

# YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA

## YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MALAWI

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## Acronyms

AFORD	Alliance for Democracy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHRR	Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation
DC	District Commissioner
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
GDI	Governance & Development Institute
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IDRC	International Development Research Institute
MCC	Millennium Challenge Cooperation
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MP	Member of Parliament
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VAW	Violence Against Women
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa

## 1. Abstract

The project aims at conducting in-depth research on the nature and extent of young women's political participation in Malawi since little is known about this not only in Malawi but in Southern Africa as well. The project activities had their basis on the general objective of examining and analyzing how the lived in social, economic, cultural and political situation of rural women in Malawi impacts on the political participation of young women at the local level recognizing the correlation between poverty, social vulnerability and gender equality. The research further interrogated four specific objectives that explored how political parties and women in Parliament are supporting young women's political participation and the extent to which the state is implementing Article 14 of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to influence the political participation of young rural women.

In the project period from February 2011 to August 2013 the research team undertook various research activities to meet these objectives. Material was developed that covered the various aspects of the research questions. The research used questionnaires, focus group discussions, stakeholder meetings, archival research and informant interviews to collect data.

The major findings of the research are;

- Malawi is off track in meeting Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 by 2015
- Politics is viewed to be a domain for older and mature people and not young people and even in the executive of the youth leagues the leaders tend to be older
- Gender equality is generally well understood in the rural communities but women continue to be viewed as housekeepers and caregivers but not as leaders and the result is that men are given more respect than women and this principle is also applied to politics
- There are no deliberate policies to promote the political participation of young rural women
- Women's role in politics especially in the rural areas is relegated to dancing at political party functions
- There are no political party strategies at grassroots level to support young rural women's political participation despite some political parties having structures at the grassroots level, youth and women's leagues are not organized where they exist and communities are more aware of only major political parties
- Political parties are not led by ideology and no political party in Malawi can identify with any ideology.

- Rural voters expect handouts from the political parties/political candidates to influence their vote but these handouts stop once the candidate wins and constituents lose their support for the political leader
- Women MPs do not usually favor the promotion of young women's political participation at local level as this is seen as a threat for a councilor is seen as an MP in waiting
- Young rural women have no access to meaningful economic empowerment and few women own property including land and due to lack of empowerment most women find themselves victims of gender based violence and as a result their self- esteem is lowered
- Girls continue to be stereotyped and denied equal access to education and other opportunities in addition early and forced marriages deny young women and girls the chance to aspire to politics as most girls marry early to escape poverty
- Malawi is making progress in discontinuing cultural practices that affect women's development but some cultures remain that influence young girls into early marriages for example "*chinamwali*"
- Article 14 of CEDAW is not key in government's policies on rural development in that it is not used to inform policy and government is out of touch with rural masses and government initiatives favor the urban areas
- Motivation to join politics in the rural areas is low due to lack of development like road networks, communication systems, schools, access to government structures etc.
- The long absence of local government elections has denied young rural women the opportunity to participate in politics
- There are women leaders at village level in village development committees and this could be a starting point for political leadership

The overall impact of the project has been the innovation of knowledge and interest in young rural women's political participation. Further impact is that the capacity of the Governance and Development Institute (GDI) and its research team has been enhanced. As this was GDI's first major project it has given the organization the stepping stone towards becoming a research institute to be reckoned with.

## 2. Research Problem

Little is known about the nature and the extent of young women's political participation in Southern Africa. This project undertook an in-depth research on the nature and extent of young women's political participation in rural Malawi.

At the next general election in 2014, Malawi will be marking twenty years since the first multi-party elections. In May 2014, Malawi will be holding its second local government elections in a tripartite election. On the national level Malawi has had sixteen years of women in political representation, but on the local level Malawi can only show one local government election conducted in 2000. It will be interesting to follow the change that the re-introduction of councilors will bring and how many women will be elected into office. This research will attempt to establish the gains of democratization for rural young women.

The 2008 national census provides key data that situates women in terms of poverty and economic potential. Malawi is predominantly rural. The 2008 census shows that in all the districts of Malawi the majority of people are women. Women make up 52% of the total population; and 86.3% of these women are rural based. 34% of the rural households are female headed (UNDP, 2001), and these are poorer than the male headed households (HIV.VAW Survey Report, 2006). Despite the poverty reduction strategies, poverty in Malawi remains abject. Poor people, especially women, are hampered by various physical, financial and linguistic barriers (OSISA, *Malawi: The Justice Sector and the Rule of Law*, 2006, p.34).

The discussion and statistics above illustrate that Malawi is predominantly rural and the majority of women are rural based. Therefore, when talking about women in politics, it would be unrepresentative to talk only about the 14% that is urban based and not about the 86% that is confined to rural settings and faces challenges that are more pronounced than their urban counterparts. It was important to explore and establish research based evidence of how the government in Malawi has addressed the unique situations of rural women and how the challenges that face rural young women in Malawi have hindered their political participation. It is among these young women that a culture of democracy can be grown in a way that is sustainable.

It was also important to investigate how political parties in Malawi have encouraged the participation of rural young women in politics and how these parties have addressed the different challenges that rural women face. The three major political parties in Malawi, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the United Democratic Front (UDF), and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), all have political structures at the grass roots level, including youth leagues; but how have rural women been encouraged to participate within these structures is the major enquiry for this research.

The Malawi Human Development Indicators show that life in the rural areas is poor and poverty is extreme among women and children. More rural women suffer inequalities and disparities than their urban counterparts (Malawi CEDAW Report 2004, p.64). The Malawi constitution provides for the right to development for rural women (Section 30) and also provides against their discrimination (Sections 20 and 24). With CEDAW and the constitution though, not much has changed since the multi-party dispensation. Rural women have problems that are unique to their setting and, where their problems are similar to those of urban women, these are experienced with higher degrees of deprivation, exclusion and exploitation (Malawi CEDAW Report). Apart from contributing 69% to agricultural labour, producing 80% of household food, attending to the sustenance of the family, child bearing, rural women are further exposed to harmful traditions and cultural practices like wife inheritance, wife battering as a seasoning for marriage, and exclusion from key communal leadership positions as village headwomen to be able to influence decisions that affect them. They are stereotyped as subservient to men and as weaker than men, undermining their self-confidence and their social standing.

### **3. The Conceptual Framework of the Research**

The definition of politics is the activities associated with the governance of a country or area<sup>1</sup>. Participation in politics is at various levels. Political participation in a democracy can take many forms, ranging from voting for representatives at regular intervals to voting on policies in referenda, forming political groups, and engaging in legal or illegal protest<sup>2</sup>. Political participation is an initiative to influence change. The question of women and political participation in Malawi has continued to be a grey area for most political analyst. Worse still the gap in young women and political participation continues to widen, with low commitment and drive both at national level and regional level. Politics continues to be viewed as a male dominated arena, with men monopolizing this public sphere. Great strides in women's rights have been made in other areas such as domestic violence, family law and employment. However the hesitation and lack of interest in pursuing young women and politics only demonstrates further how crucial this agenda remains for the average Malawian.

