

## **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.