Report

Women and power

Representation and influence in Malawi's parliament

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Cover photo: Joyce Banda People's Party nomination day, Malawi. Dan Mason / Flickr

About the research

This case study is an output from the Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making project. This two-year (2014-2016) evidence and learning project, funded by the UK Department for International Development, asks: (i) What enables women's substantive voice and influence in decision-making processes? (ii) Does women's presence and influence in decision-making improve outcomes for other women and advance gender equality? (iii) How can international actors better support women's leadership and decision-making? In answering these questions, the research has examined the relationship between women's political, social and economic power and resources, both individual and collective.

Project activities and outputs include:

- A global review of the evidence on women's voice and leadership, with thematic chapters on women's political participation, social activism and economic empowerment,
- A rapid review on women and girls' leadership programmes,
- A rapid review on women and girls' use of digital information and communication technologies,
- Five empirical case studies on women's leadership and decision-making power, in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Gaza, Kenya and Malawi,
- A synthesis report and policy briefings.

More information can be found at:
www.odi.org/women-and-power

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFORD   Alliance for Democracy
AIDS   Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CDF   Constituency Development Fund
CEDAW   Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMD   Centre for Multiparty Democracy
CSO   Civil Society Organisation
DFID   UK Department for International Development
DPP   Democratic Progressive Party
EISA   Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EIU   Economist Intelligence Unit
GBV   Gender-Based Violence
HIV   Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRW   Human Rights Watch
KII   Key Informant Interview
MCP   Malawi Congress Party
MEC   Malawi Electoral Commission
MIM   Malawi Institute of Management
MP   Member of Parliament
NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO-GCN   NGO Gender Coordination Network
NICE   National Initiative for Civic Education
NSO   National Statistical Office
ODI   Overseas Development Institute
OPC   Office of the President and Cabinet
PP   People's Party
RNE   Royal Norwegian Embassy
SADC   South African Development Community
UDF   United Democratic Front
UK   United Kingdom
UN   United Nations
UNDP   UN Development Programme
UNFPA   UN Population Fund
UNICEF   UN Children's Fund
WLSA   Women and Law in Southern Africa

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Summary

The proportion of women MPs in Malawi has risen since the first multiparty elections in 1994, and the country elected its first woman vice-president, Joyce Banda, in 2009. Banda subsequently became Malawi's first woman president. This positive trend came to an end in 2014. Banda came third in the presidential election and the proportion of women MPs fell by a quarter. This case study uses the 2014 election to examine trends in women's access to parliamentary power in Malawi and the electorate's apparent rejection of women leaders after a promising start.

To date, research and advocacy in Malawi have paid more attention to women's *descriptive representation* – that is, numbers of women elected rather than their experience and *performance* once elected, including their *substantive representation* of other women and their interests. Meanwhile, surveys of parliamentarians are rare, and longitudinal panel surveys even more so. This case study uses a survey to produce comparative (within-country) data on the profile, perspectives and experiences of the current cohort of women MP in Malawi to answer the following questions:

1. What factors influence women's ability to become MPs?
2. What factors influence women's ability to be effective MPs?
3. Do women MPs promote gender equality and/or represent the interests of other women?
4. How could support to prospective and elected women MPs be improved?

Quantitative data are needed to look at trends and qualitative data to understand the process of women's decision-making and political influence. The survey therefore included both closed and open-ended questions, and we used a mixed-methods approach to both data collection and analysis. In the summary, we report the main findings and recommendations, with the primary survey data provided in the main body of the paper.

What factors influence women's ability to become MPs?

Women's political representation has improved with political liberalisation and multiparty politics in Malawi. There has been a slow but steady increase in women MPs, to a peak of 43 in 2009 (22.3%). In the election on 20 May 2014, however, women MPs won just 16.6% of the total.

With few exceptions, political power is open to a narrow socioeconomic group of women in Malawi, bounded both by class (education, career) and social expectations (marital status, religious belief). Even so, in a patronage-based political and electoral system with no controls on party finance, women are at a distinct disadvantage, with fewer economic resources and less access to male-dominated clientelist networks. In spite of constitutional guarantees, successive male-dominated governments have done little to address women's economic and political exclusion. There are few incentives: Malawi has no strong, independent women's organisations and the mostly rural-based population is conservative. Discriminatory customary law continues to dominate, therefore, which relegates women to reproductive and domestic roles and constrains their decision-making power.

Few women have leadership positions within political parties, and their formal participation is often confined to supportive roles within party 'women's wings'. Together, electoral rules (first-past-the-post, no quota), party systems (weakly institutionalised and fragmented) and prejudice against women's leadership significantly influence whether parties nominated women and do so in seats they are able to win. The unpredictability of the 2014 election meant parties were much less willing to field women candidates: in a situation of less certainty, parties erred towards conservatism. This is despite the fact that, overall, women's chances are not that dissimilar to men's, but far fewer women (257) than men (1,033) competed in 2014 and parties more often nominate them in seats outside the region where they have the best chance of winning. This suggests lower numbers of women MPs have more to do with parties fielding fewer women than men, and disproportionately nominating women candidates in marginal seats, , than with voters rejecting women leaders.

Gender norms mean voters are likely to see women as credible leaders than men, and women MPs reported gendered abuse and 'de-campaigning' during elections. Women MPs must have traits commonly associated with men but also fit the stereotype of a 'good' woman. Strikingly, some women MPs demonstrated both extreme confidence in their leadership abilities in the public domain and a need to conform in family life to hierarchical gender norms. Meanwhile, although women are seen as less able to lead than men, women leaders are subject to greater scrutiny than their male counterparts. This has been exacerbated by the 'Cashgate' scandal becoming public knowledge in 2013 under Joyce Banda's presidency.

What factors influence women's ability to be effective MPs?

Regardless of sex, Malawian MPs face similar difficulties in their attempts to influence decision-making in their party and parliament, to perform well enough in the eyes of their constituents to retain their seats and to advance their political careers. Women MPs have additional hurdles because of the way gender norms interact with most of these difficulties.

The MPs say this is most problematic in their constituency work: women have fewer assets and less social capital than men but voters expect more of them and judge them more harshly. But the effects of discrimination are also apparent in the Assembly, in attitudes towards women politicians, and undue scrutiny of women MPs because of their minority status.

It is also seen in men's overrepresentation in leadership positions and their monopoly of the most powerful committees. Almost two-thirds of the surveyed women MPs hold positions within their party, but only a fifth are chair/vice chairs of parliamentary committees. MPs must gain the ear and support of party leaders to be appointed to leadership positions within parliament, and there are several ways gender discrimination can weaken the position of women MPs in these bargaining processes. 'Culture' constrains women's influence and promotion within parties and thus their ability to be effective.

Almost all women MPs talked about their contributions to their constituency, although there was significant variation in terms of the scale of their inputs, even across the women who had served for an equal amount of time. Women MPs employ different strategies to negotiate the constraints they face in 'delivering' development to their constituents. Also, their varying experiences, capabilities, social capital and access to resources influence their strategy.

The two women MPs we surveyed who had been re-elected in 2014 both exhibited a strong belief in their own ability to lead combined with willingness to comply with gender norms when interacting with constituents. Successful women MPs thus walk the fine line between masculinity and femininity. Rather than rejecting them outright, this suggests effective women politicians adopt a strategic approach to gender norms and expectations in pursuit of political or electoral gain.

Political intuition and knowing the formal and informal rules of the game, both inside and outside parliament, are also important. Notably, hardly any women MPs come from within the ranks of political parties. MPs learn political skills through their professional and voluntary activities before standing for parliament. These experiences vary, but over half the surveyed women MPs have a history of political activism in their families, and a significant minority had previously held leadership positions.

Do women MPs promote gender equality and/or represent the interests of other women?

There is a misplaced assumption that women politicians necessarily champion other 'women's interests' and gender equality. In reality, women politicians may not see other women as their 'natural' constituency and are as likely to be conservative as progressive, including in their attitudes to gender roles and norms. Nevertheless, all the women MPs in this study mentioned the effect of gender norms on their own political experience, and over half talked of women as a special interest group.

Only one MP described herself as a feminist, and most appeared more comfortable talking about empowering women than about gender equality. This may be strategic, given that the average Malawian is likely to hold conservative beliefs on gender roles and relations. It also raises questions about how Malawian women themselves understand their interests, particularly for MPs who represent rural constituencies. We saw little evidence women MPs interact regularly with grassroots women's groups. Only a minority of women MPs spoke of concrete actions they had taken to support women and girls in their constituency.

The ability of women MPs to work together across party lines is critical to reform discriminatory or gender-blind laws and policy (and push for implementation). Women MPs did work together to overcome male resistance to legal and normative change to get the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act passed in 2015. The Women's Caucus is the primary vehicle for women to interact across party lines.

The basic socioeconomic profile of women MPs is narrow, yet prior experiences and current motivations, capabilities and networks are diverse. Better understanding these differences can help explain variations in their performance, their views on gender and women's rights and the likelihood that they will act for other interest groups.

However, women MPs' apparent lack of close ties with civil society and gender equality activists is likely to reduce incentives for them to work in this way. In addition, the absence of an established women's movement is an important constraint on political action to advance gender equality. Overall, women's rights activists do not have the organisational or tactical strength to incentivise government to take action on women's rights and gender equality.

Headline recommendations for policy and practice

Support to women's representation in Malawi has focused almost wholly on increasing numbers of women elected through the 50/50 campaign, with limited attention to the performance and retention of women MPs. A strategy to improve women's descriptive *and* substantive representation is about trying different and complementary things, with ongoing learning and adaptation as core components. It also means taking a longer-term perspective to building women's organisational strength, within the caucus and women's organisations, while helping reformers to work politically to secure more medium term changes in law and policy in relation to gender discrimination and women's rights, but also in attitudes and behaviour.

A summary of recommendations to international agencies and domestic stakeholders includes:

- *Support future women's leaders and their diverse pathways into politics.* Work across development sectors is vital to increase the social and economic capabilities that are instrumental for women's political power, in particular higher education and economic capital. Long-term relations with the civic associations through which women acquire political skills and resources are also necessary. Party leaders, including at subnational levels, need to be persuaded of the value of attracting women.
- *Level the electoral playing field.* Donor support to candidates should be embedded within a longer-term approach to mentoring, alongside real-time research to make tailored campaign support for women candidates possible. But advocacy and strategy needs to focus much more on the incentives for parties to promote women candidates, and ensuring women are treated fairly during party primaries and the general election. Activities of organisations involved in the electoral process need to be gender-sensitive – with sex disaggregated data and analysis as an absolute minimum requirement. Malawian gender equality activists should also work with political parties and the Malawian Electoral Commission to increase the selection of women candidates, including the possibility of electoral reform and use of quotas.
- *Help women politicians to be more effective once elected.* An orientation for MPs is the bare minimum here. Work with the Women's Caucus should consider new approaches to capacity development that can improve performance, such as individual training budgets. Donors could also consider helping women MPs set up/run a constituency office. UN Women's funding of embedded technical assistance is a promising approach that might facilitate more locally led and flexible programming. Funding should also go towards action research with women MPs to learn more about how they work and their achievements, and to the parliamentary secretariat to improve technical and secretarial support to MPs.
- *Work with women groups, but also men and communities, to advance gender equality.* The development of locally anchored, autonomous women's associations and movements is necessary. In their support to the Women's Caucus, funders and implementers should achieve a balance between particular gender equality reforms and empowering MPs as an end in itself. Meanwhile, changing societal attitudes and shared expectations to gender roles and norms is critical to reduce gender inequality – and this requires working with male leaders, families and communities, not just women.

1. Introduction and research design

In recent years, there has been some cause for optimism about women's access to political power in Malawi. The proportion of women MPs has risen steadily since the first multiparty elections in 1994, reaching a peak of 21.8% in 2009,[1] when Malawi also elected its first woman vice-president, Joyce Banda. Banda subsequently became the country's first woman president (and only Africa's second) in 2012 after the unexpected death of President Bingu wa Mutharika. Under Banda's presidency Malawi enacted a Gender Equality Act in 2013, which provides for quotas for women in public (though not political) positions.

This positive trend came to an abrupt end in Malawi's tripartite election in 2014. Joyce Banda came third in the presidential election, the proportion of women MPs fell by a quarter to 16.6% and women won only 12.1% of district council seats.

In this case study, we use the 2014 election to examine trends in women's access to parliamentary power in Malawi and the electorate's apparent rejection of women leaders. We ask four questions:

1. What factors influence women's ability to become MPs?
2. What factors influence women's ability to be effective MPs?
3. Do women MPs promote gender equality and/or represent the interests of other women?
4. How have international and domestic organisations supported prospective and elected women MPs, and how could this support be improved?

To date, research and advocacy has paid more attention to women's *descriptive representation* in Malawi – that is, women's access to legislative power as measured by the number of women elected rather than women's experience and *performance* once elected, including their *substantive representation* of other women and their interests (see Box 2). We look at the latter, and also examine the under-explored question of *differences* between women MPs to propose factors that may explain variations in their behaviour, strategy and success.

Since the third wave of democratisation in the 1990s, feminist scholars have written qualitative studies of women's routes into and experience of parliamentary and political life in developing countries (e.g. Goetz and Hassim, 2003; Tadros, 2014; Tamale, 1999). This evidence base is a rich source of insight into the factors, gendered and otherwise, that influence women's access to and exercise of political power. However, existing studies are almost all small-n, using a mixture of semi-structured

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Box 1: Women's leadership and decision-making power

Leadership means the individual and collective capabilities to mobilise 'people and resources (economic, political and other) in pursuit of particular ends' (Lynne de Ver, 2009). This includes the political aspect of mobilisation – that is, the ability to navigate power relations to secure desired outcomes through contestation and negotiation, the co-option and persuasion of allies and the outmanoeuvring of opponents. Leadership therefore involves the ability to influence the ideas and behaviour of others and is effective when it translates into outcomes, whatever the content of those might be. Leadership may or may not coincide with public positions of authority.

Decision-making power is the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life – both private and public. Formal access to positions of authority and to decision-making processes is an important, if insufficient, condition for women to have decision-making power in the public domain. In fact, decision-making power is a composite of access and the capabilities and actions that shape whether women have influence over the polity or decisions about their private life. Having **influence** with, over and through people and processes is therefore central to both leadership and decision-making power.

Source: O'Neil and Domingo (2015).

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1 Higher than the proportion of women elected in the UK's parliamentary election the following year (21%), but lower than the average for Africa in January 2015 of 23.4%: http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

interviews with a purposive sample of women parliamentarians and key informant interview, sometimes supplemented with a small number of life histories. Surveys of parliamentarians are rare, and longitudinal panel surveys even more so.

We use a survey to produce comparative (within-country) data from women MPs to test propositions from the literature and fill gaps, in particular in terms of discovering *which* women are *more or less* able to be effective politicians and why. While quantitative data are needed for comparison and to look at trends, qualitative data are essential to understand the process of women's decision-making and political influence (Wales, 2015). The survey therefore includes both closed and open-ended questions, and we use a mixed-methods approach to both data collection and analysis.

The case study also serves as a **pilot for the survey instrument,** to explore its feasibility and usefulness in deepening knowledge about women's political leadership in newly democratised, developing countries. The survey performed well, but with some limitations. Available resources meant it did not include a representative sample of male MPs, which limited our ability to draw robust conclusions about the influence of gender in some areas. We were also unable to interview constituents and party officials and so were unable to triangulate their views, including on what an effective MP means.

Annex 1 provides further details of our research design and Annex 2 lists survey respondents and key informants. Citations in the text are anonymous and cannot be cross-referenced to the MPs' names in the annex. The informant reference number is omitted entirely where the citation could make the person identifiable.[2]

Section A examines women's *access* to Malawi's National Assembly, including changes in their status and political representation and factors that enable or constrain their ability to stand in, and win, elections. **Section B** examines women's *performance once elected* as MPs, including what current MPs have achieved and the factors that enable or constrain their political success. In both sections, we discuss the role of international and domestic support. We conclude with **recommendations** on how this might be improved.

Box 2: Who will best represent my interests? Descriptive and substantive representation

In representative democracy, a group of people elect another person to take decisions on their behalf. **Descriptive representation** is where the composition of a decision-making body, such as a parliament, (better) reflects the population as a whole. This may be desirable to increase the fairness and legitimacy of representative bodies. However, there is also an assumption that descriptive representation will lead to **substantive representation** – that is, a person from one background/lived experience is more likely to represent the interests and preferences of someone similar (e.g. shared gender, ethnic group or class).

Historical privilege means elite groups, usually wealthy men, tend to dominate political decision-making. One argument for proportional representation and quotas for under-represented groups is that these electoral systems can improve descriptive representation. However, even if the assumption holds that people with shared socioeconomic characteristics have similar preferences, an elected representative may be unwilling or unable to act on these. In this case, descriptive but not substantive representation may improve, for example, there may be more women in parliament but decision-making may still reflect men's preferences and interests.

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2   In these cases the citations designates whether the source is a MP (MP) or a key informant interview (KII), and the number of sources (e.g. KII x1), but not the reference number for the survey respondent or informant.

A. Women's access to parliament

2. Changes in women's status, rights and political representation

2.1 Women's status before and after the 1995 constitution

Under Life-President Kamuzu Banda's authoritarian regime between 1970 and 1993, with an almost complete fusion of the party and the state, no Malawian had political and civil liberties. The **use of tradition and custom to maintain control further curtailed women's autonomy** (e.g. 'traditional customs and practices' were used as justification for not ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1991) (Ribohn, 2002). The main political role accorded to women was as entertainment, recruited to dance and sing the president's praises (ibid.; Malera, 2005; Semu, 2002). Between 1964 and 1996, only two women were appointed cabinet ministers (3% of ministers for the whole period) and only 3% of parliamentarians were women (Malera, 2005).

In a 1993 referendum, Malawians overwhelming voted for multiparty politics; in the 1994 elections, the party to emerge from the democratic resistance, the UDF, took most of the vote. A **new liberal democratic constitution,** with guarantees of civil and political rights, based on international standards, followed in 1995. This contained **provisions advancing women's rights and gender equality**, including proscribing discrimination in any form.[3] Malawi had become a signatory in 1994 to CEDAW and its optional protocols, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, including the Protocol on the Rights of Women, and the South African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development (Malera, 2005)

However, **successive governments have done little to champion gender equality** (Malera, 2005). In 2012, Malawi ranked 124 out of 148 countries on the UN Gender Inequality Index (HRW, 2014). Beliefs about

men's superiority and ideas about the 'proper' role and capabilities of the different sexes are widespread. In the early 2000s, the Malawi Law Commission began reviewing Malawi's laws for consistency with government policy on gender equality and women's empowerment, highlighting succession, marriage and divorce and development of a gender equality law as the most urgent areas. While the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2006, almost a decade was to pass for the enactment of the Deceased Estates (Will, Inheritance and Protection) Act (2011), Gender Equality Act (2013) and the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (2015).

Discriminatory customary law continues to reign supreme in the lives of most Malawians, despite the progressive constitution. It regulates lifecycles (childbirth, adolescence, marriage, womanhood, inheritance, child custody, widowhood and death) and determines the obligations of men, women and children and their entitlement to resources, property ownership, marriage and divorce. In this way, it **dictates unequal gender relations and reinforces the patriarchal social order**, compounding the discrimination women face in public and private institutions (Kanyongolo, 2011).

Meanwhile, advocacy around Malawi's CEDAW implementation by legal networks and organisations, such as Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) Malawi and the Southern African Litigation Centre, has consistently identified **continuing gaps in Malawi's legal framework** and the need for statutory law to outlaw discriminatory customs in line with the constitution.

In practice, Malawian women continue to have **limited access to factors of production** such as land, farm inputs, labour and extension services. For example, while there is no gender pay gap in Malawi, double the amount of

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3   This includes proscribing discrimination on the basis of sex or any other status (s20), guaranteeing the right of women not to be discriminated against on the basis of their gender or marital status (s24), providing for elimination of laws that discriminate against women and for passing of legislation that eliminate women customs and practices that tend to discriminate against women (s24) and establishing gender equality as one of the principles of national policy (s13) (Malera, 2005).

Table 1: Number and proportion of female MPs in parliament, 1994-2014

Year	Candidates			MPs		
	Women	Total	% of women	Women	Total	% of women
1994	46	587	7.84	10	177	5.65
1999	62	668	9.28	16	193	8.29
2004	154	1,098	14.03	27	193	13.99
2009	237	1,175	20.17	43	193	22.27
2014	261	1,285	20.31	32	193	16.58

Source: Malawi Electoral Commission data.

men as women own rural land/farms and four times as many own urban plots/houses. Men also earn over twice as much from informal enterprise (MGCCD and NSO, 2012). Women's economic power is also curtailed by discrimination against their right to own, access, control and inherit land and property (Mbilizi, 2013). Whatever their ethnic group, women in Malawi have less power within the home, are less likely to inherit and own property and are primarily responsible for domestic chores and childcare in addition to tending to the family plot. Overall, gender differences in access to and control of property mean female-headed households have 14% less consumption per capita than male-headed households (Government of Malawi, 2011).

Malawian women and girls are also subject to various forms of **gender-based violence** (GBV): 16% experience physical violence only, 13% experience sexual violence only and 12% experience both physical and sexual violence (NSO and ICF Macro, 2010). And yet only 30% of such cases are prosecuted (Kalinde, 2013). Meanwhile, 65% of girls and 35% of boys experience some form of abuse during their childhood (NSO and ICF Macro, 2010).

2.2 Post-1994 trends in political representation, and the 2014 election

In descriptive terms, **multiparty politics has improved women's political representation.** There has been a slow but steady increase in the number of women MPs in the National Assembly, from just 10 after the first multiparty election in 1994 (5.6% of the total) to a peak of 43 in 2009 (22.3%).

On **20 May 2014**, Malawi held a **tripartite election** for the presidency, the National Assembly and district councils. This was closely fought and hard to predict, with the result delayed because of allegations of irregularities. Finally, on 30 May, the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) announced Peter Mutharika (DPP) had won with 36.4% of the vote. With 50 out of 193 seats, the **DPP was also the largest party in the National Assembly** but it fell far short of an overall majority and was closely followed by the MCP (48 seats). The PP and UDF won only 26 seats and 14 seats, respectively, and AFORD just one. Notably, independent MPs formed the biggest group in parliament after the election, with 52 MPs.

Women MPs won just 32 seats (16.6% of the total), reducing their proportion by 25% compared with the previous parliament (Table 1). These women MPs represented 12.1% of female candidates, slightly lower than the 15.6% of male aspirants who won seats (in 2009, women candidates had a slightly higher chance of winning, at 17% compared with 16%) (NGO-GCN, 2009). This indicates that, overall, women's chances of winning elections are not that dissimilar to men's, but far fewer women (257) competed than men (1,033) (MEC, 2014).

The **differences in women's representation are relatively narrow** across the three main **administrative regions** – Central (15%), South (17%), and Northern (18%) – and 4 main **political parties** – DPP (8 MPs, 16%), MCP (6 MPs, 12.5%), PP (5 MPs, 18.5%) and UDF (2 MPs, 13.3%). Notably, independent MPs also formed the largest grouping of women after the election (21.6%, 11/52). However, two women MPs have since joined the ruling DPP, as have 18 male MPs (the DPP also won two new seats in the 20 October 2014 parliamentary by-elections). There are **variations between districts**, however: the range is from 0% women MPs in 10 districts to 50% in one district (where there are only two MPs). Notably, only two women hold urban seats.

3. Factors that explain women's access to parliament

This section discusses the main factors enabling and constraining women's ability to become MPs in Malawi. These include socioeconomic status, gender norms and leadership, women MPs' own beliefs and behaviour, perceptions and beliefs of party leaders and officials, the political economy of the electoral process, and women's capabilities and campaign strategies.

3.1 Socioeconomic status

The surveyed MPs reported different ethnic backgrounds but their **basic socioeconomic profile is similar:** educated, middle-aged women who are practising Christians and married. All who married (95%) did so after the age of 18 and have children (and 70% have three or more children).[4]

The education level of women MPs' parents is low in absolute terms (36% of fathers and 64% of mothers had completed only primary) but high compared with their contemporaries. While only 23% have a parent with higher education, the majority have at least one who is/was in professional employment (59%) and/or owned a business (32%). Married women MPs' husbands are also white-collar, including civil servants (32%), current or retired politicians (21%) and business owners (9%). All the women have secondary education, putting them in the top quintile by wealth in Malawi (Chimombo, 2014), and 77% have completed higher education.[5]

The women had **varied careers prior to standing**, largely in professional roles, with a fairly even split across the private and the public sector but a notable proportion of teachers (32%) (see Figure 1).

The socioeconomic similarities of the current cohort of MPs suggest **political power is open to a relative narrow group in Malawi.** Some factors relate to **class** (e.g. education and prior career) and some to conformity with **societal expectations** (e.g. being married with children). In other developing countries also, women MPs also tend to be educated, married and from professional, middle-class or elite families (Tadros, 2014).

3.2 Gender norms and leadership

Malawi ranks 170 of 187 on the UN's Human Development Index and 51% of the population is categorised as poor (HRW, 2014). Over 80% of Malawians live in rural areas, although this is set to change (Manda, 2015). Only 31% of girls and 45% of boys complete their primary education, and only 7% and 15% upper secondary respectively. 51 out of every 100,000 Malawians enrol in university, compared to the regional average of 337 (World Bank, 2010).

Ethnic identity, kinship relations and tradition shape the lives of Malawians, particularly in rural areas. Traditional chiefs are powerful figures, whose administrative, judicial and cultural functions are legally recognised and generate for them a government honorarium (Cammack et al., 2009). Most Malawians regularly attend a place of worship, giving religious leaders the opportunity to also shape their worldview and moral codes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, **Malawi is a socially conservative country**, including in relation to dominant beliefs and norms about the 'natural' roles and capabilities of the different sexes and **women's subordinate status to men.**

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4   Around 23% of girls in Malawi aged 15-19 (but less than 2% of boys) marry before their 20th birthday (UNICEF and NSO, 2006) (and in 2010 50% of women aged 20-24 were married 'or in union' before 18 (HRW, 2014)). The MPs therefore married and had children later than the median woman of their age group, in general and for the highest socioeconomic quintile (NSO and ICF Macro, 2010).

5   Similarly, a needs assessment of the 2009-2014 cohort of women MPs found that all 32 respondents (from a possible total of 43 MPs) had secondary education and 62.5% had higher education (Mbilizi, 2011).

Figure 1: Women MP's main career prior to standing for parliament
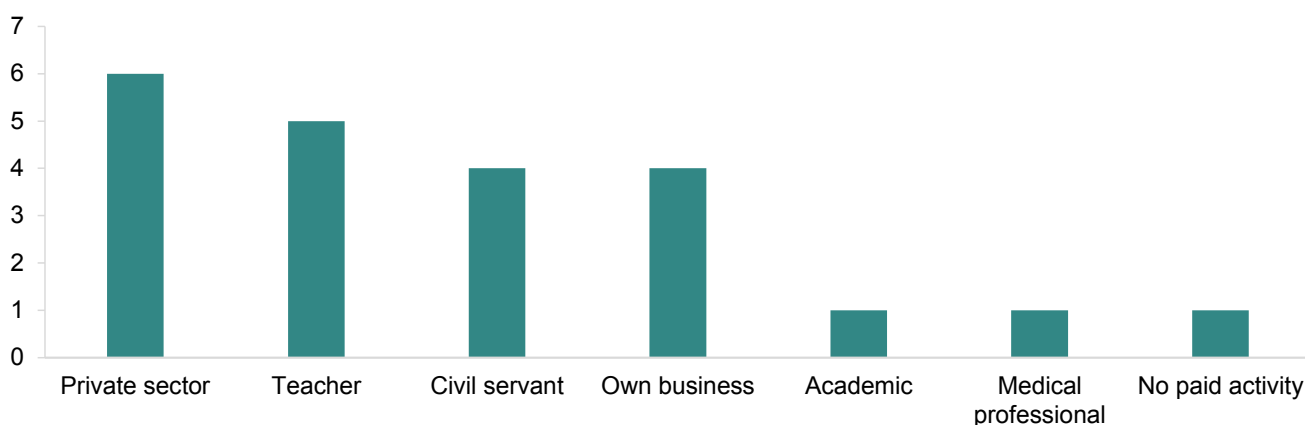
Source: Survey data

These gender norms mean **Malawian voters are likely to see women as less credible leaders and representatives than men**. Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo (2014) found prejudice against women leaders, particularly in relation to positions with more power, and that voters expected women leaders to have attributes such as 'being culturally presentable, polite, respectful, working extra hard, speaking properly', grounded in cultural understandings of a 'good' or 'proper' Malawian woman, in addition to those they looked for in men, such as honesty, reliability, humility, good education and being supportive of the electorate (p.6).

Several women MPs also said women were seen as less able to lead than men in Malawi (e.g. MP #2, #6, #7, #11, #15, #20), and emphasised the **need for women to act accordingly to gender norms about what it is to be a 'good' Malawian woman**. This is particularly the case when MPs interact with their constituents:

When you are in a leadership position in Africa, it is not all that easy. […] We are called all sorts of names. We are not accepted in this society, they are regarded as positions for men. Ladies are told to go home and look after the children and domestic responsibilities (MP #7).

Therefore, women MPs must have traits commonly associated with men but also fit the stereotype of a good woman[6] – with the very act of campaigning compelling women to transgress gender norms (e.g. stopping out late, staying away from home). Women who deviate from dominant gender norms are viewed as less of a woman. One MP told us that male colleagues said '*this one is a women in body, but in the mind she is a man*' because she

is strong, intelligent and successful (MP #1). A male MP told us, '*That one is a man*' (male MP #1).

Meanwhile, **although women are seen as less able to lead than men, voters appear to expect more from them.** Women leaders are subject to greater scrutiny than their male counterparts (Dulani and Chunga, 2015), including by the media (Malawi Institute of Management, 2013). The reaction to the 'Cashgate' corruption scandal that came to the public attention in 2013 shows these double standards at work. While the scandal was unusual in its magnitude, Joyce Banda is not the first Malawian president to be publicly implicated in grand corruption; also, the theft extends back before her tenure. Several interviewees, MPs and others, said Cashgate had damaged public perceptions of Banda, either because she was implicated or because she could not exert authority over her government. Some informants also commented that the **public assessment of Banda was generalised to women more broadly:** two informants speculated that the 'JB effect' explained the drop in women MPs in 2014 (MP #6, KII #1). Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo (2014) also found Malawian voters expected women to be more honest and therefore saw less value in voting for women following Cashgate.

Similarly, one of our informants said Banda's actions were seen as representative of her sex rather than her or her party's political interests, in a manner that would not be the case for man:

Whenever there is a problem, they [voters] say, 'Can you see women and what they are doing?' If it was a man, they would say "DPP or whatever' … Any small mistake, there was an extra level of scrutiny [for Joyce Banda] (KII #3).

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6   Voters identify Minister for Gender Patricia Kaliati as an example of a good women leader: 'She attends funerals, wears a *chitenje* [traditional Malawian cloth/dress], sits with the women and cooks with them. She can be voted for by male and female voters anywhere in Malawi. She is both male and female' (Male respondent, cited in Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014: 26).

Ribohn (2002) argues **women's association with rural community and tradition in Malawi explains these double standards.** As the 'keepers of tradition', women's 'mistakes are judged more severely […] by acting outside of local value-systems, a woman who makes mistakes threatens social relations' (pp.171-172). Despite the rights discourse that accompanied the democratic transition, many Malawians continue to 'gender culture' based on unchanging roles and customs (ibid.).

The Afrobarometer survey, the **main source of data on public attitudes towards female leadership** over this period in Malawi, provides some support for the conclusion that Banda's tenure had a negative effect on women's leadership. While there were only slight changes in response to the two questions on attitudes towards female political leadership between 2005/06 and 2011/13, there was a strong decline in perceptions of women's leadership between 2011/13 and 2014/15. However, one long-term gender activist claimed Cashgate had provided a convenient cover for sexism: '*There's a stereotype that women cannot be a leader. The issues have been there for time immemorial and no-one talks about them but now there's an excuse to not put women in power*' (KII #8).

3.3 Gender norms and women MPs' own beliefs and behaviour

It is thus a fair assumption that w**omen parliamentarians need self-belief and courage** – and our research bears this out. All the MPs made statements that show their sense of self-worth and confidence in their abilities. For example, '*If I believe that the people I represent have the right to a particular thing, nothing will stop me. That's not to do with me being a women but the fire burning inside me*' (MP #21). A significant proportion of the women (41%) also made explicit statements about their **personal leadership ability** – '*I am self-driven and self-motivated. I have always believed that I have leadership skills*' (MP #17) – and their resilience in the face of gender discrimination and expectations – '*I am a fighter and I don't bow down*' (MP #22).

Our data do not allow us to draw firm conclusions about the sources of women's self-belief, but some observations are possible. There is a heavy emphasis in the women's empowerment literature on the importance of **female role models** (O'Neil and Plank, 2015). However, few of the MPs spoke of these unprompted; those who did described a relationship with senior male politicians.[7] When explicitly asked if someone had inspired them to enter politics, only 18% (four MPs) mentioned other women politicians.[8]

Some women had relatives who were or had been elected politicians, but these were almost always men.

However, the **mothers** of a significant minority (36%) of the surveyed women MPs had worked outside the home. Having mothers who did not conform to the norm may have shaped the expectations of their children about gender roles and women's potential. Also notable, the mothers of 18% had completed higher education, a figure that far outstrips the national average for women with higher education.[9] For the women themselves, there was no clear association between **education level** and confidence – although those with higher education were more likely to say they were '*born a leader*' (MP #14) than talk about how they had learnt leadership skills.

Some MPs' comments suggest tensions arise when gender norms are in flux and women assume leadership roles, including in their own views and behaviour. Those who were more vocal in asserting their leadership credentials also explicitly rejected being subservient to their peers (e.g. in parliament, cabinet or ministries) and were indignant when male subordinates challenged their authority:

The constituency people, the political party, they don't listen to you. They think they want to tell you […] I reached the point where I had to gather every member of my constituency and ask them, 'Constituency chairman, have you ever been an MP? No. So what make you think you will tell me what to do?' […] The male MPs […] shout at these people, tell them off. But we are told to sit down […] So there is an assumption that, because I am a woman, I should, because the space I'm occupying, it's not my space. I'm always an invited guest […] They remind you every day that, remember, 'You are a woman, you are a woman politician. You are not a politician, you are a woman politician' (MP #1).

Most striking, however, are the MPs who demonstrate **both extreme confidence in their leadership abilities in the public domain alongside a need to conform in family life** to hierarchical gender norms. For example, one MP described her leadership style:

I made sure I would not even allow a man to sit on my programme […] and they have got to understand that I am in charge' but later reflected on how she managed potential tensions with her husband: '*Sometimes men can have all sorts complexes that I try to accommodate and not take myself as a high profile. I make sure that I suit the environment so that I do not annoy him [...]*'

7   For instance, they were their personal assistant and then asked to stand for a political position in the party, or they went to a prominent MP for help.

8   Patricia Kaliati (Minister for Gender) (two MPs), Joyce Banda and Margaret Thatcher.

9   Data from 1998 show only 0.25% of Malawian women at that time had completed some form of post-secondary education – suggesting MPs are more likely to come from families with unusually high levels of female education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, retrieved January 2016).

and this is what we tell our women, whenever you want to be in a top position yourself, you've got to take themselves [sic] down to the ground when they are in their homes' (MP #13).

3.4 Perceptions and behaviour of political party leaders and officials

Prior to voting, and just as critical to women's representation, is **whether political parties nominate women candidates in the first place,** and in constituencies where they have a chance of winning.

Malawian has a simple majoritarian (single-round, first-past-the-post) system to elect MPs to its National Assembly. Although this system is known to disadvantage women and minorities relative to proportion representation and mixed systems (Reynolds et al., 2005), neither the constitution nor electoral and party law provides for positive measures to increase women's representation, such as quotas, reserved seats or all-women shortlists. **Parties therefore have no legal obligation to promote women's representation, and have taken few steps to do so.**

Most political party constitutions have no express provision emphasising non-discrimination on the basis of gender. Some also do not include the objective of promoting equal participation of women in decision-making. None of the parties has adopted voluntary affirmative action of any form, and most party structures reserve few, if any, places for female members (Kanyongolo, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, **few women have leadership positions within Malawian political parties.** Their formal participation is often confined to supportive roles within the party 'women's wing'. While these are comparatively well organised, their relegation to the role of support and mobilisation means they ultimately do not bolster women's influence or leadership. For example, almost all the parties rely on the women's wing to dance at party meetings and political rallies. The role of the women's wings is also not officially well articulated, making it difficult for women to use them to advance their political and career interests within the party or even as a base to advocate women's collective position within the party (Kanyongolo, 2009).

Our survey finds **women MPs do not emerge from within the ranks of their party,** women's wings or otherwise. Party membership in Malawi is difficult to pin down. People do not hold cards or pay fees, so they may see themselves as aligned with a party but not as 'members'. However, only 14% of the women surveyed

(three MPs) reported being active in political parties for a long time before their first campaign. Importantly, men also dominate positions that play a central role in selection processes, such as district governor.[10] Our survey shows, then, that, rather than women coming from within the party they currently represent (only 1 MP), either a party asks them to stand (41%), the women themselves approach the party (41%) or they decide to stand as independents from the outset (14%).

A question arises, then, as to why parties choose to nominate women at all. As we did not interview party officials and the secondary literature focuses on barriers to women's participation, we can only speculate on this. For example, one of the party campaign directors in 2014 reflected that the key objective for a political party is to win elections and MPs are their main tools. His party would therefore select woman candidate only if she is seen to have the capabilities to beat male candidates, and that this was a rarity because of Malawian culture, education background and attitudes (KII x 1). What is clear is the positions and behaviour of parties and their leaders in relation to women's representation had a **direct relationship to the rise in women MPs in 2009 and their fall in 2014** – and the interaction of gender norms and electoral incentives shapes these positions.

Since 1994, Malawian electoral politics have been mostly peaceful, but they are increasingly competitive – a trend heightened by **fragmentation of the party system** over the past 10 years. Three regionally based parties won seats in the National Assembly in the first multiparty elections: the UDF, the MCP and AFORD. With only one seat remaining in the Assembly, AFORD is no longer a political force.

The MCP's Assembly seats have remained relatively constant since 1994, as have its votes in the presidential election: insufficient to give it a majority in either case. However, the UDF, which ruled for 11 years, has split into thee different parties over time: President Bingu wa Mutharika formed the DPP in 2005; and Vice-President Joyce Banda formed the PP in 2010 after estrangement from President Mutharika (and then assumed the presidency at the head of the PP following Mutharika's sudden death in 2012).[11]

Waning support for the UDF in the late 1990s, followed by successive splits in the parties, means **elections in Malawi have become increasing competitive and unpredictable.** The UDF and DPP still have strongholds, but the seats outside these have become electoral battlegrounds where voters make choices based on personalities. The more even distribution of power has led to much smaller

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10 A current woman MP is a past district governor and told us she was the first one in *any* of the political parties .

11 Only after members of the DPP, including the late president's brother and current president of Malawi and the DPP, Peter Mutharika, attempted to conceal the death of the president and prevent Banda from assuming the presidency, as mandated by the constitution. Due process was followed after the intervention of the judiciary and the international community (Government of Malawi, 2013).

margins between winning and losing parties and hung (or near-hung) parliaments (Chirwa, 2014).

The **2009 election was an exception in this longer-term trend:** President Mutharika and the DPP went into it with widespread support, following an economic uplift and bumper harvests, and won with 65% of the vote, bucking previous (and future) ethno-regional voting trends. Informants suggested the DPP provided its candidates with campaign resources and its landslide victory was the main factor in the increase in the number of women MPs from 27 in 2004 to 43 in 2009 (KII #2, #3, KII #8). This is plausible: 31 of the 43 MPs in the 2009 Assembly were DPP (Kanyongolo, 2009).

By contrast, the unpredictability of the **2014 election,** which extended to some stronghold seats, meant **parties were much less willing to field women candidates,** who they believed were less likely than men to win. For example, one informant recounted how *'A female candidate was told straight in her face, you will not manage that competition, it's a male competition [...] All of them [the parties] think the real competition is among men'* (KII #1). What is clear is the four main political parties did not take specific steps to promote women candidates in 2014 (Chisoni, n.d.; NGO-GCN, 2009) or to place them in constituencies where they were most likely to win.

In spite of dominant perceptions, women candidates can win when parties field them in their core constituencies – and can even win outside these. **Overall, they also have similar chances as men of winning** (Kayuni and Muriaas, 2014),[12] despite the fact that, proportionally, parties nominate more women in seats outside the region where they have most support and the best chance of winning. Overall, 20.3% of parliamentary candidates were women, with relatively little variance by individual political parties. Women have significantly less chance of winning in some parties than others, though (e.g. just 5.9% won in the UDF; 21.2% won in the DPP), and also a much lower probability of winning than men in some parties (12.9% lower in the DPP but just 2.8% lower for the UDF).[13]

However, the regional patterns of party support and voting mean aggregate figures are misleading and tell us little about a woman's actual chance of winning a particular seat. Breaking party figures down by region shows **all parties are fielding proportionally fewer women in regions where they have the most support** (their strongholds) than in the regions where they have either less or no chance of winning. For example, the PP nominated

women for only 9.1% of the seats in North region, where it had most support, compared with 32% in Central region, where it won the least seats. The MCP had 72.2% of its women candidates in South and East regions, where it won no seats (authors' own calculations based on MEC candidate lists and parliamentary results).

This suggests lower numbers of women in parliament have **more to do with parties fielding fewer women than men, and systematically doing so in strongholds seats, than with voters rejecting women leaders.**[14] Nonetheless, the regional party figures still show differences between the chances of women and male candidates winning, even in strongholds. Since the parties do not completely dominate regions, the figures need to be disaggregated further to see which seats women and men were nominated for, then comparing this with the party's chance of winning that seat.

3.5 Political economy of the electoral process

Our survey indicates formal and informal rules interact in other ways during the electoral process to influence distribution of power, behaviour and outcomes, including for women candidates.

First, for Malawian-born candidates, **being seen by voters to 'belong' to a constituency is a necessary condition for election.** All the surveyed Malawian-born MPs have contested or held seats *only* in their or their husband's 'home' constituencies. This indicates how the importance of ethnicity, kinship and place to political and social relationships in Malawi combines with electoral rules to shape selection processes.[15] The one exception to this rule is instructive: Rumphi West has a Dutch-born MP – although she has long-standing and close ties with the community, which enabled her to succeed in 2014 in spite of her competitors' attempts to discredit her as a 'foreigner'. The need for MPs to belong presents particular disadvantages for women from patrilocal communities, who will tend to stand in their husband's home district.

Second, dominant gender norms create **discrimination and sexism during their campaign period.** Almost 60% of the MPs said competing camps had used 'hate speech' to try to discredit them during their campaign. Three MPs (14%) said other women candidates had used negative campaigning against them. This is sometimes associated with what Malawians term 'Pull Her Down Syndrome', whereby women do not support, or actively cut down,

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12 In 2014, women candidates had less chances of winning than men but by a relatively small margin (12.1% and 15.6%, respectively); in 2009, women had more chances of winning than men (17% and 16%, respectively).

13 Women candidates who stood as independents had a 1.2% higher chance of winning than men, but independent candidates had an only 11.7% chance of winning overall.

14 Notably, 69% of surveyed women also won the first time they stood for election. This is a stark contrast with Western democracies, where a candidate will often need to stand (and fail) in a marginal party seat before being selected for the party stronghold.

15 The incentives for candidate selection, including considerations about ethnicity and ancestry, would be different in the context of different electoral rules (e.g. proportional representation or a mixed electoral system).

women who rise too high or do not conform (MP #13, #9; KII #5, #12). Often, **gendered language and tactics are used to 'de-campaign' women candidates**. This can be direct, for example when competitors focus on morality and 'proper' behaviour for women, with a common insult being that women who campaign are 'prostitutes'. It can also be indirect, as when women parliamentarians from groups with patrilocal/virilocal customs are exposed to accusations of '*not being from here*' (MP #2, #12, #21).

Third, **poor administration of primary elections,** by both the parties and the MEC, fuels their personalisation and unpredictability. Constitutional and statutory law sets basic conditions for parliamentary candidates[16] but, beyond these, parties are responsible for establishing and implementing rules for candidate selection and nomination (Svasand, 2013). Personal beliefs, preferences and influence within the party can thus have a significant influence on the outcome.

Ballots are not secret; they usually involve candidates lining with supporters behind them (MP #1). As parties do not have a clearly defined membership, it is not always possible to identify the legitimate voters in the constituency primaries (Gloppen et al., 2006). It is therefore possible for

candidates and their sponsors to bring in additional people to vote. Manipulation can also be less subtle, for example people being pushed from one candidate line to another (MP #20).

A third of the women surveyed who had stood in primaries **complained of irregularities,** often related to disputes between candidates with local support and the senior party leader's preferred candidate. Meanwhile, the chameleon nature of politics in Malawi, where politicians and voters can change their party colour to suit the situation (Englund, 2002a), and the likelihood that a candidate will come from outside the party mean primaries are singularly personalised, and not a contest of ideas and personalities from *within* a party as found in more established democracies with institutionalised parties.[17]

Fourth, in the absence of rules on party financing (Svasand, 2013), the unpredictability of elections and their increased personalisation have driven up the **cost of campaigns**. Malawi seems locked into electoral cycles characterised by ever-more unproductive clientelism. Candidates both over-promise and try to attract voters with private hand-outs and communal goods, as well as other displays of wealth (Mwenda, 2014). Voters respond by not only expecting hand-outs but also penalising MPs who do not deliver on their promises. This has led to an extremely high turnover in parliament and a phenomenon of one-term MPs: a staggering 86% of incumbent women were not returned in 2014.[18]

What is more, the **bulk of the campaign cost falls on the individual candidate** (Box 3), particularly for opposition candidates and MPs, who cannot rely on access to state resources or 'donations' from the party leadership.[19] Women MPs said parties gave them no financial support during primaries and little or none during the general election. The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare[20] and others successfully lobbied for the registration fees to be lowered slightly for women candidates (from MWK 200,000 to MWK 150,000). The NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO-GCN) (with funding from the Royal Norwegian Embassy (RNE)) gave all women candidates a small number of campaign materials and MWK 200,000 to pay their fees. A minority of women received in-kind support from third parties, such as from a printing business (MP #3).

Box 3: Common campaign expenses during primary and general elections

- Transport and fuel (constituencies are often large and candidates must visit all areas several times)
- Travel and other expenses (food, drink for party officials)
- In-kind (food, drinks, entertainment) or cash hand-outs for during rallies, meetings, meet and greets)
- Campaign materials (cloth/*chitenje*, caps, t-shirts, banners, flyers)
- Community inputs (club goods) (boreholes, sports equipment)
- Telecommunications (air time)
- Nomination fee, legal fees,
- Possibly also hidden 'expenses' or payments.

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16 Malawi citizen, 21 years or above, able to speak and read English, registered voter.

17 A low registration threshold and poor electoral administration have also contributed to disputes during party primary elections and a rise in independent candidates. But, overall, the chance of women winning a seat as an independent (12.6% of independent candidates won a seat) is far lower than it is on a party ticket (18.2% for the DPP, 29.6% for the MCP).

18 In 2009, only a quarter of MPs (both sexes) retained their seats (Chirwa, 2014), and only 7% of incumbent women did, although the DPP landslide would also have affected this figure. The retention rates for women MPs were higher in previous parliaments (22% in 2004, and 23% in 1999) (UN Women, 2015).

19 The MCP seems particularly short of financing, unsurprising since it has been out of government since 1994, but MPs from all parties reported that, other than some party materials and moral support during rallies, they received little to nothing from their party. The exceptions in 2014 were PP MPs: one said they received cash from Joyce Banda, but only close to the election day.

20 Henceforth, Ministry of Gender (but noting that the Ministry has had several past names changes, including Ministry of Women).

The **cost of campaigning was the issue male and female MPs raised most** about their experience of standing for parliament, with three-quarters of women MPs saying it was the main obstacle to their becoming an MP. Over a third of the MPs said the personal investment needed put women at a significant disadvantage because they had less access to resources than men; a view shared by key informants (e.g. KII #5, #9, #10). Women are not only **less likely to have independent earnings and de facto control of assets**, and to be concentrated in lower-paid (caring) profession (e.g. teaching) when they do work. Women are also **less able to raise funds through loans or by accessing male-dominated networks**. One informant told us, '*Not many investors would put in resources to a female candidate because they believe the man will make it and they will have returns*' (KII #9). Another informant reflected how gendered norms of propriety for married women can restrict their ability to network and bargain (KII #5).

3.6 Women's past experiences, capabilities and campaign strategies

Women's non-material resources and their backgrounds and experiences influence their current capabilities and the success of their campaign. While there is a trend towards MPs being more educated, higher education is not necessary to be an MP or even a minister, as one of the women MPs showed. However, **education does appear to matter for women's self-confidence and their credibility** – and it is instructive that three of the surveyed women MPs without higher education are now studying for degrees part time.

Education level is also likely to be relevant to MPs' **communication skills**. Malawians frequently cite being a 'good speaker' as something they look for in their MPs

(Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014). Politicians must also be skilled at adapting both the style and the content of what they say to different audiences. For example, MPs sometimes spoke of tailoring their language to their constituents to persuade voters, such as using metaphors with resonance to their lives in order to get messages across (e.g. MP #21). Another MP described how she had deliberately addressed potential voters in their mother tongue: '*The people looked at me with suspicion, as an outsider from town. But once I stood to address them, I decided to use the local language […] and the crowd broke into a dance […] I had been accepted* (MP #18).

Whereas the basic profile of women MPs is similar, their prior experiences are much more diverse. This is often linked to career choices but also to their family background and husband's career. Over half the women (59%) have a **history of political activism in their family**. This includes three MPs (14%) whose mothers were party activists and four (18%) with close relatives who are currently MPs.

In terms of **professional experience,** 14% (three MPs) had lived overseas and worked in international development organisations, and another had travelled frequently as a volunteer with development non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Six (27%) had been involved in community development and social work as members or founders of charities or development organisations. Five (23%) had been teachers, including two college professors and one secondary school head, and six (27%) had previous managerial experience, including a senior civil servant and business owners. One MP (5%) was a journalist and radio broadcaster.

A significant minority had **previously held leadership positions of different types:** three (14%) in church organisations and two (9%) in student associations. Around a third of the women MPs had been union members, although only two said they were active. Two MPs (9%) had held high-level state positions (first lady and UN deputy permanent representative). One (5%) had been president of a party and had stood as a presidential candidate's running mate. 95% of MPs participate in faith-based organisations, most often women's groups within the Catholic Church; this is the only common feature in the MPs' **associational life.**

Our data do not allow us to draw systematic comparisons between MPs' backgrounds and experiences and their current capabilities. However, our **qualitative data** indicate **past experiences provide different opportunities for women MPs to acquire political skills and resources** – as Box 4 shows. This is consistent with other findings on the importance of women's 'political apprenticeship' (Cornwall and Goetz, 2005) to their future effectiveness – that is, the diverse experiences women have outside of formal political organisations that contribute to their political opportunities and capabilities (e.g. Fallon, 2008; Tadros, 2011).

Box 4: Past experiences build women MPs political skills and resources

'I'm lucky because I have public speaking skills. I'm a teacher, and I'm also someone who is very confident. I have been in politics forever, but it's not that I was ever in organised politics.'

'There is no module for politics. It's something you learn as you go. For me, I am a community nurse, so I know how to interact with a community. You don't tell me how to dress.'

'Public speaking in my case is not a problem. As a leader, and also I preach. I can preach in front of thousands in a church, so I'm not intimidated. That's an advantage.'

'[From] my human resources background and 35 years in the civil service, I know how people behave. I know how to handle them'.

Source: Survey data

The different past experiences of the women MPs also provide opportunities to build relationships with different types of people and organisations, enabling them to **build up different types and amounts of social capital.** All politicians need social capital but arguably it is even more important in countries like Malawi, where personal relationships and influence have an even greater premium than is usual in politics and also MPs have limited support from parties before or after their election. Women candidates must thus harness their own personal and social resource to try to build or consolidate their local networks and structures, secure support from party leaders, finance their campaigns and mobilise a core constituency of voters – particularly given that 90% of surveyed MPs either came from outside of party structures or stood as independents.

Some MPs described how they had worked through **party structures** (MP #9, #10, #11, #14);[21] some (independent candidates) had set up **organisational structures** from scratch (MP #16, #22);[22] others highlighted relationships with traditional or religious leaders (e.g. MP #7, #8, #14, #22). Some women get around the problem of exclusion from male-dominated networks by 'borrowing' (Bjarnegard, 2014) or **piggy-backing on men's networks** (e.g. MP #7). Some spoke of how they had raised small amounts of finance from **third parties,** such as local businesses or private donors (e.g. MP #3, #20, #22).[23] The majority (59%) reported using their **own or their family resources** to fund their campaign, however, including three women who were using their retirement funds.

Turning to what candidates spent their money on and their campaign strategy, only a minority *appear* to have relied primarily on **building support through providing material assistance to constituents**[24] – mostly in the form of small community or individual 'gifts' (e.g. MP #12, #15, #22). More talked about how they were unable to base their campaign on hand-outs and material gestures and instead relied on their **long-standing presence and reputation in the community,** with both church and community work appearing important to their credibility. They also stressed their campaign message and how this focused on their continued work with the community (e.g. MP #2, #3, #8, #9, #21). Finally, at least two MPs had been able to harness a **national profile** to demonstrate credibility and build a constituency (MP #1, #4).

Notably, MPs did not discuss gauging public opinion and adapting activities to respond to it. One informant said lack of 'real-time' research and information was a problem (KII #9).

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21 Notably, three of these are MCP MPs.

22 This includes one woman who drew on earlier experience of establishing party structures.

23 One MP stood out for using Facebook to fundraise for her campaign.

24 However, some campaign finances are unavoidable, such as fuel and meeting costs. Note also this is based on what MPs chose to tell us of their campaign experiences. It is also not to suggest women are any less inclined to political clientelism and patronage but they may be less likely to have the resources to make this the central plank of their strategy.

4. International and domestic support to women's access to parliament

This section looks at the role of international and domestic support in increasing women's political representation and to aspiring women MPs before and during their campaigns.

4.1 Main international actors and sources of funding

There has been relatively **little attention to women and politics** in Malawi since the transition to multiparty politics. In recent years, development partners have contributed primarily through an **electoral support basket fund,** managed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), to support the activities of the MEC.[25] Funds went separately to **women's political participation:** a women's political empowerment fund and a Joint UN Gender Workplan to support gender mainstreaming through the Ministry of Gender. However, following two consecutive UNDP reviews, in August 2015 the women's political empowerment fund was merged with the elections basket fund (but relevant activities remain under the control of the Ministry of Gender).

The main Malawian partners, Ministry of Gender and NGO-GCN, have long advocated for maintaining a separate fund for women but the UN has found it difficult to mobilise resources for this, with agencies relying mostly on core funds for such activities. In addition, the UN sees the merger as an opportunity for gender activists to ensure greater prominence of women's representation throughout the electoral cycle, including in civic education and electoral reform processes (KII x 1).

In 2013, **UN Women** set up an office in Malawi, including a women's political participation programme.

The only other donor with significant activities in the area is **RNE,** which has provided support both through the UNDP fund and directly to NGO-GCN. Others with some activities in this area include Oxfam, the Scottish government and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

A final avenue for assistance with women's political participation is **political party support.** For example, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funds the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD) to work directly or indirectly on women's political decision-making and representation, such as on the Political Parties Act, campaign financing and party positions on women's leadership. Germany has invested small amounts of money, on an *ad hoc* basis, in support of the Young Politicians Union, a bipartisan NGO set up in 2001 to support inter-party dialogue and peaceful elections.

4.2 NGO-GCN and the 50/50 Campaign

Formalisation of **NGO-GCN** was one of the first post-transition initiatives to improve coordination and capacity around women's empowerment and gender equality. NGO-GCN began as a loose network of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on women's rights and gender equality. With funding from RNE, it became a formal organisation in 1998. It has a permanent secretariat, with 10 staff, and an eight-person elected board. Its 53 current member organisations are organised into five permanent thematic committees, including one on Women in Politics and Decision-Making.[26] These manage projects related to their theme, including deciding how to distribute

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25 The UK is contributing £6.3 million to the fund between 2012 and 2017: http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk

26 Committee members are: Association of Progressive Women, Bawaymi Women's Group, Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation, Civil Liberties Committee, Gender Support Programme, National Elections Systems Trust, National Women's Lobby Group and Pan-Africa Civic Educators.

funding and activities among members, with oversight by the secretariat and the board (KII #1, #4, #10).

Prominent network members have been advocating for many years for action on gender equality. SADC meetings and commitments have provided a focal point for lobbying since the 1999 elections. In 2004/05, CSOs from Malawi and other Southern African countries started campaigning to transform the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) into a Protocol, with legal obligations for signatories. This was finally achieved in 2008. Malawi ratified the Protocol, which included a 50% target for women's representation, in 2009 (KII #8). While it has the weak monitoring and enforcement associated with regional and international instruments, it has been instrumental in advocacy around the 50/50 Campaign and enactment of the Gender Equality Act (2013).

In 2008, the then-Ministry of Women and Child Development launched the National Programme on Increasing Women's Representation in Parliament and Local Government (known as the **50/50 Campaign**), with NGO-GCN and the Development Assistance Group on Gender, to facilitate various actors to empower women as partners and key players in national and local decision-making.

The 50/50 Campaign has brought more strategic focus to external and domestic support to women's political empowerment, which was previously *ad hoc* and uncoordinated (KII #2). Through it, the Ministry of Gender and NGO-GCN have become the focal point for donor efforts to support women's representation in the run-up to the past two elections. Several agencies have contributed financial and technical support, including Canada and Germany (2009) and RNE, UNDP and UNFPA (2009 and 2014), as well as ActionAid, Oxfam and Danish Church Aid. The **campaign has had three prongs:** (i) support to individual women candidates – material, psychological, exposure and capacity development; (ii) civic education, mainly through newspapers and radio; and (iii) engaging with party leaders (Box 5).

However, activities have focused more on increasing the supply of women candidates than on increasing demand for them through changing attitudes towards women's leadership or advocating mandatory or voluntary quotas (Kayuni and Muriaas, 2014). Activities have also been sporadic; they typically begin around a year before the election and finish a few months following it, with no ongoing programme to work with incumbents and voters between (KII #10; EISA, 2013).

Despite the disappointing results in 2014, informants felt the 2014 50/50 Campaign had been the most meaningful so far, with concerted efforts to advance the agenda of women in decision-making. However, they also said **the Ministry of Gender and NGO-GCN did not have the capacity to effectively manage and coordinate policy development, advocacy and implementation** (KII #1, #9).

Box 5: 50/50 Campaign – activities around the 2009 and 2014 elections

These activities are funded by development partners and implemented by NGO-GCN

Support to candidates

- Campaign materials (t-shirts, cloths, flyers, banners)
- Cash payments to candidates (MWK 92,000 in 2009; MWK 200,000 in 2014)
- Mentoring and exposure (organising community meetings, development of manifesto, training, psychological support, strategic advice)
- Monitors for women candidates (two each) (2014 only)
- Radio time for women candidates (three minutes to talk about their manifesto, broadcast on major radio stations) (2009 only)
- Legal support to enable women to challenge results where appropriate (2014 only)
- Orientation for the incumbent (2009 only)

Civic education

- Media campaign (print, radio)
- Meetings with traditional and religious leaders

Cross-party lobbying

- Meetings with party leaders
- Development of cross-party communiqué to support women's leadership (2014)*

Research

- Needs assessment of women parliamentarians (UN Women, 2015)
- Study of voter behaviour after the 2014 election (Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014)
- Training needs assessment of women MPs (Mbilizi, 2011)
- Needs assessment of aspirants (Nawanga, 2008)

Note:

* This was never made public because the PP would not sign. Without support from the ruling party and the (female) president, it was felt its release would have done more damage than good to women's chances of being elected (KII #2). Informants also reflected that even parties that signed or agreed in meetings to support women candidates did not take action in practice (KII #1, #8).

An independent evaluation of the 2014 campaign is being carried out but the report was not available at the time of writing. However, previous assessments broadly agree with this view, finding the 50/50 Campaign to be critical in raising awareness and supporting individual women candidates but with improvement needed in several areas, including coordination and reporting by partners, coverage, messaging, civic education, engagement with party and traditional/religious leaders, tailoring of training and profiling and ongoing support to elected women MPs (Chisoni, n.d.; EISA, 2013; MGCCD, 2009; NGO-GCN, 2009; Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014).

The Ministry of Gender and the NGO-GCN chair and secretariat appear to have a productive working relationship, on SADC processes and lobbying, for instance (KII #8), with good opportunities for the network to influence the ministry: 'I think we do have the opportunity to link in to the highest level of decision-making […] because the [50/50] campaign has always taken in not just the Ministry for Gender but also female members and other members of parliament […] There's an opportunity, but not utilised to the fullest' (KII #9). However, **institutional and human resources weaknesses** within both organisations hamper the coherence and power of gender equality advocacy and programming: 'A united voice and platform on gender is missing' (KII #9). According to Mbilizi (2013), within the Ministry there are 'structural and ideological problems […] of fragmentation, inadequate staff, lack of funds, lack of influence and weak institutional structures' (p.151).[27] And, after 16 years, NGO-GCN and its members appear to continue to revolve around a handful of founding individuals and their activities, to be project-driven and preoccupied with attracting and distributing funding (Kayuni, 2013).

Both the Ministry of Gender and civil society are dependent on international funding. The competitive funding environment has been further complicated by some development partners' reluctance to provide direct funding to the ministry and/or NGO-GCN. While Norway provides direct funding to NGO-GCN, the UN has been reluctant to work through its (and, since Cashgate, the ministry's) financial systems, instead making direct payments for services associated with NGO-GCN activities (e.g. for materials, meeting costs, etc.). Norway has also provided cash to nominated women candidates via NGO-GCN, but UN rules do not permit this. NGO-GCN members stress their impartiality means they are better placed than government to provide support to aspirants and candidates. They also criticise UNDP when it retains control of funds for their activities, arguing this causes delays and suboptimal performance (e.g. campaign t-shirts

delivered late and in insufficient quantities) (KII x 1; EISA, 2013). For their part, UN representatives say they can transfer money to NGO-GCN only when they are assured of its organisational ability to account for the funds, and their direct payments to suppliers do not equate to them 'implementing projects', as some charge (KII x 1).

4.3 Needs and views of MPs

Only 23% of women MPs talked about **training or capacity-building during their campaigning,** with one adding that people with direct campaign experience rather than NGOs should deliver it. More mentioned being given **t-shirts** and, less often, cash, but many said the inputs came far **too late in their campaign and were not sufficient for their needs.** MWK 200,000 was *'enough for one meeting'* (MP #5), and none used the t-shirts because, with so few to give out, they feared it would cause jealously and loss of support:

> *It was an insult, definitely. In my constituency, we had **,000 registered voters and I have more than 23,000 supporters. They gave us 100 t-shirts. What for? How do you share the 100 t-shirts? And at the very last days. I didn't distribute until after the elections. I would have undermined myself with the t-shirts. We didn't like it. It would have been better if they had not given us them (MP #8).*

MPs also felt it would be better **value for money** if they organised campaign materials (even if UNDP or NGO-GCN still pay the supplier directly), because they can produce more for the same amount and also tailor the messages to their own needs and campaign.

MPs also said the 50/50 Campaign involved a lot of talk and radio jingles but this **did not help them deliver once elected,** and the promise of help after the election had not materialised: *'They were promising us a lot. We will find NGOs to help in your constituency. We didn't want money from them, we wanted development in our areas […] they just congratulated me and then nothing'* (MP #7).

4.4 Evolution of the 50/50 strategy and support to women's representation

Our interviews indicate there is **broad understanding and agreement on the main obstacles to women's political participation** in Malawi and what types of changes are needed. There are also some clear **examples of trial-and-error** learning in the iterations of the 50/50 Campaign and other related activities,[28] as implementers and funders have tried to adapt to the binding constraints of the Malawian context. This includes providing cash to candidates, only

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27 The Ministry of Gender received 'only 1% of its total budget from government in 2009/2010, the rest came from development partners and bilateral organizations' (Mbilizi, 2013: 151).

28 This includes recommendations in the 2009 evaluation being tried in the 2014 programme.

working with nominated and not prospective candidates, trying to develop a cross-party position, provision of monitors for women candidates, legal aid for post-election complaints and, most recently, reorienting towards reform of the electoral and party system.[29]

A **limitation of the 50/50 Campaign** has been its primary emphasis on levelling the electoral playing field by improving women's ability to compete and win, and doing this through only **short-term engagement with women and women candidates.** One problem with this is that, while supporting *all* female aspirants is too expensive, nominated candidates do not emerge until just a few months before the election date. As a result, women candidates are not given support until late in the process, leaving little time for it to be tailored to their particular needs or for them to have any control over the process. Many accept this approach is flawed, but alternative approaches do not appear to be seriously considered, such as working with the organisations from where women leaders are likely to emerge so as to nurture potential candidates.[30]

Funding and implementing agencies, and other commentators, recognise the 50/50 Campaign must **rethink its strategy**. There is now acceptance of the need to change tack and concentrate on generating **support for quotas** for women as part of broader electoral reform. There is strong evidence that electoral quotas have been important to increasing numbers of elected women in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Krook, 2010) because the combination of gender norms, legal frameworks and informal political practices means parties have few incentives otherwise to select and support women candidates (Kayuni and Muriass, 2014; Savasand, 2013). The Gender Equality Act has brought in quotas for women in public but not political positions, and reforming the electoral system to allow for temporary special measures for parliamentarians extends this rationale.

This is also an opportune moment for gender activists to advocate for electoral reform. A **National Task Force on Electoral Reforms,** led by the MEC and made up of representatives of government and non-government agencies and development partners, has just released its recommendations for electoral reform. A range of issues are relevant to women's representation, including proposals for quotas in all electoral management structures (e.g. the Electoral Commission), introduction of proportional representation and reserved seats for women (National Taskforce on Electoral Reforms, 2015; Kanyongolo, 2015).

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29 The 50/50 Campaign focus on empowering women candidates has borne fruit but 'an alternative strategy or complementary strategy that focuses on campaign for political party quota system needs to be seriously considered' (NGO-GCN, 2009).

30 The Young Politicians Union, a bipartisan organisation, does this.

B. Women's performance as members of parliament

5. Explaining the performance and achievements of current women MPs

Measuring women's descriptive representation is straightforward: we count the women MPs. Assessing their performance is much more difficult, including whether they represent the interests of other women (substantive representation). We use emic (subject's own) categories to **define what it means to be an effective or successful MP,** based on what the women told us about their achievements and experiences (and remembering most had served for only 14 months at the time of interview). However, we organised these achievements using etic (observers') categories of whether they can obtain formal leadership positions to advance their political career; perform their legislative and representative role through influence in parliament; facilitate the development of their constituency; advance women's interests and gender equality; and, ultimately, retain their seats.

For each, we describe the achievements and the factors that enable or constrain performance. This **analysis is based on qualitative data** from the survey's five open-ended questions; as the direction of follow-up conversation depended on the initial answer, it is not possible to systematically compare all the qualitative data, or to draw robust conclusions about explanatory factors, but we can make observations based on subsets of MPs who discussed similar issues. The data also provide insights into the institutional and social environment, which, alongside the MP's own capabilities, provides opportunities and constraints in terms of what they do and how they do it.

5.1 Formal leadership positions and effectiveness in parliament

In total, 59% of women MPs hold one or more leadership position within either the cabinet, the committee system and/or their political party. They are most likely to hold **a party position:** 60% of the 15 women who are currently members of a political party hold some form of position, including in their party's national executive committee, such as publicity secretary, party whip and deputy party whip.

Leadership experience in the **committee system** is the next most common: 21% of all women MPs (not just the surveyed women) hold a leadership post on one of the 19 committees, including two chairs[31] and five vice-chairs. Women MPs also hold other leadership positions within parliament, including as first deputy speaker (elected by fellow MPs) and chair and executive committee members of the Women's Caucus. Unsurprisingly, as most are new MPs, few have **ministerial** experience. Four held at least one ministerial portfolio, while one of the MPs interviewed is a current minister (out of a possible three female ministers in President Mutharika's cabinet).[32]

A total of 41% of MPs spoke of their **achievements as a legislator,** with just over half talking about achievements in the Assembly first. Four (18%) said they were proud to be able to debate with their contemporaries and represent their constituents:

> *'Being one of those that stand and speak about the country and the constituency is an achievement, as I never dreamt about' (MP #10).*

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31 Health Committee and Commissions, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises Committee. A woman also chairs the Chair of the Chairs (a committee for Chairs of the other committees).

32 Health; Gender; and Youth and Sports Development.

Two MPs highlighted how being visible in parliament is important because some constituents listen on the radio or watch TV and word gets around:

> *'They get to hear you speak on their behalf and they are thrilled. The whole nation hears too and that gave me mileage in my career as an MP' (MP #17).*

A total of 23% highlighted their **role in the passage of legislation** unprompted, in particular the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (2015) and the Trafficking in Persons Act (2015). Two of the MPs with ministerial experience were able to point to **national projects** they had led**,** such as electrification, legal aid or awareness campaigns, and one to her role in other legal reforms, such as childcare legislation. Only one MP (5%) mentioned **committee work** in the context of particular achievements, saying she was proud of successfully increasing the health budget.

5.2 Explaining whether women have influence in parliament

Executive dominance is a basic constraint to what MPs can achieve through parliament. The 1995 constitution bestows significant powers in the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). For example, the Treasury agrees the parliamentary budget. This limits parliament's independence and creates a conflict of interest, particularly when the budget is insufficient to enable committees to meet and perform their oversight duty, as has been the case in the current parliament (MP #21; KII #6). The president has extensive powers to regulate Assembly sessions and, on recommendation from the Parliamentary Service Commission, also appoints the clerk of parliament, who is chief executive of the parliamentary service (KII #6). Parliament also does not have legal autonomy and instead must rely on the attorney-general, who is appointed by, and reports to, the president, for legal advice.[33] The president also has powers to appoint judges.

Informal conventions and practices further tip the balance in favour of the executive. As would be expected after only 20 years, Malawi is a hybrid rather than a consolidated democracy (EIU, 2015): informal practices undermine the spirit, and sometimes the letter, of the law, including due process and the separation of powers (Cammack, 2010; Chinsinga, 2010). Several MPs said **government does not react well to criticism** from ruling party, or even independent, MPs in the Assembly. Some said they had been side-lined by the DPP leadership or threatened with withdrawal of support for speaking '*the*

truth' (MP x 2). Unsurprisingly, therefore, some ruling party MPs said that, even when they disagreed with the government position, they '*kept quiet*' in parliament:

> *'The most painful thing is, when you are in the ruling party, you cannot represent the interests of your people better. When speaking you have some limits, trying to spare the ruling party and clapping hands for the leadership' (MP # 22).*

Two opposition MPs said government penalised them in other ways – such as telling government allies not to work with them. However, in general, it seems **opposition MPs feel freer to criticise government:** '

> *I am able to speak the way the people want, in the ruling party MPs align to the executive […] weakening the role of the legislature' (MP #21).*

An independent MP said the current parliament is less compliant than previously:

> *'What they [government] expect from us is just to sit there and clap hands. In the past that's what MPs did. But this crop of MPs, most of them are not keeping quiet' (MP #4).*

At the same time, the views of opposition MPs on how influential their interjections are were mixed. Some said the government ignored the wishes of the house; others were of the opinion that, when the opposition acted together, they did sometimes get their way (e.g. MP #15). MPs also said they were **not given enough time or support to scrutinise and research bills**. However, everyone who commented said party politics were less of a constraint in the cross-party committees and parliamentary Women's Caucus than in the plenary (e.g. MP # 12, #14).

An official also reflected that, while government can still go against the wishes of parliament when its interests are challenged, the numerical strength of the opposition in the current parliament had **improved the quality of law-making and committee work:**

> *When it comes to legislation, the committees do well […] leading to amendments to critical provisions in bills […] When DPP had a majority in the house, it was difficult to go by what the committees said […] What we had in the last parliament, bad bills. They had to repeal all bad bills when Joyce Banda came in and [government is] now more cautious (KII #6).[34]*

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33 Parliament can seek independent legal advice but must get the attorney-general to agree to pay for it, and this has been refused in the past (KII #6).

34 While this may be the case, the Malawi parliament has a history of fractious relations with, for example, horse-trading and stand-offs around the annual budget commonplace and threat of prorogation by the president real. A dominant party with a majority in parliament can reduce parliament to a rubber stamp, but a hung parliament can make effective conduct of parliamentary business difficult.

Beyond the informal strategies the government uses to carry the day in parliament, a host of **unwritten rules, traditions and exchanges also govern proceedings** and the exchanges between parties and politicians in the Assembly. For example, who gets to speak depends on who the speaker chooses to recognise; ruling party MPs know not to openly criticise the government position and so self-censor (but may pass notes to opposition MPs asking them to raise points); it is seen as perfectly fine to heckle MPs when they are speaking (even though this is against the Standing Orders); and horse-trading within and between party caucuses influences elections for leadership positions.

At another level, Malawi's National Assembly, like most legislatures, is governed by **strict written rules and formal etiquette.** MPs must first learn these rules – the Standing Orders of the Assembly (2013)[35] – if they are to be able to 'play' them to their advantage. For example, MPs must know when and how to intervene in plenary debates and what types of motions or amendments they can bring, when and how. If they do not, any speeches they have researched and rehearsed, or killer facts they have prepared, will be for nothing because they will immediately be called to order. As one member of the parliamentary staff said, '*These kinds of errors cause a lot of frustration*' (KII #6).

Effective politicians are therefore those able to master both formal *and* informal rules – putting the **large number of new MPs at a distinct disadvantage**. A UN Women (2015) needs assessment of the current women MPs found that 38% of the 25 participating MPs said they knew nothing of the role of an MP before being elected. Being a novice also makes MPs vulnerable to political manipulation. One party promised a new MP the chair of a particular committee if elected, but she discovered later that committee rules meant she was not eligible – something her party failed to tell her (MP x 1).

Inexperience also means the new MPs are less able to act politically and strategically to achieve their objectives, both individually and collectively. **Effective politicians have particular 'soft skills',** such as negotiation, judgement and vision, which tend to be intuitive or acquired through experience rather than simply taught or transferred. As one MP quipped: '*There's no module for politics*' (MP #9). Another seasoned parliamentary observer talked about how new MPs did not lay the necessary groundwork to have influence in the Assembly. Before even considering introducing a bill or amendment in plenary, a tactical MP would seek the advice of clerks about proper procedure,

next build support amongst their colleagues to convince their party caucus prior to presenting an issue, then find allies among other parties to have influence in other caucuses through them and possibly even persuade an independent MP to introduce the bill if it was more likely to be effective than coming from the opposition. They reflected:

Experience has shown you need something to perform well in public office. Tips that you don't get from a book, but you need [instead] to put people together […] [It's] not a house for professors or engineers, it's a house for people representatives. So you need to know how to deal with a house of representatives. They won't be amused with knowledge of science, that's not the point. You have to say how, with this knowledge, how to do I move this. I talk to that person, I speak to that person, so it makes its way into a document, it is tactical. And those who follow that have impact, and they [have] laws now (KII #6).

The drawbacks associated with being a new MP apply to both men and women. However, there are more **new women MPs as a proportion of their overall number** than men. In addition, there are **further disadvantages to the growing phenomenon of one-termism,** for both the effectiveness of individual MPs and the quality of parliament as a whole: a smaller pool of experienced people, less institutional memory and investment in the institution of parliament and fewer established relationships between MPs and between MPs and others (e.g. parliamentary staff, party officials, constituents). Adding to these problems, the **support of the parliamentary secretariat is insufficient to enable MPs to perform their legislative and oversight functions well.**[36]

5.3 Effect of gender on influence within parliament and the party

Having not surveyed a representative sample of men, we cannot draw firm conclusions on whether women face unique challenges in operating effectively in parliament or are disadvantaged relative to their male colleagues. However, we can make some observations based on our quantitative and qualitative data.

Some women MPs said **gender discrimination was much less of a problem in parliament,** in both plenary and committees, than in interactions in their constituency, and that party politics influenced how things worked and how

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35 The Standing Orders were extended in 2013 under Joyce Banda – including in ways that have increased parliament's oversight power. For example, previously the ruling party chaired all the committees but the chairs are now elected by committee members and membership of committees is proportionate to party representation in the house

36 There are 15 clerks total to support the work of 20 permanent committees, ad hoc commission (e.g. public service reforms) and the Speakers office and plenary (and currently two posts are empty), plus 3 staff members in the Library and Research Section.

they were treated more than their sex (e.g. MP #6, #7, #15, #16). The most common complaint, raised by 32%, was about being subject to more **jeering and heckling than their male counterparts** when they spoke in plenary. One MP commented that male MPs demean women MPs, including by ridiculing them for how they are dressed (MP i#18); another said

> *'MPs behave like college or school teenagers. It is therefore important to be prepared so they don't make fun of you when you walk in or stand to speak or when speaking. There is a lot of booing and one can be intimidated' (MP #17).*

In plenary, **women's minority status makes them much more visible,** and this appears to increase the undue scrutiny. For example, we heard that women find it hard to speak in plenary and are less likely to do so than men, particularly if they are not confident speaking English – the language of the Assembly.

> *E! E! It It's a challenge somehow to stand up, to speak, and also like one of the people with my education. I didn't go far with education […] In our culture, when a woman makes a slight mistake, like failing to speak good English, the whole house says "Ha! He!" But if it's a man, they can't make a noise (MP #20)*

However, one MP pointed out many male MPs also never spoke in plenary but it is just less obvious who they are because there are so many men (MP #12).

It is also **plausible that sexism and gender discrimination within parliament is simply much less overt than it is outside** (Tamale, 1999). This can be seen in the operation of the political parties, which do not overtly or formally discriminate against women but do little to actively promote them within the party. According to MPs and other informants, **discipline within parliamentary parties is strong** (e.g. KII #6; MP #15). As a consequence, the parties serve as gateways to parliamentary power not only in terms of whether they nominate women candidates in the first place but also for MPs' career progression and influence once elected.

For one, **MPs must gain the ear and support of party leaders to be appointed to leadership positions within parliament.** There are several plausible ways gender discrimination may weaken the position of women MPs in these bargaining processes. First, gender norms mean men tend to see women as less able leaders – and men dominate the positions that control appointment decisions (i.e. the party executive). Second, women may be excluded from the male patronage networks these negotiations

revolve around (Bjarnegard, 2014). Third, gender norms may limit women's ability to compete effectively for top parliamentary positions because doing so means transgressing those norms, such as by ensuring you stand out to party leaders.

Some women do hold important positions in the party hierarchy, from where they have the possibility of influencing high-level decision-making within the party. Where the MPs spoke of their party's attitudes to women's leadership, though, there appeared consensus that **'culture' constrains women's influence and promotion within parties.** One MP reflected that she was able to speak up for women in the party executive, but noted that her party was conservative and the party leaders, even when gender-sensitive, 'battle' with gender equality (MP x 1).

One MP explicitly complained **party leaders favoured men in senior committee appointments** (MP #x). One MP did highlight that it could be an advantage to be in a minority: if it was decided a woman should fill a post, there were fewer women MPs to choose from. Nevertheless, Malawi bucks the global trend[37] in that **women are underrepresented in committee leadership positions.** Women chair only two of the 19 committees (11%), which means they are underrepresented even based only on their proportion of seats (17%) rather than on a descriptive representation. Further, 12 committees, including influential committees such as Budget, Public Accounts and Public Appointments, have men in both the chair and vice-chair positions. Meanwhile, party leaders influence both member selection and, where they have the majority of seats in a committee, who their members vote for as chair and vice-chair. For example, a whip stressed that,

> *We can't implement unless our president knows what is happening. If the president doesn't agree, then it doesn't pass (MP interview).*

This raises the question of how women manage to be appointed or elected to positions, particularly on the most sought-after committees. Our research indicates **previous professional experience and technical knowledge** may be important: the chair of the Health Committee was a community nurse before working overseas for UNFPA; the vice-chair of the new (and influential) Privileges Committees has a background in human resources. Also, more generally, MPs are expected to read, comprehend and analyse large amounts of material, and do not have staff to do it for them. **Members with an academic background have an advantage in this respect;** some felt lack of education prevented some of their colleagues working effectively in plenary and committees.

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37 In a global statistical analysis, Hughes (2014) finds women tend to be underrepresented in terms of the number of MPs and party leaders but overrepresented in mid-level leadership. She hypothesises that this could be because committee seats tend to be appointed not elected, and party leaders may feel pressured or be incentivised to ensure women's representation in committee is greater than their proportion in the parliament overall.

However, **even MPs with relevant expertise need to put themselves forward and have the political skills to make their case persuasively** – for example, one said

I have learnt that men are very protective of spaces; you have to be strong and determined to succeed […] To get into important committees is not easy. I had to lobby to get into appropriate and influential committees. (MP #17).

Relationships may also provide leverage in these discussions. For example, the vice-chair of the Privileges Committee is an independent MP but is politically well connected through birth and by marriage. Other MPs we interviewed were clearly less strategic, viewing committee positions as 'just a name' and unaware of the process by which they had been put forward for a committee (e.g. MP #12). The women also varied in their willingness to transgress gender (and other social) norms by standing out and being controversial. For example, one opposition MP spoke of how Ministers had taken note of her contributions during debates of government bills, saying

You need to be a pest … Evidence makes a huge difference … [After the debate] the Minister said to me "trouble-maker come here" and I gave him the numbers (MP x 1).[38]

MPs also need to **work through their party caucus to influence other party decisions.** For example, when asked whether MPs toe the party's line, one whip told us:

Definitely, they have to. They do. Because, if they don't, then it will mean to us that they are not one of us. And what would happen? Well we don't evict them, but we just know that this one, looks not to be with us […] There's more politics there [laughs]' (MP interview).

Being able to get the ear of the party leadership, persuade colleagues and advance their career within the party is therefore critical for women's political influence.

The woman has to be supported by her party first, before being supported by the house. She has to convince the party first that what she stands for makes sense, that they should give you support in the house, that the whips approach clerks and the Business Committee who puts items on the order agenda. But the party should be convinced. If you start in the plenary, it's a problem. Don't surprise them (KII #6).

MPs did not often talk of the gendered division of domestic responsibilities affecting their performance, perhaps because most have older children and paid domestic care (MP #1). However, as research indicates a **supportive family environment** is instrumental to women having a political career (Tadros, 2014), we asked all the women explicitly how they divided domestic responsibilities with their husband – much to the amusement of some. Interestingly, 45% said they shared domestic tasks equally and their husband helped them, or had done so in the past, with domestic responsibilities, such as childcare and cooking. Other women were clear that, '*in our culture*', the expectation is that, whatever the woman's position, she is responsible for domestic responsibilities, even if this primarily means managing domestic staff.

What did surface was the **strain being an MP could cause within a marriage,** including provoking 'backlash' from husbands. One said a difference in status could lead husbands to feel the need to '*keep introducing themselves as a man*', and it was thus important to raise the man's status along with that of the woman, and for the woman to be humble in the house (MP #17). The issue of friction at home was raised more by senior politicians, perhaps reflecting the challenges of negotiating power relations within the home alongside increased public status and responsibilities (MP interviews x3).

5.4 Representing women and promoting gender equality

The MPs were not asked explicitly what interests they prioritised, but their answers to other questions were suggestive of their views. They most often spoke generically of **representing their constituents** and/or of wanting to help alleviate extreme poverty and lack of basic services. Two (9%) singled out **specific target groups,** including young people, farmers and people with HIV/AIDS. Of note, while MPs sometimes spoke in general terms of insufficient government policy in relation to services or specific interest groups, none talked about their *own party's policy* on particular issues. In fact, party policy, and ideological or other differences between the parties, was never mentioned.[39]

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38 A finding of the LSE's Above the Parapet research is women leaders are often those labelled 'troublemakers' in their adolescence and beyond precisely because they were prepared to transgress gender norms (Sen, 2015).

39 One MP did note her party was socially 'conservative' in relation to religion, the family and sex (MP #1). Also indicative of the primacy of the local and practical over the national and ideological is that aspiring candidates develop individual manifestoes focusing on local development issues to use during their campaigns (KII #5, #10).

There is a misplaced assumption in policy and programming that women politicians will champion other 'women's interests' and gender equality and therefore it is enough to 'add women and stir' (Tadros, 2010). In reality, women politicians may not see other women as their 'natural' constituency and are as likely to be conservative as progressive, including in their attitudes to gender roles and norms. Even when they are feminists, they may need to put party interests above other agendas and may not have the necessary influence to advance gender equality (O'Neil and Domingo, 2015).

Nevertheless, and in spite of not being asked directly about this, women were the specific group MPs referred to most often: 82% described **gender discrimination** in Malawian society, most often in relation to the relative experiences of male and women politicians.[40] Going beyond this, over half of the MPs (55%) also made statements about the need, or their actions, to **improve conditions or services for** *other* **women** and/or empower *other* girls and women. Almost a quarter (23%) also spoke about specific actions they had taken, such as skills development, establishing savings groups and business initiatives for women in their constituency, acting as role models for women and girls and encouraging them to participate in community governance.

The Minister for Gender spoke at length about **government initiatives to empower women and girls,** including legal reforms, economic empowerment and awareness campaigns on GBV. In general, however, the women MPs (and male informants) appeared **more comfortable talking about women's concerns and empowerment than about gender equality.** For example, while several of the MPs were unequivocal that women and men were equal, and one MP declared '*I am a feminist*', explicit statements about *actively promoting* gender equality were rare. One MP explained that, while women's emancipation rather than 'women's issues' should be the focus, it was difficult for women MPs to talk about equality (MP #16). The same MP explicitly rejected the idea that she might have a specific concern for 'women's issues':

> *The female caucus is very much focused on women and child issues, that's not my field of interest. I would say as a women's caucus you should be focused on politics or development from a women's point of view.*

5.5 Explaining the passage of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act

A total of 23% MPs spoke unprompted about the passage of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act and/or the Trafficking in Persons Act in 2015, and further 23% of MPs spoke about the importance of this legislation for women and girls in Malawi. The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill had sat on the shelf for over a decade and its passage shows how women MPs can and did work together to overcome male resistance to legal and normative change.[41]

The Malawi Law Commission had proposed a new Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill in 2006. This single law would replace the (colonial era) Marriage Act (1903) and also provide a unitary legal regime for the different forms of marriage in Malawi. Two particularly controversial provisions in the new law related to the recommendations to outlaw polygamy and to set the minimum age of marriage to 18, including for religious and customary marriages. The first time the Minister for Gender presented the Bill to cabinet, it was rejected because of the polygamy provision; a new provision for polygamy was then retained under customary or religious law in the draft Bill.[42]

In 2010, as part of constitutional amendments, the Commission recommended that Section 22(7) of the Constitution, which mandates that a person between ages 15 and 18 must obtain parental consent to marry, should be revised to a minimum age of 16. Parliament past the amendment bill but civil society, including members of NGO-GCN, successfully petitioned President Mutharika not to assent to the bill, reasoning that a constitutional right to marry at 16 would set back their campaign for a minimum age of 18.

In 2013, UN Women, as part of its work stream on Child Rights, began lobbying and education on child marriage and the importance of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill. This work included partnering with the Women's Caucus and Ministry of Gender, and good progress had been made on obtaining agreement on the Bill when the Cashgate scandal broke. This was followed by a session in which no bills were passed and then the 2014 election, which produced a whole new cadre of MPs to convince of the importance of legislating against child marriage. However, the election also resulted in a Women's Caucus that was less divided and was chaired by

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40 One MP questioned the assumption she said was implicit in our research that women MPs face challenges, although she later spoke about sexism within her party: 'It comes back to our understanding as Malawians in what women's leadership is all about. People think women as a leader need to go and dance. I don't do that' (MP interview).

41 The description and analysis of the passage of the Act draws on the interviews of several MPs and key informants (#1, #6, #13, #18) and the Hansard of the parliamentary debate (Parliament of Malawi, 2015).

42 Notably, the Commission did not recommend that marital rape constitute a crime and, in the Act, rape is only said to occur if a man and woman are separated. One informant observed that the Act 'is not perfect. It has a lot of flaws and this is one. It condones marital rape. But, if a full definition of marital rape had been included, the act would never have been passed by cabinet' (KII #13).

a prominent human and women's rights activist who had an established working relationship with UN Women.

In 2015, the Women's Caucus, and its allies in civil society and the donor community, was able to achieve the passage of the Act through a combination of strategic framing, lobbying and parliamentary tactics. This included publicity highlighting the dangers of early marriage and childbearing at a young age, drawing on examples chronicled by NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and framing these as dangers that could face the daughters or sisters of male MPs and Malawian families. The issue of common law marriage was more contentious and so was not given prominence. The Women's Caucus thus reduced resistance to the Bill by avoiding contentious issues and using language that appealed to traditional masculine traits of protecting female family members.

The Women's Caucus also asked each member to lobby five of their male colleagues on the issue. UN Women played a role here, working with the Women's Caucus and providing workshops and training on how to approach lobbying. UN Women also helped coordinate NGOs and gender activists, including from NGO-GCN, and worked closely with the Ministry of Gender in framing the Bill and securing parliamentary time. Lobbying of the Ministry of Justice, as well as the chairs of committees, was also given high priority, and men who supported the Bill were encouraged to speak out.

Also important was the leadership provided by Jessie Kabwila – Chair of the Women's Caucus – and Patricia Kaliati – Minister for Gender. Their cooperation, one a cabinet member in the ruling DPP and the other the publicity spokesperson for the main opposition party, the MCP, exemplified the cross-party bipartisanship within the caucus as a whole on the issue. Kabwila noted that their cooperation was a source of shock to many MPs – this being the first time the Women's Caucus had been able to agree a single cross-party strategy on a major bill.[43]

The leadership of all parties agreed to vote in favour, which essentially meant the Bill was almost certain to pass and there would not be an individual vote from MPs. Resistance was further reduced by the way the Bill was passed – in a single day, going through its first and second readings in rapid succession and with the committee stage superseded in favour of a time-limited debate on the floor. This minimised the time available to mobilise opposition and generate hostile amendments.

Some male MPs complained afterwards the Bill had effectively been bulldozed through parliament. Two of the women MPs also commented on the limited time for scrutiny and debate of the Bill (MP #6, #21). However, supporters countered that the intense lobbying and advocacy process meant plenty of time for debate and opposition had been given outside of the chamber. As one observer commented:

If there is a bill that received a lot of pre-bill stages, it was this Bill [...] So, when it came into the House, it was like bringing something that had already been done, and so should be passed [...] (KII #6).

5.6 Explaining the extent of women's substantive representation

A basic question in terms of thinking about what enables or constrains the ability of women MPs to represent other women is **what MPs believe women's interests to be.** Molyneux (1985) makes a distinction between *strategic* gender interests, in changing hierarchical gender norms and roles, and *practical* gender interests, in addressing or alleviating the effects of exclusionary gender norms, such as women's primary reproductive, domestic and care roles or GBV. In practice, women often seek to advance both types of interests (Domingo et al., 2015), but we cannot assume people see women's interests, women's rights and empowerment and gender equality as the same thing.

The women MPs recognised gender discrimination as a problem (82%) and **saw women as a special interest group** (55%). Notably, those who mentioned *specific* actions to empower women in their constituency were those who talked about previous activism – through professional or voluntary activities in their communities or internationally (e.g. MP #3, #21). A few MPs (e.g. #2, #6, #8) also felt they were better placed to represent women and promote development because women bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities and therefore poverty.

Most of the problems in the constituency, it is a woman who is facing them and, being a fellow woman, I think I know really what is needed because I also face the same problems [...] Men were just saying, mmm, water problems are not a problem at all. But, for me, I went also myself early in the morning, about 2am, maybe 10 km looking for water [...] I know how painful it is to look for firewood. I know how painful it is to take a baby a long distance looking for medication [...] so, as a woman, I strongly feel there is a difference between me and men when we look at these problems in the constituency (MP #2).

The views of constituents (whose votes MPs need) on women's wellbeing and rights and gender equality also become a possible opportunity for or constraint to

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43 One MP said the Women's Caucus was working better in this parliament than the last, where most of the MPs were DPP and other parties felt marginalised and, after 2012, there were tensions because the PP became the ruling party. Even in the current parliament, however, there have been two attempts to remove the current chair, ostensibly because she is the opposition publicity spokesperson, which some argue is a conflict of interests, but reportedly the reason was really because ruling party MPs believe they should have the chair (MP #8).

action. There is also the question of **how women MPs know what the preferences and interests of their women constituents are.** Research suggests the attitudes to gender roles and relations of both male and female constituents are conservative, particularly in rural areas (Phiri et al., forthcoming; Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014; Malawi Institute of Management, 2013). However, systematic research on Malawian MPs' constituency relationships, networks and operations, and how they identify or understand their voters' interests, is lacking.

Our research suggests MPs' **most frequent interactions are with faith-based organisations** (FBOs), local leaders and area development committees and, since 2015, councillors (depending on the relationship between MP and councillor, which is largely related to party politics). MPs could be encouraged to champion specific issues for women, but we saw **little evidence women MPs interact regularly with grassroots women's groups,** beyond any groups women MPs themselves set up.[44]

The ability of women MPs to work together across party lines is critical to reform discriminatory or gender-blind laws and policy (and push for implementation). This is especially the case in Malawi because of women's minority status in their parties and the absence of a dominant party:[45] the **Women's Caucus provides the primary vehicle for women to interact across party lines.** Women rights advocates also need to secure the support of the men who dominate decision-making.

The collective action of women MPs, civil society activists and UN Women and their ability to get two important pieces of legislation through parliament in under a year are notable achievements. **Whether women MPs will maintain this concerted action around gender equality is less certain.** For example, when asked what the next objective or priority for the Women's Caucus was, few had a clear idea – though some of the MPs in leadership positions highlighted the need to follow up with activities to support implementation and monitoring, such as of the age of marriage.

MPs' apparent **lack of close ties or ongoing relationship with civil society gender equality activists** is also likely to reduce incentives for MPs. MPs and informants reported some *ad hoc*, often informal, interaction, for instance when parliamentarians ask for technical advice from professional or rights organisations. However, unlike in other countries, **women MPs in Malawi have not come from the women's**

movement,[46] and the primary engagement between them and civil society activists appears to be around the 50/50 Campaign, with relationships not sustained after the end of activities.[47] Relations between civil society and MPs appear quite instrumental in fact: civil society can support MPs only if donors fund them to do so, and MPs expect NGOs to pay fuel and other allowances to attend their meetings. This is far from the ideal of feminist politicians and civil society activists having overlapping interests in advancing gender equality and seeing the mutual benefit in their cooperation.[48]

More generally, the **absence of an established women's movement is an important constraint on political action to advance gender equality.** In Malawi, professional NGOs have proliferated since 1994, but most are city-based and dependent on external funding. Some, both domestic and organisations, work on women's rights through their various thematic focal areas – ActionAid, the Centre for Legal Assistance, Oxfam, the Malawi Human Rights Resources Centre and WLSA Malawi (Maal and Banda, 2010). However, none of the established and independent CSOs – that is, those able to fundraise and undertake activities on an ongoing basis – focuses *specifically* on women's rights and gender equality.

Under the one-party state, the only large-scale *women's* organisation was a development organisation headed by Mama Kadzamira, Life-President Banda's official hostess. Malawi's transition to democracy was relatively short and did not involve the large-scale violent conflict some other African countries experienced. Individual women played an important role but women's collective action and organisations did not, which has deprived Malawi's women's organisations of an important source of political capital *vis-à-vis* the government (Tiessen, 2008).

Since 1994, some **important and high-profile Malawian feminist activists and women's networks and organisations** such as NGO-GCN have lobbied government on its obligations to promote gender equality, particularly in relation to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. There have also been important legal reforms, championed by NGOs focusing on women's rights. However, **women's organisations are weakly institutionalised,** tending to centre around their founders and without a clear domestic membership base, and therefore highly dependent on international funding and

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44 As in other developing countries, poor women often view women MPs and national CSOs as elite and distant (Domingo et al., 2015).

45 In a dominant party system, the ability of women in the ruling party to work together or for women ministers to effectively push for gender reforms is likely to be more important.

46 This does not mean they are not known to each other. Malawi has a small elite and its members either already have, or can easily get, the phone number of someone they want to talk to.

47 In fact, there is evidence of tensions in this relationship too: some MPs say CSOs have not delivered on their promises to help them once elected and some CSO representatives say the women forgot who helped them once elected.

48 Perhaps more worrying, there is little systematic or institutionalised interaction between national women's NGOs and grassroots women's interest groups (Kayuni, 2013). In her needs assessment of the 2009-2014 cohort of women MPs, Mbilizi (2011) also found them to have little understanding of interest groups in politics or relationships with gender networks, and were more likely to form relationships with other MPs.

vulnerable to their agenda being shaped by others (Kayuni, 2013). They also lack coordination and organisational capacity. Overall, women's rights activists do not have the organisational or tactical strength to incentivise government to take action on women's rights and gender equality.

Another symptom of the relative youth of both women's and rights organisation in Malawi (linked to the size of the professional class, access to education, etc.) is that **the pool of Malawian gender experts, and also feminist activists and researchers, is small.** Many NGO-GCN members, rather than being feminist organisations, work on areas (such as elections) that gender issues intersect with. This has implications for how they understand these issues and their drivers, how they communicate this to others and the content of their programmes.[49] One informant described how they advised women to '*go cook with the women, and do what the women are doing*' in order to build support. Essentialising women may at times be strategic in Malawi's conservative society, but can also send confusing messages to women candidates and to the electorate, and needs to be done consciously and very carefully. More worrying is the sexist views of one (male) trainer:

> *The only difference between men and women is that men never give up. When we talk about mentoring, we transfer the male behaviour to the woman so they grow a thick skin and stand the heat. The other problem is that, when we think about men, we think they are rich, but it's not money that's making men dominate the house, it's determination. So we transfer these characteristics to the women (KII #5).*

The **Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare**, whose mandate is to promote social economic empowerment and protection of women and children using community and welfare approaches, is also unlikely to be an independent locus of energy and action on gender equality. Its capacity is hampered by its meagre budget, which both reflects and reinforces its limited influence.[50] A study of the gender machinery also found gender expertise to be in short supply in the ministry, with only one person out of 10 in the Department of Gender Affairs holding a relevant degree, and a principal secretary and directors who do not have gender training: 'officers in the MoGCCD did not seem to have a clear understanding of what doing gender entails. They followed the philosophies and ideologies of their

international development counterparts when developing gender policies and programmes without situating issues to the local environment' (Mbilizi, 2013: 156).

5.7 Constituency development

When asked about their most important achievement since being elected, **91% of MPs talked about their contributions to their constituency** and 67% highlighted these first and unprompted. All mentioned club/communal goods related to health, education and/or infrastructure they had facilitated or directly provided. None mentioned constituency- or district-wide developments (e.g. delivered in conjunction with neighbouring MPs). All said they were also paying school fees for several individual children (i.e. private goods) and 23% spoke of less tangible achievements, such as building relationships with their constituents and local organisations/leaders, helping them organise and raise funds, supporting civic education and dialogue and being a role model for girls.

However, there is **significant variation in terms of the scale of their inputs,** even across the women who have served for an equal amount of time.[51] For example, one MP said she had built four bridges, using the Constituency Development Fund (CDF),[52] but '*I can't say I have achieved anything since the constituency needs at least 30*' (MP #5). Most (55%) were able to detail a handful of community infrastructure projects, usually including boreholes, and one or more small building projects (school block, teachers' house, bridge, community clinic). A minority (27%) described larger infrastructure projects (entire hospitals, clinics, secondary schools, roads, electrification) that, for the new MPs at least, they had managed to begin, if not necessarily complete. Unsurprisingly, MPs who were or had been ministers were able to detail a wider range of projects, including more political ones, such as the promotion of chiefs in their constituency.

5.8 Explaining MPs' ability to deliver in their constituency

Campaigning never really stops for MPs in Malawi. Nearly all MPs said their principal difficulty was the **unreasonable expectations** Malawians have and the **financial demands** this places on them personally. MPs receive a loan of MWK 7 million (around £8,000) and salary of MWK

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49 Assessments of the 50/50 Campaign also note there has been no clear conceptual understanding among NGO-GCN ,members, which has led, at best, to messages that are not 'clear or convincing' (Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014: 8) and, at worst, to 'contradictory' or 'outrageous' messaging that at times has 'consolidated cultural and traditional barriers for women's participation' rather than challenging them (Chisoni, n.d.: 4).

50 In the 2015/16 budget, its allocation amounted to 0.09% of the total: www.finance.gov.mw/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=90&Itemid=55

51 These differences are only indicative. We did not ask MPs to detail everything they had done since being elected and did not verify what we were told.

52 The CDF is voted for by parliament annually to be used for infrastructure projects. It is one of the few sources of discretionary funding at local government level. The district council has formal control but, informally, it is accepted that MPs have significant influence over allocations – that is, no decision would be made without their involvement (O'Neil and Cammack, 2014).

926,865 (around £1,000) per month,[53] as well as various allowances (e.g. for parliamentary meetings). They also receive a CDF of MWK 9 million (around £10,000) per annum distributed in four tranches.[54] MPs pointed out that, to be re-elected, they must visit different parts of their constituency regularly, which for some are a long distance from the capital, where they reside during parliamentary sittings. It is also expected that they will provide hand-outs during these visits. One informant observed, *'Previously there was a spirit of voluntarism but people now expect "trickle down" from their MP'* (KII #1).

In addition, **MPs, not government, are viewed as primarily responsible for ensuring capital investment and improved services** in the constituency:

> *People see you almost as God, they think you can do anything […] Bridging the gap between what government is supposed to do and what I'm supposed to is very difficult […] I am supposed to be a lawmaker, but whoever is supposed to make a difference, supposed to bring schools, roads? […] So if something is lacking in your district, there is an expectation that you personally will resolve that problem rather than the government? Yes, and if you don't the person who wants to run in your opposition next will resolve it for them, and that's the end of you. If you go with me to my constituency, you will witness that I will have to part with money. Not because I believe in it because I know that I have to walk the thin line between not giving hand-outs and at the same time helping* (MP #1)

MPs must therefore seek to secure either national projects and resources, or a slice of the local development fund, which the district council controls. Dysfunctional and personalised government systems, inadequate local budgets and poor service delivery are not new in Malawi (O'Neil and Cammack, 2014). However, the crisis has reached new proportions since Cashgate and the withdrawal of budget support – previously around 40% of the government's budget – by most bilateral and multilateral donors. In short, there is little public money in Malawi for investment and service provision. If they are unable to secure public investment, MPs are reliant on attracting resources from international NGOs or development agencies or Malawian firms or CSOs – or, as is often the case, using their own money – to live up to their campaign promises and to meet their constituents' expectations (Box 6). **Parties without structures in place to support MPs in their constituency duties accentuate these problems.**

As already discussed, the **financial demands of being an MP disadvantage women** because gender discrimination means they have less access to resources. UN Women (2015) also found women MPs to say lack of financial resources was the biggest obstacle to their performance. Further, several women MPs said **they have to work harder,** be more visible in their constituency and deliver more than their male counterparts to satisfy their constituents: *'If you don't go to the constituency for two months, it's an issue. But men don't go there [their constituency] and it's not an issue. I go every month, but they say, "You omit somebody. We don't see you"'* (MP #12). Two MPs also reflected that their task was made harder because women MPs are seen as more approachable by their constituents and therefore are subject to more constituency demands:

> *A woman is approachable at our homes. Early in the morning, around 4am, we have people surrounding our house looking for food, fees, whatever. But for the man, you will find there are no people outside his house in the morning. They say, "hey, he is a man, he will shout at us, we will go later"* (MP #2).[55]

When the MPs told us about their constituency achievements, we asked them how they were able to do these things. Data are not systematic but do suggest a couple of things. First, **women MPs employ different strategies for negotiating the constraints they face in 'delivering' development to their constituency,** both gendered constraints and those related to the broader political context. Second, **women MPs' varying experiences, capabilities, social capital and access to resources influence their strategy.** These dynamics are similar to those at work in MPs' campaign strategies, but are perhaps more pronounced in relation to maintaining support within the constituency.

For example, **different networks provide MPs with different levels and types of financial, material and non-material resources for constituency development.** However, which of these networks MPs have access to, and their ability to use them effectively, depends on their background, prior experiences and current position. The networks MPs use to secure necessary resources and inputs can extend: upwards in the power hierarchy from the MP, such as to party leaders or ministers; outwards to peers (e.g. cabinet colleagues, other MPs) or other organisations (e.g. international development agencies, international and domestic NGOs, domestic business); or downwards to the constituency (e.g. local leaders, FBOs, local councillors, community groups).

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53 These figures have been computed by adding the 28% pay hike for MPs to the initial salary amount: www.nyasatimes.com/2014/07/20/malawi-mps-in-100-percent-pay-rise-wholly-inappropriate

54 MPs often use the CDF to reward supporters (Cammack et al., 2007; O'Neil and Cammack, 2014).

55 A view corroborated (unprompted) by the neighbouring male MP in a separate interview (male MP #3).

Central government is the most lucrative source of funding, but access is based on **relationships with ministers** and few MPs have these. Being a member of the ruling party is an advantage but not sufficient (and the budget crisis accentuates this)[56] or necessary: ruling party women MPs can be outside the 'insider' circle that controls public resource allocation, and independent, and even opposition, MPs have succeeding in getting constituency projects through contact with ministers (MP #7, #18, #21). Whatever the party, being in a leadership position is important (MP x2). Having a politically connected family member is also advantageous (MP x2).[57] At the same time, it is clear vocal or prominent opposition MPs risk being shut out of important networks or penalised by government, including in relation to private business activities they might use to fund constituency activities (MP x2). According to MPs once in government positions and now in opposition, past seniority does also not ensure continuing status and access to state resources (MP x2).

For those without close connections to government, **accessing international finance and support** is the best next option. At least 50% of the MPs talked about their efforts to access international funding and projects. MPs do this through proposal and grant writing, with varying degrees of success (MP #2, #3, #9, #12) and/or approaching embassies, aid agencies and international NGOs (MP #2, #4, #6, #7, #8, #9, #12, #16, #18). In fact, MPs stressed the importance of proactivity and persistence. It appears past experience with international agencies and current opportunities to network[58] with them are critical to the success of this fundraising strategy. Some MPs have fundraised by approaching **Malawian business or NGOs**

(e.g. MP #4). And two have their **own charities** through which they fundraise, including one that is well established and through which the MP has direct contacts with a large number of her constituents (MP x2).

A final strategy for constituency development is **working with and through community groups and leaders,** including chiefs, development committees and FBOs, and setting up groups such as women's and civic education groups. Again, past experience (of community development), relationships and people skills appear central to success here. More research is needed, but MPs also seem to differ in terms of whether they see themselves as 'delivering' for the community or working with it to find solutions, with the former requiring more direct access to funding (e.g. MP #15) and the second more about facilitating access to funding on behalf of the community (e.g. MP #3, #9).

Whatever their strategy, all the MPs also use their **personal resources to fund small inputs**, such as scholarships or ambulances, with government or external finance essential for MPs to be able to facilitate and sustain larger investments, such as hospitals. MPs also have their CDF, but this is sufficient only for relatively small projects, and MPs who rely solely on this (e.g. MP #5) are unlikely to retain their seat. It seems the more successful MPs are those whose experiences, knowledge and skills and networks and relationships provide **access to a combination of sources of financial/material assets.**

5.9 Common strategies for re-election

The ultimate measure of the success of MPs is their **ability to retain their seats.** Only six of the 43 incumbent women MPs (14%) had been re-elected in 2014, two of whom we interviewed. Three other surveyed MPs had lost their seats in 2009 and regained them in 2014. One of these, Lilian Patel, had held Mangochi South continually from 1994 to 2009.

The two MPs we surveyed who had been re-elected in 2014, while different in many ways, such as their age and background and the chain of events that had led them to become an MP, shared some features. First, they exhibited a **strong belief in their own ability to lead** and command respect from others, including male colleagues and subordinates, **combined with willingness to comply with gender norms** when interacting, not just with their husbands, but also – and perhaps most importantly – with their constituents. They were adamant that women MPs must act according to cultural expectations in the constituency: dressing appropriately, being humble and

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56 An informant commented that in the past MPs joined the ruling party and you would then see development in their area but now the resources of so limited this is not the case any more (KII #6).

57 For example, one MP said, 'My husband has a lot of these connections because of his previous experience. He is involved. When I want to meet the government officials, he's always there.'

58 One MP had established a very successful and ongoing relationship with a US NGO at an international event, which had led to the building of six primary schools and funding for a hospital.

approachable and taking part in everyday (e.g. funerals, church) and gendered (e.g. cooking and caring) activities:

Women just have to be humble in the constituency. Malawi people are regarded as a culture that is humble. Women must know the culture of their constituency. How to address people. How to address the chief. It's not a sin for the woman to kneel down in our culture. And how to dress yourself. Every day you go to your constituency, dress in the same attire [as your constituents]. In Malawi we dress, the traditional attire, very long skirts with small [heeled] shoes (MP interview).

Another shared characteristic was **political intuition on how to build and maintain support** and understanding of the political capital in broad-based support. This more strategic thinking was expressed by other MPs who had previously been MPs, and also by some of the new MPs. It covers the importance of not only being visible in the constituency but also actively soliciting support from all directions by ensuring support does not just go to their 'home' area or faith institution and by not appearing to favour only certain supporters or officials:

You have got to be everybody's […] and you need to be changing. If today James is in my car, then tomorrow I might be with Samson, or Janet, or Aida. It should not be the very same people who is with you […] travelling across the country with you. They need to know that the car is not for one person, it is for every person (MP #13).

Also notable were the women who said they were unlikely to be elected because they were **not following expected informal political rules** in some way, for example they had challenged corruption in the use of local developments funds by chiefs or local officials, not given hand-outs to constituents or not played along with internal party politics (MP x4).

5.10 Recognising diversity: towards a typology of women MPs

One purpose of the new survey instrument is to produce comparative (within-country) data to **generate propositions about *which* women are *more or less* able to be effective MPs, in what ways and why** – a gap in the current literature on Malawi and more generally. Our data show that, while women MPs in Malawi have a similar socioeconomic profile, they are many differences between them and these have implications for what they do as an MP, how well they do it and the benefits this brings themselves and others. These differences relate to their past opportunities, choices and experiences and how these influence current strategies and successes.

We propose that two variables, 'motivation' and 'means', are important for connecting MPs' past experiences and current strategies. We suggest these variables can take on two possible values, 'self' and 'others'.

1. Motivation: Why does the person want to be an MP? What are their political objectives?

   a. **Self:** Is the MP primarily motivated by self-interest in terms of benefits for them or their family, e.g. personal status, power or wealth?

   b. **Others:** Is the MP *primarily* motivated by helping others, e.g. their community, special interests groups and/or

2. Means: What are the main resources the MP uses to achieve those objectives?

   a. **Self:** Does the MP rely mostly on their own resources and capabilities (material and non-material) to advance their political interests?

   b. **Others:** Does the MP work mostly by harnessing the resources and capabilities of other people and/or organisations?

These combinations produce four archetypes of women MPs:

The activist: A social reformer who goes into politics to improve the lives of others (motivation: others) but who is not well connected and is primarily reliant on own capabilities (means: self).

The chancer: A political novice who enters politics thinking they will be able to access resources (motivation: self) but who does not have the necessary political nous or networks to achieve aims (means: self).

The proxy: A woman who is persuaded by male relatives or local leaders to stand for parliament for their narrow gain (motivation: self) and who works through these 'borrowed' networks to achieve these objectives (means: others).

The visionary: A politician with a vision of how to make life better for a community (motivation: others) and who is able to mobilise a broad organisation to that end (means: others). This politician may be a reformist leader (i.e. they represent broad-based group) or a reactionary leader (if they seek to protect the *status quo* and interests of a narrow/elite group).

In practice, rather than being binary, the values are a continuum, with motivation and means *more or less* centred on self or others. This leads to a fifth archetype MP:

The careerist: A politician who is personally ambitious but also seeks to help others (motivation: self-others) and who relies on their own capabilities but also plays the political game and works with and through party structures to advance own and others' interests (means: self-others).

This typology can be plotted on a graph (see Figure 2). Most women MPs fall somewhere between two archetypes. It is also likely that the motivations and strategies of MPs change over time – for example women may move from being proxies to careerists or from careerists to visionary leaders – but to understand this would require longitudinal data.

This typology also is potentially useful for thinking about women's likely strategies and effectiveness and whether they are likely to benefit others. For example, **activist MPs** are more likely to be self-motivated and driven by development concerns and to have a strategy focused on the constituency. Whether this approach is as successful once they are elected as during their campaign depends on whether they have the skills and networks to actually mobilise their constituents and broker development projects (e.g. MP #3, #9, #14, #21).

Chancer MPs are more likely to have relied on family businesses to fund their campaign but are not able to sustain the level of personal investment in their political career once elected. They are politically naïve about the demands and benefits of being an MP and do not have the have the political skills or connections to access other sources. They use to the CDF to provide small inputs and are resigned to being one-term MPs.

Still other MPs seem to have both personal sources of money and good connections, directly or indirectly, to other sources of funding – both government and international. These women are those with political positions (**careerist MPs**) and/or are related to powerful or politically connected men (**proxy MPs**). Unsurprisingly, they have the ability to gain further leadership positions and to resource constituency projects, with direct implications for their ability to retain their seats (MP #4, #6, #7, #13, #15).

Ask yourselves, when you look at who has been retained, what led to them to be retained, ask yourselves, ask them. Women who have been retained […]these are people who are really working with people, making a difference, they do things, in her constituency she has maize mills, does what people need. People know her, what she does for them. Can those people vote for anyone else? (KII #2).

More tenuous is the position of careerist politicians within the opposition who have limited personal financial resources and no male relative whose patronage networks they can 'borrow' (Bjarnegard, 2015). They may be politically astute and able to advance within their party but may still be removed by the voters, or not selected by their party, if they are unable to deliver in their constituency. Noticeably, none of the women we interviewed fit the archetype of a **visionary MP** – an absence indicative of both the contextual and gendered constraints on leadership in Malawi.

Figure 2: Women MPs – five archetypes based on their motivation and means
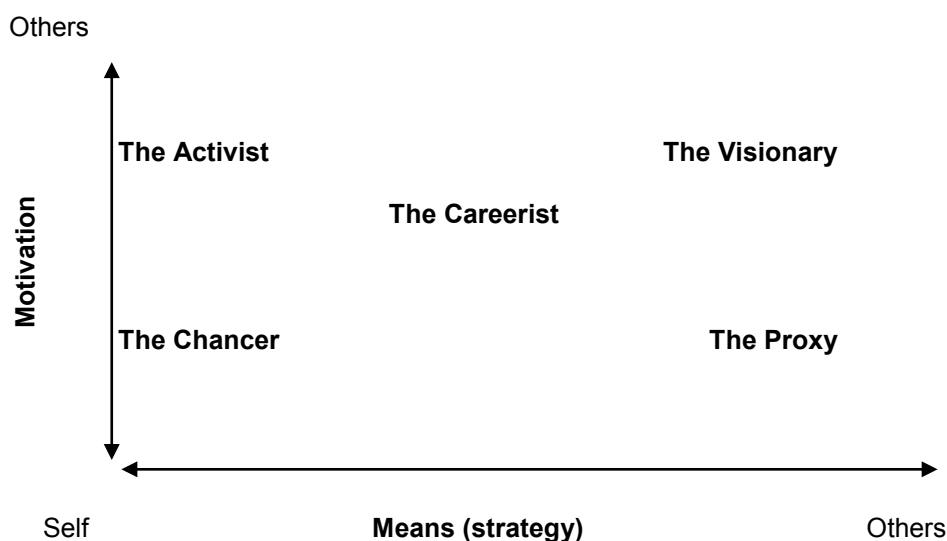
6. International and domestic support to women MPs once elected

6.1 International support to women MPs

There have been **few efforts to improve the performance of women MPs once elected.** The two main sources of international funding to women MPs are general parliamentary development assistance and support to the Parliamentary Women's Caucus.

Malawi has been one of the **largest recipients of parliamentary development assistance** from OECD countries since the 1990s (Tostensen and Amundsen, 2010). However, many donors stopped contributing towards the end of President Mutharika's first term, when he dealt with a factious opposition by not calling parliament to session (as he is entitled to do by law) and going directly to the Malawian people to explain his development choices (KII #6). Norway and Sweden continued to provide direct support to the National Assembly from 2008 but that arrangement has now also ended.

Development partners report difficulties working with Malawian parliamentarians because of **perennial disagreements over the payment of allowances** (KII #1, #2). Parliament now receives no direct funding and only small-scale project support to the training of parliamentarians from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and UNDP. This includes an orientation course, developed

UN Women Executive Director meets Minister of Gender, Children, Disabilities and Social Welfare of Malawi. Photo: UN Women / Ryan Brown

with UNDP funding and provided to all new MPs by the Malawi Institute of Management (MIM).

Since **UN Women** set up its office in 2013, there has been more focused support to women MPs and to promoting gender equality through political processes. This seems to have provided a boost of **energy and funding to women's empowerment and a locus for gender expertise.** UN Women's political participation programme has two main streams.

First, UN Women is working with the MEC, the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) and CMD on electoral reform and civic education to support the registration of (women) voters. This includes funding a consultant to ensure MEC reform processes are gendered.

Second, UN Women has a three-year programme to provide **capacity development to the Women's Caucus,** with a two-year memorandum of understanding and a one-year work plan. Activities include technical support to develop and monitor a strategic plan, capacity-building through training and missions, support to caucus oversight and women MPs' representation of constituents (in relation to issues of women and gender) and dissemination of activities and achievements.

UN Women also supports *ad hoc* activities, such as attendance of the Minister for Gender and her principal secretary, the chair of the Women's Caucus and a MEC representative at the Commission on the Status of Women in New York and an advisor embedded in NGO-GCN.

The caucus work plan **focuses on women's collective and parliamentary activities** with the aim of advancing women's rights and gender equality, in line with the formal role of the caucus, which is 'advocating and promoting gender ideals in an effort to inform the policy and legislative business before the Assembly and Committees in order to conform with the principles of gender equality, women empowerment and good governance' (Standing Order 202: 2).

The programme has been **successful in this respect:** passage of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act and the Trafficking in Persons Act, both in 2015, demonstrates international actors can facilitate collective action between women politicians across party lines and improve coordination between gender equality proponents across government, parliament and civil society in Malawi:

> *I noticed coordination across the parties [in the caucus] drive the agenda for the Trafficking in Persons Act and review of the Marriage Act [...] We saw a unity of purpose on that, which means MPs, regardless of levels of capacity, brought together can use their strengths to drive their particular agendas (KII #9).*

UN Women's **support to women's individual capabilities,** which mainly centres on short courses, has been **less successful.** A core group of women MPs attend but many have missed some or all. In addition, the partnership between the caucus and UN Women has ground to halt since June 2015 because of a dispute over allowances, in particular in relation to fuel.

6.2 Needs and views of MPs

The surveyed MPs were specifically asked about the usefulness of current support and what they needed to perform better. The **majority (64%) said their primary need was help to 'deliver' in their constituency, including to retain their seat in 2019.** A further (18%) explicitly stressed that development partners should do this by facilitating their relationship with organisations that can help with constituency development. Other needs were civic education and sensitisation (23%), training and knowledge transfer for MPs, but more in-depth than that currently provided (23%) and more tailored 9%, funding for further education (18%), exchange visits (18%) and support to constituency offices (9%) and to parliamentary oversight duties (5%).[59]

The women MPs were clearly proud of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act. At the same time, too much focus on women's collective action, and on short-term gains, relative to individual capabilities and constituency work **could lead to an overly instrumental approach to the caucus,** with the danger that the MPs feel dis-empowered not empowered (MP #9). There is a difference between putting women MPs in the driving seat and supporting their individual and collective leadership skills – in the hope they will use these to advance gender equality but not being directive about ends – and viewing the caucus primarily as an instrument to achieve specific, short-term gender equality objectives, such as legal reform. **These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but leaning too much towards the former may jeopardise actual empowerment** and the likelihood that women MPs will sustain activities if UN Women withdraws support.

It is also problematic if the **content of training** does not incentivise women MPs to attend. There appears to be a subset of new women MPs to whom the syllabus is well suited, but some MPs regularly do not attend the training sessions and some complained some courses were not suited to their needs: *'We are treated as if we are at the same level with the end result that you are trained on something that you already know. I have done gender several times at lower level and at masters. I have had enough gender [...] I need something specific on leadership or something new, but you are just given, told this is what you going to have'* (MP #14). In this respect, they could be seen as voting with their feet and, indeed, one said, *'UN Women needs us more than we need them'*. There was more agreement about the value of the basic orientation

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59 UN Women's (2015) needs assessment of 25 of the current women MPs has similar findings: 50% said that constituency development was what they needed most to retain their seats, with some requesting UN Women facilitate their networking with foreign Embassies and development agencies.

course provided by the MIM, although this is delivered in spaced tranches, which means some MPs had still not attended it over a year into their term. One MP said there was a need for 'refresher courses' for returning MPs, and the deputy speaker noted she did not receive specific training when she assumed her position.

6.3 Evolution of support to increase women MPs' performance

A strategy that prioritises increasing the number of women in parliament but not their ability to be effective or re-elected needs to be seriously questioned. Government, CSOs and development partners in Malawi, as well as women MPs, all recognise that **improved support to women's representation, substantive as well as descriptive, requires support to be more coordinated and to extend beyond election year** (e.g. Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2008; MGCCD, 2009; NGO-GCN, 2009; KII #4, #9, #10). One informant commented that '*Elections have been looked at as incidents, not process or cycles*' (KII #4).

At least **three factors explain why this learning is not being applied in in Malawi:** limited funding to women's empowerment in general; the disappointment of past parliamentary strengthening; and ongoing problems with capacity development for MPs and the need to remain politically impartial (KII #2, Tostensen and Amundsen, 2010). While these are real challenges, the **focus on women's descriptive representation is not efficient** because MPs are failing to retain their seats, which means term-on-term gains do not materialise. High turnover also makes cumulative work with women MPs near impossible, with impacts on advocacy on legislative reform and, importantly, law implementation. **Supporting women's descriptive but not substantive representation may even be counterproductive** because high turnover undermines the performance of parliament and parliamentarians, which can reinforce negative perceptions of women's leadership capabilities.

Cross-party support to incumbent MPs is more feasible in this electoral term because the (near) hung parliament means it is much less politically sensitive. In addition, while some development agencies need to be *politically neutral* in their activities in relation to party politics, none can avoid *working politically* – that is, engaging with issues of power, incentives and ideas – if they are to help women MPs have more influence. Assistance has to be relevant to the primary needs of women MPs and these – for example delivering in the constituency or negotiating the *de facto* rules of the game and party politics within parliament – are inevitably about politics (with a small p).

> *We need to think at level of those that have stayed and found out how to be strategic. Because we don't have affirmative action in Malawi, the battle is the same, male and female, no advantages. It's not just money but tactics and understanding the terrain […] during the campaign period, and how to jump in and to ride the same tide [as men] (KII #9)*

More creative approaches are needed to help women MPs be more successful, including in the eyes of their constituents. UN Women recognises the need to tailor its capacity development so it involves fewer workshops and more 'hand-holding' and constituency-level support (KII x1). At the same time, gender is not the only factor preventing women from gaining and keeping hold of parliamentary seats, and realism is therefore needed about what is possible in the medium term.

6.4 International support to the women's movement and gender equality

CSOs, in particular women's and rights organisations, play an important role in political action to advance gender equality. They provide training for women leaders, keep gender issues visible, lobby for reform and implementation, including in ways that provide an important resource for gender activists within parliament and government,[60] and can increase the cost to (resistant or indifferent) politicians of not addressing gender inequality (Domingo et al., 2015; Weldon and Htun, 2013).

Absence of a well-established women's movement in Malawi, combined with aid dependence, means **donors drive women's rights and gender equality agendas** more than they do elsewhere. In the area of women's political empowerment, support has focused on the 50/50 Campaign. Funding NGO-GCN and women's rights organisations also tends towards being project-based and short in term. This mode of engagement risks feeding a cycle whereby small organisations adapt their agendas pragmatically to the priorities of potential funders but this does not contribute to the emergence of a locally anchored and organic women's movement with the strong membership base necessary to significantly drive forward gender equality over several decades.

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60 Such as by raising issues or taking positions not politically feasible for politicians because of their party platform.

7. Conclusion

Women politicians in Malawi face similar challenges and opportunities to men but have the additional disadvantages associated with being a politician in a patriarchal society. Our survey provides original and comparative data on the profile, perspectives and experiences of the current cohort of women MPs. Using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, we draw conclusions about the main factors to enable and constrain women's political representation and their ability to be effective and influential MPs, including whether they represent other women's interests.

7.1 What factors influence women's ability to become MPs?

There has been a steady increase in the number of women MPs in Malawi since the transitional elections in 1994, with the proportion peaking at 22.3% in 2009 before falling to 16.6% in 2014. However, the interaction of electoral rules (first-past-the-post, no quota), the party system (weakly institutionalised and fragmented) and prejudice against women's leadership significantly influences whether parties nominate women and do so in seats they are able to win. In 2009, the DPP had widespread support and returned 31 women MPs – just one fewer than all the parties combined in 2014. In 2014, the election was much more competitive and the parties nominated fewer women in regions where they had the most support, reducing the number of seats they were likely to win.

With few exceptions, the profile of women MPs makes clear that political power is open to a narrow socioeconomic group of women in Malawi, bounded both by class (education, career) and social expectations (marital status, religious belief). Even so, in a patronage-based political and electoral system with no controls on party finance, women are at a distinct disadvantage. They have fewer economic resources than men and less access to male-dominated clientelist networks. Discriminatory customary law continues to govern the lifecycle in Malawi, which relegates women to reproductive and domestic roles and constrains their economic and decision-making power.

In spite of constitutional guarantees, successive male-dominated governments have done little to address women's economic and political exclusion. Ruling parties face few domestic incentives to actively promote gender equality: Malawi has no strong, independent women's organisations and the mostly rural-based population has conservative values about gender. In general, Malawian voters see men as more credible leaders, and women are subject to undue scrutiny, sexism and abuse during and after campaigning. To be successful, women candidates must therefore have self-belief and resilience.

7.2 What factors influence women's ability to be effective MPs?

Regardless of sex, Malawian MPs face similar difficulties (and opportunities) in their attempts to influence decision-making in their party and parliament, to perform well enough in the eyes of their constituents to retain their seats and to advance their political careers. These include executive dominance of parliament, personalised parties and disciplined caucuses, high turnover, insufficient support from the parliamentary secretariat or party, complex interaction of rigid Standing Orders and informal rules and practice, demanding committee and legislative work and high constituent demands on MPs as individuals in a context of low government investment and poor services.

Women MPs have additional hurdles (and only rarely advantages) because of the way gender norms interact with most of these factors. The MPs say this is most problematic in their constituency work: women have fewer assets and less social capital than men but voters expect more of them and judge them more harshly. But the effects of discrimination are also apparent in the Assembly, in attitudes towards women politicians, undue scrutiny of women MPs because of their minority status, men's overrepresentation in leadership positions and their monopoly of the most powerful committees.

Some women MPs have the resources to adopt a constituency-focused strategy for re-election, avoiding party politics and focusing their energies on constituency development. For most MPs, however, there is likely to be a relationship between their effectiveness in the party and that in their constituency: parties control leadership positions and these in turn provide MPs with leverage in negotiations over resources for their constituency. Successful women MPs, including those who retain their seats, walk the fine line between masculinity and femininity: they are seen as credible leaders and can hold their own with male colleagues while conforming to expectations of a 'proper' Malawian women in the eyes of constituents. Rather than rejecting them outright, this suggests effective women politicians adopt a strategic approach to gender norms and expectations in pursuit of political or electoral gain.

Finally, being a successful politician also means knowing and playing both the formal and informal rules of the game, both inside and outside parliament, and having political skills (e.g. political intuition, sound judgement, persuasion, networking). The majority of Malawian MPs are novices, but the turnover rate is higher for women. MPs learn political skills through their experience before standing for parliament; particularly important for women is professional experience (teaching, international organisations), membership in faith-based organisations and, to a lesser degree, student politics and unionism. Notably, however, women MPs do not come from the ranks of political parties. This means their prior experiences may prepare them more for the performative aspects of leadership (e.g. charisma, oration) than for informal negotiation with other politicians.

7.3 Do women MPs promote gender equality and/or represent the interests of other women?

All the MPs mentioned the effect of gender norms on their own political experience, and over half talked about women as a special interest group. However, hardly any described themselves as feminists, and they appeared more comfortable talking about empowering women than about gender equality. This absence of strong political or ideological views may be strategic given the average Malawian is likely to hold conservative beliefs on gender roles and relations. It also raises questions about how Malawian women themselves understand their interests, particularly for MPs who represent rural constituencies. Our data do not allow us to draw robust conclusions, but we cannot assume all women MPs hold progressive views. For example, some signal their belief or conformity in hierarchical gender roles, and many are members of churches and other religious organisations that are likely to influence their worldview, including in relation to gender. In addition, only a minority of women MPs spoke of concrete actions they had taken to support women and girls in their constituency.

Women MPs have, however, been effective in working strategically and across party lines to get gender-sensitive laws passed. Passage of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (2015) was possible because of reduced political tension within the Women's Caucus; leadership of the caucus by a human rights activist and her cooperation with the Minister for Gender; women MPs lobbying male colleagues; strategic framing of the reform as primarily about child protection, and UN Women's partnership with the caucus.

This case study confirms the iterative and piecemeal nature of change that can cumulatively alter gender relations. Gains may be small, but are still significant, not least given the absence of a strong women's movement. Ideas and behaviour continue to conform to traditional gender norms in many ways, but greater legislative presence is itself change, one that undoubtedly influences

societal expectations of women's leadership. At the same time, the (gendered) reaction to Joyce Banda's leadership and to allegations of her involvement in grand corruption shows the symbolic effect of women's leadership can also be negative and regressive changes in attitudes are possible.

7.4 Women's access and influence: cross-cutting themes

We conclude with some final observations about factors influencing *both* women's descriptive and substantive representation in Malawi, before providing recommendations on how domestic and international organisations might improve their support.

- **The political, social and economic conditions that make it difficult for all MPs to be effective in Malawi, in parliament or their constituency, are unlikely to change much in the medium term.** These binding constraints to MPs' behaviour and achievements include executive dominance, non-ideological and personalised parties prone to factionalism, dysfunctional government systems, corruption, a zero-aid budget, a disillusioned electorate and one-term MPs.

- **We cannot predict how institutions will shape behaviour if we look at them in isolation.** In practice, the *interaction* of different rules, formal and informal, shapes ideas and incentives. In a multiparty democracy, the interaction of formal rules (constitutional, electoral, party), the party system (personalised, fragmented, ethno-regional, non-ideological) and informal norms and practices (clientelism, big wo/man politics, gender) is critical to understanding who is elected and how they are likely to behave. It also means changes to one rule (e.g. new rights, quotas) are unlikely to have the intended effect unless its interaction with others is understood.

- **Gender norms are a particular type of informal norm that shape how other institutions work in practice and in ways that benefit men and disadvantage women.** MPs face common difficulties and constraints but women have the additional challenge of having to work with and around the often-hidden gendering of political rules and practices. The survey provides some insights into how women manage resistance to their increased presence in politics in ways that contribute to progressive but piecemeal change in women's rights and gender relations. More intensive qualitative methods (ethnography, process tracing) are needed to really unpack how gender influences institutional change and women's ability to effect it.

- **We need to look at the differences between women MPs to understand which are more or less influential and why.** The basic socioeconomic profile of women MPs is narrow, with factors such as higher education and incomes are important to their increased representation overall. However, women MPs' prior experiences and

current motivations, capabilities and networks are diverse. These differences can help explain variations in their performance and their ideas about and prioritisation of women's rights (and other issues) and which interest groups they are likely to act for. We propose a typology of women MPs to improve understanding of the differences between women politicians and the strategies they are likely to use to advance their political objectives, in relation to both their own career and the interests of others.

- **Collective leadership and action is important for more effective women's representation.** There is a tendency to think of leaders and leadership in terms of individuals, including in support to women's representation. However, we suggest women's organisational weakness in Malawi hampers both the performance of women MPs and their representation of other women. Feminist organisations are not well established and, unlike in other countries, women MPs have not emerged from and do not have close connections with women's associations. Women are also marginalised in political parties and do not emerge from their ranks. Faith-based organisations dominate civic life but their link to women's leadership and representation is under-researched.

- **Support to women's representation in Malawi has focused almost wholly on descriptive representation.** Beyond UN Women's partnership with the Parliamentary Women's Caucus, there has been limited attention to the performance and retention of women MPs. What is more, efforts to get more women into parliament have focused on the supply of women candidates and short-term support to individuals immediately prior to election, but not on changing electoral rules, party behaviour and gender norms that also constrain women's access to parliament.

8. Recommendations for policy and practice

A strategy for improving women's descriptive and substantive representation is not about doing more of the same but a bit better. It is about trying different and complementary things and taking a longer-term perspective while working politically to secure medium-term gains. These recommendations are for Malawian women's rights organisations, government and political parties, as well as bilateral and multilateral agencies, whose cooperation and coordination are vital to more effective support.

8.1 Supporting future women's leaders and their diverse pathways into politics

Gender advisors in funding agencies **should work with sector colleagues on programmes to increase the social and economic capabilities** that are instrumental for women's political power, in particular higher education and economic capital.

International funding agencies and Malawian women's rights organisations **should develop long-term relations with the civic associations through which women acquire political skills and resources** ('political apprenticeship') such as FBOs and student and youth groups. Identifying young women with the necessary political interests, skills and networks early, and nurturing them, is a more sustainable strategy than targeting women candidates during the election period. This would also help address the problem of women MPs standing for parliament at the behest of others (parties, male relatives, local leaders) but with no history of political activism, no purposeful political ambition (feminist or otherwise) and/or no clear idea of what being an MP entails.

Malawian gender equality activists **should work with** *party leaders,* **including at subnational levels, to persuade them of the value of attracting women,** chip away at discriminatory beliefs and support changes to make political parties more appealing to young women. There are benefits in championing women's leadership for parties that want to shed a conservative or exclusionary reputation. Engagement with parties must continue throughout the electoral cycle, such as joining party advocacy up with broader electoral reform work, and not just occur in the run-up to elections.

8.2 Levelling the electoral playing field

International funders and Malawian gender equality activists **should ensure activities of the MEC and related organisations are gender-sensitive,** both through reform processes and routine electoral management.[61] This includes working with the *MEC and political parties* **to improve the management of primary elections.**

Malawian gender equality activists **should work with** *political parties* **to increase the selection of women candidates** – particularly in constituencies where the party has a good chance of winning. Activists should work to dispel the perception that women candidates have less chance of winning than men, which is not borne out by the data.

Bilateral and multilateral agencies **should rethink their approach to short-term support to candidates and embed it within longer-term approach to mentoring.** That support comes only after nomination makes it difficult to mentor women candidates or tailor support to their particular needs. The cash and materials provided are nominal in terms of the overall cost of campaigning, and may thus even be counterproductive.[62] Another unfortunate reality is that the financial demands of being a parliamentarian in Malawi mean that, even if successful, a woman without the resources to afford the nomination fee is unlikely to maintain the support of her constituents and be re-elected.

International and domestic agencies **should conduct real-time research to make possible tailored campaign support for women candidates,** including on how to change tactics in response to changes in the external environment. They could also consider comparing different types of support to women candidates and their effectiveness.

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61 For example, UNDP's detailed statistical analysis of electoral trends in Malawi is not disaggregated by sex (KII #7); even basic figures on candidates were not until fairly recently (KII #9).

62 NGO-GCN (2009) argues, 'The K92 000 cash was a drop in the ocean for many candidates. Some women aspirants complained that it reduced their chances of accessing other contribution because the hype was that women had been financially funded under the campaign. The challenge become most obvious when one considers that the majority of women spent over a million kwatcha for their campaign.'

8.3 Helping women politicians to be more effective once elected

An orientation for MPs is the bare minimum that should be provided. *Bilateral and multilateral agencies* **should continue to support the MIM introductory course for parliamentarians** but consider whether the timing between tranches can be shortened so new MPs take the course sooner.

Bilateral and multilateral agencies **should continue to support the Parliamentary Women's Caucus,** currently the only mechanism for regular networking between women MPs and an important vehicle for any collective action.

However, a programme of training sessions delivered to the Women's Caucus as a whole may not be the best instrument for individual capacity-building. *Bilateral and multilateral agencies* **should work with the Women's Caucus to consider new approaches to capacity development that can improve the performance of individual MPs.** Individual training budgets are one possibility.

Bilateral and multilateral agencies **should consider helping women MPs set up/run their constituency office.**[63] Constituency activities are a priority for women MPs but they get minimal support from their party in running a constituency office. It is not realistic to expect individual MPs to have all the different skills they need to be visible to their constituents, build relations, monitor public opinion and mobilise supporters. External support could include funding of office costs (e.g. telecommunications, office space) or an internship programme to place new graduates in relevant disciplines with MPs for a year to support research, fundraising, communications and constituency relations. **Action research could be integrated into such programmes to look at what types of inputs MPs choose and which are more/less effective and why.**

Bilateral and multilateral agencies **must resist letting risk management and bureaucratic accountability pressure undermine actual empowerment of women leaders.** Giving women MPs more control over programmes may produce fewer short-term 'deliverables' but do more to improve their collective and individual capabilities in the long term, including their interest in and ability to advance other women's interests. This is not about abandoning results but identifying appropriate process-related objectives and indicators – such as women MPs taking responsibility for their own training – that are more likely to contribute in meaningful ways to changes to women's empowerment and more equitable gender norms and relations.

UN Women's **funding of embedded technical assistance to NGO-GCN, the Women's Caucus and the National Task Force on Electoral Reform is a promising approach that might facilitate more locally led and flexible programming.** Embedded advisors can provide day-to-day support, build trust and, if given authority, work with partners to revise in-year activities as required.

Bilateral and multilateral agencies **should fund Malawian universities or research institutes to conduct action research with women MPs to learn more about how they work and their achievements** – and use these findings in civic education to communicate the value of women leaders to party leaders, local authorities and voters.

Bilateral and multilateral agencies **should fund the parliamentary secretariat,** particularly committee chairs and the speaker, **to improve technical and secretarial support available to MPs.** High turnover of MPs increases both the demands on parliamentary staff and the value of their institutional memory and their ability to offer a constituency across parliamentary terms.

8.4 Working with women and men to advance gender equality

Bilateral and multilateral agencies should support the development of locally anchored, autonomous women's associations and movements in the following ways:

- Recognise the value of autonomous women's organisations to gender equality gains. Men are key allies and can also be feminists, but the evidence is clear on the **importance of women organising with women** for their solidarity, critical consciousness and gender equality activism;
- Do not jeopardise the **long-term maturation** of civil society by focusing on short-term goals that overly instrumentalise nascent organisations;
- Consider a **'women's fund'** to provide core funding to women's organisations, managed by a specialist women's rights organisation that can provide technical support and long-term accompaniment for grassroots women's organisations. This will provide organisations with the space and time to work out their own agenda, constituency and ways of working;
- Consider core funding for the **NGO-GCN secretariat** to enable it to focus on developing its policy, advocacy and coordination functions and to remove conflicts of interest and perverse incentives for membership;
- **Facilitate opportunities for networking and relationship-building between women's organisations to support the development of a women's movement.** This includes vertical relations that can take in grassroots women's organisations, national women's rights organisations, the Women's Caucus and the transnational women's movement. Brokering relations between individual women MPs and grassroots women's organisations may

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63 To be clear, this is not to idealise constituency offices or assume they will work in the same way as those in other political contexts. Instead, it recognises they are critical not just to support MP capacity but also to build the local vertical support networks essential for their delivery and re-election in clientelist-based political systems, particularly in a context of weak party structures.

strengthen their resolve and ability to promote gender equality. Horizontal networking is also important, such as providing opportunities for grassroots women's organisations from different districts to come together or for national women's rights organisations to exchange views and set agendas.

In their support to the Women's Caucus, *funders and implementers* should try to achieve a balance between securing specific gender equality reforms/laws and empowering MPs as an end in itself. These two goals can be mutually reinforcing, but activities to achieve more gender-sensitive laws in the short term should not come at the cost of more substantive activities to empower women and enable them to sustain collective action over the longer term (e.g. support to networking, learning and peer support, enabling women to set their own agenda).

Changing societal attitudes to gender roles and norms is critical to reduce gender inequality over the long term – in terms of both voter/party perceptions of women's roles and leadership potential and women MP's own views of their role and capacity. Attitudinal change and coordinated action among politicians, civil servants and ordinary people is also necessary if gender-sensitive law and policy is to be implemented. Incrementally changing gender values, norms and expectations requires:

- *Gender experts and civil society should work with the MEC and NICE* **to ensure electoral education is gender-sensitive and civic education is sustained throughout the electoral cycle.** Electoral education has been gender-blind and technical. Sustained civic education is needed that focuses on changing attitudes, including to women's leadership, educating different parties about their roles and managing voter expectations of their representatives (Nkuuhe and Kanyongolo, 2014).
- *International agencies* **have a role to play in ensuring funding arrangements incentivise better coordination and long-term engagement.**
- *Implementing agencies* **must adapt gender sensitisation programmes to particular groups and conditions.** Civic education should be developed and delivered by Malawian organisations that are able to work with and around political and cultural sensitivities. A priority is to work with **traditional and religious leaders** to change their views on women's leadership and gender roles more generally.

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Annex 1: Research design

This case study is part of a two-year DFID-funded evidence and learning project on Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making. There are two main research questions:

1. What are the enabling factors for women and girls' voice, leadership and access to decision-making in developing country contexts?
2. What do we know about whether and how women and girls' voice, leadership and presence in decision-making roles result in greater gender equality (e.g. more inclusive political settlements, more gender-responsive laws and policies, better provision of public goods and services to women and girls, more equitable social norms and outcomes)?

In the first phase of the project, ODI undertook a structured review of the academic and grey literature on women and girl's voice and leadership (Domingo et al., 2015; O'Neil and Domingo, 2015), and two rapid evidence reviews on women's leadership development programmes (O'Neil and Plank, 2015) and women and girls' voice and their use of digital information and communication technology (O'Neil and Cummings, 2015).

In this second phase of the project, the team is conducting five country case studies to test lessons and propositions identified in the evidence review, to fill gaps in knowledge and to consider how external agencies can improve their support to women voice and leadership in decision-making processes.

For the Malawi case study, we designed a survey to collect data about the current cohort of women parliamentarians, with a focus on the following questions:

- What factors influence women's ability to become MPs in Malawi?
- What factors influence women's ability to be effective MPs?
- How could international support to women parliamentarians be improved?

There are some important in-depth analyses of women's routes into and experience of parliamentary life (Tadros, 2014; Tamale, 1999; Goetz and Hassim, 2003). This evidence base presents several propositions:

- Women parliamentarians are educated, middle-class and, often, married.
- Women's pathways to power are diverse and often unconventional, with political apprenticeship through informal spaces, welfare-oriented work and university playing as important a role as formal party politics.
- Women involved in national politics need help to build social capital and a constituency more than leadership skills training, and women value leadership development

programmes more because they provide access to networks and funding than because of the skills they acquire.
- In patronage-based politics, women's political influence and advancement depend on their construction of personal relationships with party leaders/senior patrons and this undermines their ability to champion gender equity objectives.
- There is a symbolic/socialisation effect of women holding senior government positions that can positively transform gender norms, even when women do not substantively represent women.

However, these existing studies are almost all small-n, using a mixture of semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of women parliamentarians, a small number of life histories of women MPs and interviews with other stakeholders (e.g. male parliamentarians, CSOs, government). Surveys of parliamentarians are rare, and longitudinal panel surveys even rarer.

A survey instrument – which is available on request – was therefore chosen to compare (within-country) data from women parliamentarians to test out propositions from the literature and also fill gaps, in particular in terms of starting to generate propositions about which women are more or less able to be effective politicians and why. This case study also serves as a pilot for this type of instrument, exploring its feasibility and usefulness to deepen knowledge about women's political leadership in newly democratised, developing countries.

The survey instrument has a series of closed questions to collect data on the background, characteristics and formal positions of the women MPs and their families, and five open-ended questions to collect data on women's motivations, experiences and achievements. The evidence review, and existing research on the socioeconomic and political factors that enable women's access to political office (e.g. Tadros, 2014), guided the choice of survey questions, coding of answers (for closed questions) and prompts (for open-ended questions), and how to operationalise the concept of influence (e.g. through women's leadership positions and self-reported achievements and outcomes). All MPs were asked the five open-ended questions but the interviewers used their discretion as to which prompts to follow up with depending on the answer to the primary questions.

Primary data collection was carried out between July and August 2015. Our objective was to interview all of the 32 current women MPs. All were contacted by telephone and 22 women took part. While the spread of parties in our sample is broadly representative of women MPs as a whole, the ruling DPP is slightly underrepresented (18.2% of the sample compared with 25% of all women MPs) and the other three main parties are slightly overrepresented. However, we are

confident that, with a 69% response rate, the findings can be generalised to the population of women MPs.

All the interviews lasted at least one hour and all but one was conducted in person (one was by phone). Survey respondents were introduced to the research project and told what the research would be used for. We asked permission to record the interview. Women were informed that we would include quotations in our report but that they would not be attributed to the MP. As much as possible, we wanted the respondent views on gender and gender inequalities to emerge organically. We therefore said the research was looking at the experiences of MPs (but not specifically women MPs) and how they might be better supported, and noted separately that the research was part of a larger project on women's leadership. The open-ended questions were also purposively not gendered – for example, we asked about their motivations, experiences and achievements as an MP, not as a woman, and we did not specifically ask their views on gender equality and women's rights or whether they acted for other women. However, all MPs were promoted to reflect on the different experience of female and male politicians as a follow-up question if they had not do so already.

A team of at least two researchers carried out 16 of the interviews, with one person asking questions and another person recording the responses on a hard copy of the survey. These interviews were also recorded and transcribed. A further six interviews were carried out by a single researcher and the hand-written survey responses were typed up. Survey responses were then analysed using Excel for quantitative data and MaxQDA for the open-ended questions. The coding of the qualitative data was primarily deductive – for example based on capabilities or institutional factors known from the literature to be important to women's political power – but some factors also emerged inductively.

Many elements of the qualitative data were also entered into Excel to enable them to be analysed quantitatively – for example the number of women who reported hate speech during their campaign or the number who first spoke of their achievements in their constituency vs. their achievements as a law-maker. Mixed methods were essential to generating propositions about the relationship between the background and characteristics of women MPs, their capabilities and strategies and their achievements.

Greater analytical leverage would have been possible if we had also surveyed a representative sample of current male MPs and past women MPs, but time and resources did not allow for this. However, in three districts we were able to interview a male MP from the same party as each woman we had interviewed. Greater resources would also enable interviews with party officials and focus group discussion with constituents, including on what they expect from their MPs and how they define success, and to triangulate the information provided by MPs on campaigning and performance.

Alongside the survey, we also carried out a further 14 key informant interviews. We purposively selected informants in order to speak with representatives of the main bilateral and multilateral agencies supporting women's political representation in Malawi, and representatives from NGO-GCN as the main implementer of programmes. We also spoke with one parliamentary staff member. Interviews were semi-structured, with questionnaires developed for different categories of informant. If time had allowed, we would have spoken with more civil society representatives, parliamentary staff, permanent staff in political party executives and government officials. However, data from the survey and KIIs were triangulated with written material – both primary (e.g. Hansard, Standing Orders) and secondary (e.g. programme evaluations and reviews, academic studies).

A limitation of the survey instrument is that there was not time to explore some of the respondents' answers in the depth we might have if conducting a semi-structured interviews. In particular, it was difficult to dig deep into the question of how women MPs negotiate institutions and exert influence, individually or collectively, in order to advance their interests. However, a benefit of the survey instrument was that we asked all MPs the same questions under similar conditions and we are therefore able to compare the responses systematically.

Annex 2: List of survey respondents and key informants

To protect the anonymity of survey respondents and key informants, we refer only to their identification number in the body of the text. Each survey respondent was given an identification number, which is used in citations following the format (MP #ID number). If reported information makes the MP identifiable, we do not include the identification number in the citation, but just note the number of sources (e.g. MP x 2). Below, we list participating MPs in alphabetical order; *their position in the list does not correspond to their survey ID number and it is not possible to identify MPs cited in the text from the list from the list below.* For male MPs and key informants, we take the added precaution of not including their names at all, as their small number would make them easy to identify. Key informants were also given an identification number and are cited in the main body of the report using the following format (KII #ID number).

Members of parliament
Hon. Aisha Mambo Adams, Mangochi Nkungulu (UDF)
Hon. Esther Mcheka Chilenje, Nsanje North (Independent)
Hon. Olipa Myaba Chiluba, Mzimba North East (Independent)
Hon. Olipa Chimangeni, Ntchisi North East (MCP)
Hon. Patricia Shanil Dzimbiri, Balaka West (Independent)

Hon. Jessie Kabwila, Salima North (MCP)
Hon. Patricia Annie Kaliati, Mulanje West (DPP)
Hon. Mary Maulidi Khembo, Neno South (Independent)
Hon. Jacqueline Jacoba C.C. Kouven Hoven, Rumphi West (Independent)
Hon. Juliana Mdamvestsa Lunguzi, Dedza East (MCP
Hon. Patricia Omega Mkanda, Lilongwe North (MCP)
Hon. Mary Connie Livuza Mpanga, Phalombe South (Independent)
Hon. Beatrice Roseby Mwale, Kasungu North (PP)
Hon. Patricia Kainga Nangozo, Zomba City Central (PP)
Hon. Susan Kacholola Ndalama, Blantyre Rural East (DPP)
Hon. Alice Deliwe Ngoma, Mzimba Luwelezi (DPP)
Hon. Agness Makonda Nyalonje, Mzimba North (PP)
Hon. Lilian Estella Patel, Mangochi South (UDF)
Hon. Emily Maluziya Phiri-Chintu, Nkhata Bay South (Independent)
Hon. Lyana Tambala, Mulanje North (Independent)
Hon. Chrissy Chiphana Tembo, Lilongwe City North (MCP)
Hon. Rachel Mazombwe Zulu, Mchinji North (PP)
3 male MPs (1 MCP, 2 PP)

Key informants

Informant category	Number of interviewees
Academic	1
Bilateral agency (Malawi office)	4
Civil society / NGOs	4
Multilateral agency (Malawi office)	4
Parliamentary staff	1

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