#### ***Women and politics global perspective***

Before focusing on women and politics in Malawi, a global perspective is necessary. Women occupy only 18% of parliamentary seats around the world. Regional averages of the percentage of women in parliament vary greatly<sup>3</sup>:

- Nordic countries - 41.4%
- Americas - 21.8%
- Europe (excluding Nordic countries) - 19.1%
- Asia - 17.4%
- Sub-Saharan Africa - 17.2%
- Pacific - 13.4%
- Arab states - 9.6%

Women ministers remain concentrated in social areas (14%) rather than legal (9.4%), economic (4.1%), political (3.4%) and executive (3.9%) areas<sup>4</sup>.

As demonstrated above, the concentration of power in the hands of men is at global level and filters down to national level, with dwindling percentages of women in Parliament and in the Executive. The research will uncover the reasons rooted in social, economic and cultural issues. Which resultantly affect the participation of women in politics at all levels. This will enable interventions

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<sup>1</sup><http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/politics> ( available online 15 July 2011)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.iadb.org/res/publications/pubfiles/pubWP-638.pdf> ( available online 15<sup>th</sup> July 2011)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.iwdc.org/resources/fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.iwdc.org/resources/fact_sheet.htm) ( available online 14 July 2011)

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.iwdc.org/resources/fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.iwdc.org/resources/fact_sheet.htm) ( available 14 July 2011)

which will adequately target these challenges, to improve the level of participation of women in politics in Malawi .

### ***Women and politics in Malawi***

In 1891 the British established the Nyasaland Protectorate, but it was to take until 1950 for pressure to mount for independence from British authority. In 1958 the political party leaders of the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) invited Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda to return to Malawi to lead them in the fight for independence. In 1961 the NAC, now known as the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), won an overwhelming victory in the Legislative Council elections and in 1962 the British government agreed to give Malawi self-governing status the following year. In 1963, Kamuzu Banda took office as Prime Minister and a new constitution giving Malawi self-governing status was adopted.

On July 6 1964 Malawi gained full independence from Britain and two years later (1966) a new constitution was drafted making Malawi a one party state (*Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, Act 16 of 1966, as amended*). In 1970 Kamuzu Banda became Life President of the Malawi Congress Party and, consolidating his power further, Kamuzu became Life President of Malawi in 1971 (*Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, 1966*). Kamuzu ruled Malawi under a dictatorship until pressure from the churches and mounting domestic unrest forced him to succumb to a referendum in 1993 for the people of Malawi to decide whether they wanted to continue with the one-party state system or change to a multi-party system. On June 14 1993, Malawians overwhelmingly voted for a return to multi-party democracy. In 1994 Malawi held its first multi-party elections and Bakili Muluzi became Malawi's first multi-party democratically elected President since 1964.

The first post-colonial constitution was adopted in 1964 and established a democratic system of government complete with a bill of rights (Roberts, *Constitution of Malawi, Journal of African Law, Vol. 8, London, 1964, p.178*). In 1966, however, Malawi adopted another constitution which replaced the 1964 constitution and this constitution, much as it recognised the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, did not include a bill of rights and is said to have undermined democratic principles by its declaration of a one-party state and its setting up of Kamuzu Banda as Life President of Malawi. (OSISA, *Malawi: The Justice Sector and the Rule of Law, 2006, p.34*).

Under the new government of headed by President Bakili Muluzi, a new constitution was drafted which, among other things, included a comprehensive Bill of Rights that guaranteed a range of justiciable human rights including gender and women's rights. This Bill of Rights was a turning point for Malawi since the constitution was designed to establish a more liberal political order (OSISA, *Malawi: Justice Sector and the Rule of Law, p.34*). Due to the absence

of a bill of rights and because Malawi did not sign any international human rights instruments in the first twenty-three years after independence, there was widespread violation of human rights and the equal participation of women in politics was not guaranteed.

### ***The Evolution of Women's Rights in Malawi***

During the one party state of Kamuzu Banda very few women, if any at all, participated in politics and most of those who participated did so whilst in exile and not within Malawi itself. Contemporary state politics in Malawi has been and is a male domain and very few women find space in this area. For many years, the Banda cabinet only had one woman minister. Women were assigned roles in the Women's League which did not have any decision making powers within the mainstream political party. As for young women, their role was relegated to being members of the Young Pioneers, a military wing of the Malawi Congress Party. After the advent of multi-party democracy, young women's participation was and still is manifested in University of Malawi youth branches of the various political parties and also within the youth leagues of the political parties. Within these, however, the level of participation of women is not clear and has not been investigated.

One positive thing stands out for the Kamuzu era and that is the fact that during his reign Kamuzu Banda had a system of nominating women to the Parliament; more specifically, he had a quota system from 1977. Between 1966 and 1977, 23 of the 363 nominations were women. By 1992, 40 of a cumulative 92 nominations were women and this nomination system enabled women to participate in politics<sup>5</sup>.

In 2004, a young woman by the name of Angela Zachepe entered the pages of Malawian history when at the age of 22 she became the youngest woman to be elected as a Member of Parliament. She was among the 17 women who won in a contest that saw 153 women vie for seats in the national assembly. In the next election in 2009 Jennifer Chilunga, yet another young woman became the second youngest woman to be elected to the National Assembly aged 29. In the current composition of the National Assembly there are about only five women below the age of 35. The election of both Angela and Jennifer pioneered for Malawi's young women that they are able to participate in politics even at the highest levels. This begs the question, why, since Malawi gained multi-party democracy in 1994, can the country only showcase five young women in parliament out of 193 seats?

Women in Malawi continue to be under represented in politics, although reports on Malawi have shown an improvement in representation, but nothing close to the target representation of 50% established by the SADC Gender Protocol of

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<sup>5</sup>Malawi CEDAW Report 2004

2000, nor even of the 30% originally targeted under the SADC Gender and Development Protocol of 1997.

Women are slowly succeeding in politics and gaining voice through leadership and participation, but continue to be limited by lack of economic power, political parties that only pay lip service to women's empowerment, a civil society that only takes an interest in women in politics at election time, lack of leadership training, and a male dominated Parliament that often times undermines the role of women Parliamentarians. A study conducted by the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation indicates that the low participation of women in Malawi is due to the political system, its structures and the electoral systems that are inhibitive to women seeking national political positions, (CHRR, 2001).

The challenges that women face are many. In Malawi, anyone intending to run for office on a political party ticket has to go through primaries after recommendation from the political party. There are no quotas in Malawi's political parties. Women are usually sidelined and their role relegated to being a mobilizing tool for party functions. Women are also considered as simply having the role of casting votes during an election and providing entertainment at political rallies for male politicians<sup>6</sup>.

The challenges that women face in gaining equal participation are even more pronounced in the rural areas. Article 14 of CEDAW binds state parties to take into account particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families. It goes further to call on state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure that there is equality, participation and benefit in and from rural development. Despite article 14 Malawi does not seem to have in place sufficient measures for the progressive development of rural women. Rural women constitute the majority of the poor and the majority of the female population. They are disempowered socially and economically and this translates into their inability to actively participate in politics.

