

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON GENDER  
EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE CASE OF MULANJE  
DISTRICT IN MALAWI.**

**by**

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## **i DECLARATION**

I, **Caroline Kajawo**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled '*An Assessment Of The Influence Of Religion On Gender Equality And Women Empowerment: The Case Of Mulanje District In Malawi*' is my own original work and that it has not been previously submitted for degree purposes at any other institution of higher learning. I also declare that this thesis does not contain any information or references that have not been duly acknowledged.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2013

## **ii DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to:

My creator and my God, for His unconditional love, strength, wisdom and guidance to complete this study.

My heroes; my parents for teaching me everything about life and above all enlightening me about the reality of life; everyone must struggle hard to make their dreams come true and to be a successful person. My parents have always been voices of encouragement and rocks of stability in my life. They are the reason behind my enthusiasm. They never failed to make me believe about my dreams even when I myself thought they were too hard to reach.

All selfless men and women, who dedicate their lives to the service of others; those wonderful men and women who continue to touch the lives of the vulnerable; women and men who strive to create spaces for the once silenced voices to be heard.

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## **IV TABLE OF CONTENTS**

i DECLARATION .....	ii
ii DEDICATION.....	iii
iii ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
IV TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
V ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS .....	x
VI ABSTRACT .....	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Introduction .....	1
1.2. Background to the Study.....	1
1.3 Statement of Research Problem .....	3
1.4 Research Objectives .....	4
1.5 Research Questions .....	5
1.6 Significance of the Study .....	5
1.7 An Overview of Research Methods .....	7
1.8 Operational Definitions of Key Concepts .....	8
1.9 Chapter Outline .....	10
1.10 Conclusion.....	12
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
2.1 Introduction .....	13
2.2 Gender Equality.....	13
2.3 Women Empowerment.....	14
2.4 Gender and Development.....	15
2.5 The Status, Causes and Effects of Gender Equality in Developing Countries .....	16
2.6 Gender Equality in Malawi .....	20

2.7 Religion and Gender.....	35
2.8 Religion and Gender Equality/Inequality in Malawi .....	39
2.9 Religion and Gender Equality/Inequality in Mulanje district .....	43
2.10 Conclusion.....	44
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND .....	45
3.1: Introduction .....	45
3.2 Context of the Study.....	45
3.3. Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	56
4.1 Introduction .....	56
4.2 Research Design.....	56
4.3 Research Setting.....	57
4.4 Study Target Population.....	58
4.5 Research Methodology.....	58
4.6 Validity and Reliability .....	69
4.7 Data Analysis .....	70
4.8 Ethical Considerations.....	71
4.9 Limitations of the Study .....	72
4.10 Conclusion.....	72
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION .....	74
5.1 Introduction .....	74
5.2: Demographic Characteristics .....	75
5.3 Qualitative Results- Presentation and Discussion.....	80
5.4 Quantitative Findings and Discussions .....	100
5.5 Conclusion.....	127

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION .....	128
6.1. Introduction .....	128
6.2 Summary of Main Findings .....	128
6.3 Conclusion and Recommendations .....	132
6.4 Recommendations for Further Research .....	135
6.6 Concluding Remarks .....	136
7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	137
APPENDICES .....	150
Appendix 1: Information to Study participants.....	150
Appendix 4: Guidelines for Non-religious Leaders (CSO, CBO, GVH, Politicians )e.t.c .....	156
Appendix 5: Guiding Questions for FGD .....	159
Appendix 6: Likert Scale Questionnaire .....	163
Appendix 7: Map of Malawi .....	170
Appendix 8: Map of Mulanje Showing T.As.....	171

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Age of Respondents.....	80
Figure 2: Respondents Marital Status.....	82
Figure 3: Respondents Religious Denomination.....	84
Figure 4: Women and Men’s Access to Resources.....	109
Figure 5: Equality is a Human Right.....	111
Figure 6: Education and Culture.....	114
Figure 7: Education is more important to a boy than to a girl.....	116
Figure 8: A married woman should have her own source of income.....	118
Figure 9: Religion versus attitudes towards woman challenging a man.....	120
Figure 10: A woman should be denied chance to preach.....	122
Figure 11: Religion and women leadership and sacral roles.....	124
Figure 12: A religious woman should be submissive.....	128
Figure 14: Abortion should be considered in context of women’s health being endangered....	134

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Key Informants who took part in semi-structured Interviews.....	66
Table 2: Respondents Tribe.....	81
Table 3: Respondents Number of Children.....	83
Table 4: Respondents Education Level.....	85
Table 5: Participants Definition of Women Empowerment.....	86
Table 6: Dignity and Value between Men and women.....	108
Table 7: Women can achieve as men.....	110
Table 8: Women should be self reliant.....	112
Table 9: Women should participate in decision making.....	113
Table 10: Denomination versus education and culture.....	115
Table 11: Men should be given priorities.....	117
Table 12: A male child is more suitable to inherit.....	121
Table 13: Women should perform housekeeping roles.....	123
Table 14: Attention in gender in preaching and practice.....	125
Table 15: Religious groups should pay special attention to gender.....	127
Table 16: Religious groups should have clear policies and structures on GBV.....	130
Table 17: Respondents denomination versus polygamy.....	120
Table 18: Respondents denomination versus use of contraceptives in religious family.....	133

