WOMEN IN POLITICS
IN MALAWI

Edited by Inge Amundsen and Happy Kayuni

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CHAPTER 1

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An Introduction

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In one of the earliest studies of women in politics in modern Malawi, there is a vivid description of how women are recruited to sing and dance at political rallies. In the words of Gilman (2001: 43),

> *A salient feature of all political and state functions in contemporary Malawi – rallies, national celebrations, the arrivals and departures of presidents at airports – is the presence of swarms of dancing women ideally clad in party fabric who elevate their party and its politicians to great heights through their songs of praise and gratitude.*

Now, the situation has changed, at least somewhat. Still, the political parties of the multi-party era call out to their female supporters to perform 'traditional dances' at their public functions, but the practice is receiving much criticism. At the same time, the general awareness of the deep gender disparities is much higher, the legal framework for women participation in politics is well developed, and even the informal rules regulating women representation at the grassroots level have improved. Malawi has also had Africa's second female president, Joyce Banda, serving for two years (2012-2014).

In spite of these changes, much of the traditional role of women still prevails in Malawi. She is the caretaker; her role is largely limited to the private domain, and much social and cultural prejudice against her participation in politics persists. In the general elections in 2014, women participation in politics in Malawi also saw a significant set-back. Not only did incumbent President Joyce Banda lose the elections and consequently the presidency, the number of female members of parliament was reduced by a quarter. Although there was a small increase of women in local councils (to a modest 13.4 per cent), the 2014 general elections were a noteworthy disappointment.

This book explores the recent developments in women participation in politics in Malawi. We examine the factors behind the slow but marked increase in women in political representation during the multiparty era, as well as the different explanations for the recent set-back. We also provide some ideas as to what can be done to improve women's representation in Malawi, in terms of their sheer numbers, in terms of popular attitudes to women politicians, and in terms of women's political influence.

It is our belief that a true democracy requires representation of both genders and that the current low levels of women representation in Malawi constitute a democratic deficit.

Women Political Participation 1964 to 1994

In order to understand women's low participation in politics from 1964 to 1994, it is important to grasp two major factors: the role of *Hastings Kamuzu Banda*, the country's first president, and role of the *Malawi Congress Party* (MCP), the ruling, and from 1966 to 1993, the only legal party in the country. Competitive political participation during the Banda regime was seriously curtailed, and the president-for-life dominated the political space. He provided the vision, direction, and pace of policies, especially in terms of defining core ideas, framing the issues, and defining measures of success. No political organ, parliament included, held any significant political clout in policy-making in the one-party era. Ministers were required to resign if they disagreed with the president on significant public policy issues, and the president himself held up to five cabinet portfolios.

As a one-party state, the MCP party structures provided some semblance of participation, principally in terms of mass mobilization in support of the regime's political agenda. One key instrument was the MCP annual convention, which was dubbed 'parliament number one'. The policy agenda was outlined in the opening speech of the president, who tripled as party leader, head of government, and head of state. His proposals were not critically debated; the delegates simply spent the week competing with each other on heaping praises on the country's leadership and endorsing the president's proposals. The parliament served a rubber-stamp role only. It was not engaged in any critical debate and its agenda was determined by the MCP annual convention.

There was also very little involvement of civil society. During the period, questioning government policies was treated as questioning the authority of the president. As a result, there was no place for lobbying and advocacy. Banda looked down upon civil society and regarded it as a competing power entity.

Women's role in politics was defined likewise, within the parameters of the party and the president. Although the government ratified several international conventions on the rights of women, and Banda constantly portrayed himself as the protector of women (he even took the title of '*Nkhoswe No. 1*', meaning family advocate or guardian (Chirambo 2009: 82), his interpretation of 'protecting women' was not very 'liberating'. He pursued a "politicized cultural populism" (ibid: 79) in which the role of women was limited to sustaining and uplifting his 'cultural populism', represented, for instance, through traditional dances at political rallies. He once stated that

> *Women were trampled down by everybody ... everybody. [...] Nobody thought about women except to make them cook for them. That's all [...]. So, I made up my mind even before I came that I was going to do something about my women. Therefore when I see my women happy and singing and dancing with their heads high, their necks bent with pride like that [...] it makes me happy, very happy* (Banda, cited in Verheijen 2013: 35).

Most of the women who *were* active in politics had gone through MCP's *Women's League*. Hirschmann (1985: 8) observed that "the League provides an important channel for women entering public affairs and some practical training to this end, and also that it has a determining influence on the selection of nominees". To ensure that the Women's League continued to provide political support, Banda "built houses for some of the most active women in the party, sponsored some of the women on educational trips abroad [...]. Thus he demonstrated and fulfilled in practical ways his role and responsibilities as *Nkhoswe*" (Chirambo 2009: 83).

Although Banda constantly tried to portray his image as the champion of women, the reality was that he never challenged the social-structural environment that impeded women's participation in politics. The first cabinet after independence in 1964 included *one* female, and women political participation at the national and local levels remained extremely low throughout his reign. For instance, between 1964 and 1996, only two women were appointed cabinet ministers and only three per cent of the parliamentarians were women (O'Neill et al. 2014: 16), and in 1984 only 12.3 per cent of the positions in the local councils were filled by women (Hirschmann 1985: 11).

Women in Politics in the Multi-Party Era

Malawi became a democracy in 1994 after 30 years of President Banda and his conservative MCP. The change came after domestic unrest and pressure from Malawian churches, NGOs, and the international community. The change came in parallel with a number of other countries in what Huntington (1991) called the "third wave" of democratisation in the early 1990s.

In June 1993, the people of Malawi voted in favour of multi-party democracy, and in May 1994, *Bakili Muluzi*, chairman of the *United Democratic Front* (UDF), was elected President of Malawi and sworn in shortly after. Since the advent of formal, electoral democracy, Malawi has held five multiparty elections, every five year, all of which have been deemed relatively free and fair. A new liberal democratic constitution that guarantees civil and political rights, based on international standards, was adopted in 1995. This also contained provisions that advance women's rights and gender equality, including proscribing discrimination in any form (see Chapter 3 by *Kanyongolo and Malunga* for details). The debate on gender equality was, however, almost non-existent as the UDF took over. Political activism was still in its nascent state, and the NGOs that emerged were mainly in the governance and development realm. Those few who focussed on gender equality were not very vibrant. Consequently, the gender equality debate was not strong in the public domain.

UDF and Muluzi won the elections again in 1999, and the situation with regard to the gender debate did not change significantly. It was, to a large extent, an issue on the periphery of politics; some of the more prominent gender NGOs (such as *Women's World Banking-Malawi Affiliate*, WWB, headed by former executive member of UDF Mary Nyandovi Kerr, and the *National Association for Business Women*, NABW, headed by Joyce Banda, who later joined politics), were mainly focusing on micro-finance. Gender activism, in whatever form, was largely frowned upon.

In the 2004 elections, the ruling UDF party, with Muluzi's successor *Bingu wa Mutharika* as its presidential candidate, reinforced its position. In terms of the gender debate and the debate on women representation in parliament, regional and international organisations and actors were still the main driving force. Through the SADC gender protocol, which Malawi had signed, the government had in fact set the target of a minimum of 30 per cent women representation in parliament in these elections, but with little effect.

Then, in a fall-out with the ruling UDF party during his first term, President Mutharika created a new party, the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP), which would challenge the UDF and split the votes in the populous south where the UDF had its main support. The new party and Mutharika won the 2009 elections, mostly because he and his party were able to win much of the south, but also because he made a small inroad into the centre and a larger inroad into the north.

In terms of gender politics, civil society women groups were better organized at this time, and the high profile '50-50 campaign' was launched prior to the 2009 elections in order to increase women participation in parliament. The campaign was coordinated by the NGO *Gender Coordination Network* (NGO/GCN), supported by the Ministry of Women, and largely financed by the international donors. Apart from lack of full support from political parties, some of the challenges that the 50-50 campaign faced included conflict amongst gender NGOs and short-termism in the campaign process (Kayuni 2016).

With this relatively successful campaign, women representation reached its heights in the parliamentary period of 2009-2014, with 22.3 per cent of the MPs being women. Furthermore, President Mutharika filled 23.8 per cent of the cabinet posts with women. However, in Mutharika's second term, after assuming majority control in 2009, the government became increasingly authoritarian and autocratic (Chirwa 2014: 4, Gabay 2014: 375). Among other political events, Joyce Banda, who was Mutharika's vice-president, fell out with the president and formed her own political party, the *People's Party* (PP), in 2011. Then, Mutharika died in 2012, and his vice-president Banda took over the presidency.

In the next (and latest elections) in 2014, Malawi witnessed a significant set-back in terms of women representation. Incumbent President Joyce Banda and her PP lost the elections, and the number of women MPs was significantly reduced (to 16.7 per cent). Although Banda and the PP largely took the Northern Region (with 56 per cent of the votes cast for Banda and the PP taking 42 per cent of the region's parliamentary seats), and even though the formation of the PP meant a split of the (former) ruling party DPP, the latter won the populous south and the presidency, with Mutharika's brother, *Peter Mutharika*, as the new president.

Part of the explanation for Banda's electoral defeat lies in the fact that patriarchy is arguably a dominant social paradigm in Malawi (Kayuni 2016), which negatively affects the progress towards gender equality. During Joyce Banda's vice-presidency, some prominent individuals within the party in government (DPP) also constantly and openly challenged her credentials. Many argued that the country was not ready to have a female president. She was subjected to daily doses of derision at public rallies and on Malawi's state airwaves (Kamwendo and Kamwendo 2014: 80, see also chapter 6 by *Lora-Kayambazinthu and Shame* in this volume).

Apart from all this, the role of women in political parties has not fully departed from the practices established during the Banda era; that of entertaining crowds during political rallies. In other words, the political parties, which constitute the main actor in ensuring women representation in parliament and local councils, have not been very supportive. Very few political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas in their constitutions, and almost all of them lack mechanisms to effectively implement gender equality in party structures or in party nominations.

All in all, despite the transition to democracy, which provided some hope for accelerated support for women in politics, there has been very slow progress with certain set-backs. However, despite low representation of women in politics in Malawi, the major notable achievement during the multi-party era has been a strengthened debate on the issue. There is more awareness, and possibly in the near future we can expect to witness some significant progress.

Conceptual Background

This book is motivated by the need to better understand what promotes and hinders women's participation in politics and its possible effects in different political arenas. It also aims to investigate the impact of three forms of representation, within three arenas where politics is played out, namely within the political parties, in the parliament/legislature, and within the executive branch/government. It analyses the trends and patterns of women's representation; it examines how female representation affects the policy process and outcomes; and it studies popular attitudes towards women in the public sphere.

Most of the chapters in this book adhere to normative theories of democracy, which have political equality as a core value. We believe women are equal citizens and should, therefore, participate in politics on equal terms with men. Thus, we raise a large number of questions about women participation and representation in politics; for instance, how democracy can be sustained and deliver on its virtues and expectations when the cultural, socio-economic and political context is not supportive of the very principle of gender equality.

Although Malawi's constitution recognises human rights, gender equality and the rights of women, and a national machinery has been established to promote women's rights, challenges remain in terms of implementation. The erratic process of democratisation in Malawi, as described above, exacerbates these challenges. The efforts to increase women's participation in political processes in Malawi should, thus, be seen in the context of institutional and political uncertainty.

Malawi has experienced some gains in women's political participation but has not fared as well as many other sub-Saharan African countries. There is a huge gender gap between women and men in the political, social, and economic spheres and, overall, the representation of women in key decision-making bodies remains low.

Malawi is among the countries that rank relatively low in women representation. Quite worrisome in this respect is the downturn in women representation in parliament as a consequence of the 2014 elections and the so-called 'Joyce Banda effect'; it dropped from 22.3 per cent in 2009 down to only

16.7 per cent in 2014. In fact, if the previous increase had continued unabated and on the same rate (i.e. 5.5 per cent increase per election, which was the average from 1994 to 2009, without the 2014 backlash), women representation in parliament would have reached *one third* in 2019 and a full *fifty-fifty balance* in 2034. Now, with the backlash, the prospects are far bleaker. Several of the following chapters are trying to explain this.

The number of women in cabinet has also been increasing albeit slightly since 1994, when Malawi adopted a democratic system of governance, until the recent downturn. For instance, the representation of women in cabinet in June 2008 was 20 per cent, whilst that of June 2009 saw 23.8 per cent, which meant that Malawi fared above average in the region with regards to female representation at the cabinet level. However, the current cabinet has a much lower number. In the cabinet reshuffle of August 2015, President Mutharika nominated only three women to his 20-member cabinet (one from each of Malawi's three regions), which is only 15 per cent.

In terms of local politics (Malawi adopted decentralisation in 1998), the representation of women has also been low. With the first local elections in 2000, women representation stood at 8.1 per cent, and with the elections in 2014, the number increased to 13.4 per cent. This is a significant increase, but still way below the SADC average of 24 per cent (see Chapter 7 by *Chiweza* for the details).

Most central questions in the scholarship on gender and politics involve where, why, and how women participate in politics and political institutions. A key facet is how women participate as representatives in various branches of politics. Several of the book chapters build on Hannah Pitkin's three concepts of representation. These are *descriptive* representation (which implies asking questions on women's access to political office and why they are underrepresented), *substantive* representation (which is about whether female politicians represent women as a group), and *symbolic* representation (which is how the presence or absence of women in politics impacts on voter perceptions and opinions).

Descriptive representation, which is the *numbers and trends* of representation (including the basic factors causing female underrepresentation), has received most scholarly attention. For instance, the global increase in the number of female parliamentarians and the factors behind this increase are well described. The case of Malawi presented in this book is an attempt to add to this scholarship.

The second form of representation, substantive representation, which is the *effect* of women's presence in established democracies, has received comparatively less scholarly attention. This pertains to the extent to which female members of parliament represent women's interests, including their policy priorities and legislative accomplishments (see for instance Childs and Krook 2009). We are also asking this question in the book.

Studies on symbolic representation, which is how the presence or absence of women in politics impacts on *voter perceptions* and *opinions*, are the least studied. Within this emerging field of study (see for instance Lombardo and Meier 2014), the focus is on how patriarchal attitudes and popular perceptions about women in politics are altered, over time, and this is a question we touch upon only briefly in the book.

A main theoretical assumption of the literature on women representation is that there is a link between descriptive and substantive representation, and that an increase in numerical female representation will generate an effect on policy processes and outcomes. It is assumed that female politicians will represent women as a group. Frequently, this is analysed by employing the conceptual lens of 'critical mass theory'. The nexus between substantive and symbolic representation is so far unclear in the literature, but it seems reasonable to assume that how women perform and what they accomplish in office will also impact on their symbolic representation, i.e. in terms of changing public attitudes towards women in politics, women's engagement in politics, and perceptions of legitimacy. Unfortunately, perceived negative performances will negatively affect peoples' perceptions of women politicians. This is a valid finding in this book (see *Chikapa*, chapter 5).

Substantive and symbolic representation are topics that remain poorly understood in the scholarly literature, a fact that justifies undertaking such research in Malawi. This country has experienced a gradual increase in women's participation in politics without the systematic use of quotas; and, as such, it has taken an unconventional approach to boost women's representation. Furthermore, Malawi is a good case for analysing what pro-women actors can accomplish within the confines of a less than fully-fledged democratic system, a system characterised by competitive but weak political parties and an exceedingly powerful executive.

In other words, in this book, there is a 3x3 approach to women participation in politics. Parts of the book focus on women's descriptive representation, with figures, facts, trends, and explanatory factors to (the low level of) women representation in various arenas. Other parts focus on women's substantive representation ('acting for') and the extent to which and under what conditions the women representatives have accomplished what might be called 'women-friendly policies'. Other parts of the book focus on women's symbolic representation, their 'role modelling', for good and for bad. In addition, these forms of representation are addressed with the three political arenas in mind – the political parties, the parliament, and the government/state administration.

Finally, factors external to these three arenas, with an influence on women representation, are not forgotten. Factors such as the legal framework, international legislation and norms, regional and continental government and non-government organisations, and pressure from civil society (women's organisations in particular), is highlighted throughout. In Malawi, like in most aid-dependent countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the donors and international influence are especially important. Therefore, we have for instance addressed the question of how the new international norms are encouraging actors to lobby for the adoption of gendered policies.

The Chapters

In Chapter two, *The 50-50 Balance: Myth or Reality?*, Lewis B. Dzimbiri outlines the trends in women representation in parliament since Malawi attained formal, electoral democracy in 1994. He notes that the numerical representation of women has seen a noticeable increase, from 5.2 per cent in 1994 to 16.7 in 2014. What is noteworthy, however, is that the percentage of women parliamentarians *decreased* with the 2014 elections, from a peak of 22.3 per cent in 2009. Dzimbiri also disaggregates the figures

on region and committees, demonstrating that the Southern Region has always elected more women MPs, in relative terms, than the Centre and the North. He further notes that the women share in parliamentary committees is lower than the overall share of women MPs and that women serve on less important committees. (For a brake-down on women MPs per party, in the current parliament, see Chapter 11 by *Mesikano-Malonda*). Finally, Dzimbiri argues that these low figures do not make women representatives constitute a 'critical mass' that can substantially change politics in Malawi.

The third chapter, *Legal Empowerment: Laws Promoting Women Participation in Politics* by Ngeyi Ruth Kanyongolo and Bernadette Malunga, makes it clear that the legal framework regulating women participation in politics is well developed and up to international standards. Despite this 'enabling' legal environment, the authors argue that the laws and policies have failed to incorporate equality and non-discrimination principles in a consistent way. They also point to one specific legal weakness: the law on political parties does *not* provide for gender parity (or any minimum number of female members or candidates) as a condition for party registration.

The fourth chapter, *The Women's Parliamentary Caucus: Promoting Cross-Party Substantive Representation* by Asiyati Lorraine Chiweza, Vibeke Wang, and Ann Maganga, explores the role of the Malawian cross-party parliamentary women's caucus and its role in advancing women's substantive representation. They argue that the caucus has indeed been able to advance women-friendly policies and advance pro-women legislation, but its effectiveness has varied from one parliamentary period to the other. During the formative years, the caucus emerged as a notable collective actor, but, in subsequent periods, it has been constrained by "party politics, intraparty leadership wrangles, and a shift in the interests of the caucus members towards re-election and retention of their parliamentary seats." The authors conclude that an increase in the number of female representatives in parliament does not necessarily translate into women-friendly policies.

In Chapter five, *The 'Joyce Banda Effect': Explaining the Discrepancy between Public Opinion and Voting Behaviour*, Tiyesere Mercy Chikapa explores the puzzle regarding the decline in women's representation in Malawi's parliament in the 2014 elections, despite the fact that people's attitudes towards women politicians did not deteriorate much, according to various opinion polls. Although one explanation to this might be the so-called 'social desirability bias', that is, the fact that respondents to opinion surveys tend to provide answers they believe the interviewer wants or is socially acceptable, Chikapa argues for circumstantial factors such as the 'Joyce Banda effect' and the 'cashgate' scandal as being behind the decline.

In Chapter six, *A Different Yardstick: Gender and Leadership in the Political Discourse* by Edrinnie Lora-Kayambazinthu and Edith Kalilombe Shame, the impact of Joyce Banda's womanhood is highlighted. Using, as a prime example, a widely circulated political campaign video, which portrayed Banda in exceedingly archaic, patriarchal and prejudicial terms, they argue that women are indeed judged according to a 'different yardstick'. They also demonstrate that the use of symbols and metaphors in which Banda was portrayed as a hyena, as a snake in the grass, as a cow (that cannot pull a cart), and as rubbish to be 'swept out' all point to the fact that Banda and her failure was measured along gender lines.

Chapter seven, *Local Government Councils. A Potential Arena for Women's Substantive Representation* by Asiyati Lorraine Chiweza, looks at women representation at the local level, in the local councils. Chiweza examines what motivated women to stand for the 2014 local elections, and finds that the development needs of their home areas are a major concern, such as lack of portable water and income generating activities for women. Also early marriages of girls and other women interests' are important motivating factors for women to enter politics. However, when elected, their representation in service committees is low and they rarely reach beyond the role of vice-chairpersons of the councils; they are inexperienced and struggle to cope with the demands of political office.

In Chapter eight, *The Gatekeepers. Woman Political Participation in Phalombe and Chiradzulu Districts*, Happy Kayuni examines what makes women volunteer for political positions at the local level, with a focus on women standing for local elections and women seeking positions within the local and district party structures. He notes that some of the important factors that drive women to aspire for political office include support from spouses and traditional and religious leaders, plus exposure to development projects, NGOs, and local government institutions. Women also face a number of inhibitive factors, however, such as the competitiveness and corruption associated with politics. Kayuni argues that the 'gatekeepers' within the parties (people with power within a party, usually party chairpersons and secretaries) determine, for the most part, women's entry into politics. They can promote but also hinder women candidature.

Chapter nine, *Women in Political Parties: The Politics of Participation* by Kondwani Farai Chikadza, also looks at women in political parties. Chikadza argues that party politics is a masculine domain. However, activism and personalities have been challenging the established rules of the game (both the formal and the informal). For instance, at the local level of the party structures (branch and district committees), there is a full balance between men and women (and youth) within most political parties. Chikadza finds there are formal rules that ensure equal representation at the lower levels, and informal rules that ensure male domination at the higher levels of the parties. Women representation at the lower level is mainly 'symbolic', and it will therefore take more than changes to the party organisations to change the status quo.

In Chapter ten, *The Gender Machinery: Opportunities and Challenges for Women in Central Government*, Michael Chasukwa outlines the many structures and institutions that have been established in order to promote women participation, at the national level in particular. This 'gender machinery', which includes a 'Ministry of Gender', can paradoxically, as Chasukwa argues, "risk institutionalizing and deepening" the gender gap. He argues that the fact that the structures of the national gender machinery are *always* headed by a female minister, and that the ministry is constantly underfunded and to a large extend donor-driven, can make gender issues "for women only" and make the efforts cosmetic and symbolic only.

Finally, Charlotte Wezi Mesikano-Malonda makes a strong case for the introduction of quotas for women, in her chapter *Gender Quotas: A Possible Way to Include Women in Politics*. Her main argument is that women political representation in Malawi is so low, and even on a downward trend, that voluntary quotas (a minimum of women on the parties' candidate lists) will not suffice. What is needed is to reserve seats for women in parliament and local councils, and to put in place legal requirements

for political parties to nominate a minimum number of women on their ballots. She concludes that gender quotas must form part of the electoral law, and that there must be a minimum threshold established in the constitution, to enable women to obtain real representation in politics.

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CHAPTER 2

The 50-50 Balance
Myth or Reality?

LEWIS B. DZIMBIRI

The Constitution of Malawi provides generous basic human rights, including gender equality. The Gender Equality Act of 2013 demonstrates the commitment of the Malawi Government towards gender balance. Malawi has been part of the regional and international agenda aimed at raising the status of women in politics, administration, and other spheres of life.

This chapter analyses the situation of women in the Parliament of Malawi. The aim is to determine the extent to which the 'war' against gender imbalance, which various actors including government, NGOs and women groups have campaigned for over the years, is making inroads to achieve the ideal of a 50-50 gender balance. Since the dawn of multiparty democracy in Malawi, the number of women elected to the parliament has continued to rise steadily, although there was a setback in the 2014 elections. The increase has been attributed to the concerted efforts of various actors at the national and regional level.

The presence of both male and female parliamentarians is vital in a democratic and inclusive polity. A number of writers argue that female representatives often hold different perspectives on women's issues (Reingold 1996) and that they are more likely to prioritize women's rights (Carroll 2001, Thomas 1994) and to view themselves as champions of women (Diaz 2005).

The main objective of this chapter is to analyse the trends in women's representation in the Parliament of Malawi over the period 1994-2014. This is done through an analysis of the relative number of female MPs in the parliament since Malawi first conducted multiparty general elections in 1994, combined with an analysis of the gender distribution of seats in the statutory and departmental committees of the parliament. We have relied on official documents such as the *Hansard*, standing orders, and various committee reports to unearth women representation over the period of two decades. The data focusses on trends in numerical representation of women in parliament over time, and is disaggregated in terms of districts and regions in order to view the gender balance question from various perspectives.

The Gender Question and Critical Mass Theory

Although women make up slightly over 50 per cent of the world population, it is widely accepted that they receive only a small proportion of the world's opportunities and benefits (SADC 2004, Davison and Cooper 1981). According to the *Human Development Report* (UNDP 1993), there is no country in the world in which women's quality of life is equal to that of men in terms of longevity, health status, education opportunities, employment, income, and political rights. For instance, a study by Dzimbiri (2007) on the gender dimension of the University of Botswana's management (the deans, heads of departments, managers, etc.) found that the higher the level of decision-making, the fewer the female managers.

Political scientists have long been interested in the number of women in national legislatures, because of the fact that although women make up slightly more than 50 per cent of the world's population, they occupy on average 16 per cent of the world's elected political posts (Osei-Hwedie 2007). For instance, Dzimbiri and Molefhe's (2007) assessment of women in decision-making positions in Botswana noted that there were fewer women in all political positions such as ministers, parliamentarians and councillors than was the case in management and administrative positions which depend on academic qualifications for appointment.

Gender equality advocates argue that the relationship between women's presence in office and policy outputs that benefit women is attributed to the role played by female MPs. Female representatives are especially likely to serve on committees that address social policies related to traditional women's interests (Baekgaard and Kjaer 2012, Thomas 1994). They participate more extensively in debates involving women and families (Celis 2006) and are more likely to introduce and co-sponsor legislation that pertains to women (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008, Swers 2002).

Increasing the number of women in parliament is often justified on the basis that women have a different approach to or 'style' of politics; that their election to parliament in greater numbers will change the nature of parliament itself, and that their influence will be seen in changed policy priorities and legislation. These views are supported by the *critical mass theory*, which argues that substantive changes in political decisions depend on whether women in a legislature have reached a 'critical mass'.

According to Childs and Krook (2009) the critical mass theory is used to explain why women do not always appear to represent women once they are in political office. They argue that women are not likely to have a major impact on legislative outcomes until they grow from a few 'token individuals' into a considerable minority. Only when their numbers reach a certain threshold will women be able to work effectively together to promote women-friendly policies and to influence their male colleagues to accept and approve legislation that promotes women's concerns. A substantial increase in the number of women in political legislatures is expected to strengthen women's unity and political advocacy, leading to changes in policy content. This is also supposed to have a symbolic effect, encouraging more women to come forward as candidates and favouring the building of alliances between grassroots women and women in political institutions (ibid).

According to Bauer (2012), scholars have identified legislative gains in areas related to family law, gender-based violence and land; changes to institutional cultures, and even increases in women's presence in executive positions, as some of the impact of female MPs' increased representation. Further, observers have chronicled effects such as changes in attitudes towards women's leadership and towards women's participation in politics, women's own increased engagement in politics, and women's empowerment in terms of their ability to speak up and voice their concerns.

To examine the impact of increased numbers of women in parliament, studies have focussed on changes in legislative behaviours and environment such as changes in parliamentary atmosphere, debates, policy priorities, voting and policy outcomes. Female MPs are more willing to pursue policy preferences based on gender. The number of enactments of gender sensitive laws has increased as the percentage of women in the legislature has increased. Women even reach out to their male colleagues to get them on board on major gender issues, and male MPs tend to pay more attention to issues affecting women when there are more women in parliament (Childs and Krook 2009: 132). The parliamentary tone changes; it becomes more collegial for women, and the relationship between male and female MPs improves (Devlin and Elgie 2008: 244-6). Voters' perception toward women in public roles has also been noted to improve if there are more women in politics, and with their increased influence women politicians tend to recruit more women into politics (ibid). The presence of more women in politics, in turn, inspires other women to run for elective office (Sawer 2000).

However, as Yoon (2011) notes, the assumption of the critical mass theory still raises pertinent questions, such as whether it is fair to expect that female MPs are representatives of women, given that their electorates also include men. Furthermore, even if we expect that female MPs represent women, there is no agreement on the threshold percentage, the size of the group that becomes a tipping point and translates the numbers (the descriptive representation) into women-friendly policies (substantive representation). Bystydzienski (1995) for example, proposes 15-30 per cent; Dahlerup (1988) about 30; and SADC and the Beijing Platform for Action suggests 50 and 30 per cent, respectively.

The threshold percentage may actually vary across parliamentary functions; some bills may need higher threshold percentages than others to pass. Thus, we need to ask if women need to reach a critical mass in parliament to make a difference. Is a small minority truly powerless?

According to Yoon and Bunwaree (2008), female MPs can make a difference for women even when they are a small minority, provided they are determined to act for women and if circumstances permit. In other cases, the presence of women has not led to any substantial changes. For instance, in spite of women's sizable presence in Afghanistan's *Wolesi Jirga*, the representation of women's gender interests remains minimal. Dahlerup (1988) notes that female politicians are caught between two conflicting expectations. One is to prove that they are just like male politicians and that they will make a difference when elected. The other is to be seen to represent 'women's interests' (or perhaps 'feminist interests'). Furthermore, their impact on 'women issues' is further complicated as women are by no means a coherent group; every female legislator is different from the other in terms of education, ideology, world-view, and other factors.

Representation of Women in the Parliament

This section presents trends in female MPs in the Parliament of Malawi during the period 1994- 2014. As can be noted from Figure 1 below, the numerical representation of women noticeably increased from 1994, when Malawi became a multi-party democracy, and up to the latest elections in 2014.

Figure 1: Female Parliamentarians in Malawi, 1994-2014
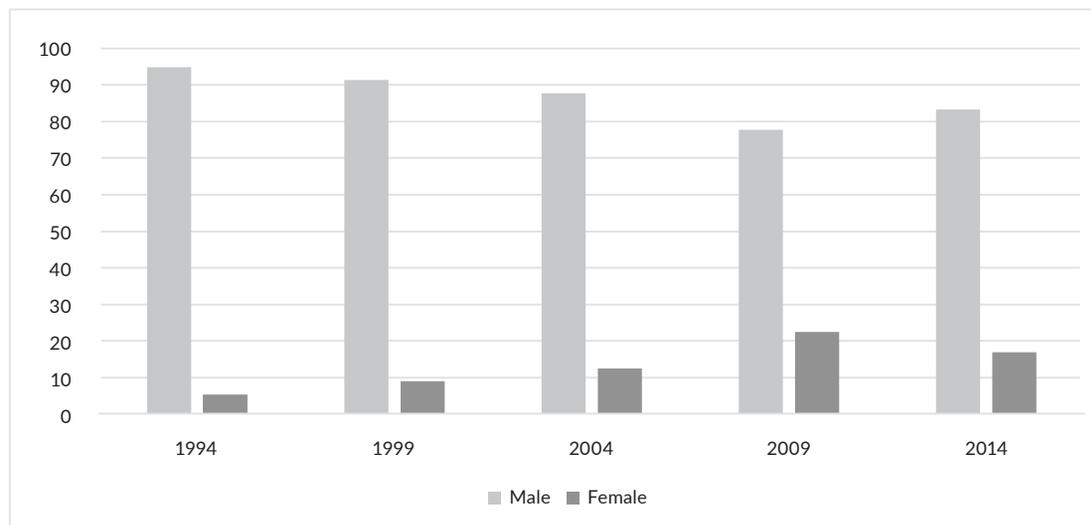
Figure 1 demonstrates that the number of female MPs has progressively increased from 5.2 per cent in 1994 to a peak of 22.3 per cent in 2009; an increase of 17.1 percentage points in 15 years, before declining to 16.7 per cent in 2014. Looking at the trend, it is clear, however, that there has never been a parliament with a female representation close to 30 per cent threshold, let alone SADC's 50 per cent target.

