

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)