

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE *ZABOMA IZI* SYNDROME

The Malawi government, just like other developing countries, wishes to reap the benefits of an improved management of its public procurement system. Among other operational initiatives is the getting rid of the *Zaboma izi* (government property) syndrome which is characterized by gross abuse of government resources at the expense of the deserving poor masses, the tax payers and supporting partners.

The setting up of the Office of the Director of Public Procurement (ODPP) is therefore one of the reformatory steps of an improved and responsible public sector in relation to procurement activities. With government as a service provider, a basic measure of a successful or failed public procurement is manifested through the quality and magnitude of the services it provides. This success or failure emanates from the goods, works or services obtained.

The perception held about the government by those entrusted with procurement or supply responsibilities determines the quality of the goods, works or services provided. If the government is perceived as *chinthu* (inanimate thing), procurers and suppliers are likely to demonstrate a *Zaboma izi* syndrome. They would be comfortable to violate their morality and rip the government off. As a result of this syndrome, it is not surprising that for the colossal benefit of the irresponsible, the government is at times treated as a dumping ground for substandard goods, works or services often supplied at inflated prices.

Under the pretext of bureaucratic demands of the government structure, those with the *Zaboma izi* syndrome feel relaxed to abuse the system and become unaccountable. Where systems of checks and balances are ideally weak, they capitalize on that for their own advantage.

If public procurers, suppliers and contractors realized that every *bona fide* citizen constitutes *boma*, stewards of government resources could have understood that when discharging their duties, they are principally accountable to all Malawians. They could have further realized that they hold their offices or business positions on behalf of all Malawians who deserve the best. Demonstrating a *Zaboma izi*

syndrome is, therefore, as good as pinching from one's own household at the expense of the entire family.

If the government were to be looked at the way we look after our own valuables, then it could have ceased to be treated as *chinthu*. Everybody directly or indirectly involved in its procurement could have taken pride in ensuring the acquisition of the best knowing that such acquisitions are not meant for *boma* as *chinthu* but *boma* as one's own household.

It should humble those in procurement to disrespect the virtues of their profession and settle for substandard goods, works or services that one would hardly want for their own home. As a matter of fact, it is a common human practice to look down upon anything substandard, given or bought. Yet the government is let to become a damping ground through unethical conduct in procurement.