Female Parliamentarians in Malawi's Regions

Only ten female candidates were successful in the first multiparty parliamentary elections in 1994. Out of the (then) ten districts in the Southern Region of Malawi, only four districts (Mangochi, Machinga, Blantyre City and Mulanje) had female MPs. Mangochi district had two women. The other six (Nsanje, Chikwawa, Mwanza, Zomba, Thyolo and Chiradzulu) had no female Member of Parliament. Out of the nine districts of the Central Region, Dedza and Kasungu had two female MPs each. The other nine districts (Ntcheu, Lilongwe, Dowa, Mchinji, Salima, Ntchisi, and Nkhotakota) had none. In the Northern Region, there was only one district, Nkhata Bay, with a female MP. The other four (Mzimba, Rumphi, Karonga and Chitipa) had none.

Thus, only seven out of twenty-six districts had female MPs during the 1994-1999 parliamentary period. There was one female MP in the Northern Region, four in the Central Region and five in the Southern Region. The implication of this is that the interests of women were not represented adequately during that period.

In the second multiparty general elections of 1999, the number of female MPs increased by seven, resulting in seventeen female MPs for the 1999-2004 parliament. In the Southern Region, five districts (Zomba, Mulanje, Machinga, Mangochi and Thyolo) had female MPs and none in the rest (Nsanje, Chikwawa, Chiradzulu, Mwanza, Balaka, Blantyre and Phalombe). It is notable that Mulanje alone had five female MPs, followed by Zomba with two. In the Central Region, five districts had female MPs (Lilongwe, Dedza, Ntcheu, Dowa and Mchinji), with Lilongwe leading with two. The rest of the region (Ntchisi, Salima, Nkhotakota, and Kasungu) did not have any female MP. Like in the 1994-1999 period, the Northern Region had one female MP in Mzimba, the other four districts were without. The potential to miss out on female voice in many parliamentary subcommittees as well as plenary sessions was very high given these figures.

In the third multiparty elections in 2004, the number of female MPs increased by an additional five from the previous term, to twenty-four. During the 2004-2009 period, ten districts in the Southern Region had female MPs (just like in the previous term) with Mulanje leading with five MPs; Zomba, Thyolo, Blantyre and Mangochi with two each. Three districts (Nsanje, Phalombe and Chikwawa) had one each, and the rest (Machinga, Balaka, Neno, Mwanza and Chiradzulu) had none. On the other hand, only four districts in the Central Region had female MPs (Dedza, Ntcheu, Lilongwe and Nkhotakota), with Lilongwe and Ntcheu leading by two each. Mchinji, Dowa, Kasungu, Ntchisi and Salima did not have any female MPs. For the Northern Region, Mzimba, with two female MPs, was exceptional. The rest (Chitipa, Karonga, Rumphi and Nkhata Bay) did not have any female MPs.

Thus, at the regional level, there were two female MPs in the Northern Region, four in the Central Region and eighteen in the Southern Region during 2004-2009 parliamentary period. Being the third general election, one would have expected more female representation in the northern and central regions. This trend reflects such a slow increase that is still denies opportunities for women in Parliament.

With the fourth multiparty elections in 2009, the parliamentary period of 2009-2014 witnessed a far greater number of female MPs, with an increase of nineteen female MPs, from twenty-four to forty-three. Of these, the Southern Region had twenty-two (a rather high increase of almost 50 per cent), with Zomba scooping four, Chiradzulu and Blantyre with three each; Balaka, Neno, Nsanje and Thyolo taking two each, and Chikwawa, Balaka, Phalombe and Mulanje scooping one each. This left only Mwanza and Mangochi in the south without any female representation. It is interesting to note that Mulanje, which dominated with five female MPs in the previous parliament, had only one female MP during this period.

On the other hand, the Central Region had fourteen female MPs (more than a 100 per cent increase), with Lilongwe leading with five; Mchinji, Dowa, and Kasungu had two each, and Nkhotakota, Ntcheu and Salima had one each. The Northern Region had seven female MPs (almost a three-fold increase),

with Nkhata Bay and Karonga with two, and Likoma, Chitipa and Mzimba with one each. Apart from Rumphi in the north, Ntchisi and Dedza in the Central Region and Mwanza and Mangochi in the south, all districts in Malawi now had female MPs in at least one of their constituencies.

In summary, the Northern Region experienced the greatest increase in female MPs to seven, followed by the Central Region with fourteen and the Southern Region with twenty-four. Although this movement was encouraging, it was still far away from the regional SADC target.

With the fifth multiparty election in 2014, there was a significant set-back in terms of women representation in parliament. There was a drop from forty-three to thirty-three (a drop by ten in absolute numbers). The Southern Region got sixteen women, with Mulanje topping high with three and Blantyre, Phalombe and Mangochi getting two each. Apart from Zomba, Thyolo, Nsanje, Neno, Machinga and Balaka which got one female MP each, Chiradzulu, Mwanza and Chikwawa did not vote in any female MPs. This was a big drop, from twenty-one down to sixteen.

On the other hand, the Central Region experienced a drop from fourteen to eleven female MPs (a drop of three). Kasungu, Lilongwe and Nkhotakota got two female MPs each, while Mchinji, Ntchisi, Dowa, Salima and Dedza each got one. Ntcheu was the only Central Region district that did not get any female MP in this election. The Northern Region also experienced a drop, from seven in the former period to six; a drop of one MP. Mzimba led by three MPs, followed by Nkhata Bay with two and Rumphi with one MP. Chitipa, Karonga and Likoma did not get any female MPs. Overall, seven districts, three in the Southern, one in the Central, and three in the Northern Region did not get any female MP in the fifth multiparty election.

Figure 2: Female Parliamentarians per Region, 1994-2014
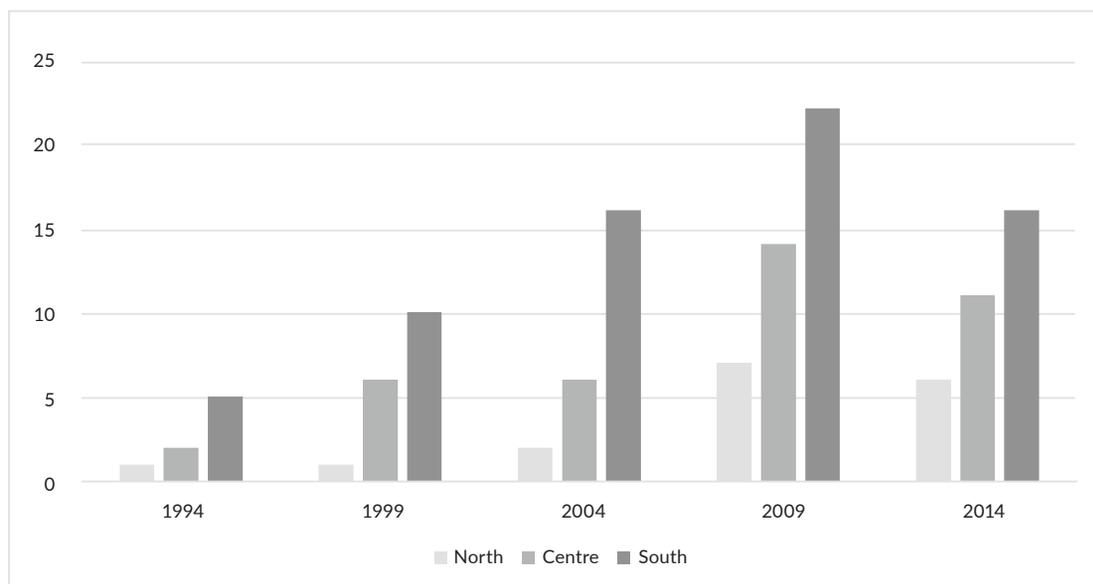
Figure 2, which shows the absolute distribution of women, demonstrates that the number of female MPs has progressively increased from ten in 1994, to seventeen in 1999, twenty-four in 2004, forty-three in 2009, and then dropped to thirty-tree in 2014. The figures also demonstrate that the Southern Region has had the relatively highest women representation throughout the entire period, and the Northern Region the lowest, with the Central Region in the middle. In other words, women are most under-represented in the Northern Region, followed by the Central and Southern Regions (with 6, 11 and 16 per cent women representation, respectively, in the current parliament).

Over the first four elections, the Northern and Central Region nevertheless had the biggest relative increase, from one to seven and from two to fourteen women MPs, respectively (a seven-fold increase in both regions, but from a very low initial level). The Southern Region increased women representation from five to twenty-two (a little more than a four-fold increase).

The 2014 elections, however, reduced the number of female MPs to thirty-three. Overall, this was a total national decline of 23 per cent, with a regional decline of 27 per cent, 21 per cent, and 14 per cent for the Southern, Central and Northern Region, respectively, after making some gains over the previous elections. In other words, in terms of the 2014 backlash, the Southern Region had the biggest relative drop, followed by the Central Region and the Northern Region.

Gender Distribution in Parliamentary Committees

A parliament functions through a series of committees in various areas of important public services. These include agriculture, health, education, trade and industry, defence and security, among other areas. MPs are allocated to various committees to transact business on behalf of the entire parliament. Because policies and recommendations proposed for presentation to the main house are made in these committees, they are also an important area where female representation is crucial.

Table 1: Female Parliamentarians per Committee, 1994-2014

Name of commitee	Total	Women	Per cent female	Total	Women	Per cent female	Total	Women	Per cent female	Total	Women	Per cent female
Parliamentary period	*1994-1999*			*1999-2004*			*2004-2009*			*2009-2014*		
Agriculture (Livestock, Natural Resources)	12	0	0	11	0	0	20	0	0	22	3	14
Budget and Finance	12	1	8	11	0	0	17	2	12	22	4	18
Commerce, Industry and Tourism	11	0	0	12	1	8	20	2	10	21	3	14
Defence and Security	13	0	0	12	0	0	16	0	0	20	5	25
Education, Science and Technology/HR	12	1	8	9	1	11	18	2	11	21	7	33
Health and Population	11	0	0	11	2	18	21	2	10	21	5	24
HIV/AIDS (and Nutrition)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	20	3	15	21	4	19
International Relations	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	17	0	0	17	5	29
Legal Affairs	15	1	7	11	0	0	19	2	11	22	4	18
(Mass) Media and Communication	13	1	8	8	3	38	21	2	10	17	1	6
Public Accounts (PAC)	13	2	15	12	1	8	18	3	17	22	2	9
Public Appointments and Decl. of Assets	12	1	8	12	1	8	23	3	13	22	4	18
Social and Community Affairs	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	20	4	20	18	6	33
Women and Children Affairs	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	12	7	58	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Public Works and Supplies/Transport	13	2	15	13	2	15	17	1	6	18	2	11
Subsidiary Legislation	13	1	8	12	0	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Environmental Affairs	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	12	2	17	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Public Asset Declaration	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	10	0	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	**150**	**10**	**6,7**	**168**	**20**	**11,9**	**267**	**26**	**9,7**	**284**	**55**	**19,4**

Table 1 shows that although the number of women in committees has been increasing progressively from 1994 to 2014, the *percentage share* of seats for women declined slightly with the parliament of 2004-2009. The share, however, bounced back to almost 20 per cent in the 2009-2014 parliament. (Data for the 2014-2019 parliament is not available).

An analysis of female MPs' representation in these committees is very revealing. From the 1994 general elections, the number of female parliamentarians in various committees was small. Out of the 13 committees with 150 seats, female MPs occupied only 10 seats, representing approximately 7 per cent of the committee seats. This is not strange given the small number of women elected to Parliament during that period. For the 1999-2004 parliamentary period, out of the 15 committees and 168 seats available, only 20 went to female MPs. This represented approximately 12 per cent. Although this trend was 5 per cent higher than in the previous parliament, the absolute numbers remained small. It is also noteworthy that in 6 of the 15 committees, there was no single woman at all.

In the 2004-2009 parliament, there were 26 female MPs in the 14 committees with a total of 267 seats. This represented almost a 10 per cent share for women. It was also clear that the number of female MPs was lower than in the previous parliamentary session. Out of the 284 seats in the 14 committees of the Parliament of Malawi in the 2009-2014 session, female MPs occupied 55 seats, representing 19 per cent. While this was an increase from the previous parliamentary session, the number was lower than the relative number of women in the parliament, which is currently at 16.7 per cent. In fact, this women under-representation in committees, relative to the total number of women in parliament, was a noteworthy trend in both the 2004-2009 and 2009-2014 parliaments.

Conclusion

What is evident from the figures is that the progression of women representation in the Parliament of Malawi over the past two decades of the country's multiparty democracy has been far too slow, considering the 50-50 target campaign that Malawi has waged over the past years.

Throughout the country's five general elections, all but one district (Mwanza) have elected a female MP for one or more periods, but several districts are still characterised by a dismal absence of female MPs. The Northern Region is the most women under-represented, followed by the Central Region and the Southern Region. A large number of districts lack women who can introduce, lobby, monitor and report for district-specific issues (and gender-specific issues) in parliament.

A low representation of women in various parliamentary committees has also been noted. As an important oversight role is performed through committee deliberations on education, agriculture, industry and commerce, finance and budget, etc., the low representation of women is a big drawback to women issues. Unless drastic policy changes on electoral policy are made, the 50-50 gender balance shall remain more of a myth than reality.

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CHAPTER 3

Legal Empowerment
Laws Promoting Women Participation in Politics

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In recent years, women have struggled to enter the political arena in Malawi, as they have often been faced with discrimination in their attempts. This was made very clear in the 2014 elections, when relatively fewer women managed to gain political positions. Yet, democratic governance requires that the interests of all population groups are represented, including women: a male-dominated political system is not a reflection of democratic principles (Bowman 2003: 582). There is a democratic deficit in Malawi that must be rectified.

Many factors have been pointed out as influencing the low numbers of women in politics. These factors range from social and economic to legal factors. Inadequate laws can be one of the main causes of the low level of women participation in politics, and the basic argument of this chapter is that the current electoral laws in Malawi have not legally empowered women in the area of politics. This claim is mainly based on the fact that equality and non-discrimination principles have not been consistently applied in the electoral laws.

Women need to be legally empowered to achieve meaningful political participation. Legal empowerment refers to the use of the law as a tool to empower the poor and marginalized. It is a process of systematic change through which the poor and excluded are enabled to use the law, the legal system, and legal services to protect and advance their rights and interests (Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor 2008: 2). The contribution played by the law in the conduct of elections is universally recognized. It is the law that defines the franchise, prescribes qualification and eligibility criteria of candidates, establishes and governs the election management body, and regulates the various stages of the electoral process, including the nomination of candidates, registration of voters, polling, counting of votes, the determination of results, and the management of disputes. It is therefore essential to evaluate the law as it creates the foundation for citizen participation (including women participation) in politics. This chapter will discuss the role of law in regulating the electoral process from a gender perspective.

Legal Principles of Gender-Equal Politics

There is no definitive list of norms or conditions for the conduct of democratic and gender-equal elections. A few guiding principles, however, seem to be indispensable for securing equality and non-discrimination, while other principles are important in guiding various forms of affirmative action.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Article 7 of the UN *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men in politics. CEDAW warrants women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for election and to hold public office at all levels of government. The state parties under this UN convention agree to take all appropriate measures to overcome historical discrimination against women and all obstacles to women's participation in decision-making processes (Article 8), including legislation and temporary special measures (Article 4).

The *Constitution of the Republic of Malawi* (1994) further prohibits discrimination in any form, and guarantees, in Section 20, the equal and effective protection of all persons against discrimination on different grounds, including gender. Section 13 of the Constitution also establishes the principle that the state should promote the welfare and development of all people of Malawi by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality and the full participation of women in all spheres of Malawian society.

Although equality and non-discrimination are the basic principles for enhancing female participation, these principles have not been consistently incorporated into the electoral laws, policies, regulations and guidelines. For example, most party constitutions reflect recognition of formal equality by indicating that the party will be "guided by" or is "founded on" principles of equality. However, most of these principles are stated in broad and general terms and are not gender specific. Only a few of the party constitutions include specific non-discrimination clauses against women in party membership or in access to the party (Kanyongolo 2009: 2).

In order for Malawi to achieve full *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality, discriminatory laws will have to be dealt with. For instance, the existence of multiple legal systems, and, in particular, the customary and religious laws that govern personal status and private life and sometimes prevail over positive law and even constitutional provisions, remains a source of great concern (Hellum and Aasen 2013: 2).

The legal provisions need also to go beyond formal and substantive equality to *transformative* equality. Transformative equality obliges the state not only to deal with direct discrimination, but also to combat systemic or structural gender discrimination (Holtmaat 2013: 95). This calls for a broad definition of non-discrimination as opposed to a formal legal approach in which a symmetrical gender equality or equal treatment norm prevails. Malawi's laws (as will be explored in the discussion that follows) display, for the most part, a formal, legal approach to equality. Thus, Malawi's policies, regulations, and guidelines need to explicitly recognize the disadvantaged position of women and award protection

to women exclusively. As such, electoral statutes such as the *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Act* (PPEA), the *Local Government Elections Act* (LGEA), the *Electoral Commission Act* (ECA), and all electoral regulations and guidelines, including the constitutions of the political parties, need to embrace a broad definition of equality and non-discrimination that goes beyond formal equality provisions.

Affirmative Action

Article 9 on the Rights of Women of the Protocol to the *African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights* (the so-called *Maputo Protocol*) establishes that women have a right to take part in the political process and decision-making on equal terms with men, and provides that states should take positive actions to promote participation of women in politics. In the same spirit, the SADC Protocol on *Gender and Development* commits the heads of state and government to, *inter alia*, ensure the equal representation of women and men in political decision-making, to enshrine gender equity and equality in their constitutions, and to ensure these rights are not compromised by any provisions in laws or practices. The protocol also recommends that state parties should endeavour that, by 2015, at least *50 per cent* of decision making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women.

Affirmative action is crucial for meaningful political participation of women. This is so because it provides space for increasing the representation of women in politics. In other countries, such as Uganda and South Africa, a variety of affirmative action measures are in place (like reserved seats for women and the requirement of a certain percentage of female candidates on party lists). In such countries, the representation of women in politics has increased (Bowman 2013: 606-609). The Constitution of Malawi, under Section 20 (2) and Section 24 (2), provides that legislation may be passed that addresses inequalities in society, including gender inequalities. It may be argued that these provisions introduce an aspect of affirmative action, but they need to be translated into an enabling statute to give guidance on how such affirmative action can be accomplished in practice. It is also worth noting that the *Gender Equality Act* (2013) has legislated for quotas in almost every crucial area of society, but surprisingly it has not provided anything in terms of elections, neither local nor parliamentary elections. It is therefore essential that the constitution and other relevant statutes should be reviewed to provide clear provisions on affirmative action on election matters.

Furthermore, there is a lack of affirmative action provisions in the political party constitutions. Few of these provide for specific special measures to deal with existing gender inequalities in terms of women's participation in decision making, for example, or by adopting quotas in favour of women (Kanyongolo 2009: 7). Although such affirmative action provisions are important for translating recognition of equality principles into practice, it can be noted that most party constitutions only create *women's wings* (which make women visible at the lower levels of party structures) and provide for women as directors of *women affairs*.

Gender Aspects of the Electoral Process

Particular laws, policies, regulations and procedures govern the electoral process. The provisions of these laws and regulations allow (in some cases) and hinder (in other cases) a meaningful participation of women in politics. We have selected five aspects of the electoral process, and we discuss them in the following sections, with a gendered legal perspective in mind.

Political Party Registration

Internal party democracy cannot be attained in a situation where only a few members of a particular gender (women) are part of the decision-making process, especially the critical decision-making processes. Although women play a big role in politics, they are mostly excluded from the party meetings where major decisions are made because they are poorly represented in the party leadership.

The *Political Parties (Registration and Regulations) Act* (1993) is among the legislation which could enable women to participate in a more meaningful way within the political parties. This act provides the legal framework for the registration and deregistration of political parties. It obliges political parties to be registered by the Registrar of Political Parties in the Registrar General's Office (who can also deregister parties). Any organization may be registered as a political party upon application, in writing, with more than 100 registered members (Section 5 (1)), and signed by the office bearers of the party (Section 5 (2)). The application is to be accompanied by the constitution, rules and manifesto of the party (duly certified by the party leader), the particulars of the registered office of the party, a list giving the names and addresses of the leader and other office bearers of the party, the names and addresses of no less than 100 registered members of the party, and any other information or document as the registrar may require. The registrar may refuse registration of a party if the application is not in conformity with the act, or if the party's objective is unlawful (Section 7).

The act does not, however, provide for gender parity as a condition. It does not set any minimum number of female members, for example, as a condition for the registration of a political party. It is even possible for a party to be registered with a leadership and membership that is all male, and even when its objectives or purposes are intended to promote gender discrimination. It should be noted that a party may be refused registration only if it discriminates on racial, colour, ethnic or religious grounds. (A gender-discriminatory purpose may, however, be challenged as unconstitutional).

It is important to make gender equality and non-discrimination principles a pre-condition for the registration of political parties. These principles can be made into legal requirements, for instance, in the founding principles of the parties, in the leadership composition of the parties; and women can be made a necessary part of the signatories of political party constitutions.

Eligibility for Political Office

Some women fail to stand for political positions because they lack proper credentials. For example, there are eligibility restrictions on public officers, although the laws are not very clear on whether people working in public offices may or may not stand for political office, and the law has been challenged in court.

Even though this provision that disqualifies public servants from contesting in parliamentary and presidential elections affects both male and female aspirants, it may impact more on women and in turn discourage them from contesting. One of the reasons for this is that women might want to preserve their jobs for financial security. This is so because discrimination against women is pervasive in Malawi and women do not have opportunities equal to those of men. Women have significantly lower levels of literacy, education, formal and informal employment, and general access to resources. For instance, in 2005, the unemployment rate for women was 10.0 per cent, nearly twice the unemployment rate of men (van Klaveren et al. 2009: 9-14). It is necessary, therefore, to review the leave provisions in the conditions of service of public offices and statutory corporations to ensure that women who opt to contest for political positions are financially secure.

Furthermore, the requirements for standing for and of being elected to public office are also not very clear and sometimes punitive. For instance, the Constitution (Section 52) provides that only people who are able to read and speak the English language can stand for parliamentary elections. Similarly, the *Local Government Elections Act* (Section 27 (b)) states that a person should not be elected as a councillor unless that person is able to speak and to read the English language well enough to take an active part in the proceedings of the council.

The majority of women are unable to meet this requirement because they lack formal education. The 2006 *National Welfare Monitoring Survey* (WMS) reported lower figures for the literacy rates of women. The survey recorded an adult literacy rate of 66 per cent, with a male rate of 76 per cent and a female rate of 56 per cent. The spatial and income distributions are also skewed against women as well. Malawi is a *Least Developed Country* (LDC), with 54.2 per cent of its population classified as poor, the majority of whom are women (Kanyongolo 2009: 2, van Klaveren et al. 2009: 29).

These challenges militate against women's eligibility to stand for political positions. It should be noted that a large percentage of women in Malawi are illiterate and not many women can confidently read and speak in the English language. In addition, not even the majority of those who have attained formal education and reached the highest level of secondary school are able to confidently and competently speak the English language. It is reported that in Malawian primary schools, learner achievement in English language is critically low. Research shows that Malawian children read better in their local languages than in English (Mmela 2006: 5). As such, there is need to critically reassess this eligibility criteria so as to help women who have at least some form of formal education but cannot confidently speak the English language.

Eligibility for women is also hindered by the nomination fees that are payable by aspiring candidates. Section 45 of the *Presidential and Parliamentary Act* provides for a nomination fee to be paid to the

Malawi Electoral Commission as fixed by the commission. Likewise, the *Local Government Elections Act* (Section 37 (1)) provides that a candidate for local elections should deposit a sum (an election fee) as fixed by the commission. For one thing, there are no guidelines on how to establish the amount and this provides room for abuse. The fees might be exorbitant, thereby excluding disadvantaged groups, including women, from contesting the elections.

Poverty in Malawi is gendered. In 2005, 59 per cent of the people in female-headed households were poor, against 51 per cent in male-headed households. This gap was about the same in rural and urban areas. On average, the annual income of male-headed households was about MWK 56,000, whereas female-headed households had an average yearly income of MWK 34,000, or just 60 per cent of the former (van Klaveren et al. 2009: 19). As such, the requirement for nomination fees for political candidates is a hindrance for most women.

However, it is important to note that for the 2014 elections, the Malawi Electoral Commission reduced the fees for female contestants by 20 per cent in both parliamentary and local government elections in order to encourage female aspirants to stand for political positions, This offer, however, was not provided for female aspirants in the presidential race. It is noted that in developing countries, the inability to pay even the modest candidate registration fees can exclude women from the election process (IDEA 2014: 6).

Campaigning for Political Positions

Campaigning for political positions usually starts with the primary elections. The conduct of primary elections within political parties mostly disadvantages the majority of women candidates. For instance, most politicians give handouts, host guests, and provide financial assistance for various activities in their community. Most women do not have such resources and end up losing or not participating in politics, not as a result of lack of interest but because they are poor. In Malawi, some women are of the view that primary elections are more expensive than other parts of the electoral process (Ballington and Kahane 2014: 9).

Furthermore, there is currently no legal provision in the electoral statutes on how party primary elections should be governed. Additionally, the internal political party rules or guidelines on the conduct of primaries are mostly ambiguous. Besides, the political parties are not transparent as regards their party funding, and almost all of them have no clear policies on supporting disadvantaged groups such as women. Currently, Malawi has no specific statute to regulate financing during campaigns and there is no effective mechanism for financial accountability of the parties. Enacting better legislation on these issues would go a long way in facilitating fairness in elections (NICE 2014: 1-2).

Some countries have adopted innovative practices to channel more funds to women candidates for elections. In Bosnia, Mexico and Ireland for example, they link political public finance allocation to the promotion of women's participation in decision-making (Ballington and Kahane 2014: 11). In most countries, public funding is available for political parties that have seats in parliament and, where this exists, it is recommended that consideration should be given on how such funding is distributed that women are not side-lined in the allocations (ibid: 3).

The electoral laws provide for unhindered freedom of expression during the campaign period and also protect aspirants from defamatory language. For example, the *Local Government Elections Act* (Section 43) provides that every candidate and every representative or supporter of the candidate should enjoy complete and unhindered freedom of expression and information in the exercise of the right to campaign, and that no person should be subjected to any criminal prosecution for any statement he makes or any opinion he holds or any campaign material he produces, publishes or possesses while campaigning. At the same time, the law provides that no person should, whilst campaigning in an election, use language that is inflammatory, defamatory or insulting or that constitutes incitement to public disorder, insurrection, hate, violence, or war. The Electoral Commission is also mandated to produce a code of conduct for elections.

Despite these provisions, contestants are usually discouraged and suffer insults and intimidation during campaign periods in Malawi. In the 2014 elections for instance, it was reported that there were several instances of electoral malpractices and misconduct such as intimidation, harassment, voter card buying, abuse of public resources, and campaign violence (MESN 2014: 31). In Malawi, contests for political positions are male-dominated and there is a widespread view that politics is 'dirty' (where abusive language and violence are norms) and this discourages some women from contesting and participating in active politics (MESN 2014: 57). The legal framework must therefore be respected and enforced, and penalties imposed (such as suspension in campaigns) for people who use insulting language.

Civic and Voter Education

A sizeable number of women leaders can have a positive impact on the perceptions of gender equality in leadership positions. However, numbers alone are not adequate for challenging social norms on gender and the deeply rooted negative attitudes towards women in leadership positions. Because negative attitudes toward women are "embedded in our own unconscious" (Rao et al. 1999: 224), a broader process of awareness-raising is needed.

The legal framework of elections in Malawi goes some way towards facilitating the dissemination of election-related information to the electorate. There are some statutory provisions that guarantee the rights to campaign, freedom of expression and information, freedom of assembly, and freedom to produce and publish campaign material. In addition, one of the functions of the Electoral Commission is to promote public awareness of electoral matters and to conduct civic and voter education. Furthermore, the *Communications Act* seeks to contribute to the creation of an informed electorate and obliges the tax-funded *Malawi Broadcasting Corporation* to "encourage free and informed opinion on all matters of public interest" (Section 87 (1) (b)) and to provide balanced coverage of the elections (Section 87 (2) (d)).

The legal framework does not, however, provide for gender-balanced civic and voter education material, nor does it provide for a gender-balanced delivery of electoral messages. There is a need for the Electoral Commission and other public bodies such as the *National Initiative for Civic Education* (NICE) and the *Malawi Broadcasting Corporation* to strengthen their enforcement of gender-balanced manuals on civic and voter education and to have effective accountability measures in their work. A gendered civic

education strategy would go a long way in addressing negative attitudes that the society has towards women candidates and to reduce the intimidation and violence that is often directed at female candidates.

High levels of poverty and illiteracy significantly affect the efficiency of voter education programs in the pre-election period. In the previous elections, there were very few players on the ground who implemented civic and voter education programmes at the beginning of the electoral cycle. Some civil society organisations intervened in February 2014, but it was only in April and May and very close to the polls that the public civic and voter education campaigns were intensified and widespread.

Reserved Seats for Women

In some countries (Germany, Italy, South Africa, and Norway among others), there are compulsory and/or voluntary provisions for the political parties to present gender-balanced party lists in order to ensure equal participation of men and women in politics. In Malawi, currently no political party has introduced such quotas despite the low levels of women candidates. Most political parties have no policies that promote disadvantaged groups such as women. Some women are even rejected as candidates on party tickets to contest in parliamentary and presidential elections simply because they are women.

Further, women are subjected to political pressure from a male-dominated political party leadership to vote for male candidates. Women often experience lack of party support and consequently stand as independent candidates. It is reported that the majority of women who stand as independents had earlier been rejected by their political parties or had lost to men in the primaries (MESM 2014: 56).

There is also a lack of principles that promote women participation and gender equality in most party constitutions in Malawi (Kanyongolo 2013: 7). Most political party constitutions have broadly adopted gender-neutral language with such references as 'all Malawians' and 'all members' instead of using the generic 'he'. A few party constitutions have also adopted gender-neutral expressions such as 'he/she' and 'men and women' in some of their provisions. Although this may be justifiable, it has the potential of masking the need for affirmative action (i.e. a positive differential treatment of women).

Conclusion

The legal framework in Malawi creates an enabling environment for citizens' participation in politics. Malawi has adopted a bill of rights, including women's rights, and is a signatory to a number of international legal instruments such as the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) and the protocol to the *African Charter on the Rights of Women.*

Despite this enabling legal environment, the presence of women in political and decision-making structures remains negligible. We have argued that most electoral laws, policies, regulations and guidelines have failed to incorporate equality and non-discrimination principles in a consistent way. Further, the legal provisions have not gone beyond formal and descriptive equality to transformative equality.

It is our contention that unless legislative reforms are undertaken to address these shortcomings, the realization of the espoused rights in the Constitution and the electoral statutes will remain illusory. For instance, principles of equality and non-discrimination are not consistently applied in the electoral laws and, in particular, such principles are weak within the political parties' regulations. It should be possible, for instance, to make gender equality and non-discrimination principles a pre-condition for the registration of political parties. More can also be done in terms of affirmative action, in addition to reduced fees for female contestants in elections.

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CHAPTER 4

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus
Promoting Cross-Party Substantive Representation

ASIYATI LORRAINE CHIWEZA   VIBEKE WANG   ANN MAGANGA

While women constitute a minority in nearly all national parliaments in the world, women's parliamentary caucuses may create space for female members of parliament (MPs) to coalesce and work together to promote issues of concern to women (Archenti and Johnson 2006).

Despite an increase in the number of countries that have adopted women's caucuses in sub-Saharan Africa, we know very little about how they actually work. Part of the explanation is that women's caucuses are a recent phenomenon; the bulk of them were formed in the first decade of the 2000s (see data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's website http://w3.ipu.org/en). In the literature on women's representation, there is an assumption that women's caucuses are conducive to women's substantive representation. Yet, their role is under-theorized and there is little empirical knowledge about how they operate and under which conditions they are most effective.

This chapter explores the role of the Malawian cross-party parliamentary women's caucus and its role in advancing women's rights legislation (i.e. the *effect* of the women's caucus in ensuring substantive representation as outcome) under varying circumstances, from its inception until today (1996-2014). Taking a historical long-term perspective makes it possible to trace its structures and operations over time and to understand the potential mechanisms that instil collective action on behalf of women. The factors that enable women parliamentarians to successfully promote legislation ensuring women's interests can then be discerned. A common distinction is made between process (acts for women) and outcome (legislation advancing women's interests) in the substantive acting for women (see Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Our focus is on substantive representation as outcome.

In this chapter we proceed as follows: first, we present the literature on women's caucuses and develop an analytical framework on this basis. Second, in the empirical analysis, we trace the Malawian cross-party women's caucus and its role in promoting pro-women legislation. This analysis draws on grey literature and the extant body of academic research. It also draws on extensive interviews with key informants, including MPs, donors, women's organizations, civil servants, and academics. A total of 49 interviews were carried out by Ann Maganga and Vibeke Wang in the period from January 2014

to January 2015. Finally, the chapter ends by reflecting on the influence and role of the caucus in ensuring women's substantive representation as outcome.

Analytical Frame: Women's Caucus and Representation

There are two clear findings from the nascent literature on women's substantive representation in sub-Saharan Africa, namely that the establishment of a women's parliamentary caucus and the cooperation with women's activists in civil society, are crucial for pro-women achievements in the legislature (Wang 2013, Bauer 2012, Muriaas and Wang 2012, Geisler 2004).

The literature focussing specifically, but not exclusively, on women's collective organization within legislatures is small, consisting mainly of reports, syntheses and 'best practice' analyses (see e.g. IPU 2013, OSCE 2013, Palmieri 2011, Gonzalez and Sample 2010, iKNOW Politics 2008). Some notable exceptions are, however, qualitative case studies on, for instance, women's caucuses in Mexico and Argentina (Piscopo 2014), Uruguay (Johnson 2014, Johnson and Moreni 2011), Timor-Leste (Costa et al. 2012) and Canada (Steele 2002). These studies confirm that women caucuses are critical for achieving substantive representation by providing space for inter-party dialogue and promoting unity, and for collective action on women's issues.

Our study of the women's caucus in Malawi goes beyond these studies by specifically focussing on the women's caucus as a venue for dialogue, consensus building, and collective action on women's issues. Following Piscopo (2014: 9), we define parliamentary caucuses as "stable, public allegiances identifiable to members and non-members". They may be formal or informal and undertake multiple activities ranging from policy advocacy to networking and capacity-building activities. Women's parliamentary caucuses are typically constituted with the aim of bringing female legislators together, across party lines, in effective alliances around a common goal. As female legislators are brought together primarily based on their gender, this should ideally downplay the importance of party affiliation, promote collective action, and, depending on the agenda adopted by the caucus, enhance women's substantive representation.[1]

How do women's caucuses affect members of parliaments' ability to act collectively for women? Their success depends on a variety of factors related to their formal design and informal features (see Piscopo 2014 for a somewhat similar approach), and to their relational resources in the external environment, inside and outside the legislature.

Among the formal features of importance are caucus membership inclusiveness, the existence of written internal rules and statutes (for membership, meetings and leadership), and the stature

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1   Women's caucuses should not be confused with other parliamentary institutions mandated on gender equality, like some parliamentary standing committees. Committees are permanent, formal institutions, constituted under standing orders. They hold a clear mandate to review policies and bills, and may for instance conduct public hearings with ministers and government officials, and their membership typically reflects the party composition of parliament.

of the caucus, that is, whether it is formally recognized by the legislature. All these factors have a bearing upon its standing within the legislature (prominence) and on the resources it has at its disposal. Among the informal features of importance are the norms or informal rules of cooperation among caucus members and the tactics or strategies employed. In addition, it is of prime importance that the caucus takes on a women's interest policy agenda.

The existence of standing committees with an explicit policy remit on women/gender may ease the caucus' effort to engender the parliamentary agenda, while an absence of such committee(s) enhances the importance of the women's caucus but could also create obstacles since pro-women issues are spread across different committees. This, in turn, may create a collective action problem. Party allegiance and the party groups in the legislature also influence the issues that caucus members are willing and able to advance, and must therefore be taken into account.

Of additional importance are factors such as the larger parliamentary environment and relations to 'important others' outside the legislature that are critical in shaping collective action. These include civil society actors such as women's activists and women's organizations as well as aid actors. The cooperation with women's activists in civil society has been noted to be crucial for pro-women achievements in the legislature (as noted above), and a women's caucus can act as an entry point for women legislators to access information and support, and build connections between civil society actors and members of parliament (Markham 2012). In aid-dependent contexts, development partners may also exert direct influence on the caucus by, for instance, extending support to the development of caucus structures and activities.

Emergence of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus (1994-1999)

In Malawi, the origins of the organisation and activist role of the parliamentary cross-party women's caucus can be traced back to 1996, when the (then) ten female legislators (later reduced to nine as one passed away) informally agreed to join forces and coordinate their views and advocacy efforts on pro-women issues. One of the founding members of the caucus, Lillian Patel, who also served as the Minister of *Women's and Children's Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare* between 1996 and 1999, summarized the origins of the caucus as follows:

> *At that time we were only nine MPs out of a total of 177 members. When we realised our minority status we made a decision that whenever there was anything to pass on women and children we should speak with one voice. We started informally. Parliament never recognized it* [the women's parliamentary caucus] *and we made our own contributions, sometimes with assistance from the Ministry of Gender. It* [the caucus] *looked like a very informal thing, but in the end, it has grown.* (Interview 14 August 2014).

The caucus was founded two years into the first multiparty parliamentary period (1994-1999). The caucus drew its impetus from the fact that women and child-friendly issues were hard to influence and to put on the agenda, although the new constitution (1994) embodied the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination, and the reshaping of Malawi's gender rights and equality priorities was underway.

In the wake of the 1995 Beijing *Conference on Women*, the government of President Muluzi launched several initiatives to address gender disparities, including the 1997 *National Platform for Action* to operationalize the Beijing declaration. In 1997, Malawi signed the SADC *Declaration on Gender and Development*, and the following year the addendum to the declaration on the elimination and eradication of violence against women and children (CEDAW 2004: 18, 22). The government frequently stressed Malawi's conformity with the international legal framework (ibid: 10).

In 1995 and 1996, the plan to form a women's parliamentary caucus gradually attracted more attention. It was promoted and discussed on a number of occasions, including in donor-supported events on women's empowerment (UNESCO 1996, Saw 1995). MCP MP Louis Chimango, one of the brains behind the new constitution and a key actor in parliament at the time, specifically encouraged the formation of an all-party women's caucus (Chimango 1995: 104). Shortly after these events, the cross-party women's caucus was formed, making it the only *cross-party* caucus in the Parliament of Malawi to this date.

Caucus Operations and Activism

The caucus elected a chairperson and a secretary from its members and this has continued to be the practice to the present day. One caucus meeting was scheduled for each parliamentary session, but the chair was at liberty to call additional meetings (NDI 1998, National Assembly 1996). Typically, the meeting frequency was higher when there were issues on the parliamentary agenda considered important to women. Caucus membership was inclusive and all female members of parliament could join. The caucus did not receive, however, any formal recognition by parliament and, in terms of funding, it relied on donors and membership contributions. This made it difficult for the caucus to carry out its activities effectively.

From its inception, the caucus adopted an explicit women's interest agenda aimed at advancing "the welfare and special interests of women, children and family life in society, under legislation and in the administrative policies of the government and other state bodies" (Government of Malawi 1996: 3). In practical terms, caucus members united around two common goals that were reflected in the caucus' by-laws. First, they wanted to ensure harmonization of existing laws with women's rights as enshrined in the 1994 Constitution. Second, they needed to ensure that gender was mainstreamed into all legislation enacted by parliament (NDI 1998: 2, 4). After conducting a poll on the issues, the caucus members in 1996 considered it most important to concentrate their efforts on achieving amendments to discriminatory laws concerning inheritance, citizenship, marriage, divorce and child custody (NDI 1998, National Assembly 1996).

The caucus' first order of business was to examine the constitution and identify existing laws that adversely affected women. The women's caucus worked closely with the *Malawi Law Commission*, the *Women's Commission* in the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, women activists, and some women academics, in order to analyse and revise legislation to eliminate discriminatory provisions. During its formative years, the caucus was able to coordinate and narrow down its focus and to work with other actors outside Parliament with relative consensus. This was achieved in spite of the low

number of female parliamentarians and the members' political party allegiance. As a result, the women's caucus emerged as a notable actor on the parliamentary scene (Young 2011: 240, Semu 2002: 90).

In a move to strengthen their leverage in parliament, caucus members were keen to build alliances with their male MP counterparts (although there has been no tradition of recruiting male members to the caucus). In order to sensitize male MPs on the importance of the caucus' agenda, they organized a workshop (NDI 1998: 4) at which they lobbied for their support. They stressed the positive impact of legal reforms on the family and society as a whole, rather than just on the women (Semu 2002: 90). They also attempted to reach out to the public. The caucus participated, for instance, in a training workshop with women's organizations on how to conduct awareness raising campaigns (NDI 1998: 4).

Over time and with the assistance of the *Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs*, the Malawi Law Commission, and women's activists, the caucus pressed for reforms and presented amendments to acts pertaining to its priority areas (UNESCO 1996: 9). These included activism to introduce a senate to enhance women's political representation. The resolution to establish a senate received the necessary support in Parliament, but it never materialised (Patel and Tostensen 2007). All of the caucus' proposed legislative amendments were initially referred back on the grounds that they needed further consultations, although the caucus had already consulted with a wide range of stakeholders (Semu 2000: 90).

In the end, however, parliament passed an affiliation bill in 1997, raising the minimum level of child support. The *Wills and Inheritance (Amendment) Bill* was enacted in 1998 with an amendment that criminalized the dispossession of surviving spouses and children (CEDAW 2004: 16). This was after fierce debate in parliament where male members ridiculed the amendment and the role of the caucus in presenting it (Semu 2002: 90). The amendment to the act was a considerable victory to the caucus. It was its first real 'win'.

Increased Caucus Recognition and Emerging Conflicts (1999-2004)

In the legislative period from 1999-2004, the parliamentary women's caucus continued with its agenda, manoeuvring in a legislative setting with a UDF majority and President Muluzi still at the helm. The number of women elected to parliament rose from ten to seventeen in the 1999 elections, leading to a near doubling of the caucus membership. It should be noted, however, that only four of the ten previous women MPs were re-elected.

During this period, the women's caucus focussed the rights of female employees and on legal reform. The caucus' agenda was closely linked to the work of the special *Gender Commission* within the Malawi Law Commission that the government established in 2001. The Gender Commission was mandated to review all gender-related laws and ensure their compliance with the 1994 Constitution. In 2000, Parliament passed the *Employment Act*, which prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including gender, and entitles female employees to eight weeks paid maternity leave. Although the bill was not part of the original priority areas of the caucus, it played an important role in ensuring that the law took the rights of women into account.

The women's caucus also lobbied to elevate its own status in parliament. Developments at the level of the *Southern African Development Community* (SADC) further enhanced its formal status. The SADC *Parliamentary Forum* launched a regional women's parliamentary caucus in April 2002 to monitor political commitments on women's participation and representation of member states, and this provided added impetus for the Malawian women MPs to push for recognition by the Malawian Parliament. Although the caucus fell short of being included in the parliamentary standing orders, it was formally recognized by parliament (Musukwa 2013: 6) and became entitled to some funds for meetings.

Caucus activities had a slow start in 1999 due to intra-party conflicts over leadership positions and the fact that there were no representatives of the opposition *Malawi Congress Party* (MCP) in the leadership. The National Democratic Institute recommended to model caucus elections on the standing committee system of electing chair and vice chair from different parties, but this was not taken on board (USAID 2000: 7-8). In addition, relations between civil society women activists and female MPs. Women's groups vested considerable resources and efforts into training prospective female candidates were strained. While women's groups vested considerable resources and efforts into training prospective female candidates for the coming elections (CEDAW 2006a: 2), they were, however, perceived as potential rivals by incumbent MPs. As one of the MPs put it, "*we felt that the NGOs were there to de-campaign us*" (interview with Lillian Patel, 14 August 2014).

Women's organizations were not always content with the effort women MPs put into advancing women's issues in parliament. The leadership of the caucus and the parliamentary committee on Women and Children's Affairs at the time were also perceived as weak. However, efforts were made by donors and others to facilitate engagement between the two groups, the civil society actors, on the one hand, and the civil servants and other committees concerned with gender-related issues, on the other hand (USAID 2000: 17). The meetings facilitated by development partners contributed somewhat to improved relations.

Caucus Activism in a Chaotic Parliamentary Environment (2004-2009)

Unlike in previous elections, the 2004 elections saw the proliferation of political parties. The new political climate also put its mark on party politics and the workings of the women's caucus in parliament. Although the newly elected President Mutharika was hand-picked and aided into office by out-going President Muluzi, he abandoned the *United Democratic Front* (UDF) once in office, and formed his own political party, the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP) (Smiddy and Young 2009). This effectively turned the UDF into an opposition party in parliament and created a chaotic and tense political environment. The opposition-run parliament, for instance, attempted to impeach the president (Muriaas 2013) and presented stiff resistance to all government bills.

The number of women in parliament increased to twenty-four, but only six of them were re-elected from the 1999-2004 parliament. This small re-elected group included Lilian Patel from the UDF, who continued to chair the women's caucus. While the women's caucus had more members than ever,

its operations were constrained by party politics. Although draft laws on marriage, divorce and family relations, succession, and citizenship were debated in parliament (CEDAW 2006a: 2, CEDAW 2006b: 8), not much progress was made with respect to such laws in this parliamentary period.

Civil society women groups, on the other hand, were better organized than ever at that time. Women activists, with the backing of the *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP) and the government, had created the *Gender Coordination Network* in 1998, an NGO that interacted with women MPs in a more organized manner than previously. Prior to the 2009 elections, the network launched the high profile and relatively successful *50-50 Campaign* to enhance women's political representation, with the support of the Ministry of Women Affairs and donors (Muriaas and Kayuni 2013). The women's caucus was preoccupied with how to ensure that its members were re-elected to parliament, and engaged in the campaign accordingly.

In terms of pro-women legislation, the major accomplishment during that parliamentary period was the passage of the *Prevention of Domestic Violence Act* of 2006 (Young 2011: 239). Yet, the role of the women's caucus in passing the act was limited. The activism and engagement of women activists and Joyce Banda, the Minister of Gender at the time, were instrumental to this victory, rather than the efforts of the women's caucus. The bill originated from civil society (CEDAW 2006a: 5) and, more specifically, from *Women and Law in Southern Africa* (WLSA-Malawi), one of the most prominent women NGOs at the time (Semu 2002: 93). The national coordinator summed up WLSA-Malawi's role in achieving the domestic violence legislation with these words: "*We conceptualized it, we crafted it, we consulted on it, and we submitted the principles of the bill to the government*" (interview with Seodi White, 15 August 2014).

Within parliament, the Minister of Gender was the main driver of the process. She threw her weight behind the bill, spearheaded advocacy work, and personally lobbied party leaders. A turning point was when she managed to get the support of the Leader of the Opposition, John Tembo, through a carefully planned meeting. One of the female MCP members of parliament recalls that the minister "*even used the car of one of the members of parliament because she didn't want to go there in a government vehicle with a flag*" (interview with Nancy Tembo, 22 August 2014). In the end, parliament narrowly passed the bill and along the way, lost the most controversial issue, marital rape, and the inclusion of cohabiting partners. In hindsight, the act has received much criticism both in terms of its definition of domestic violence as a criminal offence, as well as in the difficulties to implement it (MLC 2009: 108-9, WLSA 2009: 5). However, the act remains a landmark legislation for women, given that law reforms falling within the private and family spheres have been particularly difficult to achieve.

Leadership Debacles and Caucus Politicisation (2009-2014)

The 2009 general elections produced an unprecedented increase in female representation in parliament, from twenty-four to forty-three. Out of the forty-three, however, only three were re-elected from the previous parliament. The boost in members in the women's caucus was nevertheless quickly overshadowed by intraparty conflicts, especially within the DPP, to which the majority of women members of parliament belonged, including the newly elected Vice President Joyce Banda. The infighting profoundly affected the effectiveness of the caucus.

The first caucus chairperson during this period, Anita Kalinde, was impeached, orchestrated by DPP caucus members. This was related to how the vice president, Joyce Banda, fell out of favour with the DPP. Kalinde was Banda's niece, and was allegedly soliciting support for Banda from the female legislators. The bickering that ensued eroded trust and cohesion among the caucus members and led to low attendance rates during caucus meetings and to several leadership changes. In 2010, Jean Kalilani was elected chair in place of Kalinde, but relinquished her position to Christina Chiwoko when she was appointed minister in 2011. Chiwoko served as interim chairperson until Cecilia Chazama was installed as chair when new caucus elections were held.

During the first part of the 2009 - 2014 parliamentary period, the caucus continued to develop the capacity and skills of its members in order to make them more effective in parliament and to increase their visibility in their constituencies. The caucus teamed up with the UNDP and the Scottish Parliament to achieve all this. They also had regular interaction with various government ministries aimed at understanding the nature of programmes that each ministry was implementing in relation to women and girls.

Towards the end of this parliamentary period, there was an evident shift in the interests of the caucus members, as they were preoccupied with how they could retain their parliamentary seats in the coming elections. Commenting on the caucus agenda, the then chair revealed that *"our agenda was first of all to increase the number of women elected to parliament"* (interview with Cecilia Chazama, 15 August 2014). In addition to seeking commitments from leaders of political parties, they sought support from donors and civil society organizations to enable their re-election.

The caucus also had a number of interactions with donors and civil society organizations on issues pertaining to outstanding bills that required lobbying. Several pro-women bills were passed during this period, including the *Child Care, Protection and Justice Act* of 2010, the *Deceased Estates (Wills and inheritance) Act* of 2011, the *Land Act* of 2013, and the *Gender Equality Act* of April 2013. However, the women's caucus had a limited role in driving the processes that led to the adoption of these acts; rather, they were driven by donors and women's organizations. They supported government ministries in the development of position papers and drafted bill. They also organised meetings with the caucus and male legislators to lobby for their support in parliament. The role of the caucus members seems to have been restricted to lobbying male counterparts in parliament for the passage of the bills. Under the guidance of UN Women, the caucus members, for instance, employed the following strategy when lobbying for the passage of the Gender Equality Act:

> We involved the male parliamentarians. We first started with the chairpersons of parliamentary committees, then we involved five members from each committee, then the last stage was to involve all MPs (interview with Cecilia Chazama, 15 August, 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the cross-party parliamentary women's caucus in Malawi has been able to ensure substantive representation outcomes, but that its effectiveness as a collective entity has varied from one parliamentary period to the other. During the formative years, the caucus emerged as a notable collective actor despite its informal and minority status. It exerted influence on pro-women legislation due to its ability to coordinate views and maintain consensus, because of its advocacy efforts, and its ability to collaborate with actors outside Parliament.

In subsequent parliamentary periods, the size of the caucus grew considerably. However, its collective role in shaping policy was constrained by party politics, intraparty leadership wrangles, and a shift in the interests of the caucus members towards re-election and retention of their parliamentary seats. Although pro-women legislation was still being passed, the processes were largely driven by the lobbying efforts of individual actors within the parliament and by the activism and engagement of women's activists outside of parliament. The donors were a consistent player in supporting the operations of the caucus, right from its inception, and have, over the years, exerted significant influence in advancing pro-women agendas and legislation.

This suggests that an increase in caucus membership does not necessarily translate into more substantive representation as outcome. The women's caucus seems to be most effective when the members are united and able to draw on relational resources with civil society and donors. Yet the Malawian case also demonstrates that enactment of women's rights legislation does not depend on a potent women's caucus. In fact, the influence of donors and women's organizations in combination with key actors within parliament may bypass a disunited caucus.

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CHAPTER 5

The 'Joyce Banda Effect'
Explaining the Discrepancy between Public Opinion and Voting Behaviour

TIYESERE MERCY CHIKAPA

In 2009, women accounted for 18.6 per cent of the members of parliaments worldwide, far lower than the 30 per cent proposed at the 1995 Beijing *Plan of Action* of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU 2009). As of November 2015, Rwanda and Bolivia ranked high with 63.8 and 53.1 per cent, respectively, followed by Cuba with 48.9, Seychelles 43.8, and Sweden 45 per cent (IPU 2015). Malawi's proportion of women in parliament is lower than all these countries, but there has been a significant increase since 1994, when the ratio was 5.2 per cent, to a peak of 22.3 per cent in 2009, alongside an increase in participation of women in parliamentary elections (Jamali 2014). Yet, in the 2014 tripartite elections, the number of women in parliament declined from forty-two MPs in 2009 to thirty-three (16.7 per cent) in 2014 (see Chapter 2 by *Dzimbiri* for the details).

This recent decline in parliamentary representation came despite positive and strong support for women's political representation as expressed in several public attitude surveys carried out by *Afrobarometer*. In 2003, the survey asked respondents to indicate if they agree that women should have equal rights and should receive the same treatment as men. The results showed that 52 per cent of the respondents responded in the affirmative. Furthermore, in 2005, almost 80 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men, and this was still the case in 2012.

This chapter, therefore, attempts to unravel the puzzle at hand: Why has women's representation in Malawi's parliament gone down despite public attitude surveys indicating people's overwhelming support for equal gender representation? First, the chapter looks for a possible opinion shift among respondents between 2012 and 2014 that may explain the downward turn. Then, it looks beyond women's descriptive representation and draws attention to symbolic representation, in order to explain why there was a downturn in women's electoral performance. The chapter takes a descriptive-symbolic nexus approach, arguing that the performance of a particular representative has a tendency of shaping public opinion and future attitudes on that representative.

The chapter thus contributes to the literature on the role of symbolic representation in the construction of gender. I argue that there are important circumstantial and context-specific factors that help explain the decline in women's representation in Malawi's parliament, despite the stable opinions about women's representation presented by the different surveys. This chapter also focuses its attention on the parliament, one of the three arenas of this book.

The chapter is organised into six sections. In the second section, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings relating to representation as well as the empirical literature regarding women's under-representation in politics. In the third section I present the methodology used. In the fourth and fifth sections I present and discuss the study's findings and present some of the implications of women's poor electoral performance. The last section concludes the chapter.

Women Underrepresentation

An understanding of political under-representation requires an understanding of the concept of representation. "Political representation is about making sure that different groups of citizens are 'present' in political discussions for which they are not physically present" (Lombardo and Meier 2014: 3). In her ground-breaking work on the concept, Pitkin (1967) distinguished four dimensions of representation: formalistic, symbolic, descriptive and substantive. In this chapter the focus is on symbolic and descriptive representation.

Symbolic and descriptive representation both focus on the "people who represent", describing the ways in which agents (those who represent) "stand for" their principals (those being represented), "either symbolically or literally" (Lombardo and Meier 2014: 4). Descriptive representation refers to the physical presence of an actor as standing for the represented "through a resemblance to the represented" (Lombardo and Meier 2014: 4). It is "the making present of something absent by resemblance or reflection" (Pitkin 1967: 11). Thus, the focus is on the representative standing for a group that s/he shares characteristics with, such as gender.

In symbolic representation, there is no 'resemblance' or 'reflection', and the connection to what is represented is of a different kind (Pitkin 1967: 11-12). Symbolic representation is a 'role-model' representation, expressing what women are considered to symbolize. The representatives construct what gender should be about, and social roles get "shaped and legitimized according to prevalent social norms about what is deemed appropriate for male and female subjects" (Lombardo and Meier 2014: 58). Thus, the performance of women in power might affect perceptions and attitudes of people towards women, and what their roles should be in public life.

Symbolic representation, unfortunately, receives "less attention by scholars in gender and in politics more broadly speaking" (Lombardo and Meier 2014: 3). It is partly for this reason that this study takes the descriptive-symbolic nexus approach: to help fill this gap.

There are different explanations as to why women are under-represented in national politics. Some studies attributed this problem to the "structural and contextual factors that may shape women's access

to political office" (Krook and Childs 2010: 9). For instance, the percentage of women in politics and in parliament tends to be higher in countries using proportional representation electoral systems than in those with majoritarian ('first-past-the-post') systems. Since proportional representation systems have more than one person representing a constituency, this tends to increase the number of elected women. Conversely, the 'winner takes all' aspect of the majoritarian systems, where only one candidate from each constituency will win the election, reduces the chances for a group of candidates (like women) to be successful.

The structural factors advanced as explanations to women under-representation also include cultural attitudes in Protestant versus Catholic countries. In Protestant countries, political attitudes are more open to women leadership and there are more women in politics. There is also a link between education and women's participation in politics, as seen in countries with more educated women having more women in politics.

Additionally, it has been argued that the 'incumbency advantage' reduces the chances of members of previously excluded groups of making it into elected positions (Fox and Lawless 2010: 310). In fact, men enjoy the incumbency advantage more than women, as the incumbency advantage is "the additional electoral support a candidate gains due to his or her incumbent status" (Cox and Morgenstern 1995: 329). Thus, the men who have won previous elections, have an advantage over the women who have not.

Jalalzai and Krook (2010) note that such structural factors will vary with socio-economic development, geography, culture and political systems. Nadzhedah (2010) observes that apart from the afore-mentioned variations, women also differ across various social strata, like religion and ethnicity. These variations impact on their interest to contest for political office, as well as the actual outcomes of such contests. For instance, some scholars note that traditional gender role socialization is responsible for low women representation. This socialization incorporates a view that regards politics as a domain better left to men, and this view can explain why even well-educated women are "substantially less likely than men to exhibit political ambitions" (Fox and Lawless 2010: 311).

Apart from structural factors, there is a group of scholars who focus on situational explanations, such as the fact that there is generally a "women's historic under-representation in the professions that typically lead to political careers" (Fox and Lawless 2010: 310). Moreover, there are circumstantial factors, such as gender stereotypes, that continue to be used by media in covering electoral campaigns for men and women. "If the media rely on certain stereotypes when covering male and female candidates, and if this reliance creates differences in coverage, then media treatment can have important consequences for voter information and candidate preference" (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991: 181).

From the pool of structural barriers, situational, and circumstantial factors, it is arguably the situational and circumstantial factors that explain most of Malawi's recent experiences in terms of women under-representation in parliamentary politics. The mainstream structural barriers cannot explain the recent fall in women representation in parliament in Malawi, as there is no significant change in the educational level of women (at least not for the worse). In addition, the 'incumbency advantage' factor could not possibly reduce the number of women, and the electoral system and other structural factors have remained stable.

Data and Methods

Our study adopted a mixed-methods approach by blending qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The quantitative part provided a descriptive picture of the sampled population and measured the shifts in opinion on women's political leadership from 2012 to 2014.

I carried out a survey in order to assess whether there was an opinion shift between 2012 and 2014 on women's suitability for political leadership. In this survey I used the same question as the 2005 and 2012 *Afrobarometer* surveys, and it was conducted to cross-check the public opinions expressed in these surveys. The question was whether women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

The survey was conducted in the central and southern regions of Malawi. A multi-stage sampling technique was applied to select enumeration areas and respondents. The total respondents targeted were 350, with ten households sampled in five survey areas in seven districts, chosen randomly.

Additionally, qualitative methods were used to unearth the depth of the viewpoints of the respondents, which may not have been captured in the structured questionnaires. For this, I held 14 focus group discussions with people from each district, some discussions with males only and others with women only, and some in urban areas and some in rural areas. The participants represented various religious affiliations, education levels, marital status, and so on, so that a fair representation of the different social groups was captured. The information collected was then categorised into themes and analysed in terms of the underlying thoughts presented. Specifically, I used these methods to examine people's opinions on why women performed poorly in the 2014 elections.

Unfortunately, it is inevitable that people will try to present the best possible picture about themselves when self-reporting, and it is particularly so in opinion and attitude surveys. People are often unwilling or unable to report accurately on sensitive topics for 'ego-defensive' or 'impression management' reasons, trying to impress upon the interviewer by providing answers that the respondent believes are 'correct' or 'socially acceptable' (Fisher 1993: 303). This is called the 'social desirability bias', and it can significantly distort the data and the analysis made.

Social desirability bias is an issue when research involves collecting data on personal or socially sensitive issues, like for instance politics and gender, which is under scrutiny here. The respondents may believe that society expects them to support women's participation in public sphere, including politics, especially in the presence of an interviewer. They might therefore indicate a gender conscious attitude even when they do not believe in women's political leadership abilities. This bias is reported to be most "apparent when data are collected through a survey method where the respondent can be easily identified" (Grimm 2010: 1).

Qualitative data collection methods were used to reduce the social desirability bias. Focus group discussions were held because the questions were not necessarily directed to an individual but to a group.

Nevertheless, the social desirability effect can indeed help explain why women performed poorly in the elections, even though people expressed consistent and positive attitudes towards women's political leadership abilities in the different public attitude surveys. The social desirability effect goes a long way in explaining the contradiction, as I will show later.

The Stable Opinion

In the *Afrobarometer* surveys of 2003, Malawian adults were requested to state their opinion with regards to what they thought about the statement that "women should have equal rights and receive the same treatment as men do". In 2005 and 2012, and in my smaller survey in 2014, respondents were requested to state their opinion about political leadership abilities of men and women, and whether both sexes should have the same chance of being elected to political office.

The findings reveal that a majority of the respondents were of the opinion that women should have equal rights and receive the same treatment as men do. They also felt that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men. There is only a small downward trend in the number of people holding this positive opinion. The figures are presented in Figure 1, which shows the percentages for respondents holding a *positive* opinion on the statements.

Figure 1: Positive Opinion on Equal Political Rights for Women, 2003-2014
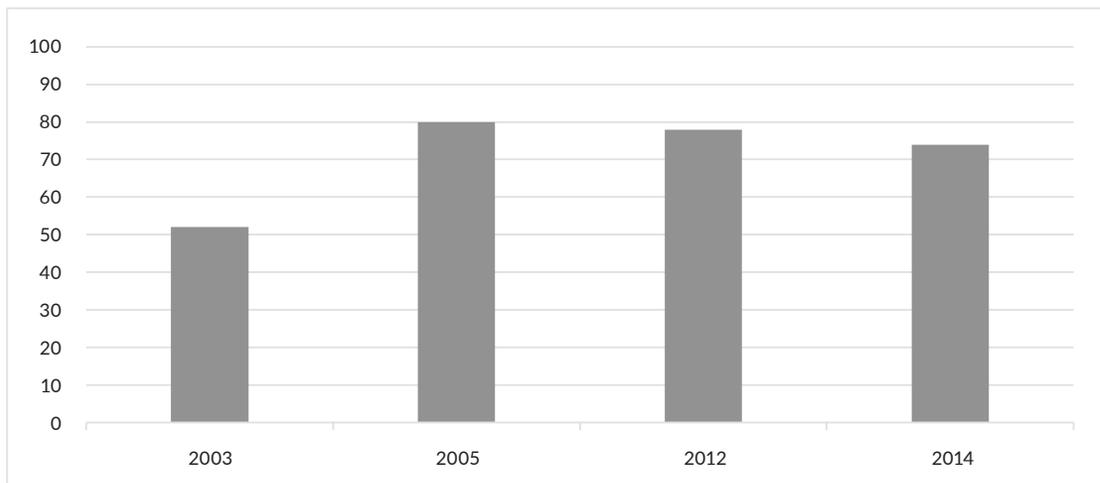
Source: *Afrobarometer* and my small survey conducted in 2014.

Note: In 2003, the statement was: "In our country, women should have equal rights and receive the same treatment as men do", and in 2005, 2012, and 2014 the statement was: "Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men".

In my smaller survey in 2014, the respondents were presented with a similar statement: "Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men". This was to check the stability of the opinions held. A large majority (74 per cent) still held the opinion that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men as in Figure 1.

This is irrespective of the respondent's gender. There was a total of 76 per cent of the men and 72 per cent of the women agreeing with the statement. The results are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Positive Opinion on Equal Political Rights for Women, 2014, by gender
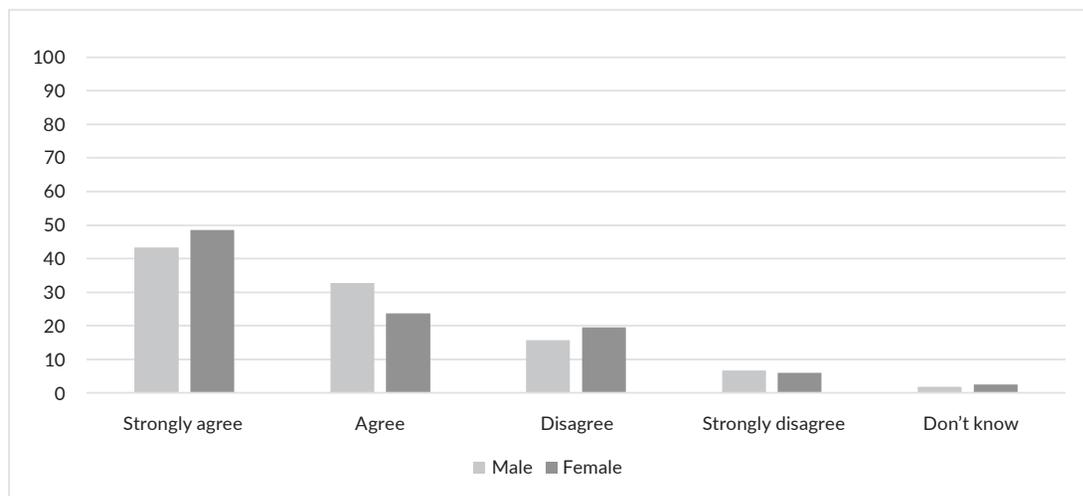
When the participants to my 2014 survey were asked why they held this opinion, they cited a number of reasons, with a majority (42 per cent) citing that women are knowledgeable just like men, and, therefore, suitable for elective office. Interestingly, that holding office is a human right is mentioned by only 8.3 per cent of the respondents. The reasons given are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Why Should Women Have Same Chances as Men?

Reasons	%
They are knowledgeable/educated	42.1
They are more capable of achieving success	14.5
It is their responsibility to lead	11.4
They have more resources	10.0
They are more honest and trustworthy	10.0
It is their human right	8.3
Other	3.8

In the survey, respondents were also asked to indicate what they believed is the most important characteristic or quality of someone to participate in politics. Table 2 shows that having more education (30.9 per cent) tops the list, followed by honesty and trustworthiness (29.9 per cent).

Table 2: Most Important Characteristics of Politicians

Characteristics	%
To have more education	30.9
Be more honest and trustworthy	29.9
To have more financial resources	14.8
To have more community support	11.8
Be more politically connected	6.9
To have special attributes (charisma)	5.6

When the respondents were asked to indicate who they think, between men and women, possess more of the stated characteristics, 47 per cent of the respondents said that both men and women possess the required characteristics or qualities, although an almost similar proportion (46.4 per cent) said that men possess more of the stated characteristics (see figure 3). This is consistent with the positive popular opinion of respondents on regarding women's political candidature.

Figure 3: Between Men and Women, Who Do You Think Possess More of These Characteristics?
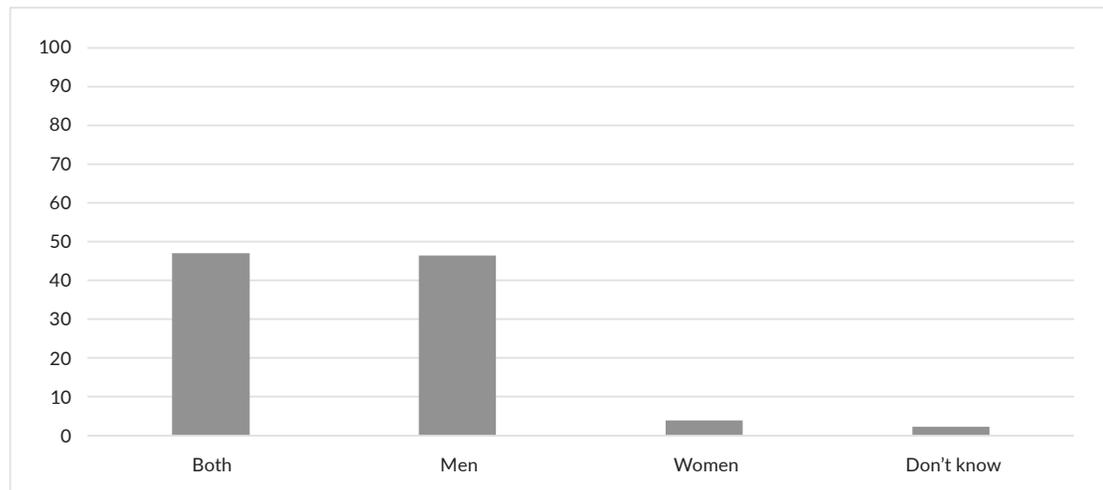
In sum, I am unable to find any significant opinion shifts in people's attitude towards women's political participation and leadership (except for a slow downturn since the strong increase recorded in 2005, see Figure 1). Despite this, the electoral outcome of the 2014 elections did not reflect the popular opinions held. There was a marked decline in the number of women who made it to parliament.

The Circumstantial Factors

As the survey findings do not show any significant shift in opinion about women, they cannot ably explain what really happened in the 2014 elections. One factor might be that the additional funding made available to women candidates under the '50-50 campaign' was lower in the 2014 elections than in the 2009 elections. Other than this, I cannot confidently argue that structural factors like education, religion, electoral system, and so on have improved or worsened for women candidates since previous elections.

Thus, in order to explain why women performed badly and whether there were other possible non-recorded opinion shifts, I will have to focus on the circumstantial factors. When the participants of my survey were asked to consider why women failed to win more seats in parliament, the dominant view (28.5 per cent) was that "women have shown less capability to lead" (which is the so-called 'Joyce Banda effect'). Their opinions on the question is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Why Women Failed to Win More Seats in Parliament

Reasons	%
Women have shown less capability to lead (the 'Joyce Banda effect')	28.5
Women had little support	23.7
Women have less education	10.7
Traditionally a woman can't lead	10.0
Women had few financial resources	9.8
Women are not natural leaders	6.7
Women have less political connections	5.9
Few women contested	3.9
Other explanations	9.0

This shows the main reasons that our respondents gave for the low support for women in elections: women politicians had shown little capability to lead and they had little popular support.

I believe this is an indication of the so-called 'Joyce Banda effect'; that voters were demotivated by the performance of former President Joyce Banda, and I also think that the so-called 'cashgate' corruption scandal was particularly harmful.[1] As stated by one woman in our group discussions:

> *This has made voters to believe that a woman cannot be a political leader.*

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1   Following her ascension to the presidency, Joyce Banda managed to gain donor confidence within a few months, but later on her leadership became associated with the massive 'cashgate' public sector corruption and financial scandal.

This was also echoed by a male discussant:

> *What happened under the leadership of Joyce Banda made voters doubt women's capability. Broad day light stealing of millions of kwacha made voters doubt women's capabilities in leadership positions like that of members of parliament.*

Corruption and mismanagement of public funds was not unique to Joyce Banda's reign, as the male presidents before her had also exhibited high levels of corruption (Chinunda 2014, Cammack and Kelsall 2011). During Kamuzu Banda's dictatorial leadership, "corruption prevailed unchecked, and referring to it was almost taboo" (Hussein 2005: 93). During Bakili Muluzi's second term, Malawi's credibility among international donors tumbled because of corruption. Consequently, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United States and the European Union withheld "nearly USD 100 million in budgetary aid" (Tenthani 2004: 1). By 2005, Malawi was "losing MWK 22 million each year through corruption, payments to ghost teachers, rentals for ghost houses, and funding for ghost projects" (Hussein 2005: 93).

Similarly, under Bingu Wa Mutharika and especially in his second term of office, Malawi experienced high corruption rates as well as misuse of public funds, such as when he purchased "his own $13.3 million jet airplane" (Nyasa Times, 10 March 2010, cited in Cammack and Kelsall 2011: 93). This plunder of public funds was met with nation-wide popular protests and a new freeze in donor funding.

The *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI) ratings by Transparency International on Malawi from 1994 to 2014 shows that the country has progressively become more corrupt from 1994 to 2014 (TI 2015), and the Anti-Corruption Bureau has estimated that "30 per cent of the annual budget is lost to corruption each year" (Freedom House 2016: 414). Although this systematic and systemic corruption cannot solely be attributed to one female president's leadership of about two years, it is still an important circumstantial factor. The 'cashgate' scandal broke out under her reign, which, to some extent, can support the argument that corruption contributed to the weak electoral outcomes for women in 2014.

Apart from Joyce Banda's performance as president, the group discussions revealed that the poor performance of other women MPs also reduced the chances for female candidates in general. To some extent, this also reduced the incumbency advantage of the women who had been in position. The discussants in my group discussions also argued that female MPs did not accommodate constructive criticism, and were rude. One discussant, for instance said that

> *It is difficult to approach women because they don't want to accept any constructive criticism. We had a female MP, [...] and when we offered our advice she used to shout at us saying we shouldn't bother her, she was educated, and scorned at us illiterate people who were difficult to handle.*

Moreover, there was dissatisfaction with women who had previously occupied different public positions and then stood for parliamentary elections. An all-male discussion group in Blantyre was of the opinion that most of the women who contested during the last elections were not new in politics (and public offices, more generally), and that they had not done a good job in their previous positions.

According to one of the participants,

> *The majority of these women had served in government positions in various capacities previously and had not performed to the expectations of the people as such voters were not willing to elect them.*

These extracts show that women did not have much of an incumbency advantage. In fact, their incumbency and previous performance might have disadvantaged them.

People were judging potential women on the basis of a few incumbents. This is consistent with the argument that "incumbency is still an obstacle to the election of women" (Schwindt-Bayer 2005: 239). The role-modelling effect of representation can be negative. Thus, the descriptive-symbolic nexus becomes evident as the (deemed) negative performance of a particular representative seems to shape voter choices, a factor that can also explain the downward trend.

Furthermore, my group discussions revealed that female candidates failed to articulate issues during their campaigns and were, therefore, unable to attract voters. This was very clear in an all-female discussion group:

> *Women fail to win because they do not have good campaign issues. For example, the female candidate in this area had as her campaign issue that when voted into power, she would strengthen women's small-scale businesses, specifically beer-selling business. In this case, how can we women vote for such a person since we already complain that our husbands spend money on beer and prostitutes found in these beer halls?*

Another reason blamed for the low success among women in the elections was that women were deliberately marginalised by male politicians, especially during primary elections. This point was captured by one of the discussants who noted that

> *Most often, political parties do not want women to represent them ... because they doubt their abilities ... Instead, they want us women to dance for the men, giving them morale during their campaign meetings.*

This view is in line with Semu (2002) who argued that women's role in politics in Malawi is largely relegated to dancing and singing praise songs for male politicians. Moreover, the political elites select female aspirants based on their own perceptions of women's abilities and experience in political responsibility (Lawless and Fox 2005). Thus, while political parties can actively recruit candidates for office, they also can play the role of gatekeepers, discouraging potential candidates from running in the process (Sanbonmatsu 2006). This is so because "political parties, and especially the political elites who control the recruitment and selection of candidates, determine the rules, the procedures, and often the criteria according to which candidates will be recruited" (Pitre 2003:103).

Our group discussions revealed that women are only given positions in non-key and low-level grass-root structures, especially during campaign periods. As one discussant noted:

> *You can find women in the party branches, but this happens only during campaign periods. Only few women hold big political positions like being governors or MPs.*

This is probably done to harness support for the men, rather than to realise any meaningful representation of women in the political party structures, thereby restricting "women's public role in politics to that of supporters of male politicians" (Semu 2002: 82).

Another circumstantial reason that the group discussion participants pointed out was that women, generally, do not contest for strong political parties in their areas.

> *Political morale is critical for one to win. This is possible if a candidate is representing a party that is loved by many in a constituency. In the previous elections, voters were just asking where the symbol of maize was. If one of the female candidates that stood in the constituency had stood for DPP, she could have won.*

Conclusion

The data from the quantitative, public attitudes surveys used in this chapter, has failed to show any significant opinion shifts on women's political leadership. Yet, women did not perform very well in the 2014 elections. This can be attributed to the social desirability bias of opinion and attitude surveys. A closer analysis of the qualitative data, nevertheless, shows a possibility of an opinion shift.

The qualitative findings provide some possible explanations as to why women did not perform well in comparison to the previous elections. Among these are the 'Joyce Banda effect', an incumbency disadvantage, and circumstantial factors like the nature of the political campaigns, the failure of political parties to promote female candidates, the representation of women in peripheral party positions, and the standing of women in weak/minor parties.

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CHAPTER 6

A Different Yardstick
Gender and Leadership in the Political Discourse

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The 2014 elections were largely run along opinions on gender, rather than facts, but how far have politics been engendered in Malawi with the coming to power of the first woman president? In this chapter, we argue that too much weight was given to former President Joyce Banda's womanhood. This claim is substantiated mainly using a video clip entitled 'Sweep out Joyce sweep her out' (*'Sesa Joyce Sesa'*) and other web-postings, illustrating the political discourse during the election period in 2014.

The first part of this chapter gives the backdrop against which Joyce Banda's womanhood is compared to the performance of her predecessors, who were all male. The second part conceptualises the discussion within the theoretical bases of critical political discourse analysis, and analyses the political discourse of the pre- and post-2014 elections. This is followed by an outline of the methodological approach of the study. The last part discusses the political discourse used to criticise Banda as a woman, using data collected through video clips, pictures, and *instagrams* to substantiate the argument that Joyce Banda's leadership and performance were couched in a discourse on womanhood.

This chapter argues that during the 2014 elections the portrayal of President Joyce Banda undermined her legitimacy to lead the nation, which was based on her personal trait as a woman and not necessarily on her performance. The campaign discourse, which criticised her legitimacy, was couched within her gender; saying 'a woman cannot lead a country' (*'ng'ombe yayikazi sikoka ngolo'*). Her performance and subsequent loss in the elections was measured not only on the basis of the fact that she was a leader who failed, but that she failed because she was a woman.

Any campaign discourse in a democratic society creates a public forum in which judgments about the desirability of candidates can be made or challenged (Beniot 2003: 7), and the ultimate goal for candidates is to persuade voters that they are better than others. Voters, on the other hand, are expected to make an informed decision from campaigns. For this reason, campaigns, as a discursive institution, ought to be seriously analysed. The Malawi 2014 tripartite pre- and post-election discourse can therefore be discussed and analysed within the dominant issues and language that defined it.

One of the dominant issues that surfaced through the mass media and social media was the unpopularity of the incumbent president Joyce Banda, as well as the subsequent post-election discourse on why she, and several other women, lost the elections. Admittedly, the issue of incumbency dominated the coverage, but the discourse was also characterized by a strong gender bias.

Joyce Banda's Presidency 2012-2014

The then Vice-President Joyce Banda came to power by default because of President Bingu wa Mutharika's sudden death on 5 April 2012. This status was then to haunt her entire presidency, as illustrated later by the video analysis. At the time, the ruling party (*Democratic Progressive Party*, DPP) cadres were neither prepared nor willing to hand over the presidency to someone they had in fact expelled from the party in December 2010. The electorate, however, initially had the good will and welcomed her ascendancy to power, and held the expectation that she would turn the economy around. But some were clearly not ready for a female president, as will be shown later, for instance with the negative proverbial sayings that arose during her reign.

Unlike her predecessors, Banda had only two years to prove to Malawians that she had the competence and the will to lead the nation, and to galvanise enough support to earn her a full five-year term in office from 2014. Those who have labelled her a *juggler* (Kainja 2013) and *accidental president* (Allison 2013) have a point.

Joyce Banda found herself in an un-anticipated situation, having to take over office so soon. Also, Bingu's arrogance and self-centredness had alienated donor support to Malawi's budget, a situation that had dire consequences to the nation. Her response to the range of national expectations, donor expectations, and her own ambitions, was a number of simultaneous approaches. These approaches probably also cost her bid for a full term, because the general population came to doubt a woman's capability to handle such a complex situation. In fact, she became the darling (if not the puppet) of the donors and the international community, and she tried to overturn each and every 'ill' initiated by Bingu wa Mutharika. For example, the national currency, the kwacha, was devalued by 50 per cent (Masina 2012), forex started flowing in again as did fuel and other commodities; the gay law was to be reviewed, the site for the national sports-stadium was reversed from Blantyre to Lilongwe; she reached out to neighbouring countries where relations had soured, and new bridges were built.

Her first 100 days in office were viewed with mixed feelings. Her reversals of a number of her predecessors' decisions, her observance of human rights and her strengthened rule of law, her basically non-nepotistic appointments, increased number of women in positions of influence, 'zero tolerance' policy against corruption, were notable achievements in a short period of time. In all, Joyce Banda was recognized for her actions of promoting good governance in accordance with the international norms of the donor community (Ghere 2013, Masina 2012). To many people, these moves proved her competence and worth as a leader.

At the same time, she was met with criticism for her wastefulness, her sporadic and therefore non-holistic initiatives of distributing goats, cows, maize and other commodities; building houses in selected areas, and for her insatiable appetite for travel within the country campaigning for a full term. Her campaigning was not successful, however, as the electorate had been hurt by the devaluation of the national currency and focussed on her economic management, quickly forgetting her milestones. Although she was not doing anything different from what other Malawian presidents had done, the electorate's focus quickly shifted from her gains to who she was. She became the woman, and not the leader, running out of steam.

Was Joyce Banda's failure to win the election based on her competence or her womanhood? Womahood does not in itself lead to failure of one's personality and competence. Former males were sometimes incompetent, but their failures were regarded as normal. Joyce Banda's shrewdness and ambiguous behaviour was akin to previous presidents in terms of survival tactics and amassing wealth for political survival. It seems that male mediocrity is accepted as normal whereas female mediocrity is to be scorned, ridiculed, and punished.

As argued by Geisler (2004), mistakes by female politicians in Southern Africa are magnified into incompetence, and expectations of excellence are impossible to fulfil. Is the yardstick different? We have tried to answer this question by assessing the performance of three former presidents. Our assessments are presented in Table 1, which summarises the accomplishments and weaknesses of the three presidents. The dynamism of leading a nation, however, demands more than ticking off the boxes; the nuances of what each did or did not achieve have less to do with manhood or womanhood and more to do with who they were as leaders, with all their qualities and frailties.

Table 1: Leadership Comparison of Three Presidential Regimes

President Issue	Bakili Muluzi May 1994 - May 2004	Bingu wa Mutharika May 2004 – April 2012	Joyce Banda April 2012 – May 2014
ECONOMY			
- Devaluation	Yes	Yes	Yes
- Foreign exchange problems	Yes	Yes	No
- Fuel shortage	Yes	Yes	No
- Economic growth	Improving	Decreasing	Improving
- Corruption scandals	Cashgate (11 bn) Bookgate Choolgate Maizegate	Cashgate (92 bn)	Cashgate (12 bn?) Planegate
GOVERNANCE			
- Accountability	Low	Low	Low
- Work ethics/professionalism	Poor	Improved	Improved
- Political handouts	High	High	High
- Cronyism and nepotism	High	High	High
- Security	Poor	Improved	Improved
DONOR RELATIONS	Poor (Danish leaving; turning to Islamic countries)	Poor (British High Commissioner expelled, turning to China)	Good

Sources: Lwanda 2006, Booth et al. 2006, Cammack and Kelsall 2011, Ghere 2013
Figures in MWK.

Discourse Analysis

Language is not always a transparent medium of communication; it can conceal ideologies. Political campaigns very often lack *civility* in the way candidates communicate with and about each other; we will often see *positive* self-representation and *negative* representation of others (van Dijk 2008). This is an issue emphasised in discourse analysis and, in particular, in *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), which is used to study the relationship between the discourse structure and identity construction as well as the ideological effects of various texts (see for example de Cillia et al. 2009, Hardman 2008).

Our argument is that the *negative* representation of others in Malawi, which is typical of political campaigns, often will express itself as an ideology in which women are less valued and not acceptable for political leadership. The simple and overt stereotyping as well as the covert stereotyping of the leadership of Banda follows her traits as a woman.

In the following, we will discuss the various media that were used during the election campaigns in Malawi in 2014. This political discourse is identified by its actors or authors: politicians and political parties. Current approaches in critical discourse analysis deal with the reproduction of political power, power abuse, or domination through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance. In particular, the analysis deals with the discursive conditions and consequences of social and political inequality that result from such domination (Fairclough 1995, van Dijk 1993).

We agree with van Dijk (1997: 13), who argues that the political arena is complex, involving the interaction of politicians and the various recipients (the people, citizens, voters, etc.). We also agree that all these groups and individuals, as well as their organizations and institutions, may take part in the political process, and many of them are actively involved in political discourse.

For our analytical purposes, we have included a video for analysis, plus images and political comments. The video recording, called 'Sweep out Joyce sweep her out' ('*Sesa Joyce Sesa*') circulated through *Whatsapp* prior to the 2014 elections. We have transcribed (see appendix) and analysed it, and supplemented it with fragments from online news, radio interviews, proverbs, media postings, campaign rallies, party jingles, *instagrams* and blogs, both from supporters and opponents of the incumbent president. We have analysed these texts and notions of language with their metaphoric and extra-linguistic context; satire, irony, ideology, and use of audience.

"Sweep her out!"

Malawian campaign discourse has changed radically over the past twenty years. The advent of television, opinion polls, and social media has transformed the nature of the contests, and private citizens now play a greater role in the campaign discourse.

The video recording called 'Sweep out Joyce sweep her out' is typical of this. The video text was produced by Mr George Saonda, a *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP) spokesperson at the time of the production, and the video was targeted for the general public of Malawi.

Prior to the production of the video, Joyce Banda had held a rally at Goliati in Thyolo District, the home village of the late president's brother, who was the presidential candidate of the DPP (and became the President of the Republic after the elections), Peter Mutharika. At Banda's rally, the Minister of Health, Catherine Gotani Hara, had made some 'provocative' remarks that the DPP candidate, Mutharika, was not automatically qualified as president simply because he was the brother of the late president. She said "if your brother was a doctor does it mean you will also be a doctor?" ("*kodi ngati m'bale wako anali dokotala ndiye kuti iweso ndiwe dokotala?*"). This was interpreted by the DPP supporters as a provocation, made in their own constituency, and a fracas ensued which even claimed the life of a policeman.

In order to repair the damage, Peter Mutharika later held a rally at the same Goliati village, and this video was shot at that occasion. Mutharika was making a powerful political oration, and Mr Saonda

was filmed in a car making his proclamation. The video was then circulated via Whatsapp and other social media, and was popularised as a de-campaigning tool used against President Joyce Banda and her *People's Party* (PP).

The video portrays Banda in the light of some archaic, patriarchal societal beliefs and values. Mr Saonda uses religious as well as social metaphors to communicate his message of how useless women are, how empty of knowledge Joyce Banda is, and why she should be removed. This video is not a testimony to how she governed the country, it is a personal attack of her womanhood.

Referential Strategies

Referring always involves choices, and these choices are functional. Referring expressions in campaign discourses do not simply identify individuals, but have a political function in drawing attention to certain aspects of identity. Apart from constructing an identity, names can confer or limit power (Ruiz and Bataller 2010: 175). For example, what may seem natural and common sense in referring to Joyce Banda as 'mother' (*'amayi'*), when assessed against alternative choices available to the speaker and assessed against other terms made to characterise other politicians occupying the same role and in the same capacity, reveals the ideologies held by the speakers.

Table 2 lists a few selected ways of referring which were used for the four presidents: Hastings Banda, Bakili Muluzi, Bingu wa Mutharika, and Joyce Banda. The table compares the referential strategies along the functions which they perform in discourse. First, we have official functionalisation, in which the presidents are referred to by the official functions they perform (van Leeuwen 2008). Official functionalisation is expressed by common phrases which describe the individual in his/her professional capacity, thereby legitimating the individual in that role.

Table 2: Referential Strategies Employed in Malawian Discourse

President Function	Hastings Banda	Bakili Muluzi	Bingu wa Mutharika	Joyce Banda
Official Functionalisation	Life President of the Republic of Malawi	First president of multiparty Malawi	The head of state, President of the Republic	The second female head of state in Africa
Functionalisation	The destroyer of the federation	The Political Engineer	The Economic Engineer	
Objectivisation	*Mkango wa a Malawi* (The lion of Malawi) *Ngwazi* (Powerful warrior)	*Mtunda wina* (The exeptional)	*Chitsulo cha njaje* (Railway steel) *Mose wa lero* (Today's Moses)	*Kumtunda* (the Great One)
Relational Description	*Tate wa pfuko wa Malawi* (The father of the Malawi nation) *Nkhoswe* (Guardian number one)		Peter Mutharika's brother	*Amayi* (Mother)
Impersonalisation	*Boma lathu* (Our government)	*Boma ilo* (The government)	*Boma ilo* (The government)	*Boma ilo* (The government)

In many other instances, proper nouns are placed in apposition to common noun phrases, e.g. *Bakili Muluzi, the first president of multiparty Malawi*. These are often rigid designators of meaning as there is often no semantic connection between the label and the designated meaning (Anderson 2007). The examples of official functionalisation above contain gendered elements of referring.

Due to the fact that presidency is a male-dominated area, the occupation of this position by a woman is explicitly marked, *Joyce Banda, the second female head of state in Africa*. This sort of labelling was common in the news which announced her rise, but continued also throughout her reign in both local and international news. The strategy was furthermore employed in the PP campaigns. Banda was acclaimed using what was considered a laudatory epithet: *the first female president*. She was praised as being unique and trendsetting. Unfortunately, this labelling, which seemed rather natural and common sense, fixated on her gender unlike the other presidents. Other pre- and post-election discourse on other political actors never carried gender labels.

Functionalisation is when individuals are referred to according to what they *do* (van Leeuwen 2008). There are many referring items for Hastings Banda, Bakili Muluzi and Bingu wa Mutharika (see examples in Table 2) but this kind of functionalisation was a rare strategy for Joyce Banda. It shows that she was rarely described in terms of what she did or could do. Interestingly, the use of the relational epithet, which described her in terms of her domestic role, 'mother' (*'amayi'*) was more popular than any other label. The widely used 'mother' fixated her image on her domestic role, for which it is felt natural to place a woman. The use of the domestic title 'father' (*'tate'*) for Hastings Banda carried a descriptive connotation, which extended the sphere of reference to the whole nation: 'The father

of the nation' ('*Tate wa pfuko la Malawi*') and 'The guardian of Malawian women' ('*Tate wa mtundu wa Malawi*').

The label 'mother' symbolizes love, respect and service; it embodies nurturing roles and is devoid of political power. However, there were a number of images circulating on social media ridiculing her mothering role. Yet, politics inherently assumes power in its definition, and labels that elevated her as a person of great strength and power were either unpopular or non-existent in the discourse. Instead, pejorative labels such as the 'accidental president' and images of Joyce Banda as a snake were common.