## **V ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ADF	Alliance Defence Fund
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BBC	British Broadcasting Cooperation
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CARD	Church Action in Relief and Development
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief
C.C.A.P.	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CHRR	Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CVSU	Community Victim Support Unit
DC	District Commissioner
ECM	Episcopal Conference of Malawi

FBO	Faith Based Organizations
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDI	Gender Related Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic product
GVH	Group Village Headmen
Ha	Hectare
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRD	Human Resource Development
ICESCR	International Covenants on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
JC	Junior Certificate
KMs	Kilometres
LCD	Least Developed Countries
LSA	Law Succession Act
MAM	Muslim Association of Malawi
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals

MDHS	Malawi Demographic and Health Survey
MFI	MicroFinance Institutions
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MHRC	Malawi Human Rights Commission
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPRSP	Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MSCE	Malawi School Leaving Certificate Examination
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NSO	National Statistical Office
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination
ROCSAS	Rotating Credit and Savings Associations
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TA	Traditional Authority
TORs	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

UNAIDS	Joint UN Program on AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNIFEM	United Nation Fund for Women
UNISA	University of South Africa
US\$	United States Dollar
WCBA	Women of Child Bearing Age
WHO	World Health Organization
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust
WVI	World Vision International

## **VI ABSTRACT**

*Qualitative and quantitative research designs were employed to assess the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district in Malawi. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires through interview with 18 key informants who were sampled by judgmental sampling and 4 FGDs with men and women belonging to different religions who were sampled by stratified random sampling. Quantitative data was collected using a self administered questionnaire to 130 participants sampled by stratified random sampling. Quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS computer program version 16.0 in order to reach to a valid conclusion. The analysis of the data involved descriptive statistics. For qualitative data, themes were induced from the interview with key informants and FGD.*

*Findings have revealed positive religious teachings and beliefs that have empowered women and promoted equality between men and women. Nevertheless, the study has also revealed that discriminatory religious teachings and attitudes are a reality in religious institutions and these have influenced not only the way women are treated in religious institutions but also the way women look at themselves.*

*In light of the findings, recommendations have been made to the government of Malawi, religious institutions, religious leaders and CSOs to take appropriate actions to promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district.*

**Key words:** *Discrimination, gender, gender equality, gender inequality, gender roles, religion, religious institutions, women empowerment*

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides a general background to the study and the research problem to justify the need for the research. Presented thereafter are the study objectives, significance of the study and operational definitions to explain and clarify key concepts used in the study. The chapter also gives a brief overview of the research methods used in the study. Lastly, the chapter gives an overview of the chapter outline of the whole thesis.

## **1.2. Background to the Study**

International aid donors, governments, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), scholars and other developmental experts have paid much attention to gender equality and women empowerment as tools for promoting sustainable development. Studies have revealed that gender equality is central to sustainable political, economic, social, cultural and human development of any nation (United Nations 2007: 953). The United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) recognizes promotion of gender equality and women empowerment as one of the goals to end poverty by 2015 (UNDP 2007:881). Thus promoting gender equality and women empowerment is seen as an encouragement to sustainable development. There is considerable evidence that countries that promote gender equality have fast economic growth, increased household incomes, reduced maternal and child mortalities and less corruption (Katseli, 2007:11). Studies have revealed that increasing educational opportunities for females can lead to higher economic growth. Countries such as Mauritius, Botswana, Chile and Sri Lanka are some of the countries that have experienced strong economic growth with low levels of gender inequality in primary education (Chatham House and Vivid Economics, 2010: 21). UNDP (2007:881) argues that gender equality and women empowerment are fundamental in achieving the other 7 goals of MDGs. The UNDP argues that attempting to achieve the MDGs without promoting gender equality will not only raise the costs but will also reduce the likelihood of achieving the other goals.

While gains have been made, gender inequalities are still prevalent in most countries as evidenced by poor social indicators such as high maternal and child mortality and morbidity, inadequate representation of women in decision making and strategic

positions, high illiteracy levels among girls and women. Statistics show that out of the 800 million people in the world who lack basic literacy skills, women constitute two thirds. It also shows that every year, half a million women of whom 99 percent of them are from developing countries die from complications of child birth while globally 1 in 3 women and girls experience physical and sexual violence (Global Education, 2011:1).

