

EDITOR'S NOTE

Ephraim Wadonda Chirwa: Rare Breed, Gone!

This special issue of the Malawi Journal of Economics is dedicated to the journal's first editor-in-chief, Ephraim Wadonda Chirwa (23 December 1965 – 15 July 2019), the benefit of whose accomplishments shall remain with us forever.

Those of us who had the privilege of working with, learning from, or simply knowing Ephraim well enough will unequivocally agree that it is virtually impossible to present a comprehensive overview of his inimitable personality. Those us who knew him during the formative years of his illustrious professional career did not require any ingenuity to recognize that here was a person on a mission, undeterred by lame excuses; a role model determined to set the standard as high as it ought to be in a society where mediocrity appears tolerable; the very definition of professional excellence. Those of us who were also in his circle of friends still feel the void in generosity, objectivity and counsel created by the sad departure of the pure soul that he was; a soul unparalleled in its resolve to do the right thing.

Building upon his immense intellectual gift, Ephraim's route to accomplishment had many elements, but dominant among them were determination and focus. Therefore, earning a first degree with distinction (University of Malawi, 1989), an MPhil from an ivy league-listed school (Cambridge, 1991), and a very solid doctorate (University of East Anglia, 2000) was rudimentary to him; part of his personal 'first nature'. Thus equipped, and after joining the University of Malawi faculty in 1993, climbing the professional ladder was but a matter of inevitability. Ephraim became full Professor of Economics by 2009, which is record time by most standards. But the extent of the man's bounty may best be illustrated in the breadth of the issues he tackled as a scholar. Although his doctorate addressed the subject of privatization and economic efficiency in Malawi's manufacturing sector, and despite his clear orientation in Industrial Economics during his earlier academic days, Ephraim's brain was unconstrained. He wrote extensively on subjects too many to list, posting a count of 31 published peer-reviewed articles, 13 book chapters and one full book to his credit. His academic contributions have been pivotal in enriching Malawi's discourses on, *inter alia*, agricultural policies, input subsidies and food security; on initiatives to reduce poverty, improve welfare and support the poor; and on appreciating the effects of economic liberalization in manufacturing, banking, and finance.

But perhaps the most inspiring attribute in Ephraim's personality was in the way he valued relations that he hardly needed for his own success. He was a master when it came to identifying and nurturing younger talent into admirable professionals, as is evident from the enormous publications he produced with his students and younger academics. Wadonda Consult, one of very few successful private consulting firms in Zomba which he founded in 1995 - and to which he dedicated most of his effort after his early retirement from the University in 2016 - was a conduit for training young researchers and research assistants, as well as creating employment for many more. And, even after retiring from the university, Ephraim remained a very integral part of the Department of Economics, taking on postgraduate

supervisory roles; collaborating in departmental research and outreach projects; and even providing financial support when required. In this regard, the man is an embodiment of the saying that the value of one's life is assessed in terms of the extent to which it positively impacts on the lives of others. It is only befitting that one of the Department's new facilities has been named the Wadonda Lecture Theatre in honor of this great personality.

Although our endearment to this irreplaceable character creates the inevitability of the "why so early?" query and its associated sense of helplessness – as well as a strong reminder of the vanity that life itself may be – Ephraim's life epitomizes the very essence of life: to live behind a world better than the one we found around us at birth. Ephraim came, saw, conquered, and left us with so much. We shall never be able to stop learning from him.

Immortalized, rest peacefully, Ephraim.

Ronald Mangani