The preponderance of a domestic label must be understood against the background of *objectivisation*, which was the preferred label for the male counterparts in the spoken discourse. Objectivisation is when individuals are referred to by using animal symbols, objects, and icons. Qualities of the chosen object are mapped onto the individual who bears the label. Objectivisation is often seen as a strategy of negative representation, but Shame (2015), in her study of the construction of identities for presidents, establishes that in Malawi objectivisation is a strategy for both positive and negative representation.

Hastings Banda was popularly known as 'The lion of Malawi' ('*Mkango wa Malawi*'), an epithet symbolizing his ferociousness and power. In Malawian folklore, the lion occupies the role of the king of the jungle, strong, predatory and wise. Both Hastings Banda and Bingu wa Mutharika were bestowed the qualities of bravery and prowess through the title 'Powerful warrior' ('*Ngwazi*'). It indicates that one is invincible and insuperable. Bingu wa Mutharika was known as 'Rail steel' ('*chitsulo cha njanji*'), symbolizing his great strength and resilience. Campaign discourse acclaiming Peter Mutharika described him as the biggest and prized catfish in Malawi, '*bombe*' (for instance in the 'Sesa Joyce sesa' video clip). Campaigners for Joyce Banda simply described her as 'The great one' ('*Kumtunda*'). This term lacks the substance which is carried by the inclusion of an object to symbolize greatness as in the lion, the rail steel and the giant catfish (or 'iron' as in epithets used for Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, Eugenia Charles and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf).

The Metaphors

One of the most common rhetorical devices is the *metaphor*. The metaphor is the use of one or more words for a concept outside of its normal use. Most people use metaphors as a device for poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish. It is often assumed that metaphors are mere rhetorical ornaments without any core information, but, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 159), metaphors are our principal vehicle for understanding our physical, social, and inner world. Metaphors can even contribute to "a situation where they privilege one understanding of reality over others" (Chilton 1996: 74).

The video 'Sesa Joyce sesa' is a good example of the use of metaphors in an attack discourse. Using religious and cultural metaphors, the video selects conservative and male-chauvinistic practices that every Malawian can identify with, in terms of how Catholics and Muslims conduct themselves in churches and mosques, respectively, by not allowing female members to be priests or imams.

It also alludes to how, traditionally when a man dies, the one who is used to cleanse the widow (the hyena, *fisi*) cannot claim that the widow is his wife. Likewise, Banda, who was only completing Mutharika's term, could not claim the presidency, which she only received on a silver platter by virtue of death.

The act of being removed from power is represented in the video through the action of removing rubbish (to sweep, *sesa*). This has a grooming effect as a daily, repeated activity, and sweeping is converted into an act of removing from power. Religious dogmas and cultural analogies are evoked in ways that not only position Joyce Banda as rubbish, but as one who disregards culture and the natural and common sense in the gender division of labour. The inheritance of political power, despite being a constitutional right, is ridiculed along gender lines:

> *I want to find out from you one thing (pardon me), time is against us, the Catholic church, a Christian church, if the priest is away, can a Sister administer the Eucharist?*

> (In Chichewa: Ndimati ndikufunseni chinthu chimodzi, nthawi silola, Catholic mpingo wa chikhristu, kodi wansembe akachoka, a sister amadyetsa mgonero?)

Here, the campaigner underscores that what happened was unnatural and un-cultural; hence, Banda's power is illegitimate. The Catholic priest, who under any circumstance is male, reinforces the natural hierarchy of power along gender lines. The Sister, who under any circumstance is female, has to act under the leadership of the priest. Since the Catholic priest can be assisted in church by not only sisters but also acolytes or diaconates or deacons, the metaphor strategically de-legitimates Banda on the basis of her womanhood. The religious convention is further universalized by making reference to two religions.

> *I wanted to ask you (I beg your pardon!), even for the Muslims, at the Mosque, if the Sheikh is away, can women serve in front of men?*

> (Ndimati ndikupempheni, ngakhale kwa asilamu, eh kunzikiti shehe akachoka, eh azimayi amapita eh kukatumikira kutsogolo?)

The hierarchy of power along gender lines is also claimed to be inconvertibly true and universal. The universality claimed on the gender order is extended to cultural ideologies.

> *I beg your pardon, there are things you inherit because somebody has died/passed away; when a hyena sleeps with the wife of a deceased husband the hyena cannot claim that she is his wife.*

> (Ndati ndikupempheni, zilipo zina umatenga chifukwa poti pafa munthu, fisi akapita kukalowa mnyumba eni nyumba akamwalira, fisiyo samati mkaziyo ndiwache.)

The hyena (*fisi*) is a cultural symbol of the man who is requested to have sex with a deceased man's wife with the purpose of cleansing her and freeing her from her dead husband's spirit. The man who performs the function is known as the hyena and he does not inherit the wife after cleansing her. The campaigner in the video makes an analogy to this custom, asserting that Banda

is not supposed to continue ruling as her duties were only expected to be temporary. Moreover, the campaigner undermines Banda's capacity as her rise to the presidency was accidental and a matter of convenience only. Thus, the act of sweeping Joyce Banda out is not based on her performance but merely that it is unconventional to have a female leader.

The DPP campaign also had a popular jingle on radio stations, centred on the corruption and fraud scandals surrounding Joyce Banda and the PP:

> *For you to know the thieves who stole your money / vote for DPP / for the truth about the thieves who stole money for your jet / vote for DPP / for cost prices to go down / vote for DPP / so that our lake should not be grabbed / vote for DPP / for us to have security back and sleep in peace / vote for DPP and Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika!*

> (Kutimudziwe mbava zomwe zinaba ndalama zanu / voterani DPP / kuti mudziwe chilungamo cha mbava zomwe zinaba ndalama za ndege yanu / voterani DPP / kuti zinthu zisike mtengo / voterani DPP / kuti Nyanja yanu yokongolayi isalandidwe aMalawi / voterani DPP / nanga kuti chitetezo chibwelere mchimake anthuni nkumagona mtima uli zii / voterani DPP ndi Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika Mutharika!)

Discourse Structure

An analysis into the way discourse was organised further reveals deep-seated ideologies about gender. Although the structure itself is not gendered, it reinforced the gender meanings carried within the discourse. The video recording 'Sesa Joyce sesa' was popular because of the powerful rhetorical effects and humour which were made through the choice of metaphors and in the dialogue. Most campaign rallies were monologues; speakers opened speeches with slogans followed by speeches with the occasional ululations, chants and responses. Where dialogic discourse occurred, the audience was mostly finishing up an utterance in agreement with the speaker. The dialogue structure in the 'Sesa Joyce sesa' video stands out differently: the campaigner broke his arguments into single utterances which were followed by a chorus. An easily memorable poetic rhythmic chorus was created, into which arguments were slotted.

> Speaker: *Sweep out Joyce sweep out* (Sesa Joyce sesa)

> Audience: *Sweep out!* (Sesaaaaa!)

This structure had the effect of allowing repetition of the metaphor *sesa* for emphasis. The audience not merely enjoyed listening but participated in the symbolic action of *sesa* through gestures and chanting. The meaning was reinforced through audience inclusion as well as the sheer repetition of *sesa*. The audience is not lost through long winded speeches.

The Defence Strategy

"Being a woman should not be a hindrance" ("*Kukhala mzimayi sichifukwa*") and "clear the way our mother should pass" ("*odi uko amayi adutseko*") were the slogans that formed the hub of Joyce Banda and the PP election campaign. What had been identified as inhibitive to success by the party was not their policies, performance, or resources, but Banda's womanhood. Womanhood was viewed as an electoral risk. When one considers the patriarchal culture in which this campaign was couched, evidenced by proverbial sayings such as "a cow cannot pull a cart" ("*ngombe yayikazi sikoka ngolo*") and "the head of the house is a man" ("*mutu wa banja ndi mwamuma*"), one might concur with the PP slogans.

The Banda and PP campaign also focussed on womanhood as an acclaim and defence strategy in its campaign rallies. In the extract below, from a PP rally, the campaigner argues for voting on gender lines regardless of political ideologies.

> *This is your first chance in life / this is your first chance to have a female president so who will be the unwise woman here / even for an elections monitor of a different party / if you are a female monitor vote for this woman.*
>
> (Mwayi wanu woyamba kuti mukhale naye mayi as president nde mayi wakuti wopanda mnzeruyo / khaya azapezeke monitor wa maelekishonziyo wachipani china / ngati monitor ali mkazi voti yako uzaponyere mayiwa.)

In the PP campaign, we notice a prevalence of words referring to womanhood without leadership qualities. This discourse was not only produced by her campaigners, but interviews with Banda herself, especially after the election, ran along the same lines. Given the despair and acrimony of the *cashgate* corruption scandal, and fears of imminent war with neighbouring Tanzania over the dispute of Lake Malawi boundaries, reducing the voter information to 'woman' ('*mzimayi'*) led to loss of confidence in women. Although the DPP jingle, which was popularised on radio stations, centred on corruption and fraud, the PP did not counter-attack on these issues but focussed their defence on restoration attempts of her womanhood (in positive terms).

The Use of Images

A number of pictures, *instagrams*, and cartoons were also used to depict Joyce Banda's womanhood. Her rhetoric, that she inherited empty government coffers, while at the same time she frequently traversed the country and the world, was a stark contradiction to her policy of economic prudence. Her response was "I will not stop visiting the poor". Yet, poor Malawians were reeling under the austerity measures, the devaluation of the currency, and plummeting living standards, as evidenced by the many strikes within the civil service and parastatal bodies (Allison 2013).

Character-wise, Joyce Banda was seen as a 'snake in the grass', and portrayed as such in many images published on-line. In response to donor demands, she sold the presidential plane, but in controversial

circumstances. She was unable to convince the Malawian public that she had actually sold the plane that she frequently used, and what happened to the proceeds. Another major tainting issue was the *cashgate* corruption scandal, where she was portrayed as a reggae artist playing the same song over again.

Joyce Banda's choice of a young male running-mate also became a gender issue, for which she was ridiculed on social media. Like her predecessors, Joyce Banda dropped the incumbent vice-president for the benefit of a younger man, Sosten Gwengwe. One instagram picture showed a motherly figure (Joyce Banda) nurturing a baby (Sosten Gwengwe), her junior by far, almost her son. This picture typified a mother-son relationship and not the professional one that other aspirants had. This ridiculed her wisdom and choice of vice presidential candidate, especially because of a catch phrase used by Atupele Muluzi, the presidential candidate for *United Democratic Front* (UDF): 'The young generation' ('*wung'ono wung'ono*').

This was quite unfair, however, as almost all political parties (with the exception of the *Malawi Congress Party*, MCP) had younger aspirants of Gwengwe's age, either as running mates (like DPP's Saulosi Chilima) or as presidential candidates (UDF's Atupele Muluzi), and made a bid for the youth vote. It was as if Malawians wanted her to have an older man besides her to keep her in line.

Another image depicted her carrying a placard with the inscription 'Having failed Malawi' ('*Ndalephera a Malawi*), implying that she was admitting to have failed Malawians prior to the elections. In other words, a woman president who was unable to run complex state affairs. Another image portrayed Joyce Banda with Barack Obama in which he tells her to concede defeat and addresses her as 'mother' ('*amayi*'), contrary to all protocol.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how far the last elections in Malawi were engendered with the coming to power of the first woman president. The 2014 elections were run along gender opinions rather than facts. We have shown that although Joyce Banda failed as a Malawian leader, her failure was measured along gender lines. There were strong, conservative, culturally-driven priorities of what was expected of a leader, and it seems that women will have to do more than what Joyce did in order to be accepted. The cultural expectations of what a woman leader can do are deep-rooted, and used to reinforce bias against women leaders in the executive arm of government.

Appendix

Transcript of the 'Sesa Joyce sesa' video clip with George Saonda

> "*A human being, here at Goliati, dressed in a PP cloth, who killed the person? Who murdered the deceased? That is the one, that's him! Sweep away Joyce, sweep! Sweep her away! I want to find out from you one thing, time is against us, the Catholic church, a Christian church, if the priest is away, can a Sister administer the Eucharist? No! Finger up! (Points/gestures at the candidate,*

Peter Mutharika). People of Goliati village, if you lose this big fish seated here, we are unfortunate people, take Joyce and place her here, then take the great one and place him here, you already know the answer, you already know what is right. You already know who is the suitable candidate. I wanted to ask you, or I beg your pardon! Even for the Muslims at the Mosque, if the Sheikh is away, can women serve in front of men? No! Sweep away Joyce, sweep! Sweep her away! I beg your pardon; there are things you inherit because somebody has died, when a hyena sleeps with the wife of a deceased husband, the hyena cannot claim that that is his wife. No! Sweep away Joyce, sweep! Sweep her away!"

("Munthu, kuno kwa Goliati, atavala nsalu ya PP, anapha munthu ndi uti? Ndiyemweyo! Sesa Joyce sesa! Sesa! Ndimati ndikufunseni chinthu chimodzi, nthawi silola, Catholic mpingo wa chikhristu, kodi wansembe akachoka, a sister amadyetsa mgonero? Ayi! Sesa Joyce sesa! Sesa! Chala m'mwamba! Inu anthu a kwa Goliati, mukaluza bombe wakhala apayi ndife anthu atsoka, (eya) kumutenga Joyce kumubitsa apa, nde mutenge mtunda musiye apa, nokha mukuziwa, choona ndi chiti, (eya). Sesa! Ndimati ndikupempheni, ngakhale kwa asilamu, eh kunzikiti shehe akachoka, eh azimayi amapita eh kukatumikira kutsogolo? Ayi! Sesa Joyce sesa! Sesa! Chala m'mwamba! Ndati ndikupempheni, zilipo zina umatenga chifukwa poti pafa munthu, fisi akapita kukalowa mnyumba eni nyumba akamwalira, fisiyo samati mkaziyo ndiwache.")

(The video is available at YouTube: http://bit.ly/1MvPYT4)

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CHAPTER 7

Local Government Councils
A Potential Arena for Women's Substantive Representation

ASIYATI LORRAINE CHIWEZA

In the 1990s, the issue of women's presence in the political sphere gained significant international traction, often fuelled by the suggestion that women would change the substance and style of politics and act in the interest of, and in a manner that is responsive to women (Costa et al. 2013). A central concern of research on gender and political representation has been the question of whether those who hold office (descriptive representation) affect the types of policies passed (substantive representation) (Childs and Krook 2009). Gender scholars are now examining these links by asking questions on whether "women act for women": whether the presence of women in politics improves the representation of women interests, and whether an increase in the number of women representatives in parliaments or local government councils results in increased attention to women's policy concerns.

Research on substantive representation in Africa has tended to focus on the legislature, with limited attention to local government institutions. Drawing from the literature on legislatures, substantive representation of women in Africa appears to be related to women's participation in cross-party women's caucuses, to cooperation between legislators, women activists, and civil society, and to an increased assertive representation of the women legislators (Hassim 2009). It also depends on the institutional rules that structure legislators' ability to contribute, and on the institutional positional power of women inside legislatures (Celis 2008). Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) argue that substantive representation requires that legislators should have certain attitudes and preferences when acting as representatives.

How do these factors relate to women in local government institutions? This is an important question because local governments, from the democratic-participatory school of thought, serve as entry points and training grounds that provide politicians with a nursery for future leadership. Local government is an avenue for getting practical experience in participating in governance and influencing decisions before moving on to national politics (Ossei-Afful 2014: 4).

There is little empirical knowledge about the representation of women in local government councils in Malawi and whether they are able to articulate women's interests and assert influence. There are persistent low levels of women representation at this level in Malawi, and a limited experience with local government (only since 1994). This chapter focusses on the political motivations of women councillors, the space for participation that they have, and their ability to articulate women's and other interests.

Theory and Methodology

Descriptive representation means election or appointment to positions of political authority. Substantive representation, as seen from Pitkin's definition, is understood as "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner that is responsive to them" (Pitkin 1967: 209). This means that elected women can and will pursue policies that benefit other women. This understanding of representation suggests that the women elected to public office are associated with the advancement of women interests, and that the ultimate aim is to improve women's lives, including but not limited to: eliminating violence against women and girls, expanding reproductive rights and women's health, advancing girls education and equality and promoting non-discrimination measures.

Advocates of decentralisation argue that decentralisation opens up more space for women to enter into decision-making arenas and articulate their interests, and in turn influence policy decisions (Blair 2000). Thus, in theory, democratic decentralisation can increase the descriptive representation of women in local governments, and at the same time, it can help in the formulation of women's responsive policies (Khan 2011: 68), that is, substantive representation.

This, however, presumes that the elected women will take deliberate action to pursue women's interests, and that they will be effective in achieving these goals. It also assumes that there is some consciousness among the elected women "that a woman representative […] speaks and acts in favour of the expectations, needs, and interests of women" (Tremblay 2007: 283).

Measuring the substantive representation of women is fraught with challenges, and there are many debates about how to do this (Celis et al. 2014). Inconclusive and contradictory findings from empirical research point to the importance of understanding the context, the representative acts, the representatives, the circumstances involved, and representation as a process (Celis 2008: 113).

Because the councillors have served only for a limited period in the local councils (elected in May 2014), we will examine women's substantive representation by examining the *motivations* (rather than the *actions*) of the women councillors, plus the *institutional* aspects (termed as spaces of participation). We are using Cornwall's (2002) idea of spaces of participation, defined as sites in which different actors, knowledge, and interests interact, and in which room can be made for alternatives but from which some people and ideas can also remain excluded. Our focus is on the space for participation that the system of local government in Malawi provides. We argue that the councillors' *motivations* for standing as political representatives and their *abilities* to articulate issues, are important indications of their attitudes about whom they represent and the likelihood that they will act 'for women'.

The research on which this chapter is based was quantitative council representation data collected from all the 34 local councils of Malawi.[1] Questionnaires to female councillors were administered through the women councillors' caucus formation meetings that took place in 2015.[2] We also collected survey data from 51 women councillors, representing 91 per cent of all women councillors in Malawi. In addition, qualitative discussions were held with women councillors from 20 local government wards and council staff in 13 district councils: two in the Northern Region, five in the Central Region, and six in the Southern Region.

Space in Local Government

The space for participation and articulation of any interests is embedded in the design of the Malawi local government system. From 2014, Malawi has a total of 35 *Local Government Areas* in which local governments, called *councils*, are established. Each *Local Government Authority* is made up of two parts: a political arm, known as the *Council*, and an administrative arm, called the *Council Secretariat*. The elected councillors are elected from the *wards*. Each constituency has two wards, except for urban areas where the number of wards is higher.

The council holds power as a corporate body, but is subjected to national policy direction and priorities. Procedurally, local government functions are carried out through a committee system. The *Local Government Act* provides for a number of mandatory committees: finance, development, education, works, health and environment, and human resources. Membership comprises elected councillors and MPs, representatives of interest groups, and council officers from the relevant sectors who provide technical advice and secretarial services.

The full council and its committees constitute the formal space (or arena) of participation and articulation of interests. The service committees play important roles in local governance, as they can propose activities in any sector, examine government policies, and oversee their implementation. The committees are consequently important avenues where women interests can be articulated and discussed. However, this depends on the positioning of women in such spaces, whether there is consciousness among them to pursue women's issues, whether such issues are articulated, who articulates them, and whether they are heard.

Women's Motivations and Positioning

Since Malawi adopted decentralisation in 1998, the representation of women in local councils has been minimal. In the first local government elections that took place in 2000, women were successful only in 70 out of the 861 wards across Malawi, depicting an overall 8.1 per cent women representation.

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[1]   The data collection was a part of a larger study on entry points on gender and local governance, commissioned by UN Women (Malawi).

[2]   The author gratefully acknowledges UN Women for the opportunity to engage with female councillors through these activities, and for the permission to use this data for this book chapter.

(From then, local government elections were consistently postponed. When their term of office expired in 2005, no councils were in place for nine years until the 'tripartite' elections in May 2014, which included local elections).

The re-introduction of local government councils in 2014 gave hope that the participation of women in local politics would increase. During the 2014 elections, there were 419 women councillor candidates (17.4 per cent out of a total of 2412 candidates). Most of the female candidates were from the *People's Party* (PP), followed by the *United Democratic Front* (UDF), independents, the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP) and the *Malawi Congress Party* (MCP).

The result of the local election was that 56 out of the 419 women candidates were elected (13.4 per cent). This represented only a marginal increase in women representation in local government. The figure also implies that Malawian women are the least represented in local government, as compared to the SADC average of 24 per cent (Gender Links 2014). Figure 1, which compares Malawi with the other SADC countries in terms of percentages of women in local councils, illustrates this point very well.

Figure 1: Representation of Women in Local Government in SADC, 2014
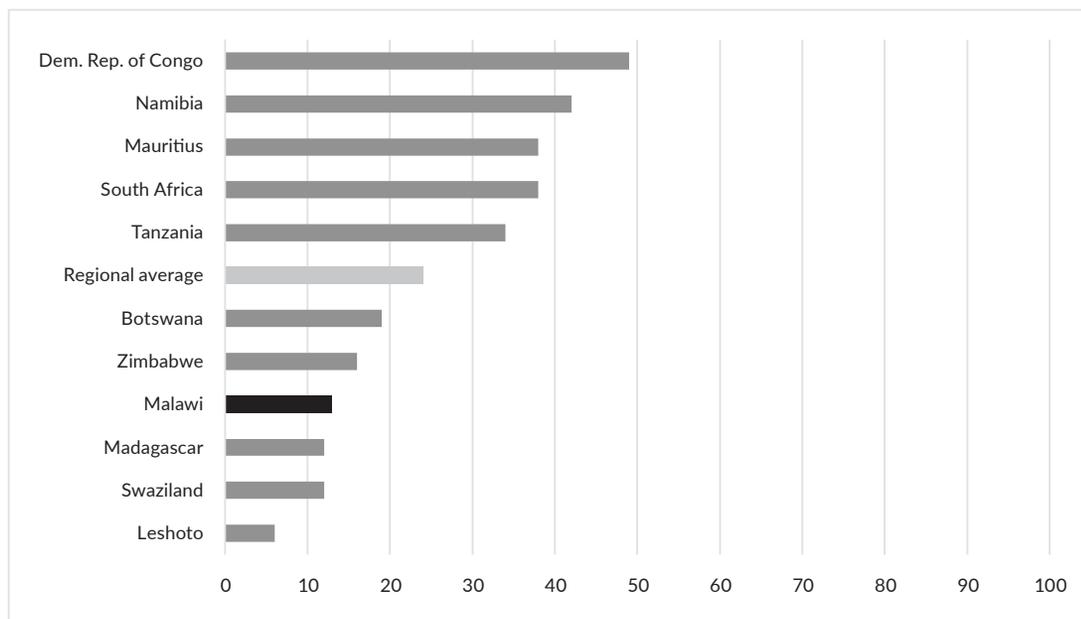
Source: Gender Links 2014 and MEC Election Results 2014. Figures in per cent.

Even though the women of Malawi are poorly represented, it is important to understand their motivations for standing as local government representatives. Does advancement of women's interests feature among their motivations? Through the survey, the women councillors were asked to explain what motivated them to stand for political office as councillors.

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the women councillors (70 per cent) were explicit about their primary motivation: to address the development needs of the ward. None of the groups explicitly talked about advancement of women's interests or attention to women's needs as part of their primary motivation, although a small group was motivated to stand in order to ensure gender balance in representation and to serve as role models for girls.

The expressed motivations are suggestive of the nature of interests the women prioritize. They are more related to generic interests, aimed at boosting their chances of re-election, and less related to particular group interests. Cammack and O'Neil (2014: 67) have noted that the most visible effect of competitive clientelism in Malawi is the incentives it creates for political leaders (whether men or women) to be seen to be directly "delivering development" to their constituents in order to be re-elected.

Figure 2: Motivations to Stand as a Ward Councillor
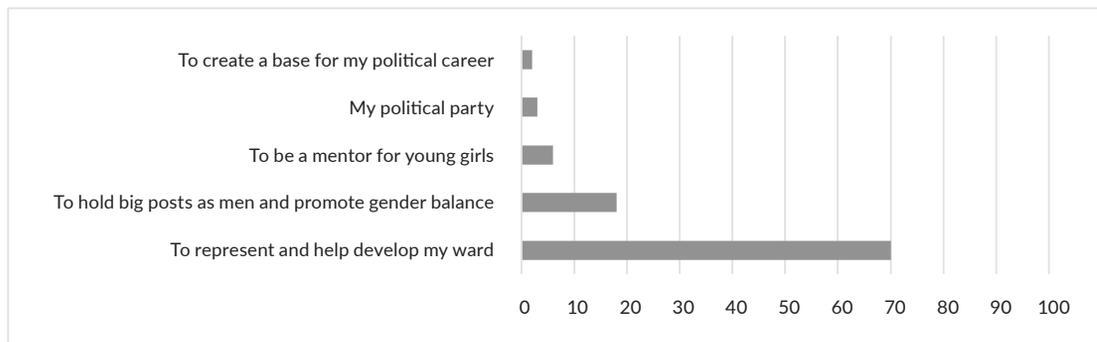
Source: Author's female councillors survey 2015. Figures in per cent.

However, what is noteworthy is that in the identification of key challenges for the ward, some women talked about issues that fall within the remit of women's interests, such as early marriages and wife abandonment, lack of income generating activities for women, limited access to portable water, and low literacy levels for women. This suggests that even though the primary motivation appears to be for the ward, women's interests encompass the ward's key problems and, as such, these issues stand a chance of being given attention.

Women's Positioning in Council Leadership

About 7 per cent of the local government council *chairpersons* are women, and 40 per cent of the *vice-chairpersons* are women. This indicates that a large proportion of women serve as vice-chairpersons, an outcome that can be attributed to the efforts of many council secretariats to promote gender balance in key decision-making positions. However, while the proportion of women vice-chairpersons is high, most of them were unclear about their actual role and what the office of the vice-chairperson entails. For example, female ward councillors in a group discussion admitted this lack of understanding as follows:

> *We need to tell the truth; we do not know the role of the vice chairperson in these committees. Before each council meeting the DC always calls the chairperson of the council* [who are men] *for briefing, but he does not call us, the vice chairpersons. When we are in the council meeting, we are just told to sit with them as if we are a handbag.*

> (In Chichewa: "Ofunika kuti tinene zowona eti, Ife ntchito za vayisi mumakomiti tilimowo sitikuzidziwa. Nthawi zonse ma DC anthu tisanayambe khanso miting'i akumangoyitana ma tcheya okhaokha omwe ndi amuna kuwafotokozera za zomwe tikakambirane ku khanso, koma ife ma vayisi satiyitanako. Tsopano tikakhala mu miting'imo, a DC ndi tcheya amangotiyitana kuti khalani apa ngati ndife chikwama.")

Similar sentiments were echoed by other women councillors, as in the following excerpt:

> *We are wondering what are the actual roles of vice chairpersons in these council committees, since the male chairpersons tend to dominate everything. When this happens, it makes us, women councillors, look like fools or incompetent. We really need help.*

> (Ife tikumadabwa kuti kodi ntchito ya vayisi mumakomiti tirimowa ndi ndiyiti popeza pakakhala chair mamuna amapanga zonse yekha. Izi zikumatipangitsa ife makhansala achizimayi kuti tizioneka ngati opusa kapena osatha zinthu. Tikufuna wina atiwunikire bwino ntchito za ma vayisi mu makomiti apakhanso.)

These stories also illustrate some tactical side-lining of women. The problem can be attributed to a lack of well-defined roles between the two actors as well as to council chairpersons' personalities and unwillingness to delegate. The council guiding documents stipulate that a vice-chairperson is supposed to stand in for the chair when the chairperson is not present. This assumes that when such a situation arises, the chairperson will delegate and provide space for the vice-chairperson to undertake some assignments. However, this was not the case as most women vice-chairpersons were simply figureheads, with very little involvement in council affairs, unless the chairperson decided to delegate. This constrains the ability of the women vice-chairpersons to gain exposure and experience as leaders in local government, let alone gain the confidence and agency to use their leadership position to articulate and advance ward or women specific interests.

Women's positioning in Council Service Committees

The number of women in the service committees is also low, reflecting the small number of elected women councillors. However, women representation in the various subcommittees is high. Over 60 per cent of the representatives have had an opportunity to serve in two or more subcommittees. About 33 per cent were chairpersons of subcommittees, while 25 per cent served as vice-chairpersons of various subcommittees.

The challenge for many of the women representatives is how to effectively articulate issues (whatever they may be) in the various local governance structures, and to steer deliberations in meetings.

The common statement that came out of interactions with the women councillors who did not have a public service background was that "we don't even know where to start from". This is because most of them do not really know what they are supposed to be doing; they have not fully grasped the operations of the council and they are not able to understand and articulate the issues in the English language. In a discussion with women councillors who were attending an orientation meeting in the Central Region, we were told that,

> *Yes, we were elected into various council committees but the problem is that we do not really know how the council works and are unable to articulate issues and even critically analyse issues… As a result, most of us are not taken seriously when we speak at the council level. Because we do not really know the issues, we are afraid to speak, lest we say things that do not make sense.*

> (Nzowona ife tinasankhidwa mu maudindo amakomiti osiyanasiyana koma chifukwa chakuti sitikudziwa zinthu monga za momwe khanso imayendela, sitithanso kuyakhula zotsatira zake anthu mu khanso satitenga siliyasi… Penanso tikumawopa kuyankhula tikakhala mu khanso sinanga sitikudziwa momwe khanso imayendera, ndiye tikumawopa ngakhale kuyankhula. Timangowona ngati kuti tiyankhula zopanda nzeru.)

The majority of the councillors are in fact new and inexperienced in matters of local government. Prior to becoming councillors, most of them served as businesspersons (44 per cent), subsistence farmers (25 per cent), and primary school teachers (11 per cent). Some key informants attributed the councillors' limited understanding and knowledge to low education levels, which did not match the level of understanding and skills required for policy deliberation and responsibilities. This goes back to the law that guides entry into local government. The *Local Government Elections Act* of 1996 does not prescribe specific educational qualifications but require that candidates should be able to read and write in English. This has been a subject of debate in local discussions on the potential of women councillors in Malawi.

The actual education profiles of the women councillors, as depicted in Figure 3, shows that only two per cent of them hold university degrees, and six per cent hold university diplomas. About half of the women councillors possess a *Junior Certificate of Education* (JCE; two years of secondary school), while the other half holds a *Malawi School Certificate of Education* (MSCE; secondary school exam). Only two per cent has no more than a *Primary School Leaving Certificate* (PSLC).

Figure 3: The Highest Qualification before Becoming a Ward Councillor
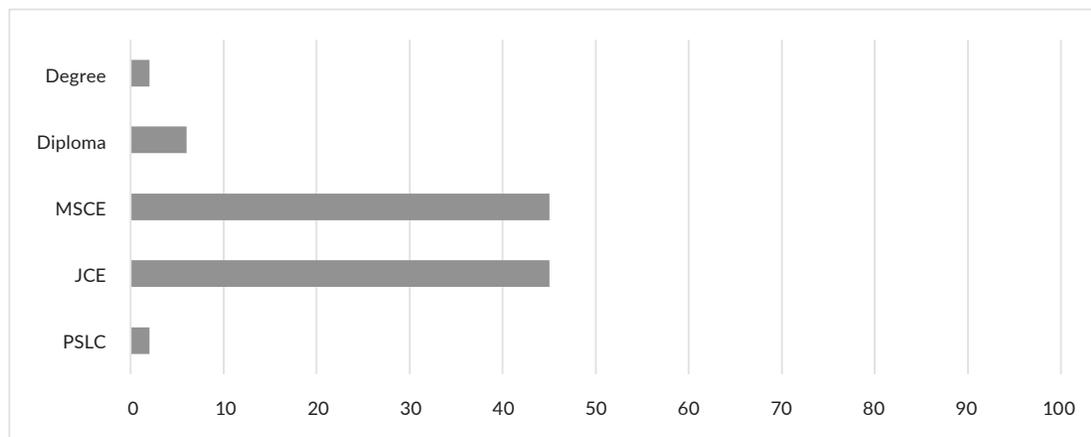
Source: Women Councillors Survey, 2015. Figures in per cent.

The councillors also generally lack basic information about their councils, and the flow of vital information from the council staff to councillors is limited. There is widespread perception among councillors that council administrative staff deliberately withholds vital information and fail to hold regular service committee meetings (under the pretext of lack of resources, etc.), in order to restrict the capacity of the councillors to oversee and scrutinise the officers' activities.

In addition, very few women possess the basic documents that guide the working of a council, such as the *Local Government Act*, *Decentralisation Policy*, the *Constitution*, and the various council guidelines. In some councils, CSOs support councillor training and provide copies of guidebooks on local government and on the conduct of council business. However, most councillors, and especially women councillors, are not able to fully grasp the content because almost all the documents are in English. These challenges have a huge bearing on the potential of women councillors to advance issues and to influence the outcomes of the local decision-making processes.

Concluding Reflections

This chapter has demonstrated that while decentralisation may indeed open up space for women to enter local government, it is not automatic that such entry will enable them to articulate issues, advance women's interests, and influence decisions. It also means that women's representation in local government does not guarantee that women will have any substantial influence over policy decisions.

Articulation of issues and the potential for acting for women's interests in local governments depends on the political incentives available to the representatives. It requires a conscious and deliberate decision on the part of the women representatives to speak for and act for other women. It also requires effective knowledge and an understanding of how the system works, which most of the newly recruited women

councillors in Malawi do not seem to possess. Embedded challenges surrounding political incentives, technical knowledge and power, which persistently undermine the linguistic and epistemic authority of marginalised actors, poses a major challenge for substantive representation of women.

Bridging these challenges through mentoring or coaching promises to enhance substantive representation in local governments. In order to be effective, programmes aimed at improving gender equality in local governance should not only aim at increasing women's representation in terms of numbers, they should also build women's political leadership capacities, train women in 'how things work', and build a network of social and political relationships.

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CHAPTER 8

The Gatekeepers
Women Political Participation
in Phalombe and Chiradzulu Districts

HAPPY KAYUNI

This chapter examines the factors that contribute to women volunteering for political positions in political parties at the grassroots level. It is political party activism at the district or sub-district level that is the focus of this chapter. The major question is to interrogate the factors and issues that make women become interested in party politics at this level. We will mainly assess the supply side of women activism.

Gender equality in the political arena has recently taken an international appeal. For instance, the recently launched *Sustainable Development Goals* (SGDs, in target 5.5) highlights gender equality in key leadership positions. One of its main objectives is to ensure "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life". It is generally accepted now that there is a strong link between women's political involvement and gender equality programmes, policies or laws (Vetten et al. 2012: 1) and, more importantly, political participation of women in government institutions is recognized as critical in the achievement of a truly democratic society (Hassim and Goetz 2003).

The basic understanding is that since women comprise about half the world's population, it does make sense that an equal proportion should be represented in key democratic institutions. It is in this context that Smith et al. (2012: 315) argue that a central political science research question should be "when and where are women present in political offices?" This is because, in almost every country or locality, there are fewer women who hold elected or appointed positions as compared to men. In one of its articles, *The Economist* declared that women represent the "the world's most underutilized resource" (2006).

The background research for this chapter is a study we carried out in Chiradzulu and Phalombe districts of Malawi on four major political parties (the *Democratic Progressive Party* DPP, the *People's Party* PP, the *United Democratic Front* UDF and the *Malawi Congress Party* MCP). In the 2014 general elections, Chiradzulu produced no female MP whereas Phalombe elected two female MPs.

Two constituencies were selected from each district. In Chiradzulu, the Central and East constituencies were selected and in Phalombe they were the North and South constituencies. The constituencies in Chiradzulu were selected because the East constituency had a male MP for a long period, whereas the Central constituency had a female MP for a short period. In Phalombe, the North constituency had maintained a female MP since 2004, while the South constituency had just replaced a male MP with a female, who won as an independent. With these variations, we believe these areas can explain some of the gender dynamics that influence women to decide to participate in politics.

Key informant interviews were conducted with selected female candidates (for the position of councillor and MP in 2014), senior party officials, and female committee members of the four political parties. The determinants for entry into politics by women in the two districts were examined from two angles: competitively elected public office and internal positions in the political party structures. Specifically, some women only appeared as party candidates for elections, while others were members of the local and district party structures. Interviews were conducted with both groups. The study noted several factors that motivated women to join politics, such as support from the spouse and from traditional and religious leaders.

The African Backdrop

Barnes and Burchard (2012: 773) points out that in sub-Saharan Africa, political opportunities have opened up for women in the recent past and enabled them to make strides in political representation, including political transitions, women's movements activism, and the acceptance of international and regional norms which support equal political representation. In Africa as a whole, a ground-breaking moment for gender parity was in 2003 when the African Union followed up on the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* with the *Rights of Women in Africa*, and encouraged the member states to achieve gender balance in decision-making by 2005. SADC decided to follow suit, and at the Heads of State Summit in Gaborone, Botswana, in 2005, a *50-50 gender target* was introduced. In August 2008, 13 of the 15 member states endorsed the gender parity policy by signing the protocol (with the exceptions of Botswana and Mauritius).

In 2005, when the African Union called on its member states to promote gender parity in political decision-making, the national legislatures in most Southern African countries, Malawi included, had low levels of women representation. Coming from a thirty year period of one-party state, participation of women in Malawian politics was more passive than active. It is in this context that the post-1994 period of democratisation witnessed an interest in bringing about realistic women participation in politics. However, most of these efforts were disorganised and not robust enough. In preparation for the 2009 general elections, the quest for increased women political participation took a more organised approach under the banner of the *50-50 campaign*. This increased interest was sustained up to the 2014 general elections.

The international pressure, combined with demands from national women's organizations, created an atmosphere where governments had to find pro-active approaches to address the low levels of women's representation in legislatures (Hassim and Goetz 2003). The most common answer to increased

demand for gender parity in decision-making has been the adoption of different kinds of gender quotas, such as reserving special seats for women and demanding that the parties nominate a certain number of women on their lists. Such measures, which address the demand side of politics, have received a lot of attention by scholars and researchers across the world (Muriaas and Kayuni 2013). Less attention has, however, been given to measures that address the supply problem of women in politics.

The supply-problem has drawn attention to the issue of getting women to volunteer as politicians. Similarly, much attention in Malawi has been on the reasons for the increase or decrease in the number of women in parliament. However, scholarly work addressing the reasons for (or hindrances to) women participation in political parties at the local level has been scant. There are several reasons for this bias, and include the fact that local level politics is a less visible aspect of national politics and is erroneously regarded as insignificant; and the fact that the decentralization process is incomplete. Yet, if bottom-up participatory politics is to be promoted, it is local level politics that matters.

Supply versus Demand of Women in Politics

The relationship between women participation in politics and democratic consolidation may be debatable, but it is generally accepted that the presence of women in politics is important. For instance, Hassim (1999: 6) argues that the presence and effectiveness of women in politics is critical as it touches on and brings credence to the core concept of democratic citizenship. A gap between the "presence of women in formal political structures" and their actual daily participation in these structures can be likened to a scenario where women have accepted the status of equality (formal citizenship) but lack the ability to exercise it and to determine their lives (lack of substantive citizenship) (Vetten et al. 2012:2).

What determines women's access to political office? And, what is the most effective instrument to fast-track women's representation? These questions on women's descriptive representation in democracies have been subjected to rigorous analysis (see for instance Krook 2010, Lawless and Pearson 2008, Lawless and Fox 2005, Norris and Lovenduski 1993).

One way of answering these questions has been to use the economic model of supply and demand. The *demand* side focuses on issues or areas over which the candidates have no control, such as the political environment. According to Kayuni and Muriaas (2014), measures that address the demand side of women in politics have received much attention by scholars and researchers across the world. In Malawi, the attention has focussed on the reasons for the increase or decrease in the number of women in parliament, in general.

However, the reasons why women do or do not participate in political parties at the local level have not been fully examined by scholars. *Supply-side* explanations emphasize factors that tell us *why* women decide to run, like Norris' examination of the forces which affect women to run for political office (1993: 310). It has been found, for instance, that this is related to whether women feel they have enough resources, knowledge and motivation (Kayuni and Muriaas 2014).

Women Political Representation at the Grassroots

According to Sundstrom and Stockemer (2015), research that analyses women's representation at the grassroot level has not received much attention in academic literature. Smith et al. (2012: 315) argue that a mixture of electoral, institutional, socioeconomic, and political factors "may explain the presence (or absence) of women in local office". Barnes and Burchard (2012: 767) argue that when women are introduced to political institutions such as political parties at local level, they encourage the "political engagement of women at the citizen level". Women's engagement has also significantly been far below that of men in such areas as talking about politics in general, contacting elected officials, or engaging with the political polity (ibid: 767).

The question is why do grassroots women matter after all? The *Huairou Commission* (which was established at a summit held in New York in September 2010, and holds consultative status with the UN), highlighted the importance of "empowering grassroots women to function as leaders in development decisions and processes at all levels," especially in developing countries (Huairou Commission 2010: 1). The commission aptly tried to address this issue by saying that:

- *Grassroots women have first-hand experience of what works and what does not work in their communities and have a strong track record for community problem solving by being information creators, problem solvers and knowledge holders.*

- *Grassroots women have valuable skills, goals, and social networks that can be tapped in the planning, implementation and monitoring of quality and accessible basic services and infrastructure at the local level.*

- *Grassroots women, particularly those linked to organized groups, reduce corruption and increase accountability when they are involved in public life. Investing in grassroots women's empowerment and inclusion in decision-making benefits not just themselves, but entire communities and societies.*

In other words, the Huairou Commission report clearly demonstrates that promoting local women participation at grassroots level is important for any polity, including Malawi.

Obstacles to Women Grassroots Participation

In order to examine the determinants of women's entrance into the political arena, we need to know the challenges they face. The removal of these obstacles may pave way for the entry of women into politics. Studies carried out at grassroots level have identified some of the challenges that women face, including the political parties and their role as gate keepers, attributes of the candidates themselves, and corruption (Sundstrom and Wangnerud 2014, Barnes and Burchard 2012, Cheng and Tavits 2011, Hansen 1997).

The political parties and their 'gatekeepers' are critical to an understanding of the supply side of women in politics. Loosely defined, gatekeepers are individuals within a party who are able to influence

the decisions of the party in terms of who should occupy party positions and stand for election on the party ticket. Sundstrom and Wangnerud argue that political parties play a significant role in explaining women representation in many countries, pointing out that "one lesson to be learned […] is that dedication matters; when political parties commit themselves to gender equality they seem to find ways of organizing recruitment to elect higher numbers of women" (2014: 1). The gatekeepers may also, however, hinder women's candidature. Cheng and Tavits argue that gatekeepers normally support or promote individuals who are like themselves and, due to the fact that there are few women gatekeepers, women end up being side-lined. In other words, "if most of the gatekeepers at the national or local level of political parties are men, this signals that there is an 'old boys' club at work which discourages women's participation" (2011: 462).

Another factor is the personal attributes of the women candidates. In his study, Hansen argued that for women to have an impact in politics, they need to be "competitive, qualified candidates and not simply nominal candidates" (1997: 75). Similarly, Atkeson found that "the presence of a competitive candidate significantly increases women's political engagement" (2003: 1040). In other words, if a country comes up with policies and systems that enhance women representation in political institutions (such as political parties), it will significantly increase political engagement within that polity (Barnes and Burchard 2012: 785). Consequently, policies should aim at improving the skills of women so that they become more competitive and not just nominal appointees.

Some studies have also demonstrated that corruption significantly affects the entry of women into politics. Using the case of 18 European countries, Sundstrom and Wangnerud found that in countries where corruption was deemed to be high, the proportion of women political representation was very low (2014:1). They further pointed out that "corruption represents unsanctioned 'shadowy arrangements' that benefit the already privileged and pose a direct obstacle to women when male-dominated networks influence political parties' candidate selection" (ibid: 2). Also, they specifically mentioned that corruption may hinder the candidature of women in two ways: firstly, when the networks which are in support of men influence the decision making of political parties in the selection of candidates and, secondly, when "they influence citizens' everyday life experiences and make them reluctant to engage in political matters" (ibid.).

Incentives to Women Grassroots Participation

The literature that examines the incentives which induce women to participate in politics at the grassroots level, both the general literature and the country-specific literature, is very scanty. In the general literature, the promise of (additional) campaign funding has been highlighted as one of the reasons why women might be interested to join politics (Kayuni and Muriaas 2014: 396). Other possible reasons may be that women have intimate knowledge about their locality and, hence, know the local challenges that need local political leadership and direction to be solved. There is also the possibility that they may have a conviction to a particular political party or ideology, or simply that they are trying to follow a particular family tradition. There is a need for studies to examine whether these factors incentivise women to participate in politics.

Support from the Political Party Gatekeepers

The analysis below provides the factors that motivated women to stand as candidates for political office as well as for women to join the existing party structures as members. Our study notes several reasons which compel women to join politics, including factors such as support from the spouse and from traditional and religious leaders. However, we will focus only on the factors that were noted as the most dominant.

Our study found that support from political parties, through their respective gatekeepers, was a major factor in *determining* women's entry into politics. This is consistent with other studies which also found this to be the most important factor (Sundstrom and Wangnerud 2014, Barnes and Burchard 2012). In general, political parties will try to support women when the main reason is to support the party structures at grassroots level, rather than make them take up influential positions or to stand as candidates for key elected positions.

We identified the chairperson and the secretary as the main gatekeepers in political parties at the district level. In some exceptional cases and at area and branch committee levels, other individuals were also influential. In other words, if the chairperson or secretary general, as gatekeepers, supported a particular candidate, that candidate was likely to be endorsed by the party. Once they were identified, the chairperson and secretary played an advisory and moral support role to the candidate, and they also mobilized support for the candidate and 'sold' the candidate on behalf of the party. Without this endorsement, it was not possible for women candidates to win party primaries for elected public office, let alone get a position within the party hierarchy.

Interviews with several secretaries of the political parties at district level highlighted some related issues. What emerged (as mentioned above) was that, in general, support for women was high for non-important positions within the party. In other words, it seems that the party needs women for strengthening the party structure at the grassroots level, but the party was not interested in women in externally contested positions (in elected public positions of MP and councillor).

In other words, for externally contested positions, the endorsement by gatekeepers was not strong due to a number reasons. First, most female candidates are not financially endowed as compared to men. The gatekeepers looked for those who were believed to have adequate funds to fund the campaign without financially squeezing the party. Thus, money is a main determinant, not gender. As one female committee member of MCP in Phalombe mentioned,

> *People have too much love for money. No one can win without money. People have no problem with women and all they want is material and financial support.*

One senior DPP party official in Chiradzulu provided an example that shows how much economic status matters. He said that the DPP campaigned strongly for their female candidate (Dr Mbilizi) in the Central Constituency. DPP was the most popular party in the whole district and, according to him, the elections were just a matter of formality. Dr Mbilizi was posed to win. However, a little

known male independent candidate, Mahomed Osman (who was not originally from Chiradzulu, but a Malawian of Asian origin), managed to win the elections. The general view was that Mr Osman won because he was good at giving handouts, such as blankets and bicycles, and he had also sunk numerous bore holes in Chiradzulu. In other words, the gatekeepers endorsed their woman candidate not only because she was educated but because she was perceived to be economically strong. However, the independent candidate proved to be stronger, economically, and won with a good margin.

This case provides a worrying trend. Dr Mbilizi seemed to have several advantages as compared to Mr Osman: she was nominated by the most popular political party in the district; she was the most educated of the candidates; and the constituency was her home village where most of her relatives lived. Her only disadvantage was that her rival had more financial resources. Her gender could be another reason for failure, but according to our interviews, it was actually her financial status that mattered at the end of the day.

The major lesson from this case study is that women are seriously inhibited by lack of financial resources and consequently hand the advantage to men, who are financially better resourced. Economic strength is considered important by the party gatekeepers as well as the voters.

In analysing the socio-economic status of female candidates (for MP and councillor positions) in the two districts, we have observed some differences. In Chiradzulu, the women who joined politics were mostly educated and one even had a Ph.D. degree (Dr Mbilizi). Most of them had stable businesses, independent livelihoods, and rather well-to do spouses. There were few who were known to depend on their husbands, relatives, or the party's sponsorship. In Phalombe, however, most of the women candidates were not adequately educated. The highest qualification for most of them was *Standard 8* (final year of primary school), and very few had attained the *Junior Certificate of Education* (JCE, two years of secondary school). Besides, they survived on small-scale businesses. The only exception was the woman who campaigned for the position of MP, Anna Kachikho, who had a master's degree.

A second issue that our interviewees focussed upon was the candidates' popularity among the common people. The election year of 2014 was not a good time to endorse too many female candidates because of the bad legacy of the out-going female MPs. In Chiradzulu, for instance, the chairperson of the DPP mentioned that the party had nominated three women parliamentary representatives in 2009, but these women had disappointed the people (a view shared by many). According to him, these failed women let down those who were aspiring for the same position in 2014, because

> They [the female MPs] *started to be arrogant and they started to disassociate with the very constituencies that voted for them. In fact, power went to their heads. They failed to help the poor. The veteran MPs Hon. Henry Mussa and Patricia Kaliati remain connected to the people. Kaliati always remains closer to the villagers and she is the model female candidate in Malawi. Otherwise, people's perception in Chiradzulu is not all that bad, only that the women failed to perform after they were given a chance in 2009.*

Thirdly, our interviewees mentioned that due to cultural norms, very few women are assertive. They lack confidence, and this was exploited by their male rivals during the campaign period. According

to the gatekeepers, the cultural attributes which expect women to obey their men extend into the political parties where most women remain virtually quiet. Often, they wait for men to lead the way, and generally men look down on women's capacity. As one government official in Phalombe mentioned: "Ideally, culture has condemned a woman to the kitchen, child bearing and washing household utensils".

They further mentioned that culture does not allow women to be in committee leadership positions; there is embedded culture which underrates women. This creates a scenario in which women have a low outlook about themselves which is compounded by men's control of their lives, particularly due to the fact that men are mostly the family bread-winners.

Ultimately, endorsement for women candidates is normally very difficult to attain as women are perceived to lack self-confidence and are risk averse. According to the gatekeepers, women are socialized to listen to their men and fail to make important decisions on their own. Their domestic roles as mothers and wives, combined with public roles, may affect their political advancement. The lack of self-confidence is evident with respect to where and how they receive political advice. According to one PP official in Chiradzulu,

> The problem is that female candidates tend to have many advisors and, consequently, everyone they meet become their advisor. Predominantly, female MP candidates depend on the advice of their husbands. In the end they get confused as they fail to choose the best advice to follow. It is after they lose that they remember, if at all, the advice of the district governor.

Although women are generally not endorsed for external elective positions, they are actually supported for local level political positions. Several reasons were advanced for supporting women at this level. Firstly, women often spearhead the organization of the party in regard to dances and mobilizing supporters. One senior PP official said that what "is a political party without the women and their dances?'' In this regard, women help by inviting others to join the party, especially during the campaign period. Their singing is perceived as boosting the morale of the party. Woman members also facilitate logistical issues related to organising party meetings such as welcoming visitors. More importantly, they help bring more support by attracting their fellow women to the party. According to one of the gatekeepers, "women articulate the merits of the party much better than men".

Another observation is that women generally show more commitment to the party, while the support and commitment from men is generally half-hearted and that they spend more time fighting for top positions. One female DPP member in Chiradzulu said that,

> Without women there is no meeting. Women are for all seasons. They dominate in weddings, funerals, top up social gatherings. They are everywhere and in the process get into contact with everyone that matters.

Exposure to Development Projects

Another good number of women interviewees in both Phalombe and Chiradzulu indicated that they became interested in joining politics at grassroots level after being incorporated in development projects run by NGOs and/or local governance institutions. This factor has not been discussed in the contemporary literature. For instance, the *National Initiative for Civic Education* (NICE) and *Action Aid* encourage inclusive participation and involvement of women in their core structures of development at the grassroots level. Also, local development structures such as *Area Development Committees* (ADCs) and *Village Development Committees* (VDCs) were gender sensitive. As one Action Aid official mentioned,

> *There is no way we can talk about good governance without women's participation. Women are in majority but they often occupy less and unimportant positions.*

The exposure to these development structures provided confidence and encouragement to women to start thinking about joining politics. More importantly, most women were encouraged by training programmes in Phalombe initiated by groups such as the *Mgwirizano* movement and the *Centre for Alternatives for Victimized Women and Children* (CAVWOC). They trained every woman interested in politics, including the twelve who were candidates for the position of councillor. They were trained in leadership skills, in public speaking, and in the challenges of a political career. Although eight of them failed in the party primaries, four actually competed and one succeeded.

Another dimension to this exposure could be that it helps women to see the possibility of providing solutions to development challenges in their home areas. This 'opening up' may encourage them to take up political positions so that they may push further their ideas for development. However, since this study did not push this element further during data collection, we cannot be conclusive on this point.

Promise of Financial Support

The promise of financial support was another main reason that made some women join politics, especially those who contested at primary or constituency/ward level for the positions of MP or councillor. Taking into consideration that campaigning for political positions is expensive and time-consuming, one of the serious challenges faced by most women is lack of financial support (Kayuni and Muriaas 2015: 396). As one former PP female councillorship candidate in Chiradzulu mentioned,

> *The people support candidates not based on character, behaviour, or not even development, rather most voters mostly support candidates for immediate gratification – money.*

In the 2009 general elections, several NGOs provided financial support to female candidates under the *50-50 campaign* umbrella. Based on knowledge of the support provided to candidates in 2009, some women decided to join politics in 2014, expecting this financial support. According to the perception of many people, hand-outs played a critical role in the success of a candidate. During a focus group discussion in one area in Phalombe, it was said that,

> *Most people go for hand-outs more than they would go for development and personality and reputation* [of a candidate].

In other words, if they know that financial support is guaranteed, their likelihood of joining politics would be very high. This financial support is mainly used as handouts to prospective voters.

Conclusion

This chapter is based on a study conducted in Phalombe and Chiradzulu districts of Malawi and the main focus was to identify factors that determine women's participation in politics at grassroots level. In other words, it examined the supply-side of women in politics and identified some of the reasons why they volunteer to join politics. The chapter has noted that there are a number of factors which compel women to join politics in the identified areas. Just like other studies have shown, the role of political party gatekeepers is one of the important determining factors. Another factor is exposure to local development structures and projects, managed by NGOs and local governance institutions. This has not been well articulated in the prevailing literature. We found that this exposure gave female candidates the confidence and interest to play a role in political affairs. Apart from confidence, it is possible that the exposure also helped them to understand the problems experienced in their immediate locality and helped them think about the role they may play in politics: to solve such problems. Financial matters also play a role in determining whether or not women run for office.

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CHAPTER 9

Women in Political Parties
The Politics of Participation

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The discourse on the significance of political parties as strategic mediums for the promotion of women participation in politics has not fallen short of coverage in the scholastic and policy literature. Through their nature of exposing citizens to politics, political parties have for long been considered the *sine qua non* in the socialization, recruitment, nomination, and election of candidates to public office (Sartori 1976). The strategic importance of political parties is rooted in the recognition that access to political power, leadership, and decision-making typically begins at the political party level (IDEA 2013: 21, Fiorina 2001: 17). The expectations are even higher in multiparty democratic environments, where contesting parties and the principles of democracy, such as inclusive participation and accountability, present multiple avenues for participation of the hitherto marginalized segments of society, including, but not limited to, women.

However, despite Malawi's transition to a multiparty democratic framework in the early 90s, political party politics is still construed as a masculine domain, with only a small minority of women (Chinsinga 2011, Kamlongera 2008, Khembo 2004). The marginalization of women in political party politics is well captured and adequately documented in an emergent discourse that can be summarized as, to paraphrase Gramsci (1984), the *pessimism of the diagnosis and the optimism of the prescription*.

On one hand, analytical traditions drawn from the political, sociological, and historical institutionalism schools of thought, posit that the low levels of women participation in party politics are a product of structural dysfunctions and institutional inadequacies (Chirwa 2014, Kamlongera 2008, Khembo 2004). This analytical tradition focuses on the centrality, if not the primacy, of formal and informal institutions in shaping women participation in political party processes. The approach borrows theoretical recourse from Douglas North's (1990) theorization of how institutions, broadly understood as rules and structures (Edigheji 2007: 9), shape human interaction in political, economic and social processes (Leftwich 2010: 15). Thus, according to this *institutional school* of thought, all proximate efforts to promote women participation in mainstream politics do not stand a realistic chance of yielding optimal results as the existing institutional milieu makes it almost impossible to introduce interventions that can effectively root out the marginalization of women in political processes.

On the other hand, gender activists and human rights NGOs in Malawi have repeatedly mounted campaigns and attempted to develop the capacities of women to enhance their participation in party politics and the electoral process. For instance, since the run-up to the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections, NGOs have stepped up egalitarian efforts aimed at increasing the numbers of female parliamentarians, in the name of the *50-50 campaign*. These have included the *Human Rights Commission*, the *Non-governmental Organizations' Gender Coordination Network* (NGO/GCN), the *Society for the Advancement of Women* (SAW), the *Pan African Civic Educators Network Trust* (PACENET), and the *Human Rights Consultative Committee* (HRCC) (Chirwa 2014: 67).

These interventions, proximate as they may appear, are rooted in an analytical tradition that posits that the low participation of women in politics is a product of their inadequate capabilities to compete against their male counterparts, who have an upper hand in terms of access to resources, both material and ideal (IDEA 2013: 86, Kamlongera 2008: 476). This actor-oriented school of thought supports Giddens' (1984) exercise of choice within parameters of constraints by focusing on how the exercise of human agency, understood as the willingness and capabilities of individuals to be originators of acts or premeditated inactions (Long 2001: 16), shapes the extent of women's participation in political processes. This school of thought considers investing in capacity development of women, as well as their representative organisations, as the main avenues for the effective promotion of women participation in mainstream politics.

This discourse, therefore, has an analytical contradiction between a pessimistic diagnosis of a predicament and an optimistic prescription of a remedy. Whichever analytical tradition one may find more appealing, such an analytical ambiguity is unsatisfactory to inform both theory and practice. This chapter, therefore, is a bid to attain some congruence between diagnosis and prescription. It retraces a few steps to the diagnosis, by examining both institutional and actor-oriented factors that shape the participation of women in Malawi's four main political parties.

The *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP), the *Malawi Congress Party* (MCP), the *People's Party* (PP) and the *United Democratic Front* (UDF) have been selected. The selection is based on the parties' percentage of MPs in the National Assembly as well as the percentage of votes that their respective presidential candidates amassed in the 2014 *Tripartite Elections*.

Based on the empirical findings, and inspired by *Rational Choice Institutionalism*, the central argument of this chapter is that individuals are hardly conduits of tradition, unthinkingly reproducing past practice, as the institutional school of thought seems to posit. On the contrary, the dynamic interface between the political will of the political gatekeepers and the capabilities of potential female candidates is the fundamental determinant of women's participation in Malawian political parties. Gatekeepers are in this case the influential individuals within the party who can influence the decisions as to which party members should occupy contested positions at the local, regional or national level.

This preceding section has introduced the subject under discussion. The following sections navigate through the theoretical underbrush of rational choice institutionalism, before examining the institutional framework for the participation of women in politics in Malawi.

Rational Choice Institutionalism

Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) is an analytical tradition that is concerned with understanding how institutions structure human interaction (Mackay et al. 2010) and how actors purposefully attempt to influence the formation, maintenance, and modification of institutions (Amenta and Ramsey 2010). Institutions are, in this sense, understood as formal or informal procedures, routines, norms, and conventions in the organizational structure of the polity or the political economy (ibid: 16). The underlying philosophy of this school is that institutions matter, but can achieve little on their own because they are generated, reformed and implemented by actors, either habitually or based on their calculation of what they stand to lose or gain (Cleaver 2012: 12, Leftwich 2008: 8).

Rational Choice Institutionalism takes a functionalist view of institutions as structures of voluntary cooperation that are deliberately created by actors in order to overcome collective action problems, either by reducing uncertainty or by restructuring incentives to cooperate (Mackay et al. 2010). Consequently, the RCI scholarship argues that institutions are purposeful human creations. As Moe (2005: 227) posits, these humanly devised rules of the game endure when they provide more benefits to relevant actors than what alternative institutional arrangements would offer.

However, in spite of this functionalist orientation, critical realism scholars have stressed that the outcomes of institutional dynamics are not always optimal (North 1990: 104). On the contrary, in many cases institutions may also be structures of coercion, abuse of power, and domination, since they limit some forms of action and facilitate others, thereby creating losers and winners in society (Lowndes 2010, Moe 2005, Knight 1992).

Formal vs Informal Institutions

Just like many other institutional schools of thought, RCI makes a distinction between formal and informal institutions. Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 728) make an important distinction by defining formal institutions as openly codified rules of the game that are established, communicated and enforced through channels that are widely accepted as official. Informal institutions, on the other hand, are socially shared rules, usually unwritten, and created, communicated, and enforced outside formally sanctioned channels of the polity.

In order to pay adequate attention to informal institutions, RCI specifies more clearly why and how informal institutions come about and what work they do. For instance, Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 730) hypothesize that informal rules emerge when formal institutions do not yield results that satisfy the actors; or when actors pursue goals that are not publicly acceptable, either because they are unlikely to stand the test of public scrutiny or because they will attract international condemnation.

We have therefore selected RCI as an appropriate framework for the analysis of women's participation in politics in Malawi. It takes into account both institutional factors, formal and informal, and human agency, in understanding how stakeholders interact and why they do what they do.

The Institutional Framework for Women Participation in Malawi

In the spirit of redressing gender imbalances and promoting women participation in politics, numerous gender equality commitments have been made and translated into formalized institutions by state and non-state actors at the global and national levels. These commitments can be traced back to the 1979 UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). They have further been reinforced in more recent instruments, such as the Nairobi *Forward Looking Strategies on the Advancement of Women* (1985), the Beijing *Platform of Action* (1995), the *Millennium Development Goals* (goal number 3) (2000), and the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the *Rights of Women in Africa* (2003) (IDEA 2013: 4). Premised on these commitments, women's political participation and representation at all levels of the political landscape have become a prominent part of politics in Africa and the rest of the world.

In Malawi, institutions to promote women participation in public life are enshrined in the 1995 *Constitution of the Republic of Malawi*, which states that gender equality is to be attained through the full participation of women in all spheres of Malawian society, on the basis of equality with men (Chapter 3.13., i and ii). The constitution further prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, along with such other factors as race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status (Chapter 4.20., i).

While the republican constitution has provisions to protect the right to political participation of both genders (IDEA 2013: 35), the supporting legislation falls short of operationalising this aspiration because of the absence of affirmative action instruments, such as legislative quotas. The *Political Parties Registration and Regulation Act* (1993), the *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Act* (1993) and the *Electoral Commission Act* (1998) are the three pieces of legislation concerned with the regulation of political parties. Neither of these, however, explicitly spells out how they intend to protect, let alone promote, the participation of women in both elected and non-elected positions. What we have in terms of institutional framework for the participation of women in politics is a comprehensive framework at the global and constitutional level, but this is a framework that lacks teeth at the operational level.

As a result of this formal institutional vacuum, the extent of women's participation in political parties has largely been left at the mercy of political gatekeepers of the respective parties. To borrow analytical insights from Leftwich (2008: 7), the politics of women participation in political parties takes place at two levels: where the rules of the games are made and where games within the rules occur.

Women Participation in Non-Elected Positions

As Leftwich posits (2008: 7), the rules of the game, agreements about the rules, and agreements about the rules for changing the rules are fundamental for any on-going political activity. In the modern world, these rules are normally expressed in formal institutional agreements, which specify the rules governing competition for, distribution, use, and control of power, and the procedures for decision-making and accountability.

To promote women participation in mainstream politics, it is important to understand the institutional dynamics that translate the political will of the gatekeepers into commitment of political parties to the cause of gender equality. If the political gatekeepers are willing to promote women participation, that political will should be judged by the institutional mechanisms they put in place and how they adhere to the letter and spirit of these rules at the operational level where the games within the rules occur.

At the policy level, the commitment of Malawian political parties to the cause of engendered participation has been questioned repeatedly, owing to their purported failure to institutionalize gender sensitive rules of the game. For instance, Khembo (2004: 40) posits that gender is largely an electoral campaign rhetoric, but one that is never seriously integrated into party structures. This verdict is based on the observation that most political parties do not have gender quotas, affirmative policies, or egalitarian ideologies that promote gender equality.

While this observation retains its validity with regard to elected political positions and senior positions within the parties' leadership structures, a careful appraisal of the political party constitutions and practices, however, demonstrates that such (voluntary) quotas exist and are observed in the recruitment of party leaders, notably in grassroots structures.   For instance, we have found that UDF has 75 men and 75 women in all committees from the *Branch* level to the *District Executive Committee* level; and that the DPP has 30 men, 30 women and 30 youths from the *Branch* to the *District Committee* level. The MCP has 90 men, 90 women and 90 youths from *Area Committee* level to *District Executive Committee* level, while it has 30 men, 30 women and 30 youth at the *Branch* level. Thus, it is not hard to conclude that these are formal institutional arrangements, created by the party elites, in the exercise of their agency in pursuit of an egalitarian commitment to promote gender equality at the grassroots level.

However, from the *Regional Executive Committee* level to the *National Executive Committees*, these gender considerations tend to fall off, as members are either appointed or elected based on their connections to incumbent office holders, their purported academic qualifications, and their political experience or exposure. Unsurprisingly, membership in these top party structures is dominated by men, owed to their privileged political, economic and human capital, whether perceived or otherwise. The following interview excerpts illustrate this well:

> At the Regional and National Executive Committee levels, we do not consider gender equality because at those levels we are interested with individuals who are educated, experienced, and those who have been exposed to politics in different countries. So, we don't normally consider gender. For one to reach those levels it requires demonstrating one's capabilities. Nonetheless, we have a few women even at the National Executive Committee (UDF District Governess, Mangochi).

> At the National Governing Council level, individuals are elected into positions at a national convention based on their competencies regardless of their sex. They have to be appealing based on their levels of education and experience in politics. Some are appointed by the elected party leaders. The idea is to make sure that only genuine members of the party hold key positions, for fear of 'selling' the parties to 'aliens' (DPP District Governor, Phalombe).

What we have, consequently, are formal rules that regulate the equal representation of men and women in lower cadre positions and informal rules that take away such an egalitarian principle in upper cadre positions. Both are 'rules' deliberately created by the political gatekeepers, based on their calculations of what they stand to win or lose. As Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 728) note, these informal rules have emerged silently, and have not been written down explicitly.

The political implications of limiting equal representation of men and women to low cadre political structures are profound and far-reaching. Politically, the arrangement to have equal representation of men, women, and youth at the grassroots level is rational, considering it is at that level where political parties recruit members that play a key role in the mobilization of party supporters (IDEA 2013: 6). Thus, it is only lucid to have structures that can relate widely across diverse gender and age groups for purposes of popularizing the political party.

However, the fact that the egalitarian mechanisms are confined to the lower ranks of the party hierarchy only, implies that women do not participate meaningfully in important decision-making processes. Such is the case because, much as the low cadre committees are expected to make non-policy decisions such as the nomination of parliamentary and local government representatives, practice demonstrates that oftentimes important decisions such as the choice of preferred parliamentary candidates are handed down from the national and regional structures. Additionally, even where decisions are made by these grassroots structures, it is the men who influence the ultimate decisions because of their socio-political positions of power.

Consequently, one can comfortably describe the nature of women participation in non-electoral positions as ranging from symbolic to instrumentalist. It is symbolic (or cosmetic) because beyond the numbers, women do not seem to wield sufficient influence to shape the ultimate decisions made at the different levels of the party hierarchy, as substantive participation would imply. Women's participation is instrumentalist because those who make use of participatory methods, the party elites, regard women participation as a means of attaining political legitimacy and popularity of the parties. Women are merely used to legitimize processes and outcomes, democratic or otherwise. The instrumentalism lies in that participation is largely a means or a ploy for power-holders to accomplish their self-serving ends, both political and pragmatic. The women's engagement is based on prospects of getting access to potential benefits, regardless of whether their presence or involvement effectively influences the ultimate decisions.

In our underlying research, we found that sometimes an individual holds several positions in several committees of the same party and members of the same family hold membership in different political parties, as a way of casting the net wide. Thus, overall participation, on both the demand and supply side, is largely a ploy towards the realisation of some self-serving benefits. The mere fact that gender quotas are abandoned in the main policy-making structures at regional and, more importantly, at national levels, substantiates our position that the inclusion of men and women in the lower level structures has little, if anything, to do with the pursuit of genuine inclusive policy making in these political parties.

Women Participation in Elected Positions

Although a legally enforceable legislation, which compels political parties to field a minimum number of women in parliamentary elections, has proved to be an asset elsewhere, the legal instruments governing elections and the conduct of the political parties in Malawi do not provide for such affirmative action. As indicated earlier, the pieces of legislation concerned with the regulation of political parties in the electoral process do not explicitly spell out how they intend to protect, let alone promote the participation of women in political party leadership and elected political positions.

As a result, the political parties in the country are at liberty to field the candidates of their choice, regardless of gender considerations. While this is not a vice in its own right, the implication is that male candidates usually dominate the nomination lists of the key political parties, due to their superior positions of political as well as financial power. Usually, these are men and, in isolated instances, women who are better educated, more exposed to politics, financially affluent, and (most importantly) better connected to the top leadership of the respective political parties, as the following interview excerpts illustrate:

> *The rules guiding candidate nomination processes are very clear. But what we normally see is that once primaries have been conducted, some confusionists from the NGC* [National Governing Council] *nullify the outcome to impose their preferred candidate. What we don't understand is that the rules that we use are not made by us. They are handed down to us from the same NGC* (DPP Constituency Governor, Phalombe).

> *Nowadays, Malawians have realised that there is a financial value attached to their vote. Politics is no longer a game for the have-nots. If you don't have money, you don't have a car and party clothes to distribute, you shouldn't even bother to get into politics* (MCP District Governor, Mangochi).

> *Political parties do not just choose parliamentary candidates anyhow. We have to choose people who are appealing to the electorate. They have to be educated, financially stable, with some working experience elsewhere. Unfortunately, in this district, most of our women do not have these attributes and they lack the confidence to convince us even at primaries* (PP Constituency Governor, Mangochi).

Owing to the country's long history of male domination, even in the traditionally matrimonial communities, it is usually the men who enjoy access to the politically necessary material and non-material resources. As a result, fewer women have been able to climb up against men, particularly in the major political parties. Figure 1 illustrates this well. It depicts the relative number of men and women nominated to stand for their respective political parties in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

Figure 1: Women Candidates per Party, Parliamentary Elections, 2014

Party	Value
United Democratic Front (UDF): 51 of 199	26
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP): 44 of 188	23
People's Party (PP): 43 of 189	22
Independents: 86 of 413	21
Malawi Congress Party (MCP): 29 of 413	18
Alliance for Democracy (AFORD): 2 of 12	17
National Salvation Front (NASAF): 3 of 23	13
Progressive Party Movement (PPM): 3 of 49	6
Chipani cha Pfuko (CCP): 0 of 5	0
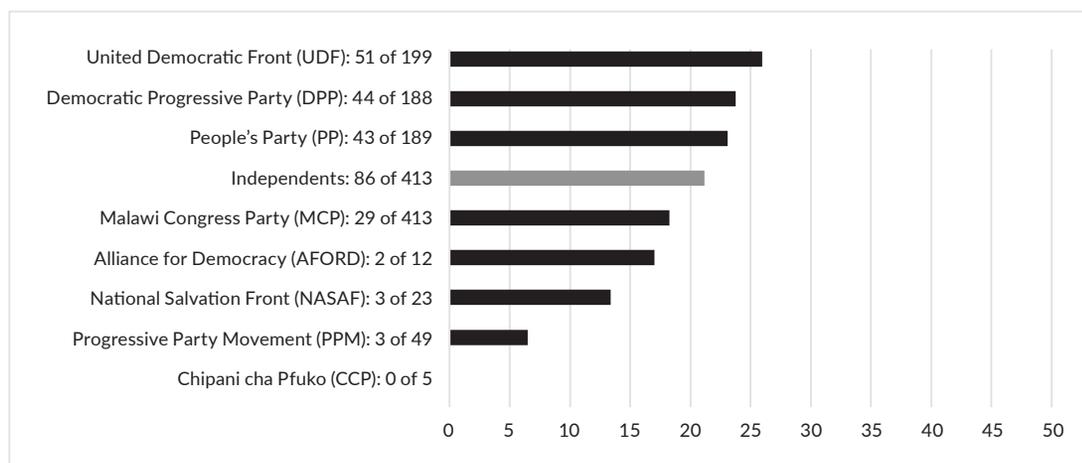
Source: MEC 2014. Figures in per cent.

Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that women were underrepresented in the race, falling short of the 30 per cent SADC target way before the votes were cast. Thus, if indeed the commitment of political parties to the cause of engendered political participation is to be judged based on the relative numbers of candidates presented, then Malawian political parties have some ground to cover. The statistics are not impressive.

Another trend is that women 'prefer' to contest as independents, as seen from the fact that there were more independent female candidates (86, in absolute numbers) than on the tickets of any of the three big political parties. What is therefore palpable is that, in terms of women exercising their human agency to participate in political party processes; their willingness is not in short supply. It is rather their access to face the stiff competition that is inadequate. It is our impression that some of the big parties tend to field more women in areas where the party's popularity is low. In areas considered as their political strongholds, the men are dominant, making the 'improvement' in the statistics on women candidates a rather cosmetic one.

As a result, it is not surprising that women are concentrated in some constituencies, oftentimes competing against each other, while other constituencies do not even have a single female contestant. For instance, statistics from the *Malawi Electoral Commission* demonstrate that in the 2014 parliamentary elections, out of the 193 parliamentary constituencies, 44 constituencies did not have a single female contestant (MEC 2014).

While these observations have put into question the political will of political parties in ensuring equal representation of men and women, political parties have justified their gender-biased selection on an alleged disapproval of female contestants by the electorate. The challenge for political parties is therefore the need to reflect on the electability of their candidates, which is of paramount importance to the political success of the parties, even if it means being described as gender biased, as the following interview excerpts illustrate;

We cannot impose female candidates on the electorate. The political landscape has changed. If you want your party to win, there is a need to identify an appealing candidate, and it is usually men who have the necessary requirements to convince the electorate (DPP District Governor, Mangochi).

As Malawians we can't run away from the fact that Malawi is a patriarchal country where there is a feeling that the home constitutes the best place for women and not in mainstream political and economic affairs. Such a culture reinforces the reasoning that women cannot lead. Even sending a female child to school is seen as a waste of time and resources (NICE District Manager, Mangochi).

Sometimes it is funny how these gender activists they to oversimplify these things especially when they are advancing the 50-50 gender campaign. The truth is that politics is not a game for a respectable woman to be involved in (UDF District Governor, Phalombe).

Based on this understanding, there is a silent consensus among political parties that they should move with caution in playing the gender equality card because of the perceived electoral bias against female candidates. However, going by the statistics provided, such arguments require further analysis considering that the electorate in Malawi has voted for women proportionate to their representation in the polls. For instance, in 2004 women represented 12 per cent of the contestants and the electorate allocated 12 per cent of the parliamentary seats to women. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, women constituted 21 per cent of the contestants and 16 per cent of those elected. Thus, if women are fielded in a geographic area considered as a stronghold of a particular political party, their sex does not fundamentally negate their chances of winning the polls.

While these numbers fall below the 30 per cent target for SADC countries, they do not essentially demonstrate any serious bias against women candidates by the electorate, especially if one considers the fact that women are underrepresented way before the polls are cast. On the other hand, if one considers that women are not represented in some constituencies and that they compete against each other in other constituencies, it is only fair to say that the electorate elects a proportionate number of women from the total number of contestants. If indeed the electorate had any bias against women, let alone a serious one, then the representation of women in Parliament would have significantly dropped below their representation at the polls, which is not the case.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued against an indiscriminate adoption of the popular line of thought asserting that the institutional environment of the big political parties is unfavourable to women participation. As demonstrated, the formal rules of the game about participation of women range from indifferent to promotive. They are promotive to the extent that all key political parties in Malawi, with the exception of the PP, have voluntary gender quotas for non-electoral positions from the grassroots structures to the district level. At the same time, they are indifferent to women participation as a recruitment criteria for electoral and non-electoral senior positions at the regional and national levels.

Men and women, with the willingness and capabilities to compete, are allowed to do so. Women, however, take a disadvantaged position due to their limited access to crucial resources, which are shaped by factors beyond the reach political parties. What is important, however, is that, while the formal institutional arrangements are crucial in shaping women participation, it is imperative to point out that they are deliberately created rules of the game, generated by the political gatekeepers.

Where the formal institutions have failed to yield satisfactory results to the political gatekeepers, informal institutions have emerged and superseded the formal ones in making decisions about who participates, at which level, and why. Thus, the formal and informal institutional mechanisms, internal to the key political parties, are all products of political deliberations, made by the political gatekeepers. Women have demonstrated willingness to participate in political parties, but factors related to their capabilities, or lack thereof, have posed challenges to their management of the stiff competition typical of the big political parties. The willingness to participate is not in short supply, the capabilities are.

Finally, we have argued that the widely held belief that the electorate has a bias against women candidates requires sober examination as available data suggests that the electorate usually allocates parliamentary seats to women proportional to their numbers in the parliamentary race. It is clear that institutions play an important role in shaping the extent of women's participation in politics, but the institutions themselves are products of political considerations of the political gatekeepers. They create, implement, and reform the rules based on calculations of what the parties stand to lose or gain. Thus, while 'getting institutions right' is a necessary measure to enhance the participation of women in party politics, it is certainly not sufficient. 'Getting the politics right' is required if meaningful participation of women in political party processes is to be realised.

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CHAPTER 10

The Gender Machinery
Opportunities and Challenges for Women in Central Government

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Central government plays a critical role in delivering public goods and services. In addition to adequate financial resources, technical expertise and coherent policies, effective delivery of public goods and services is also dependent on the institutional and organizational design of the central government. Nnoli (1986) observes that clientele, functional, areal, process, and situational principles have for a long time been used to design central government administration. Specifically, the institutional architecture of the executive branch of government is guided by these principles.

With the wave for gender equality in public governance, the *clientele principle* has been critical. The clientele principle posits that groups of people are best represented and served by individuals with whom they share characteristics and interests (Milakovich and Gordon 2013, Simon et al. 2010). The similarity in character and interests may be a product of having similar social, economic and political experiences; holding a similar value system, and/or of belonging to the same gender. When guided by the clientele principle, the semblance of character between the group and the individual representative is the key feature in the institutional design of the central government administration. The discussion on women representation in the central government administration largely falls within this idea of a clientele. Establishing a perfect match between the gender of the clients and the gender of the office-holders/civil servants, thus, preoccupies the minds of policymakers and appointing authorities.

At the global level, countries are encouraged by the UN, the African Development Bank, and other international organisations to include a so-called 'National Gender Machinery' (NGM) in the central government administration and, in particular, in the state bureaucracy (GoM and UNDP 2011, McBride and Mazur 2011, AfDB 2009, United Nations 1995, United Nations 1979). The fundamental international documents on the establishment of the NGM are the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. The aim of a NGM is to provide policy direction and guidelines for the implementation of gender-related programmes.

This chapter discusses the opportunities and challenges of organising the operational machinery (executive branch of government) of the so-called national gender machinery on the clientele and semblance principle when organising the central government administration. The chapter focuses on the structures and institutions designed to serve as conducive channels for women representation in public life, particularly at the national level.

Our main argument is that, whilst the national gender machinery, on face value, is much aligned to women interests and seeks to break the barriers that prevent high-level women representation, the practice of the lead agency and the operationalization of the national gender machinery risk institutionalizing and deepening further the barricades that the national gender machinery is tasked to stamp out. We will further argue that, in Malawi, the national gender machinery is experiencing a goal displacement because of the push and pull factors and a capture of the gendered structures by different national and international actors.

The case of Malawi illustrates that the clientele principle of designing central government administration faces challenges in promoting women representation, especially in situations where institutional design is a matter of reacting to external more than to internal forces. The government is caught up in a situation where it has to create women-centred institutions, to "play the game", without necessarily shaking off the foundations that prevent high representation of women in public life. We hold the view that feminizing the national gender machinery is a desirable step towards promoting women representation in strategic public institutions. However, we note that the national gender machinery structures, as a result of this goal displacement, pursue non-core, peripheral interests that make them go off-track on the agenda of promoting women representation.

This chapter engages the concept of 'symbolic representation' as the theoretical lens to understand the dynamics of the clientele principle (see Chapter 1 by *Amundsen and Kayuni* for an outline of the symbolic and other forms of representation). This chapter is based on empirical data collected through qualitative research methodologies and case studies. In this regard, the *Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare* (MoGCDSW) was purposively selected for a case study, and data was collected from sampled key informants within the ministry.

Overview of the National Gender Machinery

Internationally, the momentum to establish the national gender machinery and keep it operational and visible has been high. Some ministries and departments of the executive branch of several governments are even specifically created and mandated to implement the national gender machinery. These ministries and departments are important because they symbolize the commitment of government to achieve a gender-balanced society as well as to promote the representation of women in elected and appointed positions of high office.

The international documents on gender equity (the CEDAW and the *Beijing Declaration,* in particular) do *not* indicate that the structures of the national gender machinery should be headed by a female official. However, a quick scan of the ministries and departments responsible for discharging the

mandate of national gender machinery clearly demonstrates that they are indeed headed by female appointees.

The culture of feminizing the national gender machinery institutions is found on both chains of command; the minister as a political authority, and the permanent secretary as a technical overseer. At the continental level, a good number of countries in Africa have ministries of 'Gender' and 'Women' under the political and technical leadership of women, evidently guided by the clientele principle and the semblance model of central government representation.

The nomenclature of the ministries and departments varies from one country to another, but the mandate and leadership largely remain female. For instance, the Government of Mauritius has the *Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare* under the leadership of a female minister, and the ministry is "entrusted with the responsibility to design and implement social policies and programmes, which promote women empowerment, child development and family welfare as well as of the community" (Government of Mauritius 2015). In Zimbabwe, there is a female minister of *Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development*, and the mission of her ministry is to "spearhead women empowerment, gender equality and equity for community development" (Government of Zimbabwe 2015). Likewise, the *Ministry of Gender and Child Development* in Zambia is led by a woman with the mission to "coordinate and monitor the implementation of gender and child development policies and programmes in order to ensure gender responsiveness and wellbeing of a child" (Government of Zambia, 2015). Mozambique, Lesotho, and Kenya also have ministries of gender and women, which are headed by female ministers.

The use of clientele and semblance principles in these countries creates an image that the national gender machinery is an instrument for feminizing the public institutions. This argument is strengthened when noted that the women-oriented mandates and the gender identity of the top leadership of these ministries match.

The National Gender Machinery in Malawi

Malawi falls within the experiences of many other countries in Africa (and beyond) whose ministries of women and gender are headed by female ministers. The case of Malawi is interesting because since the return to multiparty politics in 1993, the ministry has *always* been headed by a female minister and a female deputy minister. Table 1 is a list of the 'ministers of gender' from 1994, and the various names of the ministry (cabinet portfolio).

Table 1: Ministers of Gender and Their Portfolios, since 1994

1994-1996	Edda E. Chitalo	Minister of State for Women's and Children's Affairs
1996-1999	Lizzie Lossa	Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare
1999-2000	Mary Kaphwereza Banda	Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs, Community Development
2003-2004	Alice Sumani	Minister of Gender and Community Services
2004-2006	Joyce Banda	Minister of Women, Child Welfare and Community Service
2006-2008	Kate Kainja-Kaluluma	Minister of Women and Child Development
2008-2009	Anna Andrew Namathanga Kachikho	Minister of Women and Child Development
2009-2010	Patricia Kaliati	Minister of Gender, Child Development and Community Development
2010-2011	Theresa Gloria Mwale	Minister of Gender, Child and Community Development
2011-2013	Rene Bessie Kachere	Minister of Gender, Child and Community Development
2013-2014	Mary Clara Makungwa	Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare
2014 -2016	Patricia Kaliati	Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
April 2016 -	Jean Kalilani	Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

Source: Compiled by author.

Despite all the efforts by different actors to curb the situation, the indicators on gender equality in Malawi are worrisome. The *Gender Index* indicates that women are doing poorly in the economic and political spheres, with significant disparities between men and women in the agriculture household enterprise. Women are underrepresented in paid employment as well as in senior positions in all sectors of life.

In order to coordinate the interventions that promote gender equality, the Government of Malawi has established a 'National Gender Machinery', that is, a "network of national systems, mechanisms and processes coordinated by a central policy coordination body located at the highest possible level of Government, [with] sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity" (GoM 2011: 16). The genesis of this national gender machinery was the institutional structures established in 1993, in the wake of Malawi's democratisation. The government has designated the MoGCDSW as the lead agency for the National Gender Machinery for Malawi. Its mandate is "to lead the formulation, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of Gender Policy, programmes, projects and activities at all levels" (MoG 2000). The MoGCDSW has a network of offices in all districts in the country and has extension staff, down to the community level in many areas.

Opportunities in Regional and Global Developments

Countries with a specific ministry to handle issues related to women and gender can quickly address these matters on the regional and global arena. As a member of several regional and global governmental organizations, Malawi gets acquainted with what is unfolding at the international level through

its representation of MoGCDSW. When the government, through the MoGCDSW, is represented by top political and technical officers, there is a greater chance that the regional and global instruments will translate into domestic policies.

Malawi has used her women appointed to high positions and women-centred institutions to build a positive image at the international level. The former president, Bingu wa Mutharika, often made remarks that his government was interested in achieving a representative and inclusive public machinery and he made deliberate efforts to appoint women in key and top decision making positions (GoM 2009).

The *Constitution of Malawi* grants the president the authority to appoint and fire cabinet members, while the *Public Service Act* (of 1994) empowers the president to appoint and fire top government officials. In fulfilling some regional and global agreements, the government has used legally endorsed mechanisms to enhance the representation of women in the public machinery, especially within the cabinet and top levels of the bureaucracy.

The institutional design is set up to avoid party politics and to ensure that women are represented in top positions. The use of rules that side-step competitive elections has helped to narrow down the representation gap that is created by electoral politics. The logic behind this institutional engineering of "decision-making and non-decision making powers" (Lukes 2005: 102), is that a few individuals, deemed capable of pushing a particular agenda, participate in the decision-making processes.

The electoral politics in Malawi largely put women outside the representative institutions. This is because the electoral politics in Malawi, in our view, is a playground for individuals with a strong financial base and the means to instigate violence. The representation of women in parliament has consequently been less than a quarter since Malawi returned to democratic electoral politics in 1994 (see Chapter 2 by *Dzimbiri* for details).

In this regard, the enhanced representation of women in public positions and the deliberate appointment of women in positions of influence put Malawi on good terms with the international community. The Government of Malawi has even taken a step further than the *Beijing Platform* and the *Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality* by adopting a 40/60 per cent quota on employment in the public service, with a provision made in the *Gender Equality Act* (of 2013). This requires an appointing authority in the public service to appoint no less than 40 per cent of either sex in any department in the public service. The remaining task to fully implement the 40/60 quota is to amend the *Malawi Public Service Regulations* in terms of employment in the public service.

The development of a law on a 40/60 quota in the executive positions of the political parties, as well as the political parties' lists of candidates, is regarded by many as a key solution to the dismal performance of female politicians in the 2014 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections (Malawi CSOs 2015: 19). However, the enactment of such a law remains to be seen.

Opportunities in Capturing Resources

Representation needs to be matched with technical and financial resources if the representatives are to deliver on their mandate. Overall, government institutions in Malawi are underfunded as far as budget support is concerned. The MoGCDSW is a case in point. For years, its budgetary funding has not come any closer to the top three ministries that enjoy relatively good financial support from government (Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Health and Education, Science and Technology). The MoGCDSW's underfunding is such that delivering on its mandate is a problem. In 2010/11 budget, the *Ministry of Gender, Child and Community Development*, as it was called then, was allocated MWK 716.69 million only (see Table 2 for a breakdown on activity areas).

Table 2: Ministry of Gender Budget Allocations, 2010/11

Ministry of Gender, Child and Community Development	**716.69**	
Education and Vocational Training	*24.24*	
Community, Youth and Sports Development	*448.97*	
Youth development services		38.94
Economic empowerment		20.31
Social welfare services		393.96
Public Administration	*132.08*	
Minister's Office		77.34
Management and Support Services		97.34
Human Resource Development		12.02
Internal monitoring and evaluation		7.62
Other		12.33

Source: GoM 2010. Figures in MWK million.

This budget had no direct and specific funds for activities on gender and the promotion of participation of women in political spaces. The only general allocation that covered these issues was "Economic Empowerment". For the 2015/16 fiscal year, the budgetary allocation for the MoGCDSW is the lowest of all government ministries, accounting for less than 0.36 per cent of the national budget (Malawi CSOs 2015: 18). The underfunding of gender related activities does not honour the *Beijing Platform of Action*, which calls for sufficient allocation of resources to national machineries for the advancement of women as well as to all institutions, as appropriate, that can contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the platform (GoM 2011: 42, United Nations 1995).

The hope in increasing funding for gender-related activities has been the Government's *White Paper* on strengthening national gender machinery in Malawi. This proposes that the government allocates at least one per cent of its national budget to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment (GoM 2011: 44).

The underfunding of the Ministry of Gender reflects the general financial problems the government is going through. Given the international donors' commitment to gender-related activities, a designated ministry has been an attractive option for the purpose of getting hold of these financial resources. In many cases, however, the development partners want to see that institutions for implementing gender activities are in place before they provide their funding and, in this regard, the MoGCDSW is a 'resource mobilization' ministry. The re-designing of central government ministries and the cabinet reshuffles have not brought about any substantive changes in the organisation of the ministry, though, because this would entail that:

> *The government is shooting itself in the foot as donors will start thinking the government is not committed to implementing national gender machinery as such withdraw their aid. Government does not want to lose the resources it gets from development partners that are supporting gender activities* (Interview with public official, 13 July 2015).

The strategy to use the MoGCDSW as a 'resource mobilisation' ministry has so far worked well. The ministry receives financial and technical support from different donors, including *UNICEF, UNAIDS, Norad/Norway, USAID, AfDB, UNDP,* and *UN Women*. Consequently, resources that could have been spent on this ministry is now freed and spent in other sectors (the so-called 'budget fungibility'). The development aid from donors to the ministry is mostly off-budget and delivered through programmes and projects. In 2009/10, the MOGCCD received USD 5,705,080 from donors, which covered 99 per cent of the total budget of the ministry (GoM 2011: 27).

The funds that were provided by development partners in preparation for the 2014 tripartite elections illustrate the point that the ministry is a strategic platform for resource mobilization meant to keep the government activities and presence afloat. The ministry was designated as an implementing partner for the project on "Political Empowerment of Women in Malawi", funded by *UN Women, UNDP,* and the *One United Nations Family*, to the tune of USD 5,446,790 (UNDP 2013: 1).

Challenges in the Feminization of the Ministry

As mentioned above, the top political leadership of the MoGCDSW has always been female ministers. This has given the impression that gender issues are just for women. Our case study indicates that this has resulted in some male government officials not being fully committed to work because they feel like they are in a wrong territory. Malawi CSOs made a similar observation on the appointment of only female ministers for MoGCDSW, that:

> *It has only succeeded in creating a mind-set that gender issues are women issues only such that some high-ranking government male officials do not see the need to take gender issues seriously* (2015: 18).

The nomenclature for the ministry has also strengthened the perception that it is established to serve women only despite the fact that it is supposed to serve other clients as well, such as children and people living with disabilities. The extension of the ministry's mandate to include children, people living with disabilities and others is thought to be a 'fire-fighting' technique and an attempt to speak to the global parlance of inclusiveness and gender balance. It emerged from our interviews that bureaucrats are not really convinced that the ministry serves other people other than women because

> *What we do is much about women. However, because other groups of people are mentioned in the name of the Ministry, we attempt to give them attention too. It is just an attempt to balance. Even when you look at the resources and activities, a lot is spent on gender and women as compared to children and people living with disabilities* (Interview with public official, 18 July 2015).