Malawi, being a developing country in Africa has not been spared from issues of gender inequality. There is a reasonable evidence of systematic deprivation of women in relation to men (Munthali, 2002:6). This is exacerbated by existing discriminatory statutory and customary laws and practices. Women in Malawi encounter discrimination in areas of inheritance, property ownership, land ownership, access to loans and education (Maal and Banda, 2010:9). This creates a situation where women solely depend on men for their survival. This also predisposes women to situations where they do not have control over important decisions that affect their lives. Women's lack of control over their fertility for instance has impeded the struggle against maternal and child mortality in Malawi. The physical and emotional integrity of women in Malawi is not sufficiently protected. Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is common and appears to have increased in recent years. A day hardly passes by without hearing that somewhere a woman or a girl child has been raped, has had her breast removed, heavily beaten or even killed by her husband. Unfortunately, though legal measures exist that protect women and girls from abuse and violence, the existing discriminatory customary laws do not sufficiently protect women and girls from violence and abuse (Action AID and UNICEF, 2006:4).

The response of the international organizations and governments has been legislating laws to protect women. Section 24 of the constitution of the republic of Malawi provides that women have the right to full and equal protection under the law and have the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of their gender or marital status (WLSA Malawi, 2010:3). However, despite legislating laws to protect women and girls and promote equality between men and women, there are some discrepancies between what is in the constitution and the actual relationship between men and women. The existing inequalities are largely due to customary and traditional laws which act as a norm in the socialization process. Malawi has many ethnic groups with diverse customs, values and traditions. Some of these traditions and customs are common among all ethnic groups

while others are unique to a particular ethnic group. Nevertheless, most of the cultural practices impact negatively on the enjoyment of human rights, particularly the rights of women and children. For instance customary law throughout Malawi relegate women to subordinate status as compared to their male counterparts which puts women at increased risk of violence. However, besides customary and traditional laws, religion seems to play a big role in influencing the relationship between men and women.

Religious groups invoke the interpretations of the holy books such as the Holy Bible and the Quran to base their gender teachings. There are variations, however within religions in the way the teachings are interpreted. While in some places, religious teachings catalyse women to take up a cause, interpretation of the same holy books have restricted women to household duties and inferior positions in other places. There are texts in the Holy Bible that reinforce the gender idea that females are secondary to men. 1 Peter 3:7 encourages husbands to be considerate with wives and to treat them with respect for they are weak partners and heirs (Holy Bible, 2001:218). 1 Timothy 2:11-12 orders a woman to learn in silence and in full submission and not to teach or have authority over a man (Holy Bible, 2001:196). Islam has similar teachings of gender with Quran in Sura 4:34 asserting 'men are superior to women on account of qualities which God gave men' and hence need for women to be obedient to men. Nevertheless, some religious teachings encourage women empowerment and gender equality. Many times in the Holy Bible, Jesus is seen giving attention to women; the widow of Nain, the woman caught in adultery, the woman with the flow of blood, Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus, the Samaritan woman and it is to the woman that Jesus first showed himself after resurrection (Holy Bible, 2001). These are some of the texts that some religious leaders use to promote equality between men and women.

### **1.3 Statement of Research Problem**

For Malawi to achieve sustainable development, it must grant equal rights to women as well as men and empower women. As discussed in the background to the study (section 1.2), women and men are accorded equal rights under the Constitution of Malawi. The constitution specifically promotes and protects the rights of women and girls. Nevertheless, despite this progressive constitution, Malawi has typically been predominantly traditional and religious. As a result, customary and religious laws; values,

beliefs and practices have taken precedent over constitutional rights and formal laws. Consequently, obstacles to gender equality and women empowerment still persist.

Gender equality and women empowerment may remain a far fetched dream in Malawi unless customary and religious laws are aligned to the formal laws and constitutional rights. This research sought to analyse religious teachings, practices and beliefs to assess how they impact on gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. Such assessment would form a basis upon which action can be taken to encourage or discourage teachings and beliefs to ensure equality between men and women and women empowerment is promoted.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

The research sought to assess the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment. In order to achieve this objective, the research pursued the following objectives:

### **1.4.1 Main Objective**

- The main objective of the study was to assess the role that religion is playing in promoting gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. The research assessed, evaluated and analyzed how religion influences gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. In order to achieve this objective, the research pursued the following specific objectives:

### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

Specifically the research sought to achieve the following:

- To explore how women, men religious and other influential leaders understand gender equality and women empowerment;
- To provide a detailed assessment of the current status of gender, equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To categorize religious teachings and beliefs related to gender in Mulanje;

- To analyze elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To analyze the elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that contribute to gender inequality and women disempowerment;
- To analyze the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies; and
- To make recommendations to promote gender equality and women empowerment in religious institutions.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the research objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- How do women, men religious and other influential leaders in Mulanje district understand issues of gender equality and women empowerment?
- What is the perception of men and women on the current status of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- What factors have contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- What factors have impeded promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- How do religious teachings, beliefs, policