actors are highlighted include private sector organisations, international development agencies etc. However, details on management of non-state actors and interest groups were missing. Management of interest of non-state actors was crucial so that the non-state promote developmental state goals rather than their own interests e.g. high profits and maintaining monopoly in economic sectors that can be perceived as hidden agendas. Similarly, there was no details on coordination with non-government organisations. The NGO sector had been proactive in development activities during the non-direct budgetary period (between 2012 to 2023 when multilateral donors stopped direct budget to government due to public finance mismanagement and corruption. Development financing was done directly to communities via NGOs working in the sectors). Developmental state implementation without NGOs would also miss best practices especially on welfare policy programmes that were developed during the non-direct budgetary period.

The developmental state implementation advocate transformation related to mindset change and economy. However, transparent transformation was necessary and not to repeat mistakes of the past e.g. privatization, liberalization which did not benefit the majority of citizen but politically connected individuals and the elite. There was also a need to rethink of the instruments for economy and trade that were to be considered in the developmental state. For instance, investment funding, taxes, financial incentives, regulations etc. These were important to ensure that the instruments support addressing issues of public debt, donor aid dependency and having trade agreements that provided mutual benefits and eliminate exploitation.

The Malawi Vision 2063 highlighted tenets of the need to develop capacity of digital technologies to support developmental state implementation. For instance, the vision state adoption and use of technologies: *“We shall harness new technologies, including the use of digital platforms. This will ensure that information is readily available, and costs associated with provision of public information are reduced.”* (#MW2063). However, details on developmental state are silent on fourth industrial revolution and its impact on national development agenda for wealth creation and self-reliance. Digital technologies will play an important part in attaining the goals in the three pillars of the strategy and consideration should also be given to the adoption, integration, use and impact of fourth industrial revolution technologies including artificial intelligence, robotics, three-dimension printing, cloud computing, internet of things, fifth generation networks etc. Missing are also the details on how these technologies can support development in economic sectors and enhance research and value adding. The ethical implications of fourth industrial technologies may be considered in relation to developmental state implementation.

5.3. Power structures in developmental state

In developmental state, key partners may include the state through government agencies and parastatals, political parties, the elite, private partners and international development agencies. All the stakeholders in developmental state arrangements have diverse interests, beliefs and views on how they see and understand development goals. Hence, it was important understand how the interests and interactions would be managed to avoid distorted interactions.

There is clear intention of the state to engage with partners in developmental state implementation as highlighted in the following statement: *“We shall move together with stated mandate and values [kuyenda pamodzi ndi mtima umodzi]...”* (#MW2063). In following up the statement, there were subsequent claims that highlighted the anticipated developmental state arrangements that highlighted the nature of expected interaction among parties:

“Exceptional institutional mechanism to promote positive regular interactions among labour, business and government will be the norm for inclusive participation in the development process” (#MW2063).

However, some groups within the society have not been considered specific in the developmental state arrangements and may lead to exclusion. The assumptions were that only stakeholders that would contribute towards capacity and resources would be part of the developmental state arrangements. Hence, those without resources and capacity would not influence the inclusive development agenda. While other parts of the strategy highlight stakeholders, specific to developmental state philosophy women, policy beneficiaries representatives from rural communities and people with special needs were omitted. The vision may consider these groups for the developmental state philosophy to be fully inclusive.

Often power structures become issues when there are different interests in policy programmes between those with political authority misuse their power in the interactions with the public sector. Often politicians influence the work of public service officers. The

Malawi Vision 2063 attempt to highlight power structures issue especially when exercising political power:

“We shall have competent, disciplined and professional public sector. The public service shall adhere to meritocratic principles in recruitment and promotions, free from political interference and predatory corruption that erodes and retards the national development gains” (#MW2063).