The feminization of the ministry has also contributed to the dismal performance of the semblance model as far as representation is concerned. The top political leadership position of the ministry has always been filled by women. Similarly, the top technical leadership has also been relatively dominated by women. Having women in top positions in the ministry has had some disadvantages, foremost among which is the lack of support from parts of the bureaucracy (despite lots of support from the development partners). Furthermore, the perception that gender issues concern women only has partially undermined the semblance model. This is because despite the changes in the name of the ministry, the term *gender* is maintained (the name of the ministry largely maintain the linkage between gender and women, see Table 1), and the top political leadership is always female.

Thus, we will argue that the matching of the gender of the representative and the represented is a flawed model, as it has not really improved the quality of representation. The semblance model has created some antagonism as well as frustration among bureaucrats as it has become evident that career-advancement stagnates at a particular level, as one of our informants points out: "*for the reason that they do not belong to the sex designated for the top leadership positions*" (Interview with public official, 19 July 2015).

The Challenge of 'Turf Wars'

Although the MoGCDSW has the specific function of promoting gender equality and protecting the welfare of Malawian women, men, girls, and boys to become self-reliant, active participants and beneficiaries of the national development agenda (GoM 2013: 25), our study indicates that the ministry, to some extent, has lost direction regarding service delivery and pursuance of its objectives. One reason that accounts for the loss of direction is the failure to strike a balance between managing government-sponsored activities and donor-funded projects. Our study established that donor projects and the ministry's own activities compete for time and the staff prefer to spend more time on donor projects because they are more rewarding than the ministry's activities. It can be argued that the ministry is the 'project implementation unit' of the development aid agencies. This sentiment was echoed by a key informant who observed that:

> *When you compare the government and donor activities, we are more committed to donor projects as compared to government projects. We don't want to lose the funding and just have to deliver and do the paperwork such as writing reports. Staff from development partners are our supervisors and we are the implementers.* (Interview with public official, 19 July 2015).

The shifting of attention by bureaucrats from implementation of government activities to the development partners' initiated and funded projects has cut off some members of the society from public services. Projects are implemented in a few, selected impact areas and for specific clients. Furthermore, some of the projects funded by the development partners are not necessarily within the mainstream mandate of the ministry. The ministry cannot, however, refuse to implement these projects because it needs the funding to reach out to its clients and, more importantly, to be visible (or seen to be visible).

Prior to the 2014 tripartite elections, a turf-war ensued between the MoGCDSW and the NGO *Gender Coordination Network* (NGO-GCN). It was about the administration of funds from the Norwegian Embassy meant to support aspiring women MPs and councillors. The NGO-CGN argued that the ministry was stretching its mandate by managing the funds and that the ministry's involvement would favour pro-government aspiring candidates; hence, the elections would not be free and fair (GoM 2009: 8).

A similar conflict occurred in 2009 between the ruling party (*Democratic Progressive Party*, DPP) and the opposition parties. Kayuni and Muriaas observed that for the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections, opposition parties perceived the donor-supported '50-50 campaign' to be "a secret agenda or even colluding with their rivals because the campaign was coordinated by the Ministry" (2014: 400). The opposition parties were concerned with the loss of neutrality and objectivity of the bureaucrats, as they were likely to be subjected to the influence of the ruling party. In addition, the ruling party was suspicious about the 50-50 campaign because "most of the NGO-GCN leaders had been severe critics of government; hence their support of women candidates was regarded as tantamount to support for the opposition" (ibid.).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has argued that the MoGCDSW, as the implementing agency of the 'national gender machinery' in Malawi, has a design that is based on the clientele principle so as to serve women (primarily) and to promote women to high office. The epitome of MoGCDSW, as a women and gender-focussed institution, is the appointment of women to the top leadership positions of the ministry.

We have noted that whilst there are serious efforts by government to break gender identities, as manifested by various public policies and interventions, the practices within the MoGCDSW give the impression that gender issues are for women only.

We have argued that one of the challenges that frustrate efforts in the promotion of women's representation, is precisely this feminization of the MoGCDSW. The feminization of the MoGCDSW is motivated by the need to conform to international and national expectations (gender agreements/protocols/laws), as well as the desire to be politically correct in the eyes of the donor community.

The cardinal rationale of the clientele principle, of effectively serving the interests of the clients is, however, compromised by this pursuit of cosmetic representation.

We have also argued that the national gender machinery is pursuing multiple official and unofficial roles. The ability of the MoGCDSW to achieve strategic goals related to gender and the promotion of women representation is weakened by both internal and external forces. The ministry continues to give lip service to women, women at the grassroots in particular, because the semblance model of representation is not functioning. In addition, the intended services of the ministry have not reached out to local communities because of limited human, organisational, and financial capacities. The NGOs that complement the government's efforts are also limited: they also have lean human project staff, selected and limited impact areas, volatile finances, a narrow focus on the gender agenda, and sometimes compete with the government structures and among themselves.

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CHAPTER 11

Gender Quotas
A Possible Way to Include Women in Politics

CHARLOTTE WEZI MESIKANO-MALONDA

This chapter focusses on the possible application of quotas in Malawi to facilitate a balanced participation of women in politics. Although quotas are sometimes considered as violating other principles such as fairness and competence, they are also seen as an efficient way of attaining 'real' equality or what Dahlerup called "equality of results" (1998: 17). A well-designed quota system might have a positive impact on the representation of women. Half of the countries of the world use some form of electoral quotas for their parliament, according to the international *Quota Project* (IDEA 2015). Within the SADC region, quotas have proven to be effective, in some cases complemented with other mechanisms for promoting women in politics. The position in Africa is, in fact, very encouraging, with over twenty countries on the continent that have either legislated quotas or political parties that have adopted them voluntarily. These measures have contributed substantially to the increase in the number of women parliamentarians.

The Challenge of Gender Quotas

Successful examples in the SADC region are South Africa and Mozambique, which have political parties that have implemented voluntary quota systems within the parties; the *African National Congress*, (ANC) and the *Front for the Liberation of Mozambique* (FRELIMO), respectively. In Uganda, each of the 56 districts elects a *Woman Representative* to parliament in connection with the general elections in the country's 214 constituencies, and the level of female representation in Uganda's parliament has risen to 35.0 per cent (IPU 2015). In Tanzania, 30 per cent of parliamentary seats are reserved for women, above and beyond those elected in their own right (IDEA 2015).

In Malawi, however, the results of the 2014 elections showed that female representation in parliament had decreased to 16.7 per cent, down from 22.3 per cent in 2009 (see Chapter 2 by *Dzimbiri* for the earlier scores). This recent decline puts into question the mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure that the percentage is in line with regional and international commitments.

As explained by several authors (see for instance Chingaipe 2015, Larserud and Taphorn 2007, Kethusegile-Juru 2003), some electoral systems are more accommodative in terms of getting women elected to elective bodies, such as national and local assemblies. Currently, Malawi uses a majoritarian system based on the simple majority of votes ('first-past-the post', FPTP system), with only one candidate declared winner of each constituency. In this system, the winner only has to pool a simple (and not necessarily an absolute) majority of votes. In other systems, a higher majority might be required, while in proportional (PR) systems, more than one candidate is elected per electoral district. The electoral system has a direct impact on the election result, with proportional representation systems usually considered more women- and minority-friendly than the FPTP system, which is criticised for being inefficient when it comes to the implementation of quotas.

There are basically three types of gender quotas used in politics: reserved seats in parliament, candidate quotas, and political party quotas. The last one is a voluntary quota, the two former are compulsory (enshrined in the constitution and/or legally mandated). The idea and practice of gender quotas present us with new challenges, but they can be fruitful if properly implemented. Quotas need to be implemented in an environment that makes them efficient, preferably together with other women-promoting mechanisms, in order not to be simple window-dressing or token mechanisms.

One pragmatic argument for the introduction of quotas in Malawi that women representation is currently so low that legal interventions are needed to increase the number of women in political positions. Legal interventions, such as reserved seats and candidate quotas, will also legitimise the gender debate and push through changes in the political culture. A combination of interventions might yield the desired goal of changed political cultures and a break in the near-monopoly of males in decision-making positions.

As indicated by Mrs Elvery Kalonga Mtafu, one of the commissioners of the Malawi Electoral Commission, increasing women representation in elected positions is a colossal job not to be left to one institution. There is need for concerted efforts of all stakeholders to level the playing field for women participation. "Female candidacy is an important indicator of the maturity of our democracy, which requires renewed attention and support. As much as the Commission would want to push this gender equality agenda, we are limited in our interventions" (MEC 2015).

The national parliament, one of the most important political institutions, remains male-dominated in Malawi as well as in the world beyond. The world average of women in parliaments is 16.4 per cent; in the Sub-Saharan region it is 16.6 per cent (IPU 2015), and 16.7 per cent in Malawi. These figures reflect the fact that that *de facto* equality has been realised neither in Malawi, in the region, nor in the world. Thus, it is apparent that women are not sufficiently made use of as agents of change for the benefit of the country and for the benefit of women. The exclusion of women, through limited representation in politics, also contributes to the marginalisation of women's needs.

The Approach

There is a large literature on the subject of quota representation. This chapter draws mainly on some lessons from two completed studies, Mesikano 2006 and Kabwato et al. 2013, as well as from a wide range of papers on women and politics in Malawi.

The Mesikano study presented the weaknesses of the current budget process in Malawi, which was found to marginalise women and perpetuate the inequalities between men and women. The Kabwato study presented data from discussions with traditional chiefs as well as ordinary people in seven rural districts (Mangochi, Thyolo, Nkhotakota, Nkhata Bay, Zomba, Balaka and Chiradzulu) and from high-level discussions with political parties and members of parliament. Individual interviews were also held with women MPs (prior to the 2014 elections), and discussions were held with the 24 members of the women's caucus of parliament.

A human-rights based approach is used to justify why the introduction of quotas might be a good avenue to propel women into parliament. The main principles of a rights-based approach are participation, empowerment, equality and non-discrimination. Equal representation and equal access to decision-making arenas and positions is an important human and political right. Women have the right to nominate, to be nominated, and to be elected to political office (see for instance UN 2014: 43).

There are, however, a lot of structural factors that limit women's enjoyment of these rights. In order to understand these underlying causes of inequality, we need to look at the daily lives of ordinary women. Also, in order to formulate possible measures to counter-act the gender inequalities, we need to be informed by women's experiences. This is why interviews and initiatives that enable women to formulate and express their views are useful.

Barriers to Women's Political Participation

There are so many factors that contribute to the persistent low representation of women in politics, according to activists, scholars and researchers. In the following, we will group and outline the most common barriers in three categories: barriers created by culture, barriers created by the economy, and barriers created by political structures.

The socio-cultural barriers include the prevalence of patriarchal structures in Malawian society. Patriarchy, or the dominance of men, starts in the home and is further manifested in choices made in the public sphere. Women are typically given stereotyped opportunities as choir-masters, secretaries, treasurers, and cheer ladies of social clubs. Women are sometimes fearful when it comes to political participation and leave this to men.

Apart from contributing agricultural labour, producing household food, attending to the sustenance of the family, and child-bearing, women provide most of the labour at the household level, which leaves them with very little time to pursue political careers. Though women may be interested in such

careers, patriarchal societies have overburdened women them support-roles that do not necessarily motivate them to pursue political careers. In some cases women are forced to leave the political party of their choice and join that of their husband.

Socialization also assigns different roles and responsibilities to men and women. Women are traditionally assigned duties related to serving others, but not as leaders. Women are also further exposed to harmful traditions and cultural practices, including domestic violence, and are deliberately excluded from key communal leadership positions.

There is a widespread belief that women cannot participate in politics and that they are dis-empowered due to their roles at home. Stereotyping of women, as more subservient and as weaker than men, undermines their self-confidence and social standing. At times, women are seen to be shy, unpersuasive, and lacking the confidence necessary for them to compete and succeed in politics.

The economic barriers are, first and foremost, poverty, which affects women disproportionately. If a woman is poor, her political participation will be poor since she has more to worry about in her personal life. As a result, women have little or no time for politics. Poverty increases suffering and decreases political participation. In most cases, women struggle to get basic needs such as food and medical care. During political campaigns, women rely on hand-outs and align themselves to the role of singing songs at rallies or any role that can provide for their needs for the day.

The lack of financial resources also affects women's political candidacy. This is because in order for women to contest in a parliamentary election, there is need for funds for campaign materials and cash to give to people in order to attract their support. Women do not always have the financial resources to make their campaigns vibrant.

Once elected, regular visits to the grassroots are expected of all MPs. However, concerns are often raised about the expectations from the constituencies, where MPs are expected to provide for things not related to their mandate. These include buying coffins for bereaved families, paying school fees for children, and providing food and other necessities such as tea and blankets to the elderly. That most constituents often grow a feeling of entitlement is a general challenge to all MPs. It does not, however, help improve society's understanding of the role of an MP, and it disfavours women MPs, in particular.

The barriers created by the political structure are well exemplified by the recent decline in the number of women in parliament. One political barrier is the fact that the political parties are presenting few female candidates for election. The number of women candidates and the number of women elected are directly correlated; and the parties are presenting less than 20 per cent women candidates (see below).

In some cases, female MPs also failed to get re-nominated by their respective parties in preference for male candidates, a practice bemoaned by several female MPs. Oftentimes, women are forced to run as independents, but this means they are not given any financial or moral support by any political party. Most support is drawn from their family, friends, and home constituency. It is therefore not surprising that women give up.

Women have further crippled their own chances of success in elections because of the way they have presented themselves to the voters. Women play vital roles in the families and communities and, as such, they are more in touch with the challenges of most people. Because of this crucial role, they are able to relate easily to the majority of the people. However, being elected into a political position depends on how one tells a story; how she presents her character and image. Women sometimes do not run vibrant, well-articulated campaigns because they fail to translate their talent in the home and local community into political confidence and influence at the national level.

Furthermore, women who take part in politics face a number of risks, including castigation, prejudice, unfair criticism, jeering at political rallies, breakdown of marriage, and even domestic violence. Domestic violence might sometimes result if a woman refuses to leave her party to join the husband's party. Thus, she might be accused of flirting with other men. Marriage has in some cases been described as a hindrance to a political career as women cannot hold political views that are different from their husbands, there is sometimes no individual freedom of choice (Kabwato et al. 2013: 5).

Because of the various barriers, particularly those raised by political parties, some women MPs in Malawi have called for quotas within political parties with respect to both positions within the party and also candidature at primaries. The justification for this proposal is the fact that there are inbuilt prejudices against women in the political parties.

The Role of the Political Parties

A higher number of women candidates will normally translate into a higher number of women elected to parliament. This is very clear from Figure 1, which shows that the number of women candidates and the number of elected women are closely related. It is interesting to note, however, that there was a higher percentage of women elected than women presented in 2009 (in other words, there was a higher voter preference for women than the preference of the parties), whereas in earlier years and, again, in 2014, there were relatively fewer women elected than presented (that is, the voters voted in a slightly lower number of women than the parties presented).

Figure 1: Trends in Women Candidates and Women Elected
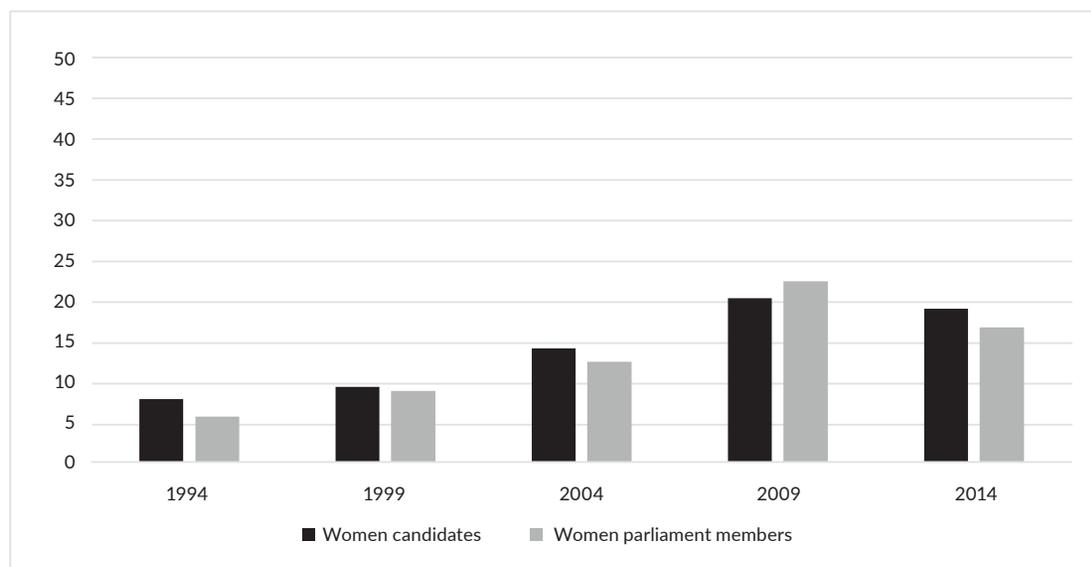
Source: MEC 2014 and 2009, Khembo 2005. Figures in per cent.

Obviously, there were some dynamics in play here, which resulted in a lower number of women candidates presented, and women elected, in 2014 than in 2009. Surprisingly, this was the period when the country had its first female president and also two female presidential candidates (See Chapter 5 by *Chikapa* for an outline of the so-called 'Joyce Banda effect'). It is therefore important to realize that women still need that extra push to enable them to be elected into office and overcome the prejudice of the political parties, of the voters, and the stigma associated with female leadership.

The position of women within the parties is also directly correlated to their positions in the National Assembly. If political ideologies are not engendered the broader participation of women in parliament as well as in other political structures is greatly affected. As the Clerk of Parliament noted,

> *The National Assembly consists of individual human beings with different ideologies and beliefs who also belong to different political parties representing different interests* (M. Katopola cited in Mesikano 2005: 9).

It is evident from the 2014 parliament that political structures in themselves are still rather male-dominated, with the *People's Party* (PP) being the only political party with its parliamentary group being headed by a woman. Other female-led political parties sprouted during the run-up to the last election (like the *United Independence Party*, UIP, led by Abusa Helen Singh), but only two out of the twelve presidential candidates were women. This represented 17 per cent of the presidential candidates. However, out of 1292 contestants for the 193 parliamentary seats, 257 were women, representing 19.9 per cent. There were, however, 44 constituencies with *no* female parliamentary contestants (Kasawala 2014).

As seen from Figure 2, it is clear that the representation of women varies considerably between the political parties, with independent candidates leading with 23 per cent (giving evidence to the claim that the political parties prefer male candidates, as mentioned, forcing women to present themselves as independents). The PP, led by presidential candidate Joyce Banda, had the largest relative number of female candidates (with 18.5 per cent), followed by the DPP (15.6), UDF (14.0) and the MCP (with 10.6 per cent). The smaller parties, AFORD and CCP, won only one seat each, both by men.

Figure 2: Women Representation in Parliament by Political Party, 2014
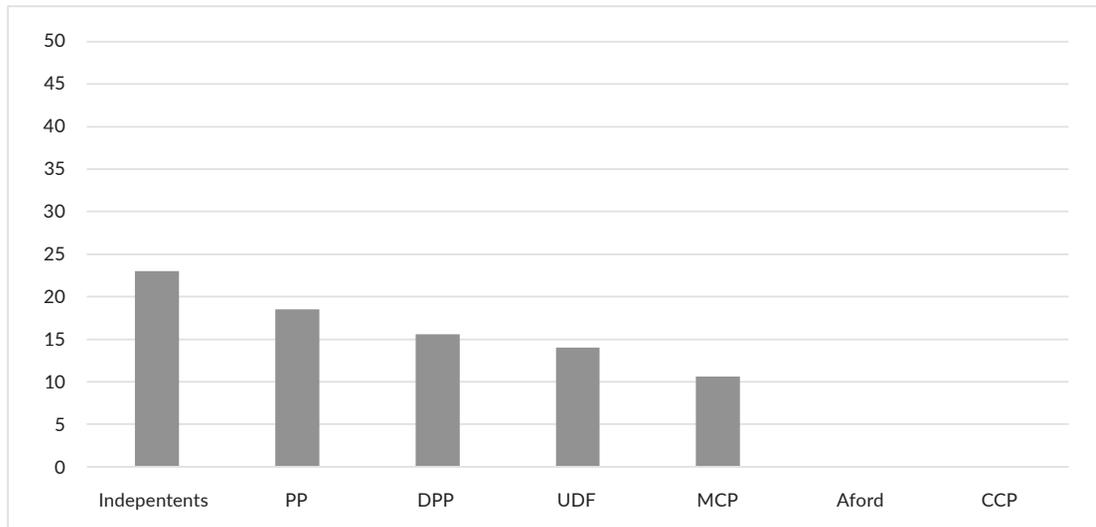
Figure 2 demonstrates that the number of women in parliament is strongly correlated to their position within the political parties; it indicates a political culture that continues to be dominated by male norms. As the current commissioner of the Malawi Electoral Commission, Elvey Mtafu, said, in most cases women face intimidation and cannot withstand the violent and turbulent processes leading to party nominations. She further noted that

> *Political parties have been involved because we know candidates come from political parties and some of the hindrances that choke women participation can ably be dealt with only by political parties* (Elvey Mtafu, *Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections* (BRIDGE) course in Blantyre, September 2015).

It is safe to conclude that the under-representation of women in parliament is a reflection of the under-representation of women within political parties. The fraction is too little for women's political representation to be considered acceptable. Although all major political parties have manifestos and have made declarations that they will integrate gender equality principles in their structures, they have not taken this beyond a certain point as women still fail to penetrate the political parties. The solution lies in making some structural reforms in the foundations of the political parties by promoting both voluntary and mandatory quotas.

The Legal Framework

The current legal framework in Malawi is actually designed to promote female political participation. However, there is still need for additional legal steps to be taken to strengthen the enforcement of the existing policy and law, especially at the level of the political parties.

At the international level, Malawi has signed conventions that espouse the introduction of gender quotas. In 1990, Malawi ratified the UN *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). Article 4 of this convention calls for temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between men and women. Such measures can include the introduction of quotas in electoral laws and policies. Similarly, at the African level, Article 9 of the *Protocol on the Rights of Women* of the *African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights* (the *Maputo Protocol*) establishes that women have a right to take part in the political process and decision-making on equal terms with men. Malawi was among the first 15 countries to ratify this protocol.

If we look at the *Constitution of Malawi*, Section 13(a) states that the State shall progressively adopt and implement policies and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality and the full participation of women in all spheres of Malawian society (for a full account of the legal framework, see Chapter 3 by *Kanyongolo and Malunga*). The law thus obliges the government to implement policies aimed at achieving gender equality, and this also includes an obligation to share political power with women. We believe the law makes full participation of women in political and decision-making processes a constitutional right. The government should therefore be held accountable for not fully providing it. The law clearly opens the way for the possible introduction of gender quotas to achieve this.

Gender activists breathed a sigh of relief when the *Gender Equality Act* was passed in 2013. Its purpose is to take action and address the inequalities that exist between men and women. The act seeks to promote equal integration, influence, empowerment, dignity, and opportunities for men and women in all functions of society; to prohibit and provide redress for gender discrimination, harmful practices and sexual harassment, and to provide public awareness on the promotion of gender equality.

One of the advantages of the act is that it promotes a greater visibility of women in decision-making positions in Malawi, at least outside of the political arena. The act provides quotas for employment in the public service, and pegs this at no less than 40 per cent of the workforce. This means that an appointing or recruiting authority should appoint or recruit no less than 40 per cent and no more than 60 per cent of either gender in any department.

The act does not apply to the 'political sphere', including the political parties, however, as these are not considered government or public service institutions. The political parties, nevertheless, can implement voluntary quotas. It would, however, be more effective if the parties were subjected to legally binding quotas to complement the current progressive legal framework.

Voluntary and Mandatory Quotas

Electoral gender quotas are being implemented at a remarkable rate all over the world (see, for instance, the *Quota Project*, IDEA 2015) and their effect can be substantial. However, quotas should be assessed from a norm-setting perspective and should not restrict women from going above and beyond the number in that quota. As mentioned, there are three different types of quota arrangements: the voluntary party-based quota, the mandatory quota in terms of reserved seats for women in parliament, and the mandatory gender quota of the political parties' candidate lists.

Voluntary quotas are introduced by political parties under their own initiative, either provided for in the parties' manifestos or practiced because of the 'goodwill' of the party leadership. The party is not bound by any legislation to implement the provision and there are no consequences if the quota is not satisfied. Two successful examples of voluntary quotas are the ANC in South Africa and FRELIMO in Mozambique, who have ensured that the minimum target of 30 per cent female representation in parliament has been met. Less successful examples are ZANU in Zimbabwe and SWAPO in Namibia. Despite their provision that 30 per cent of all decision-making posts would be held by women, the parliamentary performance of these two parties in terms of women representation has not been good.

Mandatory quotas (quotas embedded in the electoral laws, equality law, and/or enshrined in the constitution) are more forceful and directly consequential. An example of this is Namibia, which at the *local* government level has a combination of a legislated quota, a voluntary party quota, plus a proportional representation (PR) system in operation. This has resulted in a high number (43.8 per cent) of women in local government (Kethusegile-Juru 2003: 3). Tanzania is an example with a constitutional reserved seats quota, where 20 per cent of MPs and 33 per cent of representatives at the local level must be women. This is a system in which parliamentary 'women special seats' are allocated to the political parties according to their number of valid votes. Although the mandatory reserved seats quota system is among the most controversial quota alternatives, the system is efficient in terms of increasing the number of women representatives, and it has boosted the level of female representation in Tanzania (ibid: 5).

In Malawi, mandatory quotas might be introduced, for instance, through the electoral law by reserving a certain number of seats for women in political bodies (like the parliament), or by requiring all political parties to have a certain number of women on their electoral ballot. Although there is a risk that the parties will then fill the quota by nominating women in constituencies where they are unlikely to win, we still believe a combination of both mandatory (parliamentary and local) and voluntary (political party) quotas is the only solution for Malawi.

Quotas and the Electoral System

Legislated quotas come in different forms, and while reserved seats is a 'best fit' and more likely to work in constituency-based plurality/majority electoral systems, there are other types of legislated quotas that can also work well in majoritarian systems. The majoritarian (FPTP) systems are generally known to be disadvantageous to women, both because they favour the majority (and women are usually a minority in politics) as well as personalities over parties and political issues. In a nutshell, the FPTP system is skewed towards ensuring that men survive the electoral process.

A number of studies have confirmed that more women are usually elected to parliament under party-list proportional representation (PR) systems, than under majoritarian electoral systems (Norris 1985, Moser 2001). This pattern probably holds within a range of countries worldwide. Proportional representation (PR) is an electoral system in which the political divisions in an electorate are proportionately reflected in the elected body. If, for instance, 30 per cent of the electorate support a particular political party, then roughly 30 per cent of the seats will be won by that party.

The failure to translate the gender equality clauses in the Constitution of Malawi into practical measures, coupled with the FPTP electoral system that tends to marginalise women, has resulted in Malawi showing poor (though improving) statistics in terms of women political representation. As a result, the call for the introduction of electoral gender quotas is growing. The current electoral laws do not provide for any form of affirmative action, although the MEC, on their own initiative, reduced the nomination fee for women candidates in 2014 (but without any positive result).

Implementation Problems

Implementing quotas can be controversial and difficult. It is important, therefore, that the system is implemented in a way that will achieve the intended results. For instance, the legal provision can require at least a 40-60 parity from nomination to election of candidates, if the choice is to align the proportion to the 2013 *Gender Equality Act*. This should be worded carefully to avoid any misinterpretation (for instance, that the law is establishing a minimum proportion of female representatives).

Furthermore, the law must not only be a point of reference for the minimum standards, but it should be compelling and spell out the penalties for failure to meet the minimum standards. Such sanctions as financial penalties can be imposed on political parties that do not meet the minimum target of women candidates. Political parties may also be barred from participating in the electoral process. While quotas are indeed useful, voluntary action by political parties is crucial in ensuring that their structures and culture allow and encourage women to stand for office.

Complications can arise, however, on how to implement quotas on the cluster of independent candidates. The onus, in such case, lies on the Electoral Commission to ensure that the operational framework does not further squeeze out women because of the male independent candidates who may not have

made it through the primaries in their respective parties. The Electoral Commission must shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that the same quotas apply to independent candidates as well.

Another complication of a quota system is that there may be some level of stigma attached to women representatives when the electorate is compelled to accept them even when they had other preferences. Besides, the women representatives can be criticised and their competence belittled as representatives 'quoted in' and not representing a particular constituency or interest.

The Way Forward

The recommendation is for Malawi to introduce legislation that reserves seats for women in the national assembly and in the local councils. As demonstrated above, women face a lot of challenges that impose barriers to their real participation in politics, and some form of affirmative action is required.

In addition to the reserved seats in parliament and local councils, quotas that require for a minimum of women on the parties' candidate lists, either as a legal requirement or a measure written into the statutes of individual political parties, are needed. With the recent downturn in women representation in Malawi, we will argue that this is the only option for Malawi. Voluntary party quotas will not work as the challenges are above and beyond the party structures. Legal gender quotas must form part of the electoral laws, and a minimum threshold must be dictated by the constitution to enable women to achieve real presence in political structures.

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Women in Politics in Malawi

About two decades ago, in Malawi, the issue of the numbers of women in politics was not newsworthy. Few stakeholders showed any concern about the low number of women in politics.

Despite an overwhelming increase in the interest over the last years, this book notes that not much has changed on the ground. The latest elections, in 2014, exposed a major setback in women representation in parliament, thus putting into question all past efforts towards improving the status of women in politics.

Consequently, this book is exploring the recent developments in women participation in politics in Malawi. We are specifically *inter alia* examining the following key issues:

- The factors behind the slow but marked increase in women in political representation during the multiparty era;
- The explanations for the recent electoral *setback* for women representation in politics;
- Possible options as to what can be done to improve women's representation in Malawi, in terms of numbers, in terms of popular attitudes to women politicians, and in terms of women's political influence.

It is our belief that a true democracy requires representation of both genders, and the current low levels of women representation in Malawi constitute a democratic deficit.

This book is a product of collaboration between the Department of Political and Administrative Studies (PAS) at the University of Malawi's Chancellor College and Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Bergen, Norway. The book has eleven chapters and the contributors are respected academics and activists drawn from Malawi and Norway who utilised empirical as well as secondary data in their analyses.

This book is an invaluable resource for university students and lecturers, policy makers and practitioners interested in having a deeper understanding of factors affecting women in politics in Malawi.

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