Stereotyping is yet another challenge. This stereotyping of women dates back to the one-party state regime where women were assigned roles in the women's league which did not have any decision making powers within the mainstream political party. The famous "Kamuzu Mbumba" was a culture created by the regime for political organisation, especially at the grass roots level, but was not given any real power (Linda Semu, "Kamuzu's Mbumba: Malawi Women's Embeddedness to Culture in the Face of International Political Pressure and

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<sup>6</sup>WLSA Malawi, *Beyond Inequalities*, 2005

Internal Legal Change”, *Africa Today* – Volume 49, Number 2, Summer 2002, pp.77-99). It was a grouping of women organised to dance for the Life President and mobilize masses for support of the Malawi Congress Party. As for young women, their role was relegated to being members of the Young Pioneers, a military wing of the Malawi Congress Party. After the advent of multi-party democracy, young women’s participation was and still is manifested in University of Malawi youth branches of the various political parties and also within the youth leagues of the political parties. Within these, however, the level of participation of women is not clear and has not been investigated.

With a national electoral system that is highly competitive and financially inaccessible to women coupled with the poverty levels and economic inequalities that prohibit the participation of women at the national level, it is clear that women’s participation is therefore confined to local and district levels. When Malawi held its first local government elections since attaining multi-party democracy, having failed to hold such in 1997, 76 women were elected out of 843 councilors, representing only 9% of the local government seats (National Machinery for the Advancement of Women, 2002). Of the four deputy mayor positions, however, three went to women, representing 75% at that level.

Unfortunately for the women of Malawi, these were the first and to date last local government elections held in Malawi despite the Malawi Law Commission having recommended to Parliament that local government elections be held “on the Tuesday in the third week of May in the year following the year of the National Assembly elections”<sup>7</sup>. It is interesting, therefore, to investigate how this absence of local government elections has impacted on the participation of rural women. Local government elections are seen as the best strategy to consolidate democracy at the grass roots level (Kadzamira, *Challenges and Reforms, Malawi’s Second Democratic Elections*, p.56). In 2004, out of 205 traditional Authorities, only 13 were women and the disparity has not changed for the better. Chieftaincy in Malawi is still a male domain and promotes patriarchy (Malawi CEDAW Report 2004).

At the moment, local government elections have been set for May 2014 (*Malawi Electoral Commission*), having been postponed more than three times.

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<sup>7</sup>Report of the Malawi Law Commission on the Technical Review of the Constitution, Malawi Government, *Gazette Extraordinary: The Malawi Government Gazette*, 2,408, Vol. 35, No. 58, 16 November 1998, p.282

#### 4. Literature Review Informing the Research

A significant literature on women's political participation in Malawi exists. Morna (2002:8) states that the participation of women in rural Malawi is low, and yet not much work has been done on this subject. The present research project is an attempt to fill this gap.

In 'Small Victories But Slow Progress', Rebecca (2008) notes that between 1994 and 2004, Malawi experienced an increase in women's political participation and representation in Parliament. Rebecca also states that while there is an increase in the participation of women in Parliament, when it comes to the key decision-making positions the representation remains very low. Rebecca's work offers great insight into understanding women's place in political life in Malawi today. Rebecca also states the reasons why women continue to be underrepresented in political positions in Malawi.

Rebecca also highlights the fact that Malawi has not fared as well as many of its African neighbours in its efforts to promote women in leadership positions. She examines the factors that contribute to Malawi's weak performance in this regard, including a political history of patriarchal rule, a political culture of neopatrimonialism, limited opportunities for women to demand access to positions of power (including no significant political transformation creating space for women's participation) and a social and cultural context which discourages women from entering politics. She examines these challenges to the political participation of women by drawing on feminist literature, as well as quantitative and qualitative data from a 2001 Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) study and twenty interviews with women in Malawi conducted in 2005.

The literature alludes to the fact that the level of women's political participation in Malawi remains low as compared to other countries in the sub region. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human development report states that from 1990 there is only a marginal increase on the seats held by women and all of them are in the lower house. Phiri (2004:1) observes that after the 1994 first democratic elections, the number of women was disappointing as only 10 out of 177 seats were held by women. He further states that when Bakili Muluzi was elected into power, the number of women increased to 17 out of 193 members of parliament. He observes that while the percentage of women in Parliament has increased on the overall the number remains low. Mwakasungula *et al* (2001:8) notes that although the Non-Governmental organizations (NGO) in the 2000 local government elections attempted to raise awareness about gender equality, the participation remained low.

Some neighboring countries have made some remarkable improvement in the election of women as parliamentarians. (UNDP: 2005: 319) Rwanda and

Mozambique are cited as examples. Briton (2002) cites South Africa as an example too. Goetz and Hassim (2003:52) argue that the adoption of party quotas for women candidates in Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa is of profound importance, it can result in what is referred to as a symbolic or 'token' presence of women in politics rather than a more genuine and significant form of participation. Mutume (2004) also affirms that quotas indeed can actually establish a method in which women can start to participate in national politics. In addition, Trip (2003) cites the increasing number of opposition parties; improved educational advancement and women's involvement in association groups leave them well positioned to lead organizations.

Rebecca (2008) notes that compared to other countries in Africa Malawi is not as much as the other countries in promoting women in positions of leadership. She states that failure to innovative strategies, for instance, gender initiative budgets or quota systems to ensure accountability to women. In addition she mentions other important factors like political history and political culture of the country, which have brought about and institutionalized gender inequality.

According to the literature, in the history of Malawi, women have been considered as being passive, illiterate and fit only for the kitchen<sup>8</sup>. In addition, Mvula and Kakhongwa (1987) also assert that amongst the few political roles women danced for the former life President, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, at political rallies.

Davison (1987) states that women's associations played a significant role in post independent Malawi. The league of Malawi women: the national Commission for women in Development, an advisory to the state; and Chitukuko cha Amai of Malawi. He also looks at the fact that under the international pressure following the United Nations Decade for women (1975-85) the government of Malawi's forced sidelining of women in the sole political party would not meet the global requirements for recognizing women as an essential group in national development.

Cammack (2004) observes that in Malawi, like in any other African country women are marginalized in the neo-patrimonial systems. Mwakasungula (et al 2001) in an attempt to understand the obstacles to women's participation in politics and leadership in Malawi, conducted authentic research, he examined secondary literature, reviewed primary documents and carried out a series of qualitative interviews with women in Malawi. The study also engaged women who were in politics.

(Tichagwa 1998; Morna 2002) state that one explanation is women's lack of support for other women candidates. Women have internalized oppression and they are oppressors of themselves. They believe men are better leaders than

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<sup>8</sup>Mwakasungula (et al 2001:36)

themselves. (Mwakusungula et al 2001:41) in his findings also indicates that the media is also a huge factor in marginalizing women in leadership and that popular media build on cultural norms and expectations.

Rebecca (2008) argues that only the introduction of institutional changes may provide necessary steps and new spaces which can make possible women's increased participation in politics and position of leadership in Malawi.

The political participation of women and young women in particular cannot be overemphasized. The focus of the current literature is on women's political participation at a national level. The political participation of young women in Malawi remains uninvestigated. This research will contribute to studies on women's political participation in Malawi and in particular young women's political participation in rural Malawi and in local government structures.

## 5. Objectives

**General Objective:** To examine and analyze how the lived in social, economic, cultural and political situation of rural women in Malawi impacts on the political participation of young women at the local level recognizing the correlation between poverty, social vulnerability and gender equality

Under this objective a questionnaire was developed which covered all the aspects of the objective. This objective was the basis for the work carried out in the eight districts. The information collected under and the findings formed the basis for the work to be carried out in the second year of the project and informed subsequent discussions with political parties, women MPs and in focus group discussions.

