

Public statement on the government ministry merger and coordination between health and WASH

The Centre for Policy and Reform in Health and Law (CPR) is a Malawian nonprofit policy institute advancing evidence-based reforms in health, law, and governance. CPR has noted the decision by His Excellency, Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi, regarding the merger of the Ministry of Trade and Industry with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs into a single portfolio. This decision comes at a time of economic hardship and fiscal strain, and is widely viewed as a pragmatic step toward cost reduction, improved efficiency, and better alignment of overlapping mandates.

This development invites deeper reflection on how similar principles of integration and coordination could be applied to other sectors particularly the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Water and Sanitation. Currently, the Ministry of Water and Sanitation oversees policy and program implementation on water resource management, provision of safe water, and sanitation services across the country. Its mandate includes expanding access to clean water, improving sanitation infrastructure, and promoting hygiene practices to enhance public health and socio-economic development. The Ministry of Health, by contrast, provides national leadership in setting health policy, regulating and monitoring health services, mobilizing health resources, and ensuring accessible, quality healthcare for all Malawians.

Despite their distinct mandates, the two ministries share significant areas of overlap. Safe water and sanitation are foundational to good health and disease prevention particularly in tackling water-borne illnesses such as cholera and dysentery, and addressing maternal and child health risks linked to poor hygiene. Moreover, access to water and sanitation underpins broader development objectives, including food security, agriculture, nutrition, and climate resilience. A more integrated approach between Health and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) could yield high returns by enhancing coordination, reducing duplication, and improving the effectiveness of limited public resources. Evidence consistently shows that investments in safe water and sanitation are among the most cost-effective public health interventions, with lasting benefits for community well-being and economic productivity. However, a full-scale merger of the two ministries could create transitional disruptions, bureaucratic uncertainty, and potential misalignment of donor support before tangible benefits are realized. Malawi's central governance challenge is not necessarily the number of ministries, but the weak coordination mechanisms that hinder inter-sectoral collaboration. In conclusion, CPR reiterates that effective coordination between the health and WASH sectors is vital to achieving Malawi's national development and health goals. Whether through full merger or strengthened collaboration, what matters most is ensuring that government structures work efficiently and transparently in service of all Malawians. CPR therefore urges government to establish a formal inter-ministerial coordination framework supported by joint planning and accountability mechanisms. CPR stands ready to support government and civil society partners in advancing these reforms for the benefit of all Malawians.