

**DOES WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION MATTER IN PUBLIC  
POLICY MAKING? A CASE OF FEMALE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND  
FEMALE MINISTERS IN MALAWI**

MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE) THESIS

By

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Degree of Master of Arts (Political Science)

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## **DECLARATION**

I the undersigned hereby declare that the text of this Thesis entitled: **DOES WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION MATTER IN PUBLIC POLICY MAKING: THE CASE OF FEMALE MPs AND FEMALE MINISTERS IN MALAWI** is substantially my own work except where acknowledged.

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Signature

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Date:

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

We the undersigned certify that we have read and recommend to the Postgraduate Studies and Research Committee and the Senate for acceptance of this thesis entitled: **DOES WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION MATTER IN PUBLIC POLICY MAKING: THE CASE OF FEMALE MPs AND FEMALE MINISTERS IN MALAWI** submitted by **AMON KESTEN MLUWIRA** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Political Science.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family. I would not have been here without your support.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly I thank the Almighty God for the love he always show me through the days of my life and for making me what I am today. Secondly, I am greatly indebted to my supervisors, Dr Blessings Chinsinga and Ms J Tizifa for their constructive criticism and guidance during the preparation of this paper. Thank you very much for working tirelessly to perfect this paper. I am also grateful to the Department of Political and Administrative Studies (PAS) – Chancellor College for the NOMA Gender Award which helped me to carry out this study. Other thanks should also go to all Chancellor College staff members in general and PAS Department in particular for the support especially during graduate seminars.

Special thanks should go to all female Members of Parliament, female Ministers, former Malawi Parliament spokesperson (Mr L. Mengezi), the Coordinator MA (political Science) programme Dr A. Chiweza, staff at the Office of President and Cabinet (OPC), former Chairperson of Women Parliamentary Caucus Hon. Lilian Patel, Gender Coordinating Network(GCN), Society for Advancement of Women (SAW), Women’s Voice, Association for Progressive Women (APW), Mr Unandi Banda, Henry Chingaipe- York University- UK (PhD student), my mother Liberatta, lovely wife Videlia and son Marvellous, all classmates (Chanco Polscience 07), Sheriff Department staff members and all institutions and individuals too numerous to mention who helped during the study.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study was about women participation and representation in public policy making bodies, that is, at parliament and cabinet. It explains whether women participation and representation matter in public policy making with reference to female MPs and female ministers in Malawi. The study was qualitative and its main population was all female MPs and ministers. However, other groups were also added like senior parliamentary staff, the Office of President and Cabinet and all party whips represented in parliament. These other interviews were carried out in order to get information on how other stakeholders view the performance of female MPs. The study purposively and strategically selected these groups to get in depth information. Key informant interviews using interview guides were employed as the main method for collecting data. However, certain information was collected through documents like the Hansard and News papers articles. The data has been analysed through process tracing and content analysis.

One of the major findings of this study is that although there are a lot of interventions from various stakeholders to increase the number of women at these two levels, it is very difficult to achieve the thresholds of women representation as suggested by regional bodies because there are a lot of hurdles. These include culture and tradition, education, resources, electoral system among others. As a result the number of women is still very low and is increasing very slowly averaging 8 percent in every five years. Another finding is that the mere (numerical) presence of women at these two levels has an impact on policy outcomes because there are certain policies which have been brought onto the agenda because of the presence of women. However, women are always made by male dominated political institutions to specialize in feminine areas of policy making.

Again the study has found out that female ministers who are also very few as compared to male counterparts are usually relegated to feminine ministries with most of them deputizing.

Women also remain greatly underrepresented in various parliamentary committees and the Business committee, which are very important as far as parliamentary work is concerned. Most of them are also relegated to feminine committees. Due to their under-representation, the policy outcomes are affected because they do not take due account of women's input. Further to this the study has also discovered that party discipline also affects the performance of women as there are certain policies of women concern but were rejected by women themselves because of the stand of their parties.

In general women representation and participation in policy making process matters because of not only in what get discussed at these two levels but also in what kind of policies are advanced because the study discovered that there are certain policies which have been advanced by women themselves which ordinarily without the presence of women could not have been on the agenda.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	i
Declaration .....	ii
Approval Page.....	iii
Copyright.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Table of contents.....	ix
List of Tables and Figures.....	xii
List of Abbreviations.....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Background to the problem.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	5
1.3 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	9
1.5 Research Assumptions.....	9
1.6 Definition of key terms.....	9
1.7 Organisation of the study.....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Literature review.....	14
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	26

2.2.1 Elite Theory.....	27
2.2.2 Humanistic Theory.....	27
<b>CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methodology.....</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1 Research Design.....	30
3.2 Population.....	30
3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique.....	31
3.4 Data Collection Instruments.....	31
3.5 Data Collection.....	31
3.6 Data Analysis.....	32
3.7 Limitations of the Study.....	33
<b>CHAPTER 4: Findings and Discussion.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Section 1: Constraints that women face.....</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1.1 Culture and Tradition.....	35
4.1.2 Violence, Intimidation and Harassment.....	39
4.1.3 Education/ Literacy level.....	44
4.1.4 Lack of resources.....	48
4.1.5 Lack of support from respective parties.....	51
4.1.6 Electoral system.....	55
4.1.7 Lack of interest and courage.....	59
4.1.8 Pull Down syndrome.....	60
<b>Section 2: The effect of female MPs and minister Representation and Participation on policy outcomes.....</b>	<b>62</b>
4.2.1 Representation and Policy outcomes.....	62

4.2.1.1 The trend in female MPs and ministers representation.....	63
4.2.2 Participation and Policy outcomes.....	70
4.2.2.1 Participation of female MPs in the Chamber.....	71
4.2.2.2 Participation of female MPs in the parliamentary committee.....	74
4.2.2.3 Participation of female MPs in the Business committee.....	83
4.2.3 Participation of female ministers.....	84
<b>Section 3: The effect of Institutional Framework and Political Environment on the performance of female MPs and female ministers.....</b>	<b>86</b>
4.3.1 Party discipline.....	86
4.3.3 Parliamentary procedures and Government Regulations.....	93
4.3.4 Political Environment.....	95
<b>CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and Implications of the study.....</b>	<b>97</b>
References.....	101
Appendix.....	106

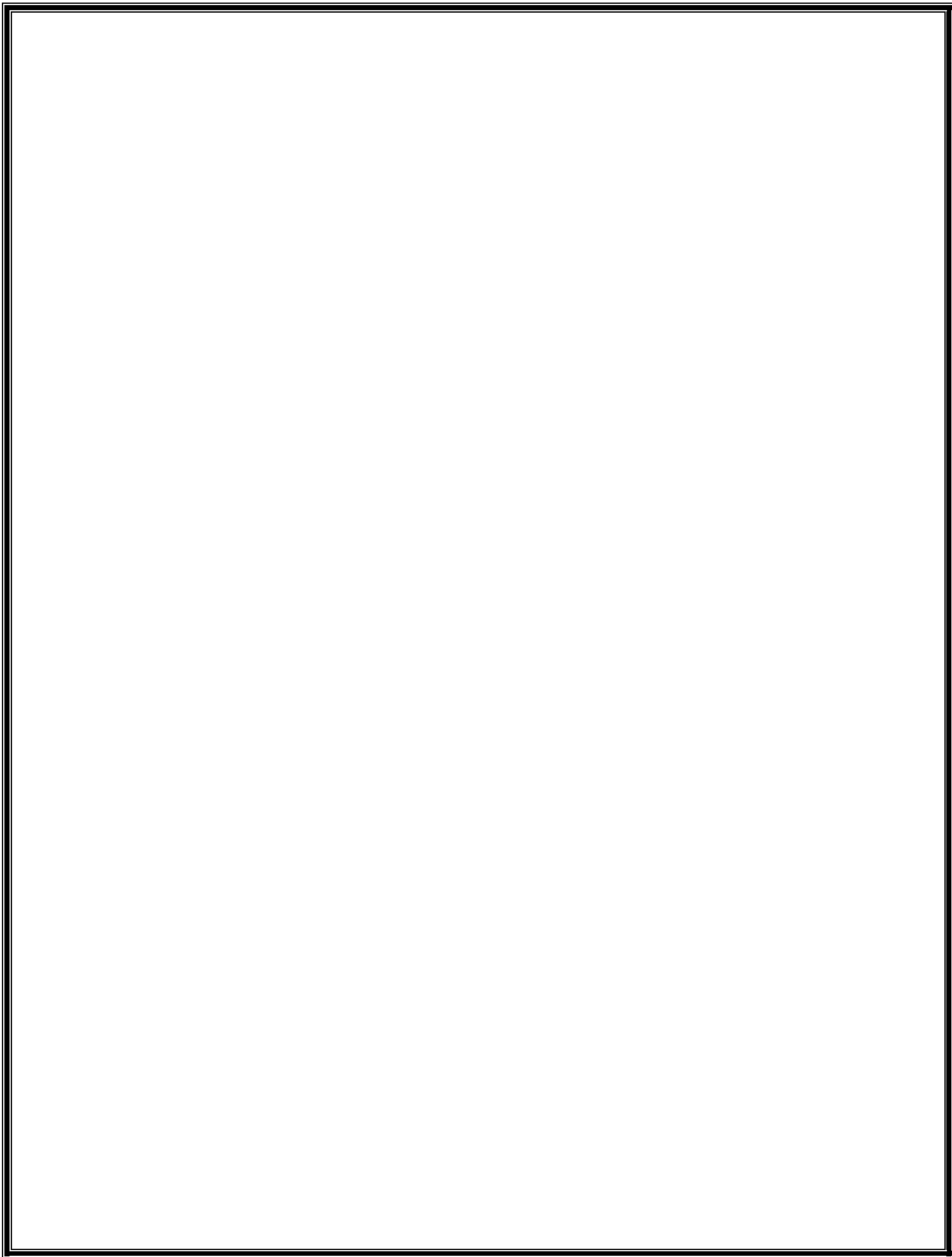
## **LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

Figure 4.1:	Percentage of female MPs	Page 63
Figure 4.2:	Percentage of female Ministers	Page 65
Table 4.1:	Parliamentary Committees Membership 2004-2009	Page 77
Table 4.2:	Parliamentary Committee Membership 2009	Page 78

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACCRONYMS**

AFORD:	Alliance for Democracy
AML:	Anti Money Laundering
APW:	Association for Progressive Women
AU:	African Union
CEDAW:	Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA:	Canadian International Development Agency
CSIE:	Civil Society Information Exchange
DC:	District Commissioner
DPP:	Democratic Progressive Party
FPTP:	First Past The Post
IWPR:	Institute for Women's Policy Research
MAM:	Muslim Association of Malawi
MCP:	Malawi Congress Party
MEC:	Malawi Electoral Commission
MGDS:	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MPs:	Members of Parliament
MSCE:	Malawi School Certificate of Education
NDA:	National Democratic Alliance
NEC:	National Executive Council
NGOs:	Non Governmental Organizations
NGOGCN:	Gender Coordination Network
OPC:	Office of President and Cabinet

PAS:	Political and Administrative Studies
PR:	Proportional Representation
SADC:	Southern Africa Development Community
SAW:	Society for Advancement of Women
SMP:	Single Member Plurality
SO:	Parliamentary Standing Orders
UDF:	United Democratic Front
UNPA:	United Nations Population Agency



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Women constitute almost half the population in Malawi but still remain greatly under represented in most decision making bodies. This particular study concerns women participation and representation in public policy making bodies especially at parliament and in cabinet. Basically, the study explains whether participation and representation matter in public policy making with reference to female MPs and female ministers in Malawi. Basing on the research findings, this study has identified and analysed the constraints that prevent women from getting into parliament or to be in the cabinet. However, even if we have some women at these two levels what impact do they have on policy issues discussed at these levels? The study therefore assesses women's numerical presence (descriptive representation) and their actual participation (substantive representation), and their impact on policy issues discussed. Since there are rules governing the conduct of MPs and ministers, the study also analyses the institutional framework in which female MPs and cabinet ministers operate before drawing conclusion from the whole discussion.

#### **1.1 Background**

Formerly a British colony of Nyasaland, Malawi gained internal self government in 1963 before being declared an independent state on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1964. The early days of colonialism in Malawi were characterized by highly centralized power as all the decisions concerning Malawi, then Nyasaland, were made by the Queen in Britain through her agents who formed the Nyasaland Government. There was no question of any native being involved in government



decision making, until the 1961 Lancaster conference although there were some issues affecting them. There was also no question of women being in position of authority as it could not happen because of the administration type or cultural background. At the same time, as observed by Randall (1987:1),

up to the 1960's, at least, and the resurgence of feminism, political science had very little to say about women. One obvious reason for this neglect is that the profession of political science was overwhelmingly male dominated, whether the criterion is numbers, positions in the hierarchy or output.<sup>1</sup>

As time passed, the natives started organizing themselves into associations to pressure for independence. In all the associations that were formed there were almost no women in the leadership positions. This was to have an effect in post independence era, in that even if the indigenous were given power, their women were not represented by fellow women like Rose Chibambo, Catherine Chipembere and Vera Chirwa and participated at a very limited scale in any leadership position that could have made them effectively influence some decisions either affecting them directly or the nation at large.

Malawi attained Republican status on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1966 and later degenerated into a one party regime in the same year after the 1964 cabinet crisis. *"This prompted the then leadership to adopt a new 1966 constitution"* (Magolowondo in Patel & Svasand, 2007:1). This constitution among other things declared Malawi a single party regime and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) as the only legal party. By the time of the cabinet crisis there was only one female minister who was involved in the crisis and was later forced into exile. At the 1971 MCP convention in Nkhatabay, delegates unanimously agreed to make Dr Banda the Life President of

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis changed.

the Republic of Malawi, a decision that was later included in the Republican Constitution. Coupled with the single party clause, this consolidated MCP and Dr Banda's rule leading to authoritarian rule for the next thirty years. All this led to the concentration of power at the executive and legislature which made decisions without consultations. However, as pointed out, after the cabinet crisis there was no female minister for some time and although the president had prerogative to nominate MPs, there were still very few female MPs. This meant that at these two powerful institutions where almost all the policy making process took place, the representation of women was very minimal which affected their participation in policy making process. As Tripp (2000)<sup>2</sup> argued,

even where women are courted by politicians, it is not always in the interest of increasing women's political power. For example, in authoritarian systems (like that of Dr Banda), parties have actively repressed women's autonomous life in the interest of co-opting women to legitimization projects of single ruling party.

In general development policy documents during this period which talked of rural producers, agriculturalists, farmers and peasants failed to acknowledge that the predominant majority of those who bore these titles were women. Women were just oriented to sing songs of praise of Dr Banda and were excluded from the processes and forums of public decision making.

A wind of change finally came when Catholic Episcopal Conference comprising all the eight bishops circulated a letter entitled "*Living our Faith*" that was critical to Dr Banda's regime in 1992. In addition there was pressure from donors who froze their aid in order to force change to a multi-party system. Other Malawians who went into exile during Dr Banda's regime also had an impact during this period especially Chakufwa Chihana a trade unionist. However, even

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<sup>2</sup> In Goetz and Hassim; 2003:11

during this period women did not take an active part to pressure for the change apart from the referendum in which they took part because they were virtually absent at the helm of almost all the pressure groups. However, it must be appreciated that there were only a few women who helped during this period. This resulted in a National Referendum on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1993 in which 63 percent of the Malawians who voted opted for a multiparty system of government<sup>3</sup>. Since 1993, (four) presidential elections have been held and one local government election with the first Presidential and Parliamentary Elections on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1994 (Rakner et.al in Patel & Svasand, 2007:175)

Every government makes decisions that affect its people for example addressing social problems. These decisions are usually made and implemented by certain groups holding various positions in government although other groups in the society have a strong influence on which decisions to be made and how to implement the decisions made. The study will be focusing on the democratic Malawi (1994-2004), because as Goetz and Hassim (2003:10) pointed out,

the feminist antipathy to policy making has become pronounced in the aftermath of democracy struggles, in which women who have contributed to democratization have often been disappointed by their marginalization from political power<sup>4</sup>.

However since independence, only few women have been in positions where they could have been able to influence these decisions and this had an effect in the democratic regime. Therefore in some instances reference will be made on Dr Banda's authoritarian regime.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.britannica.com>

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis original.

With this background in mind, this study discusses how female MPs and female ministers influence public policy-making taking into account that their formal membership in political parties had not increased their political power in policy making in any significant way. In general therefore the study goes beyond looking at the numerical presence of women at parliament and cabinet to a more substantive one or actual participation once in office. In other words, it goes beyond looking at the feminine presence to feminist activism in politics by analyzing their actual behavior and performance once in office.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The importance of public policy to people's lives within a particular society can not be over emphasized as every government in contemporary society has a profound impact on people's lives. From the moment of birth to the instant of death, the destinies of individuals are regulated by government. Since the decisions that are made by the government affect its people, proper consultations before these decisions are made are required. However, it is impossible for every person to participate or be consulted directly. This responsibility is delegated to a certain group of people who are either elected or appointed to decision-making positions. The expectation is that the group should as much as possible be representative.

There has been, however, a lot of concern about the role women play in influencing public policy from both women activists and governments in almost all countries in the world including Malawi. This problem has been compounded by a limited number of women in key decision making positions as is evidenced by their representation in parliament and at ministerial level making their participation in policy-making very minimal. For instance their representation

averages 20.5 percent in the whole world<sup>5</sup>. It cannot be ignored that representation affects the way in which actual individuals are perceived and their influence on issues like opinion and action. The absence of minority groups, like female MPs and female ministers yield what can be called the burden of representation. All this can have an impact on the policies which are made and are actually implemented as the absence of these women also affect significantly the quality of policies being made. Furthermore, Malawi is ranked 78<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries as far as women representation in the legislature is concerned as of 31 October 2007, but before the general elections in 2004 and 2009, it ranked third from bottom amongst SADC countries with the lowest female representation. That is why Goetz and Hassim (2003:viii) argue that

women as much as any other social group welcome peace and democracy and expect that new democratic institutions at national and local level will be open to their participation. Yet around the world, women have found that the resumption of political competition in post conflict democracies has left them on the sidelines.

The question that comes into mind then is: why is it that there are few women at those two important levels in Malawi as in many other countries in the world despite them out numbering their male counterparts in terms of their population? Does this situation have any effect on their performance once in office? Therefore the problem arises with the constraints women face to find themselves at policy-making positions and in this case parliament and cabinet which in the end result to a limited number of female representatives in parliament and cabinet and thereby affecting the policy-making process and hence the whole concept of participatory democracy.

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<sup>5</sup> Women in parliaments: World classification situation as of 31 August 2007.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

Despite many efforts, including ratifying several international declarations on the status of women and signing other protocols on the quota of women the number of women in key positions and in spite of the relative increase in the number of highly qualified and competent women, the number of women in key decision-making positions, and in this case, the legislature and executive who can influence public policy making in the country, is still very low as they still remain greatly under-represented. Some of the declarations that Malawi has ratified include: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) monitored by the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality, African Charter of Human and People's Rights, Southern Africa Development Community protocol on the quota of women SADC Declaration on gender and Development, among other instruments. In addition to these there are national legal and policy frameworks on gender like the National Gender policy of 2000, 1997 National Plan of Action, Response to Gender Based Violence 2006. All these call for inclusion of women in decision-making positions.

In addition, there are more women in Malawi as compared to men as they account for 51 percent of the total population<sup>6</sup> and this is also highlighted in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) that large disparities exist between men and women, although women constitute almost 51 percent of the population<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Preliminary results of the 2008 Population and housing census.

<sup>7</sup> Daily Times, Tuesday, July 29, 2008; by Chipiliro Kansilanga, p2. Women Aspirants to have skills in campaign.

Although women's exclusion from policy-making does not bring conflicts in terms of wars, they produce *"smouldering and socially corrosive injustices"* and violence that delay development and undermine any state's claim to the status of democracy. In a democratic country like Malawi, it is also important that the women must also have relatively substantial influence in public policy by participating fairly in the policy-making process because *"citizen participation in all aspects of public affairs is essential to the full development of individual capacities and the paucity of women in public office indicates that the system is being deprived of contribution of more than half of its citizens."* (Clark;1991,65). Therefore this study will help to minimize the social injustice as described above since it has unearthed the major causes of failure by stakeholders including government and women themselves to achieve the much acclaimed 30 percent and even now the 50 percent benchmark representation of women in strategic and key decision-making positions and also their influence and power after getting into those policy-making positions.

The study will help to advance the status and equality of women in the society. Since the study has focused on political context it will help to understand how members' positions within these institutions (parliament and cabinet) shape their willingness to pursue policy based on their gender. Finally the study has added to literature on politics and gender in Malawi because as observed by Patricia Mwafulirwa<sup>8</sup>, there is insufficient and lack of accurate data on gender and politics in Malawi which contributed to Malawi's failure to meet most of the local and international legal frameworks on gender empowerment. The study has also provided a clear current picture of the situation of women in politics in Malawi based on empirical evidence.

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<sup>8</sup> Former Deputy Minister of Women and Child development reported in Sunday Times, July 6, 2008.

## **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study is to establish whether female MPs and female ministers influence public policy-making.

### **1.4.1 Specific Objectives**

Specific objectives of this study are;

- a) To examine the constraints that women face to get to strategic decision-making positions (legislature and cabinet).
- b) To assess how female representation and participation in parliament and at cabinet affect their influence on public policy-making.
- c) To analyse how the institutional framework and political environment in which female MPs and female ministers operate affect their performance.

## **1.5 Research Assumptions:**

This study is based on the following assumptions:

- Female MPs and female ministers have very little impact in influencing public policy making in the country.
- Influence of MPs and cabinet ministers on public policy making does not depend on their gender.

## **1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **1.6.1 Public policy making:**

There are various definitions, stages and actors of public policy making. For the sake of this study however, public policy will be defined as a:

set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or a group of actors concerning the selection of goals and means of achieving them within a specified



situation, where those decisions should in principle be with the power of those actors to achieve them (Jenkins, 1978).

This meaning of public policy has been adopted by this study because it encompasses all the elements of public policy as discussed in this study. These public policies may be regulative, organizational, distributive, or extractive or all of them together.

### **1.6.2 Public policy actors**

There are various actors in policy cycle who are directly involved with the policy process. These actors may be either individuals or groups. According to Kilpatrick (2007:2), *“the actors involved in a particular policy area can be referred to collectively as policy subsystem”*. Membership varies by country, policy sector or domain and overtime. However, the fact remains that the policy actors are drawn from different areas of the society for instance the state machinery and from the society at large. Howlett (1995:52) argues that policy actors may be divided into the following five categories; *“elected officials, appointed officials, interest groups, research organizations and mass media. The first two reside within the state and the latter three in the society, and together they form the principal elements from which members of specific policy subsystems are drawn”*<sup>9</sup>. This paper is mainly concerned with the elected officials who are said to include the executive and the legislature. However, although the executive is included in the category of elected officials, in a practical sense, like the case under study, the executive (particularly the cabinet ministers) is appointed by the president though most of them are also elected members of the legislature.

The study looks at the elected officials’ category because the study is about the influence of women MPs from the legislature and women cabinet ministers from the executive. Furthermore,

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<sup>9</sup> Emphasis changed

the executive (cabinet) is one of the key players in the policy subsystem. *“Its central role derives from its constitutional authority to govern the country. While there are other actors involved in the process, the authority to make and implement policies rests ultimately with the executive.* (Dye,1978:53)

On the other hand, the task of the legislature is to hold government accountable to the public rather than to make or implement policies. But the performance of this function permits opportunities for influencing policies. That is why the legislature is also considered as vital element of this study. Although the emphasis is on these two actors (the legislature and appointed officials), other actors involved in policy process as mentioned in section 1.8.3 have also been referred to in the course of the discussion.

### **1.6.3 Representation**

The influence of public policy making by female MPs and female cabinet ministers is through their representation and participation at these two levels. However, representation is a much debated topic as the actual definitions of the word itself are for some cause of confusion. In simple terms representation means “ *presence or appearance*”. In politics, representation describes “*how political power is alienated from most of the members of a group and vested, for a certain time period, in the hands of a small subset of members*”<sup>10</sup>.

### **1.6.4 Participation**

Participation means a lot of things and its actual meaning depends on the context in which it is being considered. In simple terms, participation may mean the act of sharing in the activities of a

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.com> (accessed December, 2008)

group. According to Arnstein (1969:1) *“each actor would have a say in decisions directly proportional to the degree that particular decision affects him or her”* . In general participation is a process of emphasizing the inclusion of the people in the decision-making about the direction and operation of some system.

## **1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

This paper contains six chapters and the details of the chapters are as follows: The first chapter introduces the study, gives the background to the problem and states the problem. Furthermore, this chapter presents objectives of the study (main and specific objectives), the organization of the study and also defines key terms. The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study and reviews related literature to the study basing on the framework. Chapter 3 looks at the methodology and design of the study and the limitations of the study. Presentation, analysis and discussion of the first part of the findings of the study are done in chapter 4. The chapter is divided in three sections. It starts by presenting, analyzing and discussing the constraints/obstacles that women face to get at the two strategic levels (parliament and cabinet).

The second section discusses if the mere numerical representation of women in parliament and at cabinet has got any effect on the policy issues that are discussed at these two levels. In addition, the discussion goes a step further to look at substantive representation that is their actual participation, if it has got any bearing on what comes out of the policy process.

The third section looks at the institutional framework and political environment in which female MPs and female ministers operate. Specifically the section looks at this framework to determine

if it affects the influence of women on the policy process. Finally chapter 6 is a summarises the whole discussion and also discusses the implications of the study and possible future research areas.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature related to this study. Firstly, studies relating to representation and importance of having women in elected and appointed positions are reviewed. This has been followed by the review of studies relating to the context in which women MPs and appointed officials operate. It also presents the gaps in the reviewed literature and shows how this study is different from the other studies reviewed. The theoretical underpinnings of this study are also presented in this chapter.

#### **2.1 Literature Review**

Public policy is usually to do with what governments do, why they do it, who does it and what impact these actions have. As has already been alluded to, almost every government from time immemorial has been making decisions that affect its people. These decisions range from those to do with taxes, distribution of wealth, provision of social welfare services and even disaster management.

Public policy has however, been defined differently, by different people at different times. Famous authors like Thomas Dye (1978), David Easton (1965), Laswell and Kaplan (1950), Carl Friedrich (2005) among others have offered different definitions of public policy. However despite the differences, it all goes down to government action or inaction. That was why Dye(1978:3) argued that *“more elaborate definitions of public policy are found in the literature,*

*of course, but on examination they seem to boil down to the same thing*". In essence Dye simply defined public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do.

Chinsinga in Patel & Svasand (2007:351) describes public policy as "*a relatively stable, purposeful course of action taken by government or public actors in addressing a social problem (and) these social problems or issues could be unemployment, inflation, housing, land reforms, welfare, education and so on*". David Easton (1965:4) defines public policy as "*the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society*", while Laswell and Kaplan (1950) defines public policy as "*a projected program of goals, values and practices*" and finally Carl Friedrich (2005) says "*it is essential for the policy concept that there be a goal, objective or purpose*". Therefore, we can easily draw a number of characteristics from all the definitions offered by these great authors.

In the first place as Friedrich(2005:5) shows, "*the driving force for public policy is the government*" and that any other decision outside the government is not public policy. Secondly, public policy involves a careful process as most of the policies involve a series of decisions and more importantly, the environment in which the government makes or takes its decisions has a profound impact on the decisions made. This means that there are also some internal and outside forces that influence the decisions taken by government. Another important element of public policy is the achievement of goals. When a government makes a certain decision it means that it wants to achieve something. Finally, there are actors both within the state machinery and society in general "*(and for the sake of simplicity are categorized into) elected officials, appointed*

*officials, interest groups, research organizations and mass media*” ( Howlett,1994;52), who are involved in policy making processes.

Policy making starts with problem definition, agenda setting, policy implementation, adoption, implementation and evaluation. According to Northern California Grantmakers (2005-2007:1), depending on the strategy adopted, *“affecting public policy can be either high cost or low cost”*. The most typical engagement strategies used to impact public policy include; building coalitions, convening stakeholders, issue advocacy, media and communications, public/private partnerships and voter engagement”. However, Goetz and Hassim (2003:30-31) argue that there are three public engagement strategies, which include; *“access (consultation and dialogue), presence (representation) and influence (accountability)”*.

A lot of studies, as has been shown below, have been conducted in various countries on how women in general can influence public policy making in a country. The studies have covered areas in which men as the dominant actors can make some women friendly policies under outside influence of women. On one hand some studies have focused on how women, besides influencing women friendly policies from outside can also influence any kind of policy. On the other hand, other studies in other countries have focused on how particular groups of women directly involved in policy making can influence both women friendly policies and other policies in general.

### **2.1.1 Representation of women and its importance**

One of the studies concerning women and public policy in particular their representation was the Fair Vote study by Pfau E.J (1995) with a topic: "*Women representation world wide*". In this study it was observed that, there is no country in the world whose representative body fully reflects the percentage of women in its population. However, some of those with relatively higher numbers use some form of full representation, which means taking into account the number of all the social groups in decision making bodies. For instance, Germany uses a mixed system whereby some seats are elected using full representation and others from single member districts. These two countries demonstrate that when all cultural and geographical factors are equal, full representation typically results in higher representation of women. Furthermore it was observed that, cultural values are another important factor in women's representation, but even in countries where social norms discourage women's political involvement, women benefit from full representation. Full representation helps, by increasing access to a greater number of candidates. All other factors aside women are almost twice more likely to be elected under proportional representation than in majoritarian systems. Moreover, other measures aimed at increasing women's representation such as quotas for minimum number of candidates are much easier to implement under full representation systems, where parties nominate several candidates at once because almost all the social groups are taken into consideration.

Another study relating to women and public policy making was carried out by Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR- 2004) in the United States. In this study, it was observed that women's unique experiences and shared concerns may be ignored in the policy making process due to their under representation in elected office. This means that having women in office could



widen political debate to include a larger group of issues traditionally ignored by male policy makers. This research in brief analyses whether having more women in elected office is, in fact, associated with more women friendly policy in the United States. It does so by examining whether variations in women's levels of elected representation coincide with trends in women friendly policy across the 50 states based on an evaluation of data from IWPR'S work on the status of women in the states. In essence the study was assessing the proportion and importance of offices held by women at four levels: state representatives, state senators, statewide elected officials and governors. However, since the problem under study in this paper is about female MPs and female cabinet ministers in Malawi where all these levels are not applicable, the study will only draw on the findings on the first two levels in the IWPR's study.

The results of the IWPR's (2004) study were that women friendly policies across the states within the United States, have substantial and growing authority over many policies of concern to women's presence in legislatures and other state level elected offices is closely associated with better policy for women. Furthermore, it was discovered that the relationship between women's representation and women friendly policy is very strong. In general states with higher levels of women's representation also have more women friendly policies. Their scores on women's resources and rights checklist also increase. On an aggregate level, women's presence in legislatures and other state level elected offices is closely associated with better policies for women. This suggests that having women in elected office may be important to encouraging states to adopt policies relevant to women's lives. These findings point to a continued need for targeted efforts to increase women's representation. From this study, it can be seen that while having women in elected office can not guarantee better policy for women, it can help; and that

states may increase the sense that the political process addresses issues of concern to women, or they may give women the resources necessary to do so and win.

In another study in India<sup>11</sup> it was discovered that, giving women the reins of power at the panchayat level has proven that women are capable of governance and hence influencing public policy in that these women demonstrated that they were capable of rising up to a challenge and were in complete charge of their responsibilities. Generally it was observed that women's interests can never be completely represented by a group of men. However, the problem was that everybody agrees on the principle of equal participation for women, but none will ensure equal representation. The key finding of the study was that preventing women from creating their own leadership, and obstructing them from policy making decisions is simply a continuation of the gender subjugation that has gone on for millennia in this land.

Furthermore, in a study by the Women and Equality unit<sup>12</sup>, it was discovered that an increase in the number of women elected would lead to a higher quality of decision making, reflecting the greater diversity of experience of those making the decisions. In addition, there is evidence in the newly devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales that the relatively high number of women have had a discernable impact on shaping their policy agendas. In both bodies, women parliamentarians have championed issues such as child care, the social economy and equal pay. Fawcett (2005) under the topic; *"Why women representation matters"* also carried out a research in which they argued that they believe that politicians who make decisions on our behalf should be representative of the population as a whole. Fawcett argues that in particular, they campaign

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<sup>11</sup> CSIE study 2005

<sup>12</sup> Women in Public life; Women in Politics, India. Available on <http://www.crown.com>

for a greater number of women in politics. For instance in their study in 1997, it was discovered that when there was a large influx of women into parliament, matters of importance to women, such as child care and domestic violence have moved quickly up the political agenda.

However, one of the concerns was that most countries in the world have failed to give due space and representation to women in the political life. Women are moving in the direction of near equal participation in only a handful of countries. The increasing violence, sexual harassment and victimisation of women at the ground level in many of our political parties has made their participation extremely hazardous now.

In another research in Ghana<sup>13</sup> it was shown that in the search for ways of promoting women's emancipation in Africa, the importance of competent women in policy making positions at all levels cannot be over emphasized. Such women can help initiate and ensure the implementation of programmes and activities that would promote the welfare of women and encourage women greater participation in national development. They can also provide necessary insights into women's concerns that would ensure that government policies, projects and programmes have a desired impact and achieve the desired goals precisely because due account has been taken regarding concerns and views of different groups in the society.

Apart from studies in the political circles, there have been some studies on how women can influence public policy making in business circles. However, the insights that were drawn from this study were also helpful in the political arena. One such study was carried out in India by the

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<sup>13</sup> Emancipation of women: An African Perspective. Dolyphyne (1996).

Civil Society Information Exchange<sup>14</sup>. The study observed that one government after another in India has put forward planning meetings that never arrived at a consensus. The demand for the 33 percent representation was partly based on the 1970s research conducted in the United States, on women participation in business. It was shown that within any decision making body, 30 percent representation by minorities, and in this case women, could significantly influence the majority verdict.

### **2.1.2 The context in which women operate**

Goetz and Hassim (eds)<sup>15</sup> based on empirical research conducted under a research programme; *“Strengthening Democratic Governance in Conflict Torn societies”* identified the institutional arrangements and political compromises which can assure democratic control of military and security establishments, facilitate the peaceful management of conflict, and enhance the participation of excluded groups particularly women. The study was a comparative analysis between South Africa and Uganda. In each country, three sets of investigations were carried out in parallel: first, research on party systems and the role of parties in promoting both women themselves and gender issues in politics, second, research on the effectiveness of women politicians and their allies in advancing new legislation to advance women’s rights, and third, research into new electoral arrangements to bring women into local government and their effectiveness in creating space for pursuit of gender equity at the local level.

In general it is a comparative framework that uses the contrast between Uganda and South Africa’s political regimes to help highlight matters which go beyond country specific matters. In

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<sup>14</sup> India together is still a man’s world (2005)

<sup>15</sup> No Shortcuts to Power: An African Women in Politics and Policy Making (2003)

South Africa for example, it was discovered that despite the constraints that women face, the influx of women MPs impacted on parliament as issues of washroom facilities, childcare and working hours had to be addressed to create women-friendly institutions. Furthermore, a recent comparative analysis of women's political effectiveness across Europe finds that these "*women's units* (like the women caucus) *are one of the key actors in promoting gender equity in policy making*" (Goetz and Hassim, 2003:7). It was also argued that women may be fronted as candidates for elections by husbands frustrated that they can not run themselves, who govern using their wives as stand-ins.

On the other hand, it was seen that party ideologies of leaders like Murali Manohar Joshi and Lalmani Chabey<sup>16</sup>, are on record decrying women's organizations and arguing that reservations for women would be a waste of seats. Separate from the question of representation by women is the matter of power attached to legislative positions. In addition, the nomination of women closely related to the men who exercise the real control is also a potential stumbling block because such an arrangement would make it appear that women are incapable of handling their own constituencies and have to play a second fiddle to the male members.

It was further observed by Joshi that male MPs are willing to fight hard to preserve their seats in parliament. Although men and women are equal citizens in the eyes of the law, it is far from reality. The major argument in the study was that decisions taken by parliament and cabinet which is predominantly male take little concern or sympathy of women's problems. This is evidenced with the fact that patriarchal society in India not only harbours a culture of violence against women in the form of dowry, domestic violence and female infanticide, it also manifests

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<sup>16</sup> The two are 2004 presidential candidates in India

even in government policies towards women. For example, the aggressive population measures in states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, to implement 2 children per family norm blatantly target rural women to undergo forced sterilizations in the most unhygienic conditions. Instead of targeting women's health, education and family planning awareness the state governments tried taking short cuts to achieve a drop in their population growth, by risking their female populations. The question that is oftenly asked is; *"could such blatantly anti women policies or laws pass through a parliament where a third of votes come from women themselves?"*

Finally, in another study by Vir Shanghvi<sup>17</sup> it is argued that the basis of parliamentary democracy is that a representative represents all his or her constituents. Men are not elected to help men and women are not elected to help women, both are elected to help everybody. Therefore it is not necessarily correct to say that women will only progress if other women represent them and as such although the proportion of women in parliament is significantly lower than the percentage of women in the population, we should not change the rules of the electoral system to ensure a near parity.

From the studies reviewed in this paper, there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn which form the basis of the problem under study. In the first place, all these trends indicate that women's representation in politics requires special consideration, and can not be left to the forces that presently dominate our parties and government. Secondly, the few women in leadership positions have not been able to encourage the entry of greater numbers of women in electoral and party politics, and are ineffective minority within their own respective political groupings which has an effect into their entry in decision making positions. Finally the male

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<sup>17</sup> Available on <http://www.rediff.com> and accessed in December 2007.

party leaders have shown little willingness to include women in party decision, or even to help create a conducive atmosphere for women's participation in their parties.

However, the studies above leave a gap in that, in the first place they have concentrated on having women in key decision making positions to make women friendly policies only. This study will go well beyond and also consider how the women influence all the policies in general because as already pointed out earlier on, if we concede that women will, on balance, pay greater attention to the concerns of their sisters than male politicians have, in fact, we encounter new dangers because democracy demands that elected officials shall have due regard for the interests not only for those whose support they have obtained but of all whose aspirations they represent. Furthermore, past research has only concentrated on legislature only, but policies are also initiated and implemented at cabinet level where this study is also tackling. Related to this the conditions under which some larger number of elected women could be translated into substantive representation or actual participation of women in literature reviewed are not well explained and this study has clearly tackled this issue.

Related to the above point, Beckwith and Meyers (2007:553) shows that *"women issues are socially constructed and because they vary widely based on specific processes of construction, women's issues differ from context to context, across and within (countries) and across time"*. In the same vein Goetz and Hassim (2003:2) in their study showed that *"the political and institutional conditions under which women's representation gains were achieved (in South Africa and Uganda), are very different with contrasting implications for the perceived legitimacy of women politicians and for their effectiveness in advancing a policy agenda"*. They argue that

while at least some of the same favourable conditions exist for making the representative system in Uganda and South Africa more responsive to women's demands, there are also revealing differences between the two countries that account for the variance in the outcomes of the inclusion of women in the state. For instance, there is no political party system in Uganda which is the first area for inclusion of women, while in South Africa apart from the fact that they have a party system, there is an emerging dominant party system. Therefore looking at situation of these two countries the political and institutional conditions are very much important in understanding the performance of women.

However many of the studies that were being reviewed were done in other parts of the world especially industrialized countries, but this study seeks to understand the problem in the context of Malawi which is in the southern Africa. Therefore this study has taken into account the context within which women enact political representation and participation. This is because the political context is the necessary condition for translating the numbers to influence since the context may inhibit people's efforts to advance their policy priorities. In other words, as other authors have shown, variations in the culture of politics and the design of public institutions will produce a different quality of engagement (access, presence and influence) for women and different outcomes in terms of the way policies, legal judgements and state agents in their day-to-day interactions with clients respond to women's needs and promote their interests.

Furthermore some prominent analysts of the state in Africa, such as Naomi Chazan (1989:186) have argued that *"African women have played no significant role in statecraft and that there is little literature on the experience of women (in policy making)"*. It is also argued that the



relationship between women's political representation and policy effectiveness is not well established. Therefore this research will also add to the literature on women and public policy making. Again, earlier studies emphasized on the input rather than the output or policy side of the political process while this study will look at both angles. In addition, while the studies reviewed suggest a maturing of women's electoral politics, and a consolidation of women as an electoral constituency, the extent to which women's policy leverage has been increased as a result of representation remains the key question which has been addressed by this study. Finally, this study is distinct in a way that unlike the studies reviewed, it has started by identifying the stumbling blocks for women to be elected or appointed in policy making positions and in this study, parliament and cabinet.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study has been motivated by the Elite theory of public-policy making and the Humanistic theory of feminism. As Vandall (1987:1) observed,

Political science and feminism have a lot to learn from each other. Not only has feminism encouraged political science to pay greater and more careful attention to rather more than half of the world's population who are women. It can also contribute to a fuller understanding both of individual political systems and of politics itself. Feminists can learn from political science the importance for women, of public politics and the state, and the ways in which women and feminists can more effectively influence policy-making<sup>18</sup>.

Therefore in order to fully understand the issues under study and also to underscore the main purpose of this study, it is very important that the study draws from these two areas. However, although the study has been driven by these two schools of thought, it goes a step further to

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<sup>18</sup> Emphasis changed.

indicate that the input of others apart from the elites also influences policy making. Furthermore, it also argues that women are more interested in pursuing women-friendly policies.

### **2.2.1 The Elite Theory**

This study has been driven by the assumption that public policy is the preference and values of governing elite, although some theories will be referred to in the course of discussion. The Elite theory assumes that there is some group called the elite pre occupied with public policy-making and considers everyone as passive. The elite has all the information to carry out public policy-making. The elite solely has the responsibility for policy decisions and governs the ill-informed masses. This theory has been chosen to underscore the main purpose of this study since we are looking at the influence of women in public policy especially when they are represented and do participate in some activities. This means that for women to participate or be represented, they need to be in certain category which we can ably call the governing elite. Therefore women MPs and cabinet ministers are in elite group as they have made some in roads into public debate contributing to a climate of policy change in which gender representation is part of gender discourse. However, it must be appreciated that although the argument here is that the women can also be in this group, they are also undermined within the same elite.

### **2.2.2 The Humanistic Theory**

The study has also been guided by the consensual approach within the Humanistic theory which views *“women public officials as participating as individuals representing themselves and whatever interests their constituents share. A common sense of humanity dominates over gender”* (Kelly, et.al 1991:85). Furthermore, political theorist Hannah Pitkin in (Berkeley,1967)

asserts that political representation “*means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them*”, no particular gender differences are articulated by these female political actors when they are at these two decision-making levels. Women public officials believe they are or will be assimilated into the established system. This is opposed to the traditional liberal feminist approach which focuses on recruiting more women to the system, emphasizing their rights to garner resources for women’s traditional concerns. They would focus on women’s issues and concerns and see women as a distinct interest group. Again, as Swers (2001:217) argued, “*the pressure for frequent elections suggests that all representatives, regardless of gender, will zealously advocate the interests of their constituencies*”.

Generally, the focus of humanistic perspective is on the self, which translates into “*one*” and “*one self*” perception of his/her experiences. This view for instance argues that a politician is free to choose his/her own behavior, rather than reacting to the political environment. Issues dealing with self esteem, self fulfillment, and needs are paramount. The major focus is to facilitate personal development. For instance, Carl Rogers (1977) feels that each person operates from a unique frame of reference in terms of building self regard or their self concept. Self concept is one’s own belief about themselves<sup>19</sup>. Vallance and Currell<sup>20</sup> describe the typical woman MP (in this framework) as seeing herself as an MP first and a woman second.

This humanistic theory of feminism has also been used to accentuate the main aim of the study which is concerned with a broad range of policies as opposed to women friendly policies only. In addition, a representative government is justified on the assumption that the representative

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<sup>19</sup> Available on <http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/dept/dev/Fall98/Theories/humanistic.html>

<sup>20</sup> In Vandall, 1986,p154

body is a microcosm of the entire population and can be readily substituted for a democratic convocation of the whole people.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodology and design used during the study. In particular it looks at the design, population, sampling, data collection and the instruments used, how the data was analysed and it finally presents the limitations of the study.

#### **3.1 Design**

The research was qualitative and according to Strauss (1998) “*means any kind of research that provides findings that are not arrived by means of statistical procedures or other quantitative method*”. This design was chosen because the nature of data in this study could not be analysed using quantitative methods.

#### **3.2 Population**

The population of this study were all 26 female MPs and 9 female ministers in cabinet during data collection period for this study, senior staff at parliament secretariat, at the Office of the President and Cabinet ; and all party whips in parliament (DPP, MCP and UDF). The idea was to get all the respondents as mentioned above interviewed. The study was interested in parliament and cabinet because “*these two structures have been seen as the route to increasing women’s presence in the state and offering women some degree of participation in policy formulation*”. (Goetz and Hassim, 2003:11), Furthermore, as Anne Phillips (1999) pointed out, “*.....without representation in legislatures women citizens have a diminished ability to hold government accountable*” and just like in South Africa, decisions here in Malawi are made at two crucial sites, cabinet and portfolio committees of parliament hence women’s participation in these sites is crucial in exercising leverage.

### **3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

This involves choosing a person or subject to involve in a study. The study focused on depth of relatively small samples and as such the study employed purposive sampling. The study purposively selected participants who could provide relevant information for this study. This was done because the study was locating information rich cases strategically and purposefully. The participants of the study included, female MPs, female ministers, and gender NGOs like NGOs-GCN, SAW, APW and the Women's Voice.

### **3.4 Data collection instruments**

The study used a key informant interview guide as the main instrument for data collection since the study mainly involved key informant interviews. The interview guide contained 10 questions but it gave room to follow up questions.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The study employed a number of methods for collecting data. Firstly, there were indepth interviews with the female MPs and female ministers. Indepth interviews were used because they are critical in collection of data concerning key political decision-making and activity, often at the highest political level. These interviews helped to shed light on the hidden elements of political action that are not clear from analysis of political outcomes and to get first hand information from the female MPs and female ministers who are also key participants in the political process. Secondly key informant interviews were conducted with other stakeholders like senior staff in the Office of President and Cabinet (OPC), Parliamentary Secretariat, all party whips represented in parliament and leaders of other women organizations dealing with advancement of women in political circles. The second interviews were carried out in order to get information on how other stakeholders view the performance of female MPs. As Tansey (2006;4) argues, *“elite interview data is rarely considered in isolation and the goal for collecting*

*such data is often to confirm information that has already been collected from other sources”.*

The main problem during the interviews was that since the respondents knew that they were being interviewed for this particular study, some of them (particularly the politicians) were misrepresenting statements either to please the interviewer or not depending on whether they wanted to undermine or over emphasize the role of women. Finally, data was collected through documents especially parliamentary hansards and standing orders, records from OPC and newspaper articles. These documents like were used since they contain pertinent information in relation to the study. However, with the documentary evidence was that some important processes were not documented because of the feeling that the information was too sensitive to document in written form in those records.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

This involves the preparation and organization of data, that is, reducing data into meaningful segments. The study employed two methods of analyzing data.

- a) **Process Tracing:** This focuses on the processes by looking at how something happens rather than just focus on outputs and outcomes. It aims at explaining the internal dynamics of how a program operates. In essence, with process tracing, a person *“examines histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case”* (Tansey; 2006:3). The focus is on what people expect. The study focused on the processes at these two levels (parliament and cabinet) and explains how policy is influenced although it has also focused on the actual outcomes. The study looked at a process of how policy is made and/or influenced in parliament and at cabinet and it has also looked at how female MPs

and female ministers participate in the chamber, committees and cabinet. This has been used because policy making is a process and assessment of the influence on it has to look at the elements of the whole process.

- b) **Content Analysis:** According to Stemler (2001:1), “*this is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding*”. In other words, it is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of a message. It involves the ability to see patterns in seemingly random patterns and searching text for recurring words or themes. It also involves data reduction and making sense effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings. The content analysis has been used by this study because it helps to sift large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. Furthermore this method provides an empirical basis for monitoring public opinion which was also a concern of this study. In this study data has been reduced to identify core consistencies and meanings.

### **3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The first limitation of this study was the political impasse during the data collection period before the 2009 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. Most politicians were reluctant to release information because they were highly suspicious. Most of the time when carrying out the interview you were seen either as an agent of government or the opposition depending on the side of the respondent. It had to take some discussions to convince them that the information was



for academic purposes. Related to the above limitation was the time factor. Fulfilling an appointment was very difficult as the politicians were fond of cancelling appointments last minute. For example the researcher could plan to have at least four interviews in a day but ended up having only one or none at all and this resulted in unnecessary delays. Finally, there was lack of sufficient literature on the realities of life about the situation of men and women's involvement in the decision-making process in Malawi and as a result the study used a lot of literature from other countries. However, despite the limitations described above, the study got the information it sought to analyse the problem under investigation. A lot of effort was made to convince the politicians that the information was for academic purposes only. In addition, although it took time to have an interview, almost all the respondents targeted were interviewed.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. The chapter has been divided in three sections. The first section looks at the constraints that women face to get to parliament and to be appointed as ministers while the second section, which has also been divided in two sub sections, has gone a step further to look at the effect of female MPs and ministers representation and participation at these two levels on policy outcomes. Finally, the third section focuses on the impact of party rules and norms on women's political participation.

#### **4.1 CONSTRAINTS THAT WOMEN FACE TO GET TO PARLIAMENT AND TO BE APPOINTED AS MINISTERS**

Basing on the findings of the study, this section presents and discusses the constraints/ obstacles that women face to get to the two strategic positions, parliament and cabinet. The obstacles identified in this study include; culture and tradition; violence, intimidation and harassment; education/literacy level; resources; lack of support from political parties; electoral system; lack of interest and courage; and pull down syndrome.

##### **4.1.1 Culture and Tradition**

The study found out that one of the obstacles preventing women from being elected to parliament and appointed as ministers concerns culture and tradition. In the first place, it must be pointed out that there are three attributes like rationality, responsibility and aggressiveness as prerequisites for effective political participation which culturally in Malawi are regarded not to

be present in women. According to female MPs and leaders of gender NGOs, culture is one of the biggest challenges thwarting efforts aimed at making sure that women play an active role in development and any efforts of ensuring their greater representation in decision making and politics especially at parliament and cabinet level.

Although these words (culture and tradition) are used interchangeably, culture is defined as the attitudes and behavior that are characteristics of a particular social group or organization<sup>21</sup>. In other words it is defined as a set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) which individuals inherit as members of a particular society, and which tells them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, and how to behave in it in relation to other people<sup>22</sup>. Tradition is an inherited pattern of thought or action. It is a mixture of beliefs and opinions which are a historical process. They are customs, beliefs and practices, accumulated through the history of their development, which form the views and ways of a society. From the definitions above it can be appreciated that culture is more general than tradition and they do play different roles in influencing or shaping behavior although they do both affect people's way of life.

According to many respondents especially gender NGOs, culturally in Malawi most women are viewed to be secondary to their male counterparts and their role is seen to be confined within the walls of the kitchen or other domestic chores and as such in most cases there is no question of fielding women for political offices. The main argument according to the gender NGOs here is that in Malawi women's role is deemed secondary in that it is associated with the domestic

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<sup>21</sup> Available on <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/culture>

<sup>22</sup> Available on <http://www.butler.org>

setting. As such they do not have time to indulge in politics hence not good candidates to run for political office. Clark (1991;71) also argues that *“Women are trained to be passive and home oriented. Men are taught to be independent, assertive and achievement oriented. Consequently, politics and public life in general are seen as a man’s world while the home is a woman’s domain”*.

During the study it was also observed that even the NGOs dealing with women representation issues disregarded culture in their campaign to promote women in decision-making. That is why Lawfold Palani<sup>23</sup> observed that most organizations lobbying for greater women representation were forgetting culture as a crucial component in the quest to achieve the SADC 30 percent women participation goal, set in Blantyre 1997. In addition, the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM)<sup>24</sup> observed that, gender activists have a tough task of lobbying for a fifty percent representation of women in decision making positions in view of the 2009 general elections as Malawi is not culturally ready for that scenario. This fifty percent women representation in decision-making positions is unattainable because culturally, Malawi has been a chauvinist society in that it is seen not to be ready to accept women as decision makers.

Most female MPs observed that women are seen to be weak beings as such they are not fielded during elections as politics is regarded as a dirty game and only for strong characters. They argued that women naturally are regarded not to be rulers. This has been the mentality of the majority of the people starting even before the colonial period through the one party regime to

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<sup>23</sup> Speech of the DC for Chikwawa at a 4 day workshop for Association of Progressive women (APW) community and district facilitators in preparation for the May 19,2009 General Elections. Reported by the Daily Times, Wednesday, August 20, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> The remarks were made by the Executive Director of MAM, Saiti Jambo, during a community sensitization meeting in Mulanje District.

the current regime despite efforts by various activists to improve on women representation. *“That is why when a woman holds office, that office is named petticoat office or government, when a country is being governed by a woman, by most people who undermine women authority basing on culture”*<sup>25</sup>.

Within the subject of culture includes what is known as political socialization which is defined as the interaction between the social system and an individual, whereby both predispositions for and skills relating to participation in the political sphere are internalized. Almost all gender NGOs interviewed observed that there are already established gender roles in Malawi which are internalized at childhood. It is at this childhood stage where children learn that politics is for men only and they grow with this perception which in the end affect their interest in politics even when they grow up. This socialization associates girls with immediate environment and boys with the wider environment. Therefore this socialization as an element of culture has caused low representation in public office especially at parliament.

Although the respondents mixed a lot of elements under the culture banner, this study tried to isolate those to do with culture and those to do with tradition. One such aspect identified by the female MPs and ministers is the family and motherly responsibilities. The argument is that child responsibilities do deter women because they are less politically active after birth of children as they concentrate on looking after their children at the expense of time for political work. One of the female MPs stressed that *“when you follow female MPs you will agree with me that not so often do we hear that this particular female MP has a baby. This shows that we run away from these responsibilities of looking after babies to secure our political office”*. Traditionally,

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<sup>25</sup> Remarks by one female MP

*“women have more responsibility for children, their activities are more family-centred than men’s and this shapes other aspects of their social role (and in this case their role in politics)”* (Vandall;1987:30). Even some studies that have already been carried out indicated that traditionally women’s political behavior is dominated by men in their lives as wives are presumed to adopt the political views of their husbands. Political legacy was also one of the tradition aspect identified by Gender NGOs and the women caucus. These respondents argued that women are more politically conservative than men and therefore it takes them time to adjust to new challenges. Although Dr Banda used some form of affirmative action, most women are still with the mentality that their role in politics is to spice up political rallies with traditional dances. Even if one is elected to a higher office, instead of sitting at the podium articulating or listening to policy issues, they are usually with fellow women on the dancing floor. Stoper and Johnson point out that *“it could play into the hands of male politicians happy to confine women to traditionally feminine political roles and in this case dancing”*.

#### **4.1.2 Violence, Intimidation and Harassment**

Although most respondents used the words violence, intimidation and harassment to mean the same thing, they are different both in their meaning and application. However, it must be pointed out that most often, when defining these terms they do overlap in some elements only that the emphasis on each element differs. Therefore in this section each word will be discussed as a separate obstacle depending on their meaning and according to the study findings.

### **i) Violence**

During the study, violence was found to be one of the major obstacles preventing women from vying for public office. The word violence is used broadly to describe a destructive action. In simple words, violence is the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse or cause psychological harm. Olweus (1999)<sup>26</sup> confines violence to the use of physical force. He defines violence/violent behavior as “*aggressive behavior where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body as an object (including weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon an individual*”. This behavior involves pushing, shoving, shaking, punching, kicking, squeezing, burning or any other form of physical assault on a person or a group or on property.

During the study, it was observed that in Malawi, election campaign is marred by violence. The most vulnerable and affected are female candidates because as discussed in section 2.1 they are regarded as weak. Most female MPs admitted that during campaign period a lot of candidates use violence to stop their rivals from conducting campaign rallies. This violence was identified to be in form of bringing down or damaging the pavilion, cars and other property like public address systems and even physically handling fellow candidates. When this is done between male candidates, there is some sort of revenge. But when it is a woman against a man usually, it is the woman who gives in because she is most of the time helpless because naturally she does not like violence and this prevents them from contesting.

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<sup>26</sup> Dr Mona OMoore, Anti-Bullying Centre, Research and Resource Unit Department of Education, Trinity College, Dublin.

A female MP from Phalombe and another one from Bwanje South were cited as some women who survived the violent campaign from opponents during the 2004 general elections<sup>27</sup>. These female MPs were contesting against the then ruling party (UDF) heavy weights who used a lot of violence to stop these women from contesting. In addition, the 2008 primary elections for all the major three parties, DPP, UDF and MCP were marred by violence resulting in many female aspirants contesting as independents. This is evidenced by the number of female candidates who contested as independents which reached a record of 80 candidates surpassing the number of female candidates in any party.

In other words, women are seen to be weak and are hence susceptible to violence and are unlikely to retaliate. If women cannot, or if it is thought that they will not exercise force, they are regarded as poor candidates for office with coercive responsibility. Most female MPs observed that women withdraw from their candidature since most of them are orderly and can not organize violence on their own. In addition, until recently, most of the female aspirants were very responsible and older mothers. It is a fact that this violence is more pronounced during primary elections which are regarded as a stepping stone to the higher office. Since in most cases there are more aspirant MPs within the same party, chances are very high that they can do everything possible to prevent their counterparts from getting the nod of the party to be their representatives during the actual general elections. For instance, the 2008 primary elections for all the three major parties, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and United Democratic Front (UDF), were characterized by violence and this made a lot of women aspirants to withdraw from the elections. For example, three incumbent female MPs and two of them ministers withdrew their candidature from the DPP and contested as independents

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<sup>27</sup> Maclan Kanyang'wa, The Nation (Malawi), 27 May 2004.



because of the violence during primary elections. Records also showed that although more than 400 women showed interest to contest on various party tickets, after the primary elections only 227 contested because, apart from other factors some withdrew due to the violence<sup>28</sup>.

## **ii) Intimidation**

Intimidation was also found to be another obstacle preventing more women from reaching decision-making positions. Intimidation is intentional behavior which would cause a person of ordinary sensibilities fear of injury or harm. In other words, these are verbal or physical threats, with intent to inflict fear and to prevent another from acting in accordance with personal choice. The purpose is to try to instill a feeling of discouragement in the face of someone's superior fame or wealth or status and force him or her to do what another person wants him or her to do.

Most female MPs and female ministers indicated that starting from the time women declare their interest to contest up to the time of election campaign they are intimidated. For example in the run up to the May 2004 general elections, president of the then ruling party, kept on intimidating a female candidate of Phalombe south on the basis that she was challenging a male counterpart of the same party in primary elections who was favoured by the party leader. After failing to convince her to take a diplomatic post, the woman was threatened to be dismissed completely from the party if she continued with her bid. Women are also intimidated in a way that they are subjected to threats of injury and harm if they continue with their plans of contesting. But as SADC Information Resource Centre observed, *“despite the immense pressure, (the woman from Phalombe South) ultimately won the parliamentary seat in her constituency and (was) appointed a deputy minister in the same UDF government (then) that castigated her”*.

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Women, children Affairs and Community Services report for 2009 primary elections.

Almost all the respondents felt that the way politics is defined in Malawi has got a very big bearing on the entry of women into political life. The word politics itself is intimidating because in Malawi it is literally defined as “*Ndale*” a word associated with *tricks* and most women do not want to be associated with it. Most female MPs and female ministers felt that even the immediate families of female aspirants act as an intimidating factor in that they discourage them from taking any part in politics in their status as women. Most of them admitted that they contested without the blessings from their families because their families were usually afraid of the intimidation these women go through during the whole election period. Again, during the 2004 general elections, most women contested as independent candidates because they lost in the primary elections of their political parties often due to intimidation by party leaders, male contestants and sitting MPs. The respondents also argued that women were not only intimidated during primaries but also after they had gone through to the House during deliberations in an atmosphere which is predominantly male.

### **iii) Harassment**

During the course of the study it was observed in one of the parliamentary meeting and the 2009 General Elections campaign period that most female candidates were subjected to harassment. This harassment came in form of irritation, annoyance, persecution and pestering among other things. Harassment is the act of systematic and/ or continued unwanted and annoying actions of one party or group including threats and demands. The purposes may vary including racial prejudice, personal malice, an attempt to force someone to grant sexual favours, or merely gain sadistic pleasure from making someone fearful or anxious.

It was further observed that most people want to annoy or irritate female aspirants just because they have declared their interest to compete in the elections. This goes up to the point of calling female aspirants very strange names like prostitutes because they have joined men's game or alleging that the aspirants are going out with their respective party's big wigs that is why they are courageous enough to challenge or unseat the incumbent. As observed by one MCP female MP, during the actual campaign, men also take advantage and call women prostitutes. But a woman mostly would not do like wise to castigate the men. *"I experienced this in the last election when some people talked bad about me and I know a lot of women also suffer such insults. Usually in such cases when people are saying unfounded things, a woman has got no chance of defending herself"*<sup>29</sup>. In the same vein after elections these women are also subjected to harassment especially during parliamentary deliberations where most women are subjected to all sorts of abuse by being called a lot of defaming names. For example during the 2008 Budget meeting two female cabinet ministers during this period were referred to as *"husband killer"* and the other one as *"woman with plastic surgery face"*. Since the parliamentary proceedings are on live broadcast, the would be female MPs decide not to join politics at this level basing on what they hear from parliament.

#### **4.1.3 Education/Literacy Level**

The study found out that low education levels for women is one of the major causes of low participation in many areas of development and decision-making and in this case the policy process. Generally according to statistics, more women are illiterate than their male counterparts

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<sup>29</sup> Reported in the Nation Newspaper, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008,p6.

and according to statistics in Malawi, nationally the literacy level is at 59.2 percent. Men's literacy level is at 76.3 percent compared to 67.3 of all women<sup>30</sup>.

Most gender NGOs argued that due to their levels of education, women are not as competitive as their male counterparts. They further observed that *“even voters see and perceive women as less qualified than men to hold public office which in the end limits women's access to public office”*. The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) has got the minimum qualification of Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) or at least a pass in English proficiency test to qualify as a parliamentary candidate. For instance, *s51(1);(b)* of the Malawian Constitution, states that, a person shall not be qualified to be nominated or elected as a member of Parliament *“.... unless that person is able to speak and to read the English language well enough to take an active part in the proceedings of parliament.....”*<sup>31</sup>.

During the study, gender NGOs observed that a lot of female aspirants shy away because if they do not have MSCE then they fear going for English proficiency test. They further observed that because most women are not very exposed in terms of education levels, hence lack skills in public life/speaking. It was further observed that they tend to be shy and unable to communicate and articulate issues properly during election campaign although the campaigns are conducted in vernacular. Therefore, since most women do not have the necessary basic requirements, they do not attempt to contest during elections. Even those that gather courage to contest, mostly do not have a very big competitive edge like male aspirants as they are discredited during campaign

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<sup>30</sup> Mitch Report (2006), National Statistics Office, Zomba, Malawi.

<sup>31</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, *s51(1);(b)*; Qualifications of Members of Parliament 6 of 1995, 4 of 2001 and 13 of 2001.

period due to their lack of sound education qualifications. Even Vandall (1987:89) argues that *“education is the most decisive influence on women’s political participation”*.

Because of low educational qualifications, most women lack necessary educational background to access employment which would assist them discuss issues. According to Githens (1977)<sup>32</sup> (education) is a *“vital ingredient of eligibility for elite politics”*. Most gender NGOs argued that women’s availability for political roles is also related to employment outside the home because paid work does change women’s political awareness and aspirations. For instance, this study found out that most female MPs of 2004 – 2009 term had a background in either nursing, human resources management and teaching. It was therefore observed by many female MPs that people tend to elect female candidates who at least have necessary occupational background, but since most of them do not have the necessary occupational background in fields discussed above, that is why there are few women in parliament.

This obstacle is often compounded by the fact that MPs are not allowed to speak in local languages during parliamentary deliberations. For example, Parliamentary Standing Order (SO) 74 states that, *“all proceedings of the Assembly shall be in the English language.”* And Standing Order 75 states that, *“every Member desiring to speak shall rise in his place and address himself to the speaker.”*<sup>33</sup> In addition the Republic of Malawi constitution s56(5)<sup>34</sup> also restricts the language in parliament to English although it gives room for revision to parliament. It is therefore a requirement for all the MPs to use English whenever they are making their

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<sup>32</sup> Githens (1977) in Vandall (1986:126)

<sup>33</sup> Malawi Parliament Standing Orders, adopted by the House on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2003; s74 and s75

<sup>34</sup> Constitution of the republic of Malawi, s56(5); the right to Regulate procedure; 6 of 1995, 4 of 2001, 13 of 2001 states that; “The proceedings of parliament shall be conducted in the English language and such other languages as the National Assembly may prescribe.”

contributions in the House failing which certain penalties (like being sent out during deliberations) may be imposed.

From observation of one of the parliamentary meetings (2008-2009 Budget meeting) , most of the female MPs shy away because they are afraid to communicate in English. In addition, they do not contribute or ask questions or convey messages from their constituencies during debates because they are not comfortable to use the Queen's language. For instance, during this meeting which took about three months because of adjournments, on average only four female MPs out of about 30 MPs were contributing in a day whether on a point of order or substantive contribution. Not only because they were not recognized by the speaker but because they were not standing up to be recognized. In other words, as Professor Alfred Mtenje puts it,

...the feelings of doubt which most MPs (and in this case female MPs) in Malawi have about competence levels of their counterparts, and the fear of being laughed through interventions has, undoubtedly, forced the less linguistically gifted members to refrain from making contributions during debates, thus being denied their democratic rights to express their views in the House.<sup>35</sup>

All this has got a very big bearing on the interest of women to contest for this top position.

In general, Dolphyne (1991,49), ably summarized on the need of education for women in decision making by stressing that,

“in search for ways of promoting women's emancipation in Africa, the importance of competent women in policy making positions at all levels can not be over emphasized. Such women can help initiate and ensure the implementation

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<sup>35</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture of the University of Malawi by Prof. Alfred James Dailex Mtenje. The Role of language in National Development. A case of local languages. P16.

of programmes and activities that would promote the welfare of women, and encourage women's greater participation in national development".

They can also provide necessary insights into women's concerns that would ensure that government policies, projects and programmes have desired impact and achieve the desired goals precisely because due account has been taken of the concerns and views of different groups in the society.

#### **4.1.4 Lack of Resources**

Lack of resources was identified by many respondents as another constraint that female aspirants face to get to decision-making position. According to records, although this constraint is said to cut across the gender line, women are more vulnerable and disadvantaged than men. Statistics show that although females head 29.1 percent of the poorest households in Malawi they head only 19.4 percent of the wealthiest households<sup>36</sup>. Most women are subsistence smallholder farmers and others rely on very small scale businesses. This is in sharp contrast with their male counterparts in that most of the male aspirants have reliable sources of income. This means that women do not have enough finances to engage in extra activities apart from their subsistence. However, in order to carry out a successful campaign in Malawi and probably most of the countries around the world, one needs a lot of resources. The study found out that most of the women who were successful had to be at least equal, in terms of resources, with their male counterparts.

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<sup>36</sup> Source: A Relative Profile of Poverty In Malawi: A Quntile-Based Poverty Analysis of the Malawi Integrated Household Survey-1997-98

Apart from the small businesses that women engage in, they do not have other reliable sources of getting funds. However, men have a lot of ways and opportunities of sourcing funds both formal and informal. For instance, most men as compared to women are employed and hold very big positions and also are very big entrepreneurs. This is evidenced by the assistance female aspirant MPs got during the campaign period in the run up to 2009 general elections from organizations like the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the United Nations Population Agency (UNPA), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), GTZ, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Danish Church Aid, Action Aid and Oxfam who made a commitment to fund women aspiring to become legislators during the 2009 general elections, to beat the SADC and African Union (AU) to meet international targets in decision making positions. For instance, the NGOs GCN funded all women candidates with MK21 Million during the 2009 General Elections.

From observation of primary elections, in the run up to 2009 General Elections of various political parties , electoral campaign involves many resources. Among other things, the resources are needed for first and foremost, for transport. Most of the constituencies are very big and as such one needs to travel very long distances which involves spending money on transport not only for the candidate herself but also her committee. In addition, arranging for a campaign rally requires a lot of planning like erecting a podium, hiring the public address system, paying for security and other materials which also require a lot of money. During these rallies, the findings indicate that, one needs monetary (handouts) and material resources to entice and motivate people to attend or take part in the activities like dances and others. As MCP Director



of Women<sup>37</sup> observed, *“at times women do not have as many financial resources as men. Politics today is a game of money, at least this is what has been implanted in most Malawians. You must give them money to support you.”*

The campaign materials themselves are very expensive. These include things like banners, posters, adverts in the press. However, according to most female MPs, women candidates have special problems to raise funds to engage in the electoral campaign. On the other hand, it must also be appreciated that these campaign rallies start during the primary elections up to the time of the general elections. In Malawi there is no law that compels the candidates to reveal their sources of campaign resources, as such it is very difficult to come up with the exact amount of expenses. However, one of the female MP indicated that the minimum amount spent for a successful bid for parliamentary seat is not less than MK 2 million (Malawi Kwacha)<sup>38</sup>. As has been already explained, it is very difficult for female aspirants to source this amount of money. For instance, another MCP female MP observed that, *“not most women have got resources for vigorous campaigns. One needs transport and not a lot of women have cars. You need fuel. You need posters to communicate your messages. A lot of resources are needed which a lot of women do not have.”*<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, MEC increased the nomination fee for parliamentary candidates from K5,000.00 to K100,000.00 and for presidential candidates from K40,000.00 to K500,000.00 during the 2009 General Elections. This in a way scared many female aspirant MPs because even donors indicated that they will only fund female MPs whose nomination papers have already been accepted by MEC. The drop in the number of female aspirants from 400 to 227 has also been attributed to the rise in the nomination fees by many gender activists.

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<sup>37</sup> Dorothy Chirambo is MCP Director of Women. Reported in The Nation Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Approximately U\$13,500

<sup>39</sup> Reported in the Nation Newspaper, July 23, 2008.

In preparation for the 2009 polls, only five women won primary elections in twenty constituencies where the UDF conducted the elections, while in MCP only 16 women in 193 constituencies won the primaries. However, most of those who won were the incumbent MPs in their respective areas and this can be attributed to resources that the women had. Since they were serving MPs they had most resources, including financial, because they receive a monthly fixed salary and other allowances. This gave them an edge over other male aspirants. As Clark (1991;74) observed

political incumbents have a tremendous electoral advantage in running for most offices because of the political resources that office holders control, their sheer advantage in name recognition, and the fact that previous victories demonstrate an ability to appeal to voters.

In addition it has been seen by most gender NGOs during the study that men in the primaries bribe voters which is what led to poor results for women in all the major three political parties in the 2008 primaries.

#### **4.1.5 Lack of support from political parties**

Another obstacle that women face to get to key decision-making position according to the respondents is lack of special support from their respective parties. Most female MPs and female ministers observed that parties are more willing to assist male aspirants than women especially during primary elections. The argument here was that the majority of the parties' National executive members are men and as such they tend to favour each other when it comes to the organization of the primary elections. For example, in MCP there are only 3 women out of 25

Executive members<sup>40</sup>. Many respondents indicated that the political parties play a very big role in either discouraging or encouraging, women's political participation. It was observed that political parties in Malawi do discourage the participation of women despite the fact that women are very disadvantaged in several ways. That is why without deliberate measures the threshold, as suggested by regional bodies like SADC, of female MPs and female ministers can not be achieved. However, there are no special measures that political parties in Malawi put in place to help women during elections.

During the study it was further observed that apart from the fact that the political parties are dominated by men, women face competition and are usually regarded as intruders. Men try as much as possible to run the parties in a way they want because they established them. Even during primary elections, men are the ones who decide where, when and how to hold the elections. In essence, political parties in the country do not make the process of holding primaries accountable and convenient. Respondents observed that political parties deliberately, in most cases avoid informing the people on the importance of voting for women but they most of time promote fellow men. For instance, during the 2008 DPP primary elections many women aspirants, some of them incumbents and serving cabinet ministers, withdrew their candidature because of the way the primary elections were being managed and chose to run as independents. Consequently, they were all dropped as ministers. Instead in the above constituencies, the party declared male aspirants winners. Even the NGO-GCN observed that the primaries were not conducted well because women were being oppressed, a thing that disappointed them. This means that political parties hinder women during the primaries in that they do not give them full support which affects their chances to be elected to parliament and to be appointed ministers.

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<sup>40</sup> Nation Newspaper, Friday, January 23, 2008.

In general, political parties lack commitment in providing and creating favourable conditions for women to go through primaries first and most importantly to win elections. In addition some 2009 women parliamentary aspirants complained that some political parties set up exorbitant primaries' participation fees to hinder them from participating. For example, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), introduced a K50,000.00 (Fifty Thousand Malawi Kwacha) registration fees, which was later slashed to K20,000.00 (Twenty Thousand Malawi Kwacha), for aspirant MPs just to compete during the 2008 primary elections in readiness for 2009 General Elections. Since we have already argued that women are very disadvantaged in terms of resources, the fees discouraged many women from contesting during primaries meaning that the party itself played a very big role in discouraging these women.

It was also observed during the study that parties expect strong women that would go and win elections. For instance, MCP, the country's major opposition party, stressed that it will not give any special treatment to its women aspirants for parliamentary seats to fulfill the 50/50 SADC declaration although it pointed out that it is prepared to have women take part in some fields. Despite indicating that in almost all constituencies, it has women competing with men, there was no special treatment for women and it emphasized that men and women are equal and must compete equally. The parties expect the female aspirants or MPs to go to the villages throughout the year to familiarize with the people but without party support. *"It has been observed that no political party has come out with tangible plans on how to accommodate more women in the general elections."*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Reported in the Daily Times, Tuesday, 29 July 2008, p2.

Gender NGOs indicated that most political parties have a tendency of deliberately opting for women candidates in areas where they have little chance to win. Primaries are more likely to be held in constituencies which are considered safe for the party, so that if a woman succeeds in the primary, she stands a better chance of also winning the seats. In general political parties in Malawi lack affirmative action because there is what Clark (1991,73) refers to as “*Male Conspiracy theory*” derived from feminist ideology. “*Women do not achieve equality with men because men discriminate against them. Party and interest group leaders are men, and prevent women from achieving equality*”.

Furthermore, apart from the political parties themselves, even the gender activists in a way discourage women. For instance they gave a strong indication that they will fund campaign for all women aspirants endorsed by the Electoral Commission. However, they disbursed MK 21 million to 227 aspirants translating to MK92,511.01 per aspirant. In addition although the Gender NGOs promote women, they do not want to spend time to convince parties on importance of women and they are perceived to be more concerned with getting funding than achieving their purpose. For instance, they strongly argued that

we don't care whether we will divide the parties or not. We want to implement the world's agreement to put more women in decision-making positions. This is of national importance, when we implement this, it will be easy for this nation to get donations. But parties do not want this. They have let us down so why should we care about them?<sup>42</sup>

It has been observed by NGOs-GCN that the readiness of political leadership in various parties, which is usually male dominated, is the crucial factor in increasing female representation at

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<sup>42</sup> Emmie Chanika, Executive Director of the Civil Liberties Committee, (CILIC), Reported in the Sunday Times, August 31, 2008.

these two levels since apart from various reasons they act as an important initial recruitment area in politics. A study by Women's Voice in 2004 discovered that lack of finances resulting from discrimination by political parties in favour of male aspiring candidates leads to ineffective campaign which affects the chances of women making it to parliament.

#### **4.1.6 Electoral System**

Many respondents of the study argued that the nature of electoral systems themselves may be limiting the election of women to public office because electoral records show that women clearly do better in some types of elections than others especially the First Past The Post system (FPTP). Malawi uses FPTP system also known as the Single Member Plurality (SMP) in both the Parliamentary and Presidential elections, which according to Rakner et.al (in Patel and Svasand eds, 2007: 186) *"was introduced by the British colonial administration (and) was used on four occasions under Dr Banda's rule"* although it is argued that the nature of elections in post colonial era in Africa , including Malawi tilted towards a state regulated non competitive model where make shift elections were organized to legitimize the political order. Democracy can be argued to be an important form of government in modern times. One of the principles that need to be fulfilled in a democratic system of government is the holding of free and fair elections. This is because elections are an important tool of legitimizing the political authority and also in making sure of the orderly process of leadership succession. That is why *"the discourse and theories on democracy, especially in its libertarian form, place elections as a core variable bearing an organic linkage with democratic concept"* (Adejumobi,2000;59).

Although the FPTP system has got advantages which include its simplicity in electing representatives especially in new democracies where voters and administrators lack experience with election process as a valid vote only requires a mark; links between the voters and the local community on one hand, and the elected representative on the other; ensures accountability of the MP as he is in a better position to consult the electorate before making decisions on policy issues or votes in parliament and also opens up for independent candidates; according to the respondents, the system has affected representation of women in parliament particularly in Malawi.

Electoral records from across the world show that women representation is much lower in countries with FPTP because there is one candidate in the district/constituency and with the arrangement it is very difficult for a woman to get elected as parties tend to nominate a candidate who can attract more votes. In this system a winner takes it all in that only one candidate with the most votes is one who is declared a winner. As a result most political parties tend to field candidates who are seen to be strong. In this regard then most women are taken to be weak candidates and as such they are not fielded during elections. For example during the 2009 General Elections, DPP fielded 50 female candidates, UDF 32 female candidates, MCP 22 female candidates while the other parties fielded 43 female candidates in total out of 193 constituencies.

The (female MPs' and ministers') weaknesses are identified as inflexible after making a decision, loss of focus and easily breaking down and inefficiency.”<sup>43</sup> As observed by one female MP<sup>44</sup>, “.... parties first and foremost are looking for numbers in parliament. Thus they feel that they can not field a weak candidate so if people do not vote for you in the primaries, there is no way the party can impose you on the people. It is therefore a

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<sup>43</sup> Sunday Times, July 6, 2008, sunDELIGHT column, p4.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Sendeza, Malawi Congress party MP for Lilongwe

necessity that an aspirant show herself to the people throughout all the four years before an election.

In the end this also calls for the need of a lot of resources on the part of women aspirants.

In relation to this, since the winner takes all, the stakes are high and so the motivation for using crooked practices. As such most women are the ones that are affected by these crooked practices. These practices are especially evident during primary elections where returning officers who are most of them men and strong decision-makers in the parties favour their male counterparts. For instance, the primary elections for the ruling DPP were characterized by a lot of irregularities. The problem was that members of its NGC were the ones responsible for running these elections. However, almost all of them were also aspirants in their areas and as such there was a lot of conflict of interest. What came out clearly was that there was a lot of favouritism especially amongst the male contestants. The DPP leader even acknowledged that most of its candidates lost against independents because its primaries were not free and fair citing favouritism from the NGC members<sup>45</sup>. That is why Vallance (in Vandall,1986;140) concedes that, *“in a system of ours where only one candidate is selected, all the pressures are to choose the standard product, largely middle class, middle aged and overwhelmingly male”*. This in the end affects the number of women going through primary elections. As a result women are discouraged as they do not have any incentive to take part in the elections, which is a step backwards for democracy.

Most gender NGOs and the women caucus argued that in countries where they have done well in women representation like South Africa, Mozambique, Uganda and Rwanda, it has been because

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<sup>45</sup> Speech made by Dr Bingu Wa Mutharika, 2009 DPP presidential winning candidate at a dinner for winning DPP MPs at Sanjika Palace.



of the Proportional representation (PR) where people vote for a party and not an individual. So the parties in the name of promoting gender put more women in positions. In Tanzania for instance, they have special seats for women in every district. On the other hand Russian parliament especially the lower House also known as the Duma, which has 450 members combines the single member district representation and the party list representation. According to Rummington (in Almond et.al eds, 2006:374), *“the Duma’s 450 members are elected in two ways. Half, or 225 members, are elected in single member districts by the FPTP, plurality rule. The other 225 are elected on party lists. This means that pre determined proportion of parliamentary seats is constituted on the basis of constituency vote while another proportion of parliamentary seats is constituted on the basis of party vote”*. Therefore using the FPTP system, the threshold for women representation as suggested by the regional bodies can not be achieved. That is why despite a lot of campaign on the importance of voting for women, only 40 women out of 1152 parliamentary contestants succeeded in the 2009 General Elections. This is the reason why several writers suggest that the party list version of proportion representation (PR) particularly, favours women, because it encourages national parties to devise slates of candidates which are representative of the main groups in the society, including the two sexes, so as to maximize their electoral appeal.

Most female MPs and ministers felt that the Malawian parliament which is elected using the FPTP system narrows the political character of parliament as there is no inclusiveness. The argument here was that with the FPTP system there is less representation of disadvantaged groups like women as it does not open avenues for balance in the legislature because if a woman misses out on the plurality system she can not be considered anymore as it is in the party list

system. In general, as Clark (1991,74) summarizes, there is less representation of women using the FPTP system because ;

first parties may be more willing to place women on the ballot when there are more seats available. They can reward both active men and women in the districts. Second, voters may be more willing to elect women when they have several votes and can also vote for men. Finally, in campaigns in multi-seat districts, candidates focus on their own accomplishments rather than attacking opponents' and more women may be willing to run for election in such an environment.

#### **4.1.7 Lack of interest and courage**

Most respondents argued that lack of interest, determination and courage is another constraint that prevents women from getting to strategic decision-making. Regardless of all the obstacles already highlighted above, most female MPs acknowledged that women themselves lack a lot of interest to join politics. Politics involves a lot of dedication and courage but most of the female MPs interviewed indicated that they were not willing to join politics but were either coaxed or requested by their constituents or other people. This is in sharp contrast with their male counterparts who apart from the constituents, they force their way into politics and have that determination. Even after getting into those positions, other female MPs do not even care if they will be re-elected or not. For instance during the interviews, one female MP from Chikwawa stated that *“in the first place you must appreciate that I did not want to stand as an MP. Because there was nobody to be trusted in my constituency, I was forced to compete. I do not care whether I will be re-elected or not”*. The woman did not even contest in 2009 primary elections for her party and although she contested as an independent candidate in the General Elections, she lost. This means that the women lack ambition and experience in politics. Again, political aspiration and the ambition to hold public office still seem to be more constrained among women than men and many women do not aspire elected office.

Related to this is the issue of courage. It has been observed during the study that male candidates who despite all the obstacles carry on, while women candidates give up because they are easily disappointed and this prevents them from getting to these decision-making positions. For instance 400 women expressed interest to contest during the 2009 elections but only 227 contested because most of them withdrew due to various disappointments. That is why Reen Kachere<sup>46</sup> warned women aspirants against a smooth ride in both the primaries and the general elections. She observed that it would be childish for aspiring MPs to think that they would go to parliament on charity and that politics is about competition. On a similar note she also observed that *“It should also be noted that there are jobs which many people especially women want to secure. Even if you encourage them they are not sure that they are going to win. They tend to hold on to what they have”*.

#### **4.1.8 Pull Down Syndrome**

According to 85 percent of female MPs and ministers, another obstacle is the pull down syndrome among women themselves in the parties. Apart from support they get from the party or their friends, men support each other in various ways in their bid for the office. However, the story is very different when it concerns women. Most of the time there is a tendency by women to frustrate each other in their bid for the office. Since these people frustrate and disappoint each other they give an added advantage to their male counterparts. For instance, as Rose Hara Ngondo<sup>47</sup> observed, *“incumbent women MPs are usually afraid of those aspiring for the same*

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<sup>46</sup> Reen Kachere was the chairperson for NGO- Gender Coordination Network (NGC) permanent committee on women politics but currently she is Minister of people with disabilities and the elderly and MP.

<sup>47</sup> Rose Hara Ngondo is Vice chairperson for Taskforce for aspiring women MPs; 2009 elections. Reported in Sunday Times, p4, August 24, 2008.

*positions and do all they can to frustrate them*". She cited a situation where capacity building meetings for women MPs were only attended by one incumbent MP out of the 25 women MPs. *"The fact is that the incumbent does not want to empower fellow women by not supporting their cause"*.

Furthermore, it has also been discovered that even the women in the party who have influence do not support their fellow women especially when the party stands a better chance to take government as they fear of minimizing their chances of being appointed into ministerial positions. Even female candidates for 2009 general elections admitted that women are prevented from assuming decision-making positions by their counterparts in high positions as evidenced by an example of capacity building meetings cited above.

In addition, some chiefs<sup>48</sup> have even observed that although women can be given support in some way, women themselves must be courageous, support each other and if there are many in one party and one constituency, they have to agree on who should contest and they all rally behind that person to avoid splitting votes as is the case currently because of jealous and envy among themselves. For example, after losing primary elections to a fellow woman, an incumbent female MP from Thyolo North supported the winning aspirant to avoid splitting votes for the party. In end the female MP who was being supported by her fellow woman won the seat after beating other six male contestants.

All these obstacles have resulted in Malawi's failure to attain the initial 30 percent benchmark for women representation in decision-making positions as recommended by SADC by 2005

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<sup>48</sup> Paramount Chief Lundu and Senior Chief Chapananga of Chikwawa district.

which raises many questions on whether it can achieve the current 50 percent benchmark. In general, women can be said to have two hurdles, to win the primaries and win in the actual election. This is something that deter a lot of women from assuming public office and as observed by some respondents *“if we want to improve on the representation of women in parliament, we have to sort out this issue of hurdles first”*.<sup>49</sup> For instance, as already pointed out women being supported regardless of their political parties were over 400 but only 227 contested in the 2009 general elections. Vandall (1987:79,130) ably concluded that

of all the charges brought against women political behavior, apparently, the most solidly founded is that they know less about politics, are less interested and less psychologically involved in it than men and that relatively few women actively aspire to political office because they lack motivation, but more importantly because there are specific constraints on their freedom to do so and they are less able than men to satisfy the requirements of certification.

## **4.2 THE EFFECT OF FEMALE MPs AND MINISTERS REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION ON POLICY OUTCOMES**

This section looks at female MPs and female ministers representation and participation and its effect on policy outcomes. Firstly, basing on the study findings it analyses and discusses numerical presence of female MPs and female ministers and policy outcomes. Specifically it looks at the trend in female representation at these two levels from 1994 to 2009. It then looks at the actual participation of female MPs and female ministers particularly at various levels like in the chamber, parliamentary committees, business committee and at cabinet.

### **4.2.1 Representation and Policy outcomes**

This sub-section discusses the mere presence (numerical representation) of women in parliament and at cabinet and its effect on the policy issues that are discussed at the two levels. This has

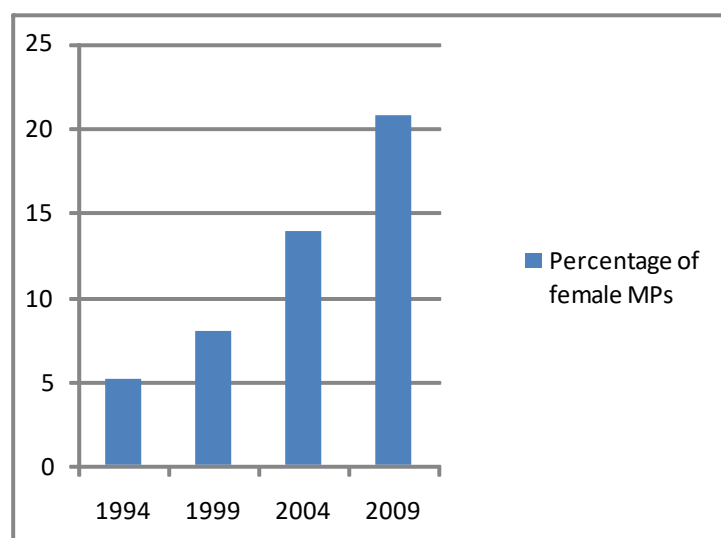
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<sup>49</sup> Nancy Tembo MP, reported in Nation Newspaper, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008.

been done by firstly looking at the trend of female numerical representation from the period between 1994 and 2009 although much emphasis has been put on the 2004-2009 administration.

#### 4.2.1.1 The Trend in Female Representation

In general terms, Malawi has not done well in terms of female numerical presence both at parliament and cabinet. In terms of world and regional rankings of female representation as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007 , in Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region, Malawi was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of 14 countries with 13.6 percent female representation at parliament. The 13.6 rating is said to compare badly to other countries such as South Africa which accounted for 32.8 percent, Mozambique 34.8 percent and Tanzania 30.4 percent who all have beaten the earlier 30 percent SADC benchmark. On the other hand, globally with the same 13.6 percent, Malawi is ranked 75<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries.



**Figure 4.1: Percentage of female MPs:** *Source: Malawi Electoral Commission<sup>50</sup>*

In Fig. 4.1, the percentage representation has been calculated on the basis of the actual number of female MPs against the total number of MPs at that particular period in question. Looking at

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<sup>50</sup> Figures only

the parliamentary statistics from 1994 to date, the number of female MPs has been increasing. However, this increase has been at a snail's pace. For instance, in 1994 only 9 female candidates made it to parliament out of 177 established seats and this represented 5.08 percent.

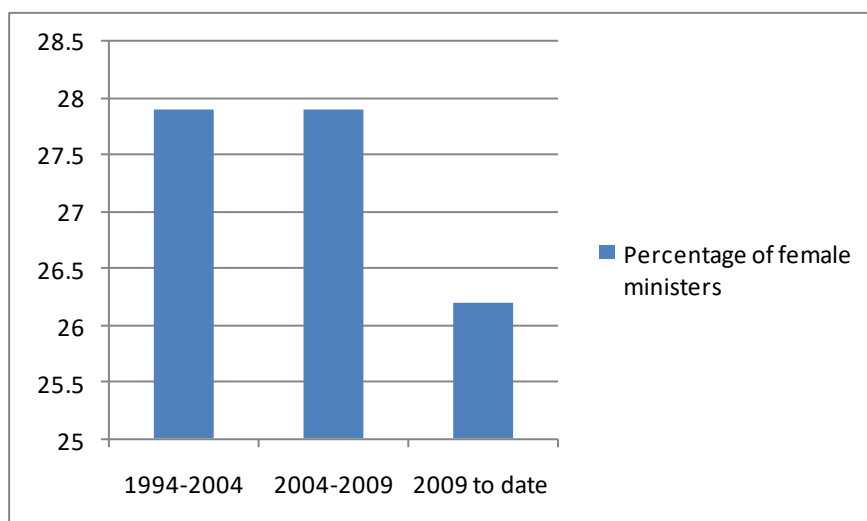
In 1999 the number of female MPs increased from 9 to 14 out of 177 seats representing 7.9 percent female representation and a 2.1 percent increase from the previous figure. The number increased substantially in 2004 from 14 female MPs to 27 out of 193 seats representing 13.9 percent female representation and a 6 percent increase from preceding period and 8.1 percent increase from the first multiparty elections after Dr Banda in 1994. After the 2009 General Elections the number of female MPs also increased from 27 to 40 out of 193 representing 20.7 percent female representation. This is a 6.8 percent increase from the 2004 elections and 14.9 percent increase from the 1999 elections. Looking at the above trend it is likely that the number of female MPs is going to increase at least by 9 percent in the 2014 general elections because there is an average percentage change of additional 3 from every preceding period. However, all these figures falls short by far, of the target of women representation by regional bodies which was initially at 30 percent and currently is at 50 percent.

However, the analysis of the actual changes in the number of female ministers in Malawi is very difficult. This is the case because unlike the MPs who have a fixed term of office, ministers do not have. It is the discretion of the president to appoint or remove one in a cabinet ministerial post because s94(1) and s95(2) of the Republic of Malawi constitution<sup>51</sup> give him/her such

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<sup>51</sup> S94(1) of the Republic of Malawi constitution (1999) states that, "The President shall have the power to appoint Ministers or Deputy Ministers and to fill vacancies in the cabinet." While S 95 (2) of the Republic of Malawi constitution states that, "The President shall have the power to remove Ministers or Deputy Ministers from their posts."

powers. As such the rate at which cabinet ministers are reshuffled varies from time to time. For instance, you can not determine how many times cabinet can be reshuffled during the president's tenure of office which is a maximum of two consecutive five year terms. Therefore in this discussion and analysis of the total number of female cabinet ministers during a particular regime is an aggregate number of all the female ministers appointed during that president's tenure of office. The problem then comes in because when we say there were so many female ministers during a certain regime, it will not show the number of female ministers after each reshuffle against their male counterparts, rather it will show the total number during a certain period.



**Figure 4.2: Percentage of female ministers: Source: OPC<sup>52</sup>**

Using fig 4.2, during Dr Bakili Muluzi regime covering the period between 1994 and 2004, at different times for a period of 10 years there have been 12 female ministers against 43 established ministerial positions representing a 27.9 percent. On the other hand, for the current

<sup>52</sup> Figures only



administration of Dr Mutharika, there have also been 12 female ministers against the same 43 established ministerial positions for a period between 2004 and 2009 representing also 27.9 percent. After 2009 general elections, 11 women were appointed as cabinet ministers out of 42 ministerial positions representing 26.2 percent of female representation at cabinet and a 1.7 percent decrease from the previous five year term. However, it must be appreciated that there is a decrease because the current figure is being compared with a period of five years. It is therefore likely that after the period of five years there will be a general increase as compared to 2004-2009 period because after reshuffles, which are most of the time likely during a five year term, new women will be appointed into cabinet. In essence there can be either an increase or decrease in the percentage of female ministers after Presidential tenure of office depending on whether the established posts have increased but the number of female ministers remain the same. On the other hand the same can happen if the number of female ministers increase but the number of established posts remain the same or decrease.

All these can be seen as worrying statistics considering that 15 years later in 2009 since the re-introduction of multiparty democracy in Malawi women hold 26 percent and 20 percent of ministerial and parliamentary positions respectively which is far below the earlier 30 percent mark and taking into account that 12 years have gone since the country signed the 1997 SADC declaration on Gender and development. However, having presented all the figures and facts the question that remain is; has the increase in the numbers or the mere numerical presence of women in parliament and at cabinet affected in any way the policy issues that are discussed at these two levels?

In the first place, according to statistics as shown in figure 4.1 and 4.2, although the number of female MPs and female ministers has been steadily increasing, currently they have very little impact because they are always outnumbered. For example the number of women in all the four parliaments (1964-1992; 1994-1999; 1999-2004 and 2004- 2009) did not even reach 20 percent which according to female MPs minimized their chances of being recognized during debates as they are constantly overshadowed. For instance, out of 193 seats, 27 were occupied by women before two of them passed away, which translates to domination of male MPs during deliberations at any parliamentary forum.

Many respondents felt that the recent increase in the number of female MPs and female ministers has made some impact on policies in relation to the actual increase of their numbers. The argument here has been that each time there is an addition in the number of female MPs and female ministers, the policy outcomes are also affected. For example, as has been shown in the next section, there are other very important issues like the Domestic Violence Bill, Wills and Inheritance Bill among others, which have been brought as a result of mere presence of women in parliament and at cabinet according to all female MPs and ministers interviewed. Therefore since some issues which previously were not brought to attention of these legislators because of the absence of women are now being considered on the agenda, it means that any slight increase in the number of female MPs and female ministers, correspondingly translates to a slight impact. Still more some respondents from the gender NGOs indicated that ideally an increase in the number of female MPs and female ministers has a very big impact on the policy outcomes because as the women increase they have a strong force in that their mere presence can alter or influence other decisions because the decisions are made while recognising their presence.

However, they argue that the current slight increase has not in any way yielded anything because of various reasons including; party discipline, political environment, regulations and parliamentary standing orders which have been discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

About 20 percent of the respondents indicated that there is no guarantee that the mere presence or an increase in the number of women can have any effect on the policy outcomes the reasoning here being that, it does not matter whether there is an increase in the presence of women or not in public policy making. However, in general terms, looking at all the arguments discussed above, which include; an increase in numbers can have effect and any increase in the numbers does not necessarily translate to impact and that an increase in the number can have an impact but depends on several factors or conditions. It can be concluded that the increase in the number of women both at parliament and at cabinet has got impact on the policy outcomes because of various reasons.

Firstly, although there was variation in the responses of the interviewees, the general consensus was that if the number of women increases in parliament, they can have bargaining power, regardless of their political affiliations. For instance, the women's caucus, which has just gained status of a full parliamentary committee, can have more members. With more women in parliament, women caucus can have a very big impact on the issues that are discussed. During the time of the study there were only 27 female MPs who had diverse political interests and this rendered the women caucus ineffective. During the study, it was observed that the women caucus was not effective as it hardly met. Even when it met many female MPs and ministers from the government side were not attending because of the political confrontation that time

between the government and the opposition. As such the members had no time to advance a common agenda as a caucus. Therefore apart from the fact that as a block it had few members, the political interests of the members played a very big part in the ineffectiveness of the caucus. If the number of members increase, although there can be divergent political views in the group, the chance that a good number of members will share similar views and concerns is very high. Furthermore, it means that the number of female MPs in the parties will also increase. As a result, the policy issues emanating from the political parties caucuses will also reflect women's concerns and input than is the current case when there are few women.

From observation of one of the parliamentary session, during deliberations, the speaker has got discretion to recognize a member to speak on a particular issue. At the time of the observation, there were few female MPs and it was very difficult for the speaker to fairly recognize any female MP. As such many issues which would have been put across by women suffered a lot. As observed by one female MP,

it is very difficult for us to be recognized since we are very few. As such it takes some time before we speak in parliament. The problem may be is not with the speaker but the procedures. There must be deliberate measures so that the minority groups, such as women, should adequately be recognized.

This means that if the number of women in parliament increases the probability that a woman will be recognized can be higher and hence the probability that women issues, concerns and input will be put across. This is unlike the current scenario where we have few women and the probability that a woman will be recognized is very minimal and hence their influence is also compromised.

In general therefore from the discussion of the results above it can be appreciated that by any means if the number of female MPs increases, policy issues will in a very big way be affected because as already observed women's unique experiences and shared concerns will not be ignored in the policy-making process due to their under-representation in the House. In addition decisions of high quality will be formulated in relation to the diversity of experience of those making the decisions. In terms of cabinet ministers, it must also be pointed out that since the practice has been that most of the ministers if not all are appointed from within parliament, women low representation in parliament has an effect on their appointment to the cabinet and hence their impact on policies emanating from cabinet. Therefore their increase will also have a similar effect as with female MPs.

#### **4.2.2 Participation of female MPs and female Ministers and its effect on Policy**

##### **Outcomes**

This sub-section draws some lessons from sub-section 4.2.1.1. Unlike the previous section, which was only looking at the mere presence of women in parliament and at cabinet (descriptive representation) this section goes a step further to discuss what female MPs and female ministers actually do when they get into those decision-making positions (substantive representation) because this is where the actual participation or the impact of female MPs and female ministers can be assessed. In other words, this section assesses or discusses whether female MPs and female ministers actual participation has got any bearing on the outcome of the policy process.

This analysis has been done by looking at the participation of female MPs in the house during deliberations and in the committees. Furthermore, the participation of female ministers will be assessed by looking at the importance of portfolio held and also participation in other ministerial committees and even in the House.

#### **4.2.2.1 Participation of Female MPs in the Chamber**

This section looks at female MPs participation in the House during deliberations. This participation is on a wide range of issues that are discussed in parliament but the main emphasis will be on policy issues. The analysis has among other things looked at the female MPs contributions at certain meetings of parliament like those issues that women can proudly say that they contributed and are on policy agenda. In the first place, as has been already pointed out, the discretion to recognize a member in the House rests solely in the hands of the speakers. As such, since there are few female MPs, it must be pointed out on the onset that they stand very little chance to be recognized.

However, we want to go beyond and look at the issues that when they are recognized to contribute can be attributed to their own participation. From observation of parliamentary proceedings and according to parliamentary records, there are very few issues that can be attributed to the contribution of female MPs in the House. Again, another question that needs to be addressed is how important are those few issues? For instance, when female MPs were asked to identify issues that they will proudly say it was a result of their own direct involvement and contribution, they all mentioned Domestic Violence Bill which was successfully passed and enacted into law. In addition, they also mentioned of lobbying for the passing of the Wills,

Inheritance and Protection Act which is still on agenda. The female MPs further admitted that it was as a result of extensive lobbying to NGOs and their fellow MPs and stamping their authority as female legislators or making their presence felt in the House. In addition they also teamed up as female legislators in form of women caucus that resulted in influencing the Domestic Violence Bill to be passed. It has also been seen that for the first time, since the first multiparty elections in 1994 after the one party rule, female MPs united regardless of their political affiliations and even influenced male MPs in their parties to support the Bill. However, all the Bills identified above as their contribution are to do with feminine issues. Looking at the above fact, it means that if there can be an increase of female MPs they can have an impact on issues discussed or to be brought for discussion in the House although in this scenario they were very much concerned with issues that affected them directly than any other issues.

Furthermore, during the study it was discovered that another important issue that was introduced and influenced by a certain female MP was successfully implemented. The female MP did this in her own right as an MP without any influence from her political party. This is the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). CDF is a fund for each member in which he/ she was entitled to MK3 million (Malawi Kwacha) every month for small development projects in the members' constituencies before it was later slashed to MK2 million in the 2009 – 2010 budget. This fund is managed by the District Commissioner's (DC) office. This issue has in many ways helped MPs as they have been relieved from using their personal resources for small development projects in their areas. This is because they were forced to be seen to be delivering on one hand while it has also helped the constituents in particular and the nation in general as it has provided the much needed development in most parts of the country since it started on the

other. Even now, the current parliament is supporting the CDF and has requested the Ministry of Finance to rescind its decision of cutting the amount to MK2 million.

Nevertheless, there are some important issues/policies that are discussed in the House including the appropriation Bill, Loan Authorization Bills for development projects and other important issues or policies. It has been discovered that there is very little contribution from female MPs on most of these issues because of various reasons. Firstly, one of the reasons commonly cited is that of complexity of the issues cited above. Ninety five percent of female MPs interviewed felt that they do not participate in the debate of these issues because the issues come in the House in technical form. Most of the female MPs interviewed bemoaned the absence of outside expertise for individual MPs who can help them in understanding most of the technical issues contained in the Bills. For instance, Loan Authorization Bills, Appropriation Bill and the most cited example is the Anti-Money Laundering Bill (AML). Most female MPs acknowledged that most of the issues contained in the Appropriation Bill are not easily understood and that most of them do not easily understand and need more time and expertise to articulate or grasp the issues that are contained in the Bills. Although some male MPs are also affected, the study observed that female MPs are the most affected. Furthermore, the AML was passed by most members without really understanding the concepts or even the whole Act. During the study a certain female MP argued that, *“the Bill was debated because it was brought before us and we had to discuss and pass it”*.

This makes women to be less active than men and less willing to contribute on important policy issues let alone participate. That is why gender analysts have bemoaned the tendency by some



MPs who insult women in parliament saying this was affecting their participation in decision making positions. Even Emmie Kaliya<sup>53</sup> observed that the insults by some MPs in the House result in low participation of women in the House which in the end affects discussion of some issues of national interest and those that affect women directly. These include maternal deaths and property grabbing which are not discussed at this level. This is the case because with the insults of such nature men find this as a better way of restricting women from participating in decision making as most women do not want to contribute to issues in such an environment.

#### **4.2.2.2 Participation of Female MPs in the Committees**

Records have shown that female MPs remain greatly under-represented in various parliamentary committees due to their small numbers. Parliament business works through committees. In other words a good deal of parliamentary business is carried out in these committees. There is therefore a need to consider other groups like women which are often marginalized in the House because these committees contribute to better administration and policy-making through their reports and recommendations.

A parliamentary committee is a group of members appointed by the House of parliament itself to deal with specific issues. Parliamentary committees are of two kinds; the standing committees and ad hoc committees. According to Ibele (1972:339),

standing committees are created for the life of parliament and they are usually established in successive parliaments, which means that they have a continuing role. On the other hand ad hoc committees are appointed for a specific purpose

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<sup>53</sup> Emmie Kaliya is the Chairperson for NGO-GCN a group of 40 NGOs aiming at promoting gender equality. Reported in Daily Times; august 25, 2008,p2.

and they cease to exist when they finish the task assigned to them and submit a report.

Generally, parliamentary committees are essential to any system of government, democracy in particular, because they can identify problems. Sometimes they may offer solutions to the problems identified and very frequently they make proposals or recommendations which may or may not prove effective.

Depending on the size of any given assembly, the committees may vary in size and in Malawi on average a committee has 18 members from various parties in direct proportion to the numerical strength of each party in the House. Most of the MPs serve on the committees, except for some office holders and ministers. In practice, each committee is chaired by a government member and has an opposition member as the deputy chair and the members of each committee are selected or elected within the political parties and their names are put forward by respective party whips. However, committees have considerable powers usually delegated by the House appointing them and laws establishing some committees also have particular provisions on these matters.

The Malawi Parliament committees are established under *s.56(6)* and (7) of the Republic of Malawi constitution<sup>54</sup>, National Assembly Standing Orders<sup>55</sup> and by resolutions by parliament. Before looking at specific functions for Malawi parliament committees, it must be mentioned

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<sup>54</sup> Republic of Malawi constitution *s 56(6)* states that; “Parliament may establish any committee of its members and may form joint committees for the scrutiny of legislation and performance of other functions, except voting on motions and Bills”. *S56(7)* states that; In addition to any committee appointed under subsection (6), there shall be a Public Appointments Committee, a Budget Committee and a Legal Affairs Committee of the National Assembly.....”. Revised Edition up to May 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Malawi Parliament Standing Orders. *139, 140 and 141*. Adopted by the House on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2003.

that these parliamentary committees under Standing Order 164(1) are named after Government ministry in which they exercise oversight functions and in this regard if the name of the ministry changes so too will it be for the committee. The main purpose of committees is basically to save time on the floor of the House and where possible to improve on the quality of legislation. The functions of the committees vary from one committee to another depending on the name it bears but in general terms the committees have more or less similar functions.

One of the important functions of the committees in Malawi is to investigate and inquire into management and operation of a particular government department. With this function according to area of specialization, or the name it bears, it can directly take part in the affairs of that particular ministry or its area of specialization or to use the words of Ibele (1972;339), *“committees effect division of labour”*. With this function, the committee makes sure that government and its departments are accountable, transparent and responsive to the needs of the people in the country which is also a vital tool in a democracy.

Furthermore, the committees in Malawi parliament are empowered to consider the policy objectives of a particular government department, which is the concern of this study, and assess the implementation of those policies and also examine the estimates of expenditure by a particular government department. Finally the major function of parliamentary committees in Malawi is to summon responsible ministers and government officials to account for themselves and report the findings to the House. They also play a part in refining and improving legislation.

**Table 4.1 :PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES MEMBERSHIP 2004-2009** <sup>56</sup>

<b>NAME OF COMMITTEE</b>	<b>TOTAL No. OF MEMBERS</b>	<b>No. OF FEMALE MEMBERS</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE MEMBERS</b>
Agriculture and Natural Resources	19	0	0
Budget and Finance	22	3	13.6
Legal Affairs	21	1	4.8
Public Appointments and Declaration of Assets	26	5	19.2
Social and Community Affairs	18	8	44
Education, Science and Technology	18	2	11.1
Health and Population	23	3	13
Commerce, Industry and Tourism	21	4	19
International Relations	19	1	5.3
Media and Communications	20	2	10
Public Accounts	22	5	22.7
Transport and Public Works	19	1	5.3

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<sup>56</sup> The Women caucus which has just gained committee status has not been included in the schedule because its composition, as its name suggest, is all female MPs.

**Table 4.2 :PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES MEMBERSHIP 2009**

<b>NAME OF COMMITTEE</b>	<b>TOTAL No. OF MEMBERS</b>	<b>No. OF FEMALE MEMBERS</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE MEMBERS</b>
Agriculture and Natural Resources	20	2	10
Budget and Finance	20	2	10
Legal Affairs	20	3	15
Public Appointments and Declaration of Assets	17	4	23.5
Social and Community Affairs	18	5	27.7
Education, Science and Technology	20	5	25
Health and Population	20	7	35
Commerce, Industry and Tourism	19	4	21
International Relations	17	6	35.2
Media and Communications	18	2	11.1
Public Accounts	20	2	10
Defence and Security	19	3	15.7
HIV and AIDS	21	4	19
Pan African Parliament	5	1	20
SADC Parliamentary Forum	5	2	40
Parliamentary Service Commission	5	1	20
Transport and Public Works	20	1	5

During the 2004-2009 term, there were 14 parliamentary committees but looking at the leadership of these committees there was a lot to be done especially when considering the

participation of female MPs. Most of the cabinet and parliamentary committees were male dominated and male led. Out of 14 parliamentary committees only two were chaired by female MPs. Again there were various reasons explaining this status. According to Parliamentary Standing Order 142 (1), political party whips are the ones who recommend MPs to various committees and according to Parliamentary Standing Order 153(1) after appointments by their respective parties to various committees, the members elect their own leaders in the committees. During the study, most female members of these committees admitted that there is a practice of members to those committees that when they are electing their leaders they usually sideline female MPs since they are few in numbers. Using their numbers in the House, the men have shared the lucrative position of chairperson in terms of influence. Even one party whip argued that *“you know, these women are very few. As such it is very difficult to have more female members in the committees. Their numbers in the committees is a direct reflection of their representation in parliament”*. In addition to this, one female MP also argued that *“the thing is that women in committees are few in number. In most committees we have an average of three women and when a woman’s name is proposed for the position of chairperson, she loses out to a man. The men who are in majority in committees were supporting each other”*.<sup>57</sup>

During the 2004-2009 term, the only committees that were chaired by female MPs were the social welfare committee, a committee which mainly deals with women or children issues; and the women’s caucus which has just gained the status of parliamentary committee recently which in essence meant that women only chaired one functional committee. This trend has also continued in the committees formed after the 2009 General Elections. Despite the fact that the number of female MPs has risen from 27 to 40, out of 15 parliamentary committees only two,

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<sup>57</sup> Anita Kalinde MP, Chairperson of Parliamentary women’s caucus. Reported in the Sunday Times, July 26, 2009.

International Relations and Women's caucus, are chaired by women which again effectively means that women chair only one functional committee. Furthermore, in most committees that are regarded as technical the membership of female MPs was also very low. For instance as has been shown in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2, during the 2004-2009 term, in the Agriculture and Natural Resource committee out of the 22 members there was no female MP while after the 2009 General Elections there are only 2 female members in this committee out of 20 yet this is an important committee in that it provides oversight to the executive on Agricultural matters which is the back bone of Malawi's economy and taking into account that most subsistence farmers are women. In another crucial committee of Budget and Finance there were only two female MPs out of fifteen members while currently there are also 2 female members but this time out of 20 members. In Legal affairs there was only one female MP out of nineteen members and now there are 3 female members out of 20. In addition, in Public Accounts there was only one female member out of nine members and now it has 2 female members out of 20. Finally in Public Appointments and Declaration of Assets there were only two female members out of eight members. The situation in this committee has not changed like in the other committees because there are now 4 female members out of 17.

These committees are regarded as the most important with all mentioned above enshrined in the constitution except the Agricultural and Natural Resource. As such policy issues emanating from or scrutinized by these committees do not take due consideration of women views which affect the nature of policies coming out of the process. For instance, most Bills are scrutinized in the committees, as such the absence of women in these committees also has an impact because obviously the women's unique contributions on some important issues are missed. In addition,

the study has observed that there is an irrigation policy which encourages the use of treddle pumps which most of which are manual. However, these treddle pumps are not user friendly to women because one has to peddle which involves a lot of energy. These concerns would have been brought through the agriculture committee but since there were no female members the concerns were not seriously brought forward. On the other hand, the Domestic Violence Bill was passed and the Wills and Inheritance is hot on the agenda because of the lobby by the women caucus (which has female membership as the name suggest). Furthermore, since the social welfare was headed by a female MP and had more female members, the 50-50 government gender campaign was successful as there is an increase in the number of female MPs elected during the 2009 General Elections. The absence of women from these key committees, as already observed by Swers (2001:218) *“inhibits women’s effort to change policy regardless of their commitment to pro choice initiatives”*. The women only chair the committees, mentioned above, because they deal with issues close to a woman’s heart meaning that women are relegated to those fields considered to be logical extension of traditional feminine concerns.

In any institution the chairperson or the head has got a profound effect on the output of the institution. Most of the time, although the group participates in most the decision-making process the final authority rests with the leader. As Deborah Nyangulu Chipofya<sup>58</sup> argued in her article *“a chairperson is the crux of a committee and s/he more or less determines the direction which the committee will take”*. This is because according to parliamentary Standing Orders , duties of chairpersons include presiding over meetings of the committee, providing leadership to the committee, convening meetings of the committee among other duties and most importantly the chairperson is responsible to act in any matter on behalf of and in the best interest of the

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<sup>58</sup> Reported in Sunday Times, July 26,2009.



committee. We have already shown the importance of committee members in parliamentary work especially policy-making. Therefore with the absence of a reasonable number of female MPs leading these committees, their influence on the general issues coming out of the committee is undermined. Consequently it means that these female MPs are further dominated by men and since we are saying that these committees are important as the whole House itself, then female MPs influence specifically on policy matters is compromised. It was observed during the study that the social welfare committee which was being chaired by a woman and had more women membership performed remarkably well as it tackled more issues concerning vulnerable children and women empowerment which had an impact in the 2009 General Elections.

Furthermore, it would have been better if in the important committees female members are also given a special consideration so that their numbers should match those of their male counterparts in direct relation to their proportion in the House, by taking advantage of the fact that there is no restriction of membership overlap between committees. This could have given female MPs a good leverage to advance their agenda regardless of their parties. The female MPs themselves observed that if women are given an equal opportunity to hold important position of chairperson, they too can use this position of influence to contribute substantively to policy making. However, their absence in the important committees means that they can not contribute to very important policy issues. In general, however, the findings show that the disproportionate representation of female MPs gravely affected their representation in the 14 parliamentary committees which in the end affect their influence on policy issues and hence the quality of policies emanating from those committees.

#### **4.2.2.3 Participation in Parliamentary Business Committee**

The discussion of the parliamentary functional committee can not be completed or finalized without talking about the Business Committee. This committee is mandated to give direction to the House and is composed of all leaders and party whips of political parties represented in the House and the Speakers of parliament. The function for the Business committee can be regarded as supreme as far as parliamentary business is concerned, in that it decides the business and direction of the House. Any business transacted in the House is sanctioned by this committee. They can decide whether to proceed with certain issues or to adjourn but in line with the standing orders. For instance, on many occasions especially during the 2008/2009 Budget Meeting, characterized by suspension and adjournments of proceedings, it was seen that announcements to that effect were being made by the Business Committee without being questioned by the MPs.

During the 2004-2009 parliamentary term the Business Committee had only one female member, an AFORD MP, Loveness Gondwe, who was there by virtue of being the only member of AFORD in the House. During the study, this female member acknowledged that her input or contribution was negligible as the committee was male dominated. If the Business Committee is involved in the direction of the House then their input has got a strong bearing on the policy outcomes from the House. However, since women are not well represented in this committee, then their input about the direction of the House and hence their influence on policy issues is also undermined. To make matters worse, as argued by one female MP<sup>59</sup>, although women's caucus was fully taken on board at parliament as a committee, a proposal that a female member be incorporated into Business committee was rejected. However, the problem rests with not the

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<sup>59</sup> Chairperson, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Central African Sub Region Committee.

women themselves but the procedures that regulate the appointment of MPs to the Business committee and this has been discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

#### **4.2.3 Participation of female Ministers**

This section discusses the participation of female ministers in the policy process. This discussion has mainly dwelt on the nature of portfolio held. This is because the nature of portfolio held to a greater extent also determines the amount of influence that one will have as far as initiation and implementation of policies is concerned.

At the time data for this study was being collected there were seven female ministers. Out of these, four were full ministers while the rest were deputies. Those full ministers headed the ministries of Information and Civic Education; Foreign Affairs; Women, Children Affairs and Community service; and Tourism while the rest were deputies in Health; Education responsible for primary education; and women, Children affairs and Community Services Ministries. In the current Government, there are 10 female cabinet ministers and female Vice President. Among the female ministers, 6 are full ministers while the remaining 4 are deputies. However, the analysis in this section will not dwell on the current ministers because they had only been in office for one month but the analysis will be for female ministers in 2004-2009 Government.

Like parliamentary committees, there are certain ministries which are very important and/or technical in nature like those of finance, foreign affairs, agriculture, economic planning, trade and private sector among other ministries. Although policy issues are usually finalized at cabinet level, those holding these ministries have got a strong influence on some policy issues that have

a strong bearing on the nation at large. However, only exceptionally does a ministerial appointment deviate from the rule of concentrating their appointment to women's related issues. Looking at the portfolios held by women during the 2004-2009 term, it is seen that only one of the ministries mentioned above, that is of Foreign Affairs was held by a woman. Most of the ministries that women were heading were welfare or service ministries than the technical ones. For example since attaining independence 44 years ago, there has never been any female finance minister. All the ministries except Foreign Affairs that are occupied by women, deal with issues close to a woman's heart. For example, health which has mainly to do with caring for the sick and prevention, information and civic education is about informing and teaching the masses, primary education is very much concerned with dealing with children while children, women affairs and community services is directly related to them. This in a way undermines the influence of female ministers since it takes a long time for welfare or service ministries policies to change than the technical ones.

From observation, often times women are not heard unless there are some men who would want to stand by them like during the passing of the Domestic Violence Bill. The problem is that when women are fighting for full participation, men feel that they are being fought and they do not support the women. For instance, when the minister responsible for children, women affairs and community services, was pleading with other members in House to support the Wills and Inheritance Act when it is introduced, some male MPs responded by saying that they can never support that Bill because it encourages women to kill their husbands so that they can inherit the property since there will be no relative from the husband's side to disturb them. However, with women caucus now being recognized as a parliamentary committee, the influence on policy

outcomes will also improve at cabinet level. This is the case because the female ministers who are also members of this committee will be advancing issues emanating from the caucus during the cabinet meetings because as Thomas (1994) and Saint-Germain (1989) maintain “*the presence of a women’s caucus provides women with additional resources beyond their numbers, thus reducing the negative effects of tokenism*”<sup>60</sup>.

### **4.3 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE MPs AND MINISTERS**

This section discusses whether the institutional framework and political environment in which female MPs and female ministers operate shapes their decision calculus regarding what policies to pursue. Institutions are the agreed and predictable rules about ways of doing things. The section looks at both formal and informal political institutions like party discipline, parliamentary procedures and government regulations and it also looks at the political environment. This has been done because it is seen that the institutional framework and political environment in which female MPs and female ministers operate can have a profound impact on their performance once in office.

#### **4.3.1 Strict Party Discipline and the performance of female MPs**

This part looks at the impact of strict party discipline on the performance of female MPs, taking into account that parliament is, without contest, a national forum for collective decision-making on matters that affect the nation as a whole. Generally, the study discovered that individual MPs are more inclined to their respective political parties than to their constituents. This is because they fear reprisal from their party like suspension or worst still expulsion.

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<sup>60</sup> Emphasis original.

As is the case with many other countries in which British traditions play a formative role, the convention of strict party discipline is firmly entrenched in the Malawi parliament. The system of strict party discipline means that as a general rule, MPs are not free to act as they see fit in fulfilling their duties in the legislature. MPs are usually bound to follow the instructions of political parties to which they belong and as a result, the MPs are not loyal to the people they represent. This party discipline distorts representative democracy in the way that the whole set up affects the representation of masses and the legislation that will come out.

The strict party discipline is encouraged by the anti-defection clause under *s65(1)* of the Republic of Malawi constitution<sup>61</sup>. This clause subjects the MPs to the authority of their political parties because they are not allowed to join any party once elected. According to the respondents this then makes the MPs to fear their parties more than they fear the electorate. As a result the accountability and responsiveness of legislatures to the electorate is undermined hence their performance. The system of strict party discipline goes against the values of the system of electoral process in Malawi which provides for the election of an individual candidate whether sponsored by party or not, to represent people of a clearly defined geographical area.

In this study, party discipline can be explained generally to mean the amount of loyalty an individual member displays to a political party to which he/ she belongs. Ironically, it is general knowledge that when the electorate is electing a candidate, they do that on the basis of the

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<sup>61</sup> *s65(1)* (8 of 2001) of The Republic of Malawi constitution states that; The speaker shall declare vacant the seat of any member of the National Assembly who was, at the time of his or her election, a member of one political party represented in the National Assembly, other than by that member alone but who has voluntarily ceased to be a member of that party or has joined another political party represented in the National Assembly, or who has joined any other political party or association or organization whose objectives or activities are political in nature.

understanding that the candidate will be their representative to the National Assembly and that the candidate will be representing the views of the electorate and also those issues that he/she thinks are in the best interest of his/her constituents.

Each member is supposed to go to the House for deliberations individually or in his/her capacity as sole representative of a certain area. There are two categories of representatives. The first group are those who contest on a particular political party ticket and the second are those who contest as independent members. Although the emphasis is on the former scenario, the latter scenario serves as a reference point for the discussion following.

On one hand, the member has to serve the party to which he/she belongs and on the other hand the member has to represent the interests of the constituents. Like any other member, female MPs are supposed to advance their own agenda in the best interest of the people they represent and the nation at large. They are supposed to hold consultation meetings before they go to parliament with their constituents to hear from them what policy or development issues they want and they also have issues which they think are in the best interest of their constituents. However, before they start House deliberations they also hold party caucus to have one voice or a stand as a party. It is at this party caucus where the contributions of the constituents or of the individual member are watered down by the party stand.

Almost all the female MPs interviewed revealed that members are not allowed to speak anything contrary to a party stand. This then means that party discipline has got a very big impact on the way MPs in general and female MPs in particular operate or participate in that they do not

contribute freely by avoiding to depart from their party stand. This undermines their influence on policy issues. Therefore,

MPs especially those subjected to heavy doses of party discipline and whipping in are denied a constitutionally enshrined right to freedom of choice and conscience for fear of unspecified reprisals, and the quality of the decisions made, sometimes they may leave a lot to be desired as they are shaped by misguided politics and not rationality<sup>62</sup>.

As a result, the integrity of the institution of parliament is consequently greatly insulted and the representative role of the individual members is highly compromised. Chingaipe<sup>63</sup> further argues that, “..... with other variables in the political environment *ceteris paribus*, it is unfair and a miscarriage of justice that the representative role of MPs should be choked by emotional party or factional discipline”. For example, during the course of the study, most female MPs themselves justified the need to increase women in decision-making by stressing that they know that their fellow women face and experience many problems than their male counterparts citing examples like fetching water at long distances. However, during the 2008/2009 Budget Meeting, a Water Bill that would have enabled the government to supply piped water in many areas was rejected in a roll call vote by all the female MPs from the opposition. When asked, they all indicated that they agreed as a party to shoot down any government business.

Although one can cite the Water Bill that was shot down by parliament in May 2008 as indicated above, as an example where higher representation of women would have mattered in that they believed that if they had a lot of women in parliament that Bill would have passed because women understand the importance of such basic necessities than men, strict party discipline

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<sup>62</sup> Henry Chingaipe, Senior Research Officer, Malawi Parliament, 2002,p2

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*



played a very big part in the rejection of the Bill because all the opposition female MPs rejected it. As observed by Kansilanga<sup>64</sup> *“It is indeed a fact that women go to maize mill, fetch water, look (after) the sick in hospitals and this makes them appreciate the plight of other women and even men when they get into the realms of power, (and in this case parliament)”*, but strict party discipline affects them. This becomes even more complicated when there is a roll call voting in the House as each member is supposed to vote for or against through a roll call.

Results have shown that, although party discipline also affects male MPs, the most affected are female MPs because most of the party leadership is dominated by men. As such, men can use their influence as leaders to advance their policy agenda at the expense of female MPs in the name of party agenda since the female MPs do not have power. There are no female MPs at the helm of the party leadership except for very few who are just incorporated into the National Executive Committee (NEC). The study by Kafakoma and Mhepo noted that UDF had 36 percent women in its NEC while MCP only had 11 percent. In essence, in MCP there are only 2 female members in the executive out of 25. An exception was the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) during the past three years (2006 and 2007) when it was headed by Loveness Gondwe MP after the death of its founder Chakufwa Chihana. This meant that as a party president and sole legislator of the party, she had a lot of influence on her party stand on certain policy issues. We have already argued on the number of female MPs in chapter four, however, at this point it is important to stress that since there are few female MPs it also follows that the number of female MPs in various parties represented in parliament is also small as compared to their male counterparts.

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<sup>64</sup> Daily Times, Tuesday, July 29, 2008 by Chipiliro Kansilanga, p2,; Women aspirants to hone skills in campaign.

The second scenario as already shown in the introductory part of this section serves as a reference point. During the 2004 – 2009 term, there was no independent female MP because soon after the elections they joined various political parties. Therefore although many respondents were asked of this scenario, it was like speculation, assumption or they were basing on their past experience. Ideally an independent MP does not have any attachment to any political party and as such the assumption is that they will be presenting only those issues that emanates from consultation with the electorate in their respective areas. We have had scenarios where before opening parliament all independent MPs also form their own caucus. However, this is different from political party caucus where you advance policy agenda basing on party's ideologies, independents have different views and hence ideologies and they only fight for their recognition in the House. Therefore their input in the House on policy issues only emanates from the electorate and what they think is in the best interest of the public, unlike the former case. This in a way improves the quality of policies formulated as they take due regard of personal input of this group. Having looked at these two scenarios, it is safe to say that the influence of female MPs on policy process is greatly undermined by party discipline because they are more loyal to the party than advancing their interests and those of the constituents.

#### **4.3.2 Party Discipline and performance of female Ministers**

It must be pointed out that like the current case, during the 2004-2009 term, all female ministers were also MPs of the ruling party. This has been revealed at this early stage deliberately because from what the study gathered the discipline that female MPs display to the party as MP has also a profound effect on their behavior as ministers. It must also be appreciated that at this early

stage that it is the prerogative of the Head of State to appoint or remove one from ministerial position.

In the first place, the assumption is that people vote for a certain party basing on their manifesto or ideology. It is therefore expected that once in office the party will implement what was in their manifesto or what they promised the people to do. With this in mind, it is most of the time impossible for public officials, in this case the ministers to depart from their manifesto or ideology, unless there are certain new emerging issues or that there is need for modification of the existing issues. However, before we proceed to look at whether indeed parties implement what they promised or they take a different direction, the concern of this study is; how involved are the female ministers in implementing the ruling party manifesto?

During the course of the study, although it was not the intention of the study to explore these variables (manifesto and ideology), it was discovered that except in very rare circumstances, ruling parties in Malawi do not follow their manifestos and do not have clear ideologies. Most of the policy issues that are implemented are just spontaneous. Usually policy issues are discussed and finalized at cabinet. In Malawi almost all the ministers come from within the ruling party and if there are any from outside they are only sympathizers of the ruling party. Therefore, the same party discipline displayed in parliament is also displayed during cabinet or ministerial meetings. We have seen ministers, not only female but also male, departing from important policy issues to do what their parties want.

Female ministers interviewed admitted that although they may have important input to policy agenda, they are forced to depart from their good ideas because they have to be loyal to their party. Earlier on in this section, I pointed out that it is the discretion of the president to appoint or remove a minister. However, in Malawi like most countries in the world the President of Republic is also the head of their political party and in most emerging democracies even its founder. As such loyalty or discipline does not only go to the party in general but also goes further to the party leader who is also Head of State and appoints them to such a high office. That is why Rogers, 1983 (in Vandall,1986;156) observed that *“the token woman appointee will be under pressure to side with the majority group in that organization against their own and to adopt acceptable, stereotyped roles, as well as being subject to extra stress”*. Women learn to be loyal at an early stage and as such it is very difficult for them to do contrary to any authority.

#### **4.3.3 Parliamentary Procedures; Government regulations and the Performance of female MPs and female Ministers**

This section looks at the effect of parliamentary procedures and government regulations on the performance of female MPs. Among other parliamentary procedures, it is the discretion of the speaker to recognize an MP who is supposed to hold the floor during parliamentary deliberations. Because of their underrepresentation, there is low probability that a female MP will be recognized. In addition, the underrepresentation of women in parliament also translates into underrepresentation in various parliamentary committees because according to the Standing orders, every party is required to nominate its members to the committees basing on the percentage of their representation in parliament.

Furthermore, some women MPs feel like intruders in the gentlemen's club' atmosphere because of the way the sitting plan was designed in parliament<sup>65</sup>. Swers (2001,218) pointed out that the male behavior is regarded as the norm in the legislative institutions and women feel pressure to adapt to those expectations. Therefore, as Chingola<sup>66</sup> observed,

political life in Malawi and in the region was organized according to male norms and values and even the political model was based on competition and confrontation instead of mutual respect and collaboration. The women MPs are overstretched and overworked, since in addition to their party and constituency work, they have to serve on various committees, network with their parties, at multiparty level and with women outside parliament.

According to female ministers, government regulations also affect the performance of female MPs and female ministers in various ways. For instance if women are appointed to ministerial positions, they often face potentially difficult decisions about where they and their family should live because the regulations require that all ministers should reside within the capital city. Therefore it becomes very difficult for them to move together with their families since most of the times their husbands are usually in permanent jobs or have established businesses outside the capital city. On the other hand, female MPs face the long and unpredictable hours of parliamentary sittings due to unstable parliamentary calendar especially during the 2004-2009 term. During this time, they are supposed to stay within the precincts of parliament which is in the capital city. This keeps them away from their families for a long time. Therefore as mothers and homekeepers, this makes them miss their children which result in loss of concentration on parliamentary work than the male MPs. Most female MPs acknowledged that they stayed a long time in the capital away from their homes and were usually home sick.

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<sup>65</sup> The sitting plan was designed in a way that the Government and opposition sides face each other like adversaries

<sup>66</sup> Speech by Jones Chingola, Second Deputy speaker of Malawi Parliament (2004-2009) at the opening of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians meeting.

Again as observed by one female MP

“..... many women are at a disadvantage because civil service conditions demand that they should resign the minute they embark on a political campaign. Many women who aspire for political offices are public servants. I would have expected that government should at least allow people like these to go on unpaid leave and campaign. If they win then they can resign. The problem is that they are expected to resign even when they have not gone through the primaries<sup>67</sup>.

This regulation then puts away a lot of women in the civil/public service from seeking parliamentary seat.

#### **4.3.4 Political environment and performance of female MPs and female Ministers.**

It must be appreciated that the behavior of human beings or other animals is affected by the environment in which they live in. This section therefore explores the extent to which the nature of political environment affects the influence of female MPs and female ministers on the policy process.

The turbulent political environment started after the 1999 general elections. There are several factors that contributed to this situation. Firstly, there were so many parties that emerged on the political scene. This created a lot of diversity in the country and promoted a lot of hatred as each of the political parties wanted to be heard or their interests to be furthered. Secondly, the failed Third Term and Open Term Bill, in which Dr Bakili Muluzi was seeking another term against the two consecutive constitutional five year term, also contributed to the turbulent political

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<sup>67</sup> Nancy Tembo, MCP MP for Lilongwe in an interview with Callisto Sekeleza. Reported in Nation Newspaper, July 23, 2008,p6.

environment. This factor worsened because after the bid failed, Dr Muluzi imposed a presidential candidate Dr Bingu wa Mutharika who was seen to be a stranger in the party because he was not even in the National Executive Council (NEC). Things got worse in 2004 when Dr Bingu wa Mutharika left the UDF and later formed his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). From that time up until 2009 General Elections, there had been political tension. The political impasse was aggravated by the discussion of controversial anti-defection section 65 debate.

The time of data collection for this study was characterized by hatred and deep divisions both in parliament and outside due to the political impasse. Many female MPs acknowledged that this created a lot of fear, threats and suspicion among the MPs in particular and politicians in general. The most affected were female MPs and female ministers. For instance, when asked why it took almost two days before most of them, either from the opposition or government, contributed on a certain specific issue in parliament, the consensus was that they feared being jeered by rival camp not because of their contribution but because they belonged to a different camp.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

#### **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

This study was about female ministers and female MPs influence on public policy making. The study tried to establish a link between the presence of women at parliament and cabinet and policy impact. It was guided by the following three specific objectives; to establish the constraints that women face to get to strategic decision making positions, and in this case, parliament and cabinet; to determine how female representation and participation in parliament and at ministerial level affect women's influence on public policy making; and to determine the institutional framework and the political environment in which female MPs and female ministers operate. The study has revealed that, before we even start thinking of assessing the influence of female MPs and female ministers on policy making, there are several obstacles that women face to get to parliament. These include; culture and tradition; violence, intimidation, harassment, education level, lack of resources, lack of support from respective parties, the electoral system and lack of interest and courage.

Furthermore, it has also been seen that there are very few female MPs and female ministers. For instance during the 2004 – 2009 term, there were 25 female MPs out of 193 MPs and 7 female ministers out of 43 established cabinet ministerial positions. As such their influence on policy issues was always undermined because they were constantly overshadowed. Currently, there are 40 female MPs and 11 female ministers. In addition, due to their underrepresentation at these two levels their participation on various issues and programmes was also undermined. The



female MPs were overshadowed during deliberations in the House since they are either overlooked by the speaker or undermined by their male counterparts. In addition, they do not make any impact in the committees where they are greatly underrepresented and the worse scenario being that they were not even represented in certain important committees. There were also few female ministers, with most of them in welfare ministries and deputizing making their impact on policy issues very minimal. Finally, it has been discovered that the institutional framework and political environment in which female MPs and female ministers operate also affects their influence on policy process.

A number of conclusions and implications that can be drawn from the study and possible future research areas. In the first place, according to the study, chief among the obstacles that women face to get to strategic decision making positions is the electoral system. Therefore, there is need to change the electoral system to one which can incorporate the quota system. Findings have shown that countries like South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania all managed to surpass the earlier 30 percent SADC benchmark on female representation in parliament because they pressed for a quota in their political electoral system. This meant that the choice at this level was not of either/ or kind as it is in Malawi, so that women are less directly in competition with men and all other factors aside women are almost twice more likely to be elected under proportional representation than in majoritarian systems.

Secondly, there is need for political socialization of women at an early stage so that they can appreciate the basics of the political processes unlike as is the case this time. Thirdly, in politics the behavior of men and women differs because of the latter's lack of political power. Women,

as has been shown through out the discussion, are always made, by the male dominated political institutions, to specialize in feminine areas of policy making such as health, women and children affairs, and community services among other areas. This makes them to have effect only on specific policy issues which can only benefit a small section of the community than the nation at large. It is also safe to conclude that female MPs and female ministers in general have made a small difference in that, to a greater extent, they have only helped the enactment of women friendly policies like the domestic Violence legislation and pursuing the Wills and Inheritance Act onto the agenda. As a result of their over concentration on women issues, it has undermined their role of representing their constituents and the nation at large through participation in the policy process which was the framework of this study.

There is also need to change perception that men are the policy and decision makers because this has a huge bearing on the participation of women in the policy process. The policies are affected because due account of women's concerns or outputs at these levels are not taken on board. Because of their underrepresentation both at parliament and cabinet level, women's participation at these two levels is very low as they are constantly being over shadowed. As such women's unique experiences and shared concerns may be ignored in the policy making process due to their under representation in elected office. It can therefore be deduced that in order to fully discuss female MPs and female ministers' influence on policy issues, the starting point should be to look at their numerical presence at these two levels. Their numerical presence, as has been discussed in the paper, has got a huge bearing on the level of their participation and hence their influence. This means that having women in office could widen political debate to include a larger group of issues traditionally ignored by male policy makers. In essence, the mere

presence of women in large numbers in legislative bodies makes a significant difference not only in what get discussed but also in what kind of legislation is advanced.

In general therefore, women representation and participation in policy making does matter because firstly, women represent half the population of a country and have the rights to half the seats and parliamentary decisions that affect their lives. Secondly, women have different social and biological experiences that ought to be represented and hence may exhibit a different style of leadership that will have consequences for the very process by which public policy is made. Furthermore, since most women who are elected go through a rigorous process in that they have to be twice as good as men to overcome intraparty obstacles to their selection, those who are elected in parliament are likely to be better qualified. Finally women in positions of power can inspire more women to take up these paths and more importantly we believe that a more balanced group of representatives would lead to better decision making and political priorities that more closely reflect voters' concerns in form of public policy.

Again women have a lot of experience as far as male dominance is concerned and because of their oppression they are more sympathetic with the plight of other minority groups. Finally women are more ethical and humane than men. In so far as they participate in conventional politics, they bring to it concern for ordinary human beings and for ethical standards of conduct. Infact when a critical mass of women is in positions of power, they tend to bring their experiences and perspectives to the table which tend to benefit their families, communities and nation at large.

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## **APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**

Amon Mluwira,  
PAS Department,  
Chancellor College,  
P.O Box 280,  
Zomba.

### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

#### **DATA COLLECTION FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE**

I am Amon Mluwira, a student at the University of Malawi-Chancellor College, pursuing Masters Degree in Political Science. I do not represent the government or any political party. I am studying whether women participation and representation matter in public policy making. I am specifically looking at the case of female MPs and female ministers in Malawi. The information gathered in this study will only be used for development of a thesis which is part of requirement for the fulfillment of the course. I would like, therefore to discuss with you some issues, which are pertinent to the study.

Yours faithfully,

Amon Kesten Mluwira.

## **APPENDIX B: LIST OF RESPONDENTS**

Female MPs and female cabinet ministers

Chairpersons for all parliamentary committees

Chairperson for women parliamentary caucus

Senior staff at Parliament

Senior staff at the Office of President and cabinet

Chairpersons of NGOs specialising in women in decision making and empowerment

Leaders of all parties in the House

## **APPENDIX C: KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **(A) FEMALE MPs AND FEMALE CABINET MINISTERS**

#### **OBJECTIVE 1**

1. Politics is seen as male dominated arena, as a woman what attracted you to join politics?
2. You were elected to parliament and defeated several other strong candidates in the elections. What made people elect you and not others or what made the president appoint you into cabinet?
3. Out of 193 MPs 27 are women representing only about 14 percent yet women make 53 percent of the total population. What are the reasons behind this? Or out of 42 established ministerial and deputy ministerial positions only 7 are occupied by women representing only about 16 percent yet women make 53 percent of the total population. What are the reasons behind this?
4. What were some of the challenges you faced personally as a woman starting from the time you declared your interest to contest up to the time of the elections?
5. After going through those challenges so far what has been your experience as an MP?

#### **OBJECTIVE 2**

6. As female MP/female minister do you think your presence in parliament/cabinet has any effect on the public policy issues that are discussed?
7. If yes, how and what are some of the issues?
8. If no, why do you think so?
9. How can an increase in the number of female MPs/female ministers make a difference in terms of policy issues that are discussed?
10. As an MP (regardless of your gender) have you in anyway influenced any policy issue?
11. If yes, what issues?
12. If no, why?
13. As female MP/female minister, do you think you are given a fair chance by the speaker/president or other MPs and ministers to take part in parliamentary deliberations/cabinet meetings?
14. If not what do you think is the problem?
15. What is the implication on the policy outcome if female MPs/ministers are or are not given a fair chance to participate in parliamentary deliberations/cabinet meetings?
16. As a female MP/female minister, how can you best contribute to policy issues during house deliberations/cabinet meetings?
17. Do you belong to any parliamentary committee?
18. If yes, which committee and what do you think is the relative importance of your committee as compared to other committees?
19. How has your membership in this committee helped you in contributing to policy issues?

20. If not, parliamentary committees are said to be fundamental as far as parliamentary functions are concerned, do you think your lack of membership to any of the committees has affected your input to parliament in particular and to the nation at large on policy issues?

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

21. Are the current parliamentary procedures conducive to your participation in parliament?
22. As a female MP has the party discipline affected your free participation during parliamentary deliberations?
23. The current political environment is characterized by high level of political bickering and mistrust. Do you think this environment is healthy for free women participation in parliament/cabinet?

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

24. What is your general overview of female MPs'/female ministers' performance in Malawi as far as influencing policy is concerned?
25. What needs to be done?
26. As a female MP/female minister, what issues can you proudly say that I did them and are on policy agenda that can be attributable to your own participation or contribution?

## **(B) NGOs SPECIALISING IN WOMEN DECISION MAKING AND EMPOWERMENT IN POLITICS**

### **OBJECTIVE 1**

1. Out of 193 MPs, 27 are women and out of 42 established ministerial and deputy ministerial positions only 7 are women. Why is the case considering that women make 53 percent of the total population in Malawi?
2. As an organization dealing with women in decision making or concerned with women empowerment in political circles, what specific challenges did you discover that women face when vying for public office?

### **OBJECTIVE 2**

3. Does the presence of women in parliament and in cabinet have any effect on policy issues that are discussed?
4. If yes, how and what are some of the policy issues?
5. On relative note, the current parliament has more women than the previous parliaments we have had in Malawi. What difference has the current numbers of women in parliament and cabinet made in terms of advancing policy changes in Malawi?

6. Specifically, do you have in mind one or more female MPs who have been in front influencing specific policy issue?
7. Do you think female MPs/ministers are given fair chance by the speaker/ president to take an active part in parliamentary deliberations/ ministerial meetings?
8. If not, what are some of the reasons?
9. What is the impact of such a practice on the outcome of the policies?
10. How can female MPs/ministers best contribute to policy issues through their participation during parliamentary deliberations/ ministerial meetings?
11. Parliamentary committees are said to be so fundamental as far as parliamentary functions are concerned. So far there is no parliamentary committee that is chaired by a woman, why is the case?
12. Why do you think the few female ministers we have in Malawi are usually allocated welfare or service ministries such as, women affairs, health than the technical ones such as Finance, Constitutional Affairs, Energy e.t.c and most of them deputizing?
13. What is the implication of this practice on policy outcomes?

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

14. Do you think the parliamentary procedures are conducive for women participation in parliament and especially on policy issues?
15. If no, why do you think so?
16. What can you say about the effect of party discipline on the free participation of women during parliamentary deliberations?
17. Do you think the current political environment is conducive for women participation?

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

18. What is your general overview of the performance of female MPs/female ministers in Malawi as far as influencing policy is concerned?
19. What needs to be done?
20. As NGO dealing with women issues in political circles, what issues can you proudly say that a woman did them and are on policy agenda that can be attributable to their own participation or contribution?

### **(C) LEADERS OF PARTIES IN THE HOUSE**

#### **OBJECTIVE 1**

1. As a party represented in the house, do you have female MP?
2. If yes, why is it that out of ..... MPs in your party, only.....are women?
3. What are some of the challenges that women in your party or women in general face to be elected to parliament?
4. From the statistics given above, it is very clear that women are very disadvantaged in terms of getting to parliament than their male counterparts. As a leader of a party

represented in parliament, how do you make sure that you have equal number of female MPs although this does not happen?

## **OBJECTIVE 2**

5. Does the presence of women in parliament/cabinet have any effect on the policy issues that are discussed and of course on the final policy?
6. If yes, how and what are some of the issues?
7. As a party represented in parliament, what difference do you think can the increase in the number of women make in terms of advancing policy changes in Malawi?
8. As a party represented in parliament how have female MPs in your party helped you advance your policy agenda?
9. Do you have any regret having few numbers of female MPs in terms of advancing your policy agenda?
10. If yes why?
11. As a party in parliament, most of the times you speak as a bloc. Do you give female MPs in your party a chance to freely participate before you make a final stand?
12. If no, what do you think are the implications on the policy outcomes?
13. How can female MPs/female ministers in your party best contribute to policy issues during parliamentary deliberations/ministerial meetings?
14. Parliamentary committees are said to be so fundamental as far as parliamentary functions are concerned. So far there is no parliamentary committee that is chaired by a woman, why is the case?
15. As a party represented in parliament, you recommend members to various committees, who in turn vote for their chairperson. Have you ever recommended any female MP for the post of the chairperson?
16. If no, why?
17. Do you think the absence of female chairperson in these committees has no policy implications?
18. What do you think are the policy implications, if all the committees are chaired by men as is the case?
19. Have you ever recommended female MPs to committees that are considered very powerful like the Public Appointments committee, Finance and Budget, Legal affairs, e.t.c

## **OBJECTIVE 3**

20. As a party in parliament, you have party discipline as you usually contribute in the house only what the caucus has decided. How has this affected free participation of women during parliamentary deliberations on policy issues?

21. Do you think the parliamentary procedures offer equal opportunities for participation of all MPs in the House regardless of gender?

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

22. What is your general overview of female MPs'/female ministers' performance in Malawi and what needs to be done?
23. As a party in parliament, what issues can you proudly say that our female MPs/female ministers did them and are on policy agenda that can be attributable to their own participation and contribution?

### **(D) CHAIRPERSONS FOR ALL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES**

#### **OBJECTIVE 1**

1. There is no parliamentary committee headed by a woman. As one of the chairpersons in these committees, why do you think the case is like this?

#### **OBJECTIVE 2**

2. Does the presence of women in the committees have any effect on policy issues that are discussed?
3. If yes how, and what are some of these issues?
4. What difference can the increase in numbers of female MPs in the committees make in terms of advancing policy changes in Malawi?
5. As the chairperson for a committee, what role do you play ensuring that women participate equally during your meetings and parliamentary deliberations?
6. What do you think is the implication on the policy outcomes by sidelining women to participate in the committees?
7. As a committee do you have some thing that emanated from female MP (member) and is on policy agenda?

#### **OBJECTIVE 3**

8. Are the current procedures followed in the committee conducive for women participation?
9. With the current political impasse, do you think women are free to participate having in mind that most of the time you are divided along party lines in the committees?

### **GENERAL QUESTION**

10. What is your general overview of female MPs' performance in Malawi both in the committee and in the House, and what needs to be done?

## **(E) CHAIRPERSON FOR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS<sup>68</sup>**

### **OBJECTIVE 1**

1. Out of 193 MPs, only 27 are women, as a chairperson of women parliamentary caucus what do you think are the reasons behind this?

### **OBJECTIVE 2**

2. Do you think the presence of women in parliament has any effect on the policy issues that are discussed in parliament?
3. If yes, how and what are some of the issues?
4. You have been in parliament for over two terms and you have seen the number of female MPs growing, though very slowly. What difference has the increase in number of female MPs made in terms of advancing policy changes in Malawi?
5. Do the female MPs given a fair chance by the speaker or other MPs to take part in parliamentary deliberations?
6. What is the effect of either including or sidelining women in deliberations on the outcomes of the policy issues being discussed?
7. How can female MPs best contribute to policy issues during parliamentary deliberations?
8. Parliamentary committees are said to be so fundamental as far as parliamentary functions are concerned. So far there is no committee headed by a woman. What are the reasons behind this?
9. What do you think is the effect of the current situation on policies emanating from the committees?
10. As a caucus what are you doing about this?
11. As a caucus, do you have some issues that emanated from your group and became quickly on policy agenda?

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

12. Do you think the current parliamentary procedures are conducive for free participation of women?
13. As a caucus you take a stand on certain issues. Don't you think this has an effect on free participation of women?
14. As a caucus, how do you reconcile a stand taken by a party of each member and that of yours and what is the implication of this on policy outcomes?

### **GENERAL QUESTION**

15. What is your general overview on the performance of female MPs and female ministers in influencing policy issues?

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<sup>68</sup> The Guide for other respondents not included here were similar to these other questions and were just rephrased to reflect the type of group being interviewed.