The national vision document misses out on corrective strategies of power abuse especially among political elite that have for a long time misused their power and state resources and kept the majority of the people out in influencing national development. Further, there are lapses in institutional arrangements that would empower the rural majority to hold the political elite and bureaucrats accountable in decisions and moral hazard practices (e.g. misuse of state resources and corruption). The majority of the people living in rural areas are kept uneducated and uninformed about national development decisions to maintain the status quo. The existing systems maintains an environment of small advocacy groups that hold the state to account but also not very effective. The advocacy groups suffers intimidation from politicians and state security institutions. The weak legislative frameworks and agencies in the country do not adequately support the work of advocacy groups to address accountability and governance issues.

Another area of power relations was domination of foreign ideas related to national development that are taken as given without articulation of local context issues and social values. For instance, the vision 2063 highlight the privileged development ideas and policies:

“Our country has for a long time pursued development policy based on imported paradigms that react to specific situations rather than proactively addressing problems that the country face” (#MW2063).

This could be attributed to the domination of development partners (e.g. private partners, multilateral donors and international financial lending institutions) that had hidden motives of promoting their interest (e.g. profits and influence) rather than of the real needs of the majority in the country. The role of the state in managing the domination of external partners is not clear in the declaration of the vision and the developmental state philosophy so that the past mistakes can be corrected.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study set out to unpack the assumptions on social democratic developmental state as a philosophical underpinning of Malawi Vision 2063. Our findings revealed thematic areas that appeared to be normal in relation to the developmental state. These include the role of the state, private sector involvement in government programmes, attempts to improve bureaucratic capacity, leadership, long-term planning, and governance. Another finding was the presence of a structure of power as part of developmental state implementation that appeared to be normal where the state had visioned to establish relations with private sector organisations, development agencies, and investors to support the implementation of development programmes and processes. These findings were consistent with other studies that have described developmental states in the context of developing countries as having

two parts: the role of the state and power structures (Mkandawire, 2001; White, 2007; Maserumule, 2012).

What was silent in the presentation of the social democratic developmental state approach to development was reflection on the current institutional arrangements and mechanisms for collaboration between the executive, judiciary, and legislature. The articulation of the institutional arrangements and how they could be improved to support policy programmes and processes that require the backing of legislation and regulations. Another interesting finding was that the ideology of the developmental state only reflected ideas of the state in the vision and the political elite that was supporting capitalism. The details emerging from the strategic level highlighted interventions geared towards supporting the functions of capital and markets. There was limited evidence on how the social and cultural values of local communities were not reflected in the developmental state approach in the vision strategy. This was also consistent with other studies that have noted the obscurity of ideology in the context of developing countries in relation to the developmental state approach (Bresser-Pereira, 2019; Mann & Berry, 2015). Our findings also showed that although technology was one of the enablers of the Malawi Vision 2063, there was limited representation of the local meaning, adoption, appropriation, and use of frontier technologies and how they would be integrated in addressing socio-economic issues.

Critique is one way of initiating reflection with optimism that social and economic conditions can change in society (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The Malawi Vision 2063 is a good idea that can inspire and guide a nation that is struggling to achieve socio-economic development, especially for the large rural population. From the findings, inclusive democratic developmental state approaches have worked elsewhere, including in African countries, e.g., Rwanda, Ethiopia, Botswana, etc. (Mann & Berry, 2015; Singh & Ovadia, 2018). Developmental solutions that have worked elsewhere do not automatically guarantee success in other contexts and require critical scrutiny. Malawi has an opportunity to transform using a similar approach that can be adapted to its local realities and contextual conditions. Limitations highlighted in the study related to the philosophy of the developmental state approach require attention and further thought to guarantee corrective action from the Malawi Vision 2063 development agenda.

The key concepts of the Malawi Vision 2063, e.g., wealth creation and self-reliance, need to be unpacked further to reflect local understanding, values, behaviours, and attitudes. The findings showed that there were narrow descriptions of the concepts in the vision document that could limit the actions and practices emerging from the statements. The concept of wealth creation may be clarified further in consideration of multiple dimensions. For instance, wealth creation in relation to intellectual, social, individual, political, natural, physical, cultural, and financial capitals (Ratner, 2019). Furthermore, wealth creation may reflect responsibility beyond profit and value-adding for stakeholders in the developmental state implementation, e.g., the state, the private sector, citizens, or policy beneficiaries. There should be clarity of who benefits and who loses from economic activities from developmental state implementation. Efforts may be made to ensure that those who lose are compensated and given the opportunity to improve their conditions and capacity to contribute through skills development, acquire assets, participate, and solve their problems themselves.

Another area that requires clarity is the presentation of political ideology in relation to the developmental state approach that was presented in the Vision 2063 document. The findings showed that Malawi Vision 2063 had limited representation of development ideology. Studies show that developmental state often blend the desirable ideals of capitalist and socialist ideologies (Cai, 2010; Fritz, V., & Menocal, 2006). Malawi, as a democratic state, falls within the capitalist model of the economy (Mpesi, 2010). However, there is no clarity of ideology that is explicitly declared in relation to the developmental state. This makes it difficult to understand how the development policies, strategies, and programmes that will emerge from Malawi Vision 2063 will be shaped and how the decisions implemented. One of the reasons is that the Malawi political landscape operates in an environment of ideology deficit where there are no clear political ideologies and the formation of parties is more tied to the charisma of the founder who leads the party (Cammack, 2017; Mpesi, 2010). The absence of ideology means that political leaders, as elected representatives, lack a clear stance on priorities and agendas to be implemented during their tenure. Often, the situation creates power struggles between the interests of the political leaders and the priorities of the development partners who provide resources for development programmes.

Findings related to structures of power can also be viewed from the perspective of how individuals conduct themselves and engage with their social situations and conditions. The findings highlighted power relations at the strategic level (e.g., politicians and bureaucrats and government and development partners). However, one area that was also crucial to the philosophy of the developmental state and required further articulation was the local understanding of the identity of the citizens. This was significant so that citizens, as beneficiaries of Malawi Vision 2063, may take responsibility for their future and enhance their human agency. Previous development plans and vision had placed emphasis on what the nation could get from external entities, including financial support, technical capacity, intellectual capital, humanitarian support, etc. (Hwedi, 2001; Kampanje, 2022; Mangani, 2023). The developmental initiatives and programmes based on the precepts of international development partners supporting the country were not value-free and often implemented with conditions that sometimes did not reflect the local values. Further, the programmes also eroded the self-worth, confidence, value of local knowledge, understanding, and conventional wisdom that can lead to loss of identity for citizens and nationhood (Dzama, 2003; Rompel, 2020). Hence, citizens often perceive that development programmes are the responsibility of others and that there was no need to take ownership and develop capacity to improve their human agency in addressing their challenges.

The study was without limitations. Often, policy documents are not explicit in their description of the practices, cultural values, and behaviours of those who use the documents to implement government programs. The next step for the study is to seek clarification and input from policymakers (e.g., government officials, politicians, donors, representatives from private sector organisations, and rural communities) through interviews. Another area of further research is exploring how local beliefs, values, ways of thinking, and actions of policy stakeholders will affect the initial implementation of the Malawi Vision 2023 through policy programmes, processes, and politics. Areas of further research from this perspective can include how international relations will be managed and how emerging technological

advancements (e.g., the fourth industrial revolution) will be integrated with indigenous knowledge systems in the national development agenda.

In conclusion, the study set out to assess the assumptions on the social democratic developmental state in the Malawi Vision 2063. What appears to be normal for an inclusive democratic developmental state are statements related to the role of the state, private sector involvement, bureaucratic capacity, leadership, long-term planning, and governance. The hidden agendas of an inclusive democratic developmental state were mainly in areas of bureaucratic capacity, leadership, governance, and transformation. Areas related to power structures that would affect an inclusive democratic developmental state were relations with local policy actors and beneficiaries and international development partners. Local values, beliefs, norms, and ways of thinking and acting were left out in some thematic areas of the vision and could affect the implementation of Malawi Vision 2063.

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