**Specific Objective 1:** *To analyze the issues that hinder young women's political participation in rural Malawi*

This objective was fully implemented in the first year of the project and involved data collection in a number of rural districts using a questionnaire that asked respondents questions relating to the social, economic, cultural and political issues that affect young women's political participation. A further questionnaire was developed which was designed and implemented targeting select households and addressed questions on the household approach to girls and boys in the home. The analysis of the findings brought to fore the various issues affecting participation of young women in politics, the understanding of gender equality at local level and the impact of the absence of local government elections. It also established the low involvement of women MPs in their constituencies and their even lower influence on young women at the local level. The analysis further established the stereotyping or lack thereof that defines the treatment of girls and boys in the home.

The main findings are;

- Malawi is off track in meeting MDG 3 by 2015 which is to promote gender equality and empower women. Most of the women who hold positions of power at district and national level are from the elite groups. At grassroots level there is still a lot to be done to ensure that women in particular young women are given the opportunity to lead local groups and organizations to prepare them for aspiration to political office. The current Parliament has 43 women out of 193 seats and this is still far below the SADC 30% requirement and despite the 2009 50:50 campaign and other efforts Malawi still has a long way to go to achieve women empowerment. Retention of sitting women MPs has also been a big challenge for women MP. From the 2004 crop of 27 women only 4 were retained in 2009. The long absence of local government elections has also contributed to this failure to achieve MDG3 for the elections would have ensured women in decision making positions at the local level to boost the numbers. It has been noted, however that during the registration process for the 2014 elections more women than men have

registered in all the districts. It is hoped that this will also translate into more women standing for office at both parliamentary and local levels. Annex VI is a detailed list of the registered numbers per district provided by the Malawi Electoral Commission.

- Gender equality is generally understood in the rural communities but in some districts like Nkhata Bay of the respondents interviewed 33% of them failed to define gender equality. Nkhata Bay is a patrilineal district where women are still subjected to a lobola (marriage payment) system and once such is made the woman is considered the property of the man and his family. Despite the understanding of gender equality in the other districts though women continue to be viewed as housekeepers and caregivers and not as leaders and the result is that men are given more respect than women and this principle is also applied to politics.
- There are no political party strategies at grassroots level to support young rural women's political participation, youth and women's leagues are not organized where they exist and communities are more aware of only major political parties. There are no deliberate policies to promote the political participation of young rural women despite the political parties having women and youth directors.
- Young rural women have no access to meaningful economic empowerment and few women own property including land and due to lack of empowerment most women find themselves victims of gender based violence and as a result their self-esteem is lowered. Since campaigning in the Malawian context mainly involves handing out money and other things to the electorate to buy their support it is difficult for women to compete with men as they do not have the financial muscle for such campaigning. 60% of the respondents pointed out that their understanding of political campaign is that if you have no money you cannot campaign for any position. The challenges that women face are many. In Malawi, anyone intending to run for office on a political party ticket has to go through primaries after recommendation from the political party. There are no quotas in Malawi's political parties. Women are usually sidelined and their role relegated to being a mobilizing tool for party functions. Women are also considered as simply having the role of casting votes during an election and providing entertainment at political rallies for male politicians<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> WLSA Malawi, *Beyond Inequalities*, 2005

- Girls continue to be stereotyped and denied equal access to education and other opportunities in addition early and forced marriages deny young women and girls the chance to aspire to politics as most girls marry early to escape poverty. Of the households sampled almost 50% admitted to assigning chores to children based on their gender and prioritizing boys' education over girls'. One respondent actually responded that she expects her girl children to marry early as this is what her own mother did with her. This attitude forces girls into early womanhood. Malawi is currently grappling with early and forced marriages most of which is brought about by stereotyping, cultural practices and lack of adequate incentives and programmes to keep girls in school. Stereotyping dates back to the one-party state regime where women were assigned roles in the women's league which did not have any decision making powers within the mainstream political party. The famous "Kamuzu Mbumba" was a culture created by the regime for political organisation, especially at the grass roots level, but was not given any real power (Linda Semu, "Kamuzu's Mbumba: Malawi Women's Embeddedness to Culture in the Face of International Political Pressure and Internal Legal Change", *Africa Today* – Volume 49, Number 2, Summer 2002, pp.77-99). It was a grouping of women organised to dance for the Life President and mobilise masses for support of the Malawi Congress Party. As for young women, their role was relegated to being members of the Young Pioneers, a military wing of the Malawi Congress Party. After the advent of multi-party democracy, young women's participation was and still is manifested in University of Malawi youth branches of the various political parties and also within the youth leagues of the political parties. Within these, however, the level of participation of women is not clear and has not been investigated.

**Specific Objective 2:** *To examine progress made by Malawi with realization of Article 14 of CEDAW in order to facilitate the political participation of rural women with particular focus on alleviating the capacity of rural young women to participate in politics*

A questionnaire was prepared for District Commissioners (DC). The DCs questionnaire was implemented in Zomba and Chiradzulu. Therefore the findings under this are based on responses from the DCs for Zomba and Chiradzulu and from archival research on the policies and programmes by the Malawi Government to promote young women's political participation. Article 14 of CEDAW has not yet been domesticated in Malawi despite Malawi signing it in the late 1980s and as such it is not authoritative but only persuasive.

There is no policy that directly addresses rural development but in 2006 Malawi became eligible for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCC) and this account is geared towards poverty reduction and also focuses on rural development including rural electrification among many developments. This was however,

suspended when the government of Bingu wa Mutharika broke some of the principles for eligibility but has now been resumed under Joyce Banda. It is hoped that if the MCC succeeds in its mandate there will be significant development brought to rural communities which could promote economic activities and investment and boost the economic standing of rural women.

The main policy focused on therefore was Malawi's core policy - the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I which has now been revised into the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II. This policy forms the main strategy for the Malawi government meant to drive social and economic. It focuses on nine key priority areas including gender equality, poverty reduction and youth development. It does not specifically speak to young women in political participation but touches on rural development. The agenda for young rural women therefore is a combination of the strategies on gender equality and women's empowerment, poverty reduction and rural development.

The key findings on this were;

- Article 14 of CEDAW is not key in government's policies on rural development in that it is not used to inform policy and government is out of touch with rural masses and government initiatives favor the urban areas
- Motivation to join politics in the rural areas is low due to lack of development like road networks, communication systems, schools, access to government structures, poverty etc.

Below are examples of some government initiatives to improve rural life. These are just examples and are not representative of all the efforts that have been made by the government of Malawi.

- The government of Bingu wa Mutharika introduced the upgrading of feeder roads to provide farmers with access to markets. This project is ongoing and will be able to assist rural people including women to have easy access to markets and in translation, better economic empowerment. Malawi being a significantly agro-based economy with most of its population rural and subsistence farmers the majority being women, access to markets is therefore vital. Since the lack of economic empowerment is one of the major hindrances to rural women's participation in politics projects like these are crucial.
- The current government of Joyce Banda has introduced poverty reduction initiatives like the One Cow a Family and the Mudzi Transformation Trust as strategies for improving the livelihoods of rural people and it is hoped that this will also translate into political participation. The one cow a family initiative program is a program under the Presidential Initiative on Poverty and Hunger reduction. The program identifies and targets poor and vulnerable households, especially those

led by women in the rural areas. The Family is provided with a cow with the aim that poor families should benefit from diversified food in form of meat, eggs and milk. Providing poor families with diversified food produced from the cow is an effective way of reducing incidences of malnutrition. In addition, the sale of milk, the meat from the cows and the sale of any off-spring results in an increased income for the families. The manure from the cow is also utilized for any crops that the families might cultivate. This program as stated identifies vulnerable groups particularly women, as such women are economically empowered through this program.

The Mudzi Transformation Trust is a five year private sector-led project. The project seeks to provide and improve the social economical lives of the rural and urban poor by providing good shelter for the vulnerable Malawians, access to clean portable water, accessible rural transport as well as ensuring food security and nutrition to low income earners. Beneficiaries for the Trust are identified through the Chiefs and community leaders.

The lack of economic empowerment is one of the main obstacles to rural women's political participation and with the one cow a family initiative if well managed, delivered and sustained a lot of households could improve their economic standing.

**Specific Objective 3:** *To explore and analyze how political parties in Malawi influence the political participation of young women at the grassroots level with focus on the 2011 local government elections, pre, during and post-election.*

This research project was designed based on the fact that local government elections were to be held in April 2011 and later postponed to August 2011 and then to May 2014. At the time of submitting this report Parliament had passed a bill into law that will now enable Malawi to hold tri-partite elections in May 2014 and primary elections for parties were about to begin. Since this and the actual elections are beyond the scope and time frame of the project and objective 3 was mainly based on the local government elections taking place in April 2011 this objective was partially implemented.

GDI sampled three political parties that have a nationwide representation and have a presence all year round not only during elections. For comparison's sake two smaller parties were also sampled. The work with political parties focused on how political parties influence the political participation of young women at grassroots level prior to elections and centered on preparations for the 2014 local government elections. The methodology of observation under this objective was taken out. The findings were;

- Political parties in Malawi are not guided by ideology. No political party interviewed was able to point to any ideology and relate itself to it. It is therefore difficult to ascertain what issues can guide any interested person to decide which party to join or support. This therefore affects the participation of young people and women as joining politics is not based on any sharing of political ideology. The lure into politics is mainly based on rhetoric and which party makes the most luring promises. Joining a political party also tends to be informed by regionalism, tribalism and also guided by which party currently holds the public purse as some people join ruling parties for self-enrichment.
- Politics is viewed to be a domain for older and mature people and not young people and for some political parties even in the executive of the youth leagues the leaders turned out to be older and male so the question becomes how these leaders are able to engage with the youth and young women in a way that relates to their goals and aspirations and in ways that they relate to. It was concluded that for political parties to advance the agenda for the youth they need to put in position people who relate to the youth and are part of the affected age group.
- There are no political party strategies at grassroots level to support young rural women's political participation, youth and women's leagues are not organized where they exist and communities are more aware of only major political parties. There are no deliberate policies to promote the political participation of young rural women. 0% of the political parties consulted were able to demonstrate a specific strategy or plan that targets rural young women. Strategies are generalized towards the youth as a whole.
- For example the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which was the ruling party at the time of this research indicated that there are no specific programmes aimed at enabling young women at grassroots level to participate in politics. What the party has done is to educate women about their democratic rights and ensure that they are economically empowered through loans they get from village banks. DPP when it was the ruling party pushed for the 50-50 campaign in parliament which aimed at having 50% of Members of Parliament as women as part of this campaign DPP was approaching young women in Universities to recruit them to run as MP's. The 2009 elections saw 43 women become MPs in a Parliament of 193 seats from 27 women in 2004.
- United Democratic Front (UDF) on the other hand has in its hierarchy one of the three positions of Vice Presidents reserved for a woman as a deliberate effort to ensure women's participation at a high level. However, the party has no specific strategies on how to help young women attain positions in parliament or as ward councilors. Women

individually have to convince the electorate to vote for them. Currently the party has only one female Member of Parliament. At the time of the meeting with the UDF the party was in the process of putting together a policy conference which it hoped would help the party in strategizing in all areas including the area of promoting women in politics.

- Malawi Congress Party (MCP) also does not have a clear strategy of how it will entice young women to vie for positions as its representatives. The party does not have a quota system which it believes is destructive. One of the guiding principles of the party is that those that are interested must openly declare their interest and this includes women. The party clearly stated that it is only those that declare an interest to participate in politics that the party supports and that if women show an interest to participate then the party would support them. There is therefore no deliberate strategy to get women to participate.
- The long absence of local government elections has denied young rural women the opportunity to participate in politics. With a national electoral system that is highly competitive and financially inaccessible to women coupled with the poverty levels and economic inequalities that prohibit the participation of women at the national level, it is clear that women's participation is therefore confined to local and district levels. When Malawi held its first local government elections since attaining multi-party democracy, having failed to hold such in 1997, 76 women were elected out of 843 councilors, representing only 9% of the local government seats (National Machinery for the Advancement of Women, 2002). Of the four deputy mayor positions, however, three went to women, representing 75% at that level.

(See more detail on the findings of this objective in Annex III – Political Parties Brief)

**Specific Objective 4:** *To investigate how young women in Parliament representing rural constituencies are influencing young women's political participation*

This research commenced when Malawi was under the leadership of President Bingu wa Mutharika and of the four young women targeted under this objective only one was a government minister. The first year of data collection included the constituencies of these four young women. All four young women MPs were communicated to on the planned interviews but only one MP availed herself not only to GDI but also to IDRC in September 2011.

With the death of Bingu wa Mutharika in April 2012 a new administration came in and three of the targeted women joined the cabinet of the new administration and unfortunately due to their busy schedules and exigencies of duty efforts to interview them proved futile. The progress on this objective therefore is based

on the response from the year one data collection exercise in the women MPs' constituencies.

The findings below are mainly based on the responses from the respondents in the district targeted.

- Women MPs do not usually favor the promotion of young women's political participation at local level as this is seen as a threat for a councilor is seen as an MP in waiting. There are 43 women Members of Parliament in Malawi. There was a general consensus among the interviewees that women MP's have failed to live up to the people's expectations. Most of the time women MP's like to spend their time in the city where they have their homes unlike the constituencies which are in rural areas. Women MPs never consult their constituents on the issues that affect them and neither do they allow the constituents to hold them accountable on their promises except during elections when the constituents vote them out.
- A considerable number of interviewees expressed that given better male candidates they would not vote for women MPs. This is a worrying finding and requires political parties and the current sitting women MPs to act quickly to ensure that they regain the electorate's confidence in their abilities.
- There are women leaders at village level in village development committees and this could be a starting point for political leadership in the absence of initiatives by women MPs to promote young women's participation at local level.
- Women despite not being economically empowered are always willing to take on voluntary roles and with regard to the provisions of the law on elections of councilors and their role in particular the fact that councilors do not receive a salary like an MP but only receive an honorarium it is thought that many men would not want to take these roles but women would by the nature of their willingness to undertake voluntary work. Based on this it is most likely that despite lack of motivation from women MP a considerable number of women will aspire for the local government elections.

**Annex I:** Policy Brief on Young Women's Political Participation

**To:** Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development

**From:** The Governance & Development Institute

### **1. Executive Summary**

Rural women experience challenges in their day to day lives that are unique to their environment and where they are similar to those of urban women they are experienced with higher degrees of hardship and deprivation. Reports including government reports and the Malawi Human Development Social Indicators Report show that the general quality of life in rural areas is poor and that poverty is worse among women and children. Sections 20 and 24 of the Republican Constitution of Malawi are to the effect that rural women should not be discriminated against.

The purpose of this brief is to enlighten the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development (the Ministry) of the social, economic cultural and political barriers rural young women face and how these challenges limit the scope of their political participation at the local level. The key findings in this area of research dictate the need for the Ministry to push for programs that will tackle the barriers that limit young rural women's political participation and ensure that there is an increase in the number of young rural women who actively participate in politics at the local government level.

### **2. Statement of the Issue**

What role can the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community development play in increasing and promoting the political participation of young rural women at the local level?

### **3. Background**

Little is known about the nature and extent of young women's political participation in Southern Africa and Malawi in particular. Malawi is predominantly rural with more than 80% of its population confined to the rural areas. Women make up 52% of the population of Malawi and of this 86.3% are rural based. Despite a number of poverty reduction strategies life in the rural areas remains poor. Poverty and women's empowerment including political empowerment are interlinked. At the next general election Malawi will be attaining twenty years of multi-party democracy but would only be holding its second local government elections. Due to the competitiveness of the Parliamentary elections rural women are relegated to participating at the local level but without conducive

environments for this including the relevant development rural women cannot be guaranteed equal participation.

There is very little research and focus on young rural women's political participation at the local level. GDI conducted an in-depth research into this area with the aim of analyzing how social, economic, cultural and political situation of rural women in Malawi impacts on the political participation of young women at the local level. The study further interrogated how the government is realizing the provisions of Article 14 of CEDAW to achieve beneficial development for rural women, how political parties are promoting the rural participation of young women and also how young women Members of Parliament are encouraging young rural women to aspire at the local level.

The research was conducted in the districts of Mangochi, Zomba, Chiradzulu, Thyolo, Nkhatakota, Kasungu and Nkhata Bay and targeted major political parties and women MPs through the Women's Caucus in Parliament. It also included some district commissioners.

The key findings of the research are as follows;

- Malawi is off track in meeting Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 as many rural women remain disempowered, rural young women have no access to meaningful economic empowerment, few of them own property and due to this disadvantaged positions they are targets for gender based violence
- Girls/women continue to be stereotyped and are denied equal access to education, they are victim to early and forced marriages and this hinders their aspirations including political aspirations
- Political parties do not have deliberate policies, programmes or strategies that directly focus on young rural women and political party presence at local level is low and parties are more elitist in representation low involvement of grassroots and ordinary people
- Malawi is making progress in discontinuing bad cultural practices that affect women's development but more needs to be done as other traditional practices still exist that hinder young women from participating in politics
- Article 14 of CEDAW is not instrumental in informing government policy on rural development that benefits women and motivation to join politics is low due to lack of development like road networks, communication systems, markets, schools and access to government structures etc. This is further impacted by rural women's inability to articulate their right to development.

- women MPs are not doing much to promote young women aspirants at the local level and this has been attributed to the fear that a councilor is an MP in waiting
- the leadership roles that some women are playing in village development committees could be an opportunity to encourage women to stand for office at the local level
- the long absence of local government elections has denied young rural women the opportunity to participate in politics as participation at the national level can be daunting and too competitive for rural women

#### **4. Governance & Development Institute Interest**

The GDI with funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) conducted the study mentioned herein. One of the objectives of the organization is the empowerment of women and the attainment of MDG 3 by 2015. GDI works to realize better outcomes for women and girls and links poverty reduction to women's empowerment. As stated above rural women experience inequalities with higher levels of hardship and GDI considered it important to explore and establish research based evidence of how the government of Malawi and political parties are addressing the unique situation of rural women and how the challenges young rural women face are hindering their participation in politics. GDI's research targeted young rural women as a constituency that has never been targeted before in Malawi for it is among these young women that a culture of democracy can be grown in a way that is sustainable.

#### **5. Pre-existing Policies**

There are no pre-existing policies directly targeting young rural women aimed at promoting their political participation. The findings of this research are therefore intended to provide the basis for policy development.

#### **6. Policy Options**

A few strategies can be employed to promote the political participation and representation at the local level of young rural women. These strategies include;

- 6.1 legislation to enhance young women's political participation at the local level,
- 6.2 a quota system
- 6.3 empowerment programs

#### **7. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Policy Options**

##### **7.1 Option 1: Legislation**

There is currently no strong or specific legislation that covers or encourages women's political participation. The closest legislation that Malawi currently has that empowers women is the recently enacted Gender Equality Act.

There is a need for The Ministry to lobby for domestication of Article 14 of CEDAW. This article which addresses the particular problems faced by rural women will ensure that young rural women are protected by the law and their right to political participation and activism is guaranteed by domestic laws. Article 14 of CEDAW also touches on all aspects of rural women's lives as such the root causes which impede women's participation in politics will be addressed. The challenge of domesticating article 14 of CEDAW is that enforcement and implementation and enforcement of laws that contain social economic rights are progressive in nature as such very slow. Therefore, the impact on increased numbers of young women participating in politics will be very gradual.

### **7.2 Option 2: Quota System**

Legislation can also introduce gender quotas, meaning introducing a mandatory percentage of young women candidates at the local government level. This could be within a political parties Act that could make it a condition for registration for political parties to include quotas for women at all levels of political participation within their parties constitutions. This is a faster and immediate mode of closing the gender gaps and automatically increasing the number of young women into the political system. The legislation applies to everyone and once it is passed it must be complied with. In addition to its immediate impact, new laws increasing young women's political participation at the local can also be incorporated in the existing national gender policy for 2012-2017. The national gender policy recognizes that women and young girls should participate in politics and decision making positions; there is a need however to focus and also highlight young rural women's participation at the local level.

However, as it has been seen countless times implementation of laws can be a challenge. In addition gender quotas do not necessarily lead to effective mainstreaming of gender concerns in politics. The root causes and constraints that limit young women's political participation in the first place still remain unaddressed. Therefore it ends up with increased political participation according to the laws but in practice the gaps still remain.

### **7.3 Option 3: Empowerment Programs:**

The Ministry may also push for Programs which will address the social, cultural and economic barriers that limit young women's participation and ensure that young women in the rural areas fully benefit from such programs. Through these programs young women should have access to financial assistance to help them with their political careers. In addition, the young rural women will be able to network with other aspirants and women Members of Parliament. This will provide the young women who are debutants in the political sphere, as such have no prior political affiliations to benefit from the women MPs and share experiences with the other women members. The benefit of such programs is that they can also reach out and sensitize the men in the rural areas in order to penetrate the strong patriarchal systems and start changing the mindset and attitudes of both men and women in the rural areas.

The challenge with such programs is the necessary finances to fully and successfully roll out such a program. This program touches on several dimensions and in order for the young women to grow and develop it has to be a program that runs for a long period of time. In addition the majority of the Malawian population is in the rural areas, therefore the challenge will be in regards to the outreach of the program. All rural young women across the country have to benefit but that will require extensive outreach.

## **8. Policy Recommendations**

It is recommended that programs which will economically empower young women in the rural areas, break down all barriers impeding women's participation and sensitize the rural area population is the best option to address this issue. This option will create an enabling environment for young women's political empowerment and ensure that where there is female representation, the representation is effective and makes an impact in politics rather than being representation on paper.

## **Annex II: Political Parties Brief**

**To:** The DPP, UDF, AFORD, MCP and Maravi People's Party

**From:** The Governance & Development Institute

Governance and Democratic Institute commissioned a study into the nature and extent of young women's political participation in Malawi. The project activities had their basis on the general objective of examining and analyzing how the lived in social, economic, cultural and political situation of rural women in Malawi impacts on the political participation of young women at the local level. Specifically, one of the objectives of this project is to explore and analyze how the political parties in Malawi influence the political participation of young women at the grass root level with the focus on the 2011 local government elections, pre, during and post-election. This objective was originally based on the expectation that local government elections would take place in April 2011 but they were later postponed to May 2014 to run together with the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in a tripartite set up.

Since, however, this specific objective was based on the local government elections and May 2014 was beyond the period of the study which was February 2011 to August 2013, the scope of the objective was changed to mainly focus on the strategies that political parties have or are putting in place to promote young women in political participation generally.

In order to properly assess and satisfy the said specific objective, it was necessary to engage political parties in Malawi to investigate how they have encouraged the participation of rural young women in politics either in the national assembly or at the local level. It was also important to discuss with the political parties how they have addressed the different challenges that rural women face. These discussions also provided an opportunity to present to the parties the findings carried out in the first phase of the research whereby respondents in different constituencies were asked questions ranging from political party presence in their area to political party support in an election.

The nature of the discussion was open and allowed for free and unrestricted interaction with at least four members of each political party. The parties GDI was able to get were the Democratic Progressive Party, the United Democratic Front, the Malawi Congress Party and the Maravi Peoples' Party. Of the four the first three are large parties and have been ruling parties before and the Maravi Peoples' Party is relative small but was relevant in providing a view of how smaller parties are strategizing as well to provide alternatives to young women on political party choice. The members in most cases comprised of the president, the secretary general, the director of youth and the director of women's affairs. All the parties gave a general introduction to the history of their

party, their party structures, the gender representation in the structures and their policies, goals and aspirations as an introduction to their political party. The discussion then narrowed down to the youth's and women's participation within their party and the parties' opinions on the findings from the data collection in the districts.

The findings below are drawn from the views of all the political parties consulted and are not specifically relating to any party. The findings are also based on the analysis and observations of the GDI.

## **Findings**

- Political parties need to have a set ideology upon which their parties are based to allow young people and women to have informed choices based on ideologies they share.
- Although there is diverse political party presence in Malawi, it is difficult to attract young people to join political parties.
- Political parties have the desire to bring young people on board but they do not have tangible programs for the youth.
- The youth also shy away from political participation, they fail to register with parties, they do not assist in any party activities and usually they do not vote.
- Nowadays it is important to reach young people through the medium they understand and utilize, which is the social media because today's youth for example the urban youth are the "Facebook" generation
- In the rural areas to successfully reach out to the youth, they have to be addressed through social games, traditional events and other social and cultural mediums
- In the past it was taken for granted that women who wanted to participate in politics would make themselves available, however the dynamics have changed and there are now deliberate party policies to ensure women's participation.
- Women fail to participate in politics because they are not economically empowered therefore it is essential that programs for women address that.
- A woman's HIV status if positive is received with a lot of stigma and affects their confidence to stand for office
- Most rural women do not exercise their sexual and reproductive rights and end up with too many children and no time to do other things like participate in politics.
- Once women are Members of Parliament it is a challenge for political parties to help them retain those positions due to cultural reasons and also the personal traits of the women

- Women who aspire to go to the National Assembly cripple their chances of being elected because of the way they present themselves and sell their agenda to the voters.
- The party structures have positions which specifically require women members to fill in order to encourage women within the parties to hold decision making positions and some political parties have deliberate policies on certain positions that reserve them for women.

### **Comment**

The findings above reflect that the political parties in Malawi do not have proper and organized strategies for promoting the participation of young women in politics and this is even so at rural level. It would seem that much of what the parties are engaging in on young women tends to be ad hoc. There is a lot being done to entice the youth into political participation both through holding office and voting but not specifically on young women. Only one party has a youthful President and this could encourage young people including young women to see politics as a career that is open to them. It was also GDI's observation that no political party consulted has a young Youth Director. It was observed that the people presented as Youth Directors are of the older generations and this begs the question as to whether they are able to inspire the youth and lead them in a way that appeals to them.

The parties have directors of women who are leading the women's leagues in the and actively promoting women's interests in the parties but it was observed that there is a disconnection and no deliberate attempts to create a link between the agenda for women and the agenda for the youth so that the two zero in on young women.

The majority of women and the youth are rural based but the political parties much as they reach out to the rural electorate during elections, tend to be elitist in representation at the national level and there is no ownership at the grassroots level.

### **Recommendation**

Malawi's political parties need to put in place deliberate policies, programmes and strategies to target rural young women and promote their participation in politics. Parties need to employ both the top down and bottom up approaches to ensure that there is a middle ground in how all levels of political party structures are participating. It is also recommended that they explore the link between their youth and women strategies so that they feed into each other.

Political party presence in the form of institutional structures needs to be built so that young people know where to go if they desire to join a political party of their choice.

### **Annex III: Press Release**

To: All Media Houses

The Governance and Development Institute an organization registered in Malawi under the Trustees Incorporation Act between February 2011 and August 2013 with funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) conducted a study into the social, economic and cultural issues that affect young rural women's participation in politics at the local level. The issue of rural young women, rural development and political participation has never been explored in Malawi. Rural women experience challenges in their day to day lives that are unique to their environment and where they are similar to those of urban women they are experienced with higher degrees of hardship and due to this the GDI decided to innovate research into this area.

The specific objectives of the study included examining the social, economic, cultural and political issues that hinder young rural women participation, examining how the state has implemented Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to improve the lives of rural women, how political parties in Malawi are promoting the participation of young rural women and how young women Members of Parliament are promoting the political participation of rural young women at the local level.

The original design of the study was centred on the local government elections which were originally set for April 2011 and then postponed to August 2011 and then finally to May 2014. With the change in the time frame for the elections this objective went beyond the scope of the study but the GDI also asked respondents questions on how the long absence of local government elections in Malawi had impacted on the participation of young rural women.

The methodology for the research employed questionnaires which required the respondents to answer questions on social, economic, cultural and political issues and a few questions on local government elections. This exercise was carried out in the seven districts. The study further used focus group discussions to gather more information and to discuss the district data collection findings. In fulfilling the objective on political parties GDI consulted individual parties through meetings and held discussions with the parties on each party's policies, programmes and strategies for engaging young rural women in politics. The parties consulted under this were the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Maravi People's Party. Each party was represented to the meetings by the Secretary General, the Director of Women and the Director of Youth except for the UDF which was also represented by its Presidential candidate for the 2014 elections. These

proved to be high profile consultations and GDI is grateful to all the parties that participated in its study.

Some of the major findings of the study were that;

- Malawi is off track in meeting Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 as many rural women remain disempowered, rural young women have no access to meaningful economic empowerment, few of them own property and due to this disadvantaged positions they are targets for gender based violence
- Girls/women continue to be stereotyped and are denied equal access to education, they are victim to early and forced marriages and this hinders their aspirations including political aspirations
- political parties do not have deliberate policies, programmes or strategies that directly focus on young rural women and political party presence at local level is low and parties are more elitist in representation low involvement of grassroots and ordinary people
- Malawi is making progress in discontinuing bad cultural practices that affect women's development but more needs to be done as other traditional practices still exist that hinder young women from participating in politics
- Article 14 of CEDAW is not instrumental in informing government policy on rural development that benefits women and motivation to join politics is low due to lack of development like road networks, communication systems, markets, schools and access to government structures etc. This is further impacted by rural women's inability to articulate their right to development.
- women MPs are not doing much to promote young women aspirants at the local level and this has been attributed to the fear that a councilor is an MP in waiting
- the leadership roles that some women are playing in village development committees could be an opportunity to encourage women to stand for office at the local level
- the long absence of local government elections has denied young rural women the opportunity to participate in politics as participation at the national level can be daunting and too competitive for rural women

The full findings of the study will be available on the IDRC website soon. The GDI will soon be submitting a policy brief to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development to inform the ministry on the findings of the study and suggest policy direction that can benefit rural young women.

**Governance & Development Institute (November 2013)**

## **Annex IV: Article 14 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

Article 14 of CEDAW addresses the particular problems faced by rural women and recognizes the significant role they play in the economic life of their families. This article places an obligation on States Parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure that women in rural areas enjoy and realize all the rights granted under provisions of CEDAW. In addition, State Parties are required to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas so that they may participate in and benefit from rural development equally with men.

### ***Article 14: Rural Women***

- 14.1.1 State Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-remunerated sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of this convention to women in rural areas.
- 14.1.2 State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women; that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
- a) to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
  - b) to have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counseling and services in family planning;
  - c) to benefit directly from social security programs;
  - d) to obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency
  - e) to organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;
  - f) to participate in all community activities;
  - g) to have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
  - h) to enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

## **Annex V: Ndime ya Khumi ndi Chinayi ya Ndondomeko yothetsa Mchitidwe wa Kusala kapena Kusankha Amayi**

Ndime ya khumi ndi chinayi ya ndondomeko yothetsa mchitidwe wa kusala kapena kusankha Amayi imakamba za mavuto omwe amayi okhala kumudzi amakumana nawo komanso imafotokoza za kufunikira kwawo pa chuma cha mabanja awo. Ndondomekoyi simakakamiza maiko kuchita chothekera chilichonse poonetsetsa kuti amayi akumudzi akukhala ndi ufulu wawo. Koma boma likufunika kuthetsa mchitidwe osala amayi akumudzi kuti nawonso adzitha kutengapo mbali ndi kupindula ndi chitukuko cha m'madera akumudzi ngati abambo.

### **Ndime ya Khumi ndi Chinayi: Amayi a Kumudzi**

- 14.1.1 Maiko adzaganizira mavuto enieni omwe amayi akumudzi amakumana nawo ndi mbali imene amayi amatengapo pa chuma chokweza mabanja awo kuphatikizapo ntchito yomwe amagwira yosalipidwa ndipo maiko adzaika njira zoyenera kuonetsetsa kuti zonse zoyenera za mu ndondomeko iyi zikutsatidwa
- 14.1.2 Maiko adzatsata njira zoyenera kuthetsa mchitidwe osankha kapena kusala amayi akumudzi poonetsetsa kuti palibe kusiyana pakati pa amayi ndi abambo komanso kuti amayi akutenga nawo mbali ndikupindula pa chitukuko chakumudzi ndikuti amayiwo adzikhala ndi ufulu wawo:
- a) potengapo mbali pakufotokozera ndi kukhazikitsa ndondomeko za chitukuko m'magawo onse;
  - b) akutha kufikira zipatala komanso kukhala ndi chidziwitso cha mfundo, uphungu ndi njira zakulera
  - c) kupindula paokha kuchokera ku ndondomeko zothandiza anthu ovutika
  - d) kukhala ndi mwayi ophunzitsidwa komanso kuphunzira, m'masukulu komanso m'malo ena, kuphatikizapo kudziwa kulemba ndi kuwerenga, komanso kupindula ndi maphunziro akumudzi ndi oyendayenda (monga a alangizi a ulimi), kuti achulutse chidziwitso chawo.
  - e) kukhala m'magulu odzithandiza okha ndi osungitsa ndi kubwereketsa ndalama kuti akhale ndi mwayi okweza chuma chawo kudzera mu ntchito yolembedwa kapena yodzilemba okha, Kutengapo mbali pazonse zochitika m'dera lawo.
  - f) kukhala ndi mwayo obwereka zipangizo za ulimi komanso ndalama, kutsatsa malonda awo, zida zoyenera komanso kuthandizidwa mosasiyana ndi abambo pankhani ya malo, ulimi komanso pankhani yopeza malo kwina osati kwawo.
- Kukhala ndi nyumba zabwino zotakasuka, magetsi, madzi, mayendedwe ndi kutumiza komanso kulandira mauthenga mosavuta.

## **Annex VI – The Understanding of Gender Equality**

One of the core questions of the GDI study contained in the data collection questionnaire was on the respondents' understanding of gender equality. Below are some of the views gathered from respondents in four of the eight districts studied. Through these responses one understands how gender equality is understood in Malawi. It is a social issue but also an economic issue whereby the woman is seen as a care taker while the man is the bread winner and this is how gender equality is verbalized. The definitions came from both male and female respondents.

### ***Nkhata Bay District***

- Everyone has to take part equally in development it inevitable that men and women have sometimes different roles to play
- Anyone can do any job and people understand this
- Men and women doing things together regardless of sex
- There is uniformity when people are working, segregation is not allowed.
- People think it brings unity in society
- Equal position between men and women
- Everyone is equal and there is no difference in the participation in development activities
- Assisting each other in every aspect of work
- Men and women working together but some work is gender specified
- Work done regardless of sex
- Equal treatment in every activity in the community
- Men and women complement each other
- Agreement between men and women
- Men and women working together
- Participation in development and leadership should be equal
- Women taking part in leadership positions
- If there are no differences in decision making
- Working together
- Equality in positions
- Doing similar jobs
- Men and women are different even in what they do

### ***Nkhotakota District***

- Men and women doing similar jobs
- Roles given to men and women by society
- Women having power equal to men

### ***Mangochi and Thyolo Districts***

Gender equality means;

- Men and women involving each other at decision making. A good number of men felt that sometimes it is not culturally possible.
- Men and women working together though sometimes the work is different, thus there is a stereo type that cooking and looking after children are roles for women while men ensure that the home is provided for. (social issues)
- To work together in development issues and to look after the home and the family together. (Economic and social issues)
- At times it was described as involving responsibilities as regards home based care (where women look after the sick). (social issue)
- The status quo is that men and women have different rights and responsibilities.
- In terms of responsibilities. (social issues)
- It is accepted that women should be supported by their husbands financially in executing these duties (economic issues)
- gender equality allows women to participate in politics and to become leaders and men to do domestic work'

Gender equality is verbalized as;

- Women are care givers, home makers, mothers', house keepers
- Women are house workers
- women are born to do house duties
- The main role for women is care giving. It is clear that respondents (who include women) view women as the glue that keeps families together. Most domestic work is done by women, and on the other hand most of the leaders are men<sup>10</sup>. This results in a social situation where men are given more respect than women and even in terms of political participation, the same principles are adopted.

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<sup>10</sup> Vendor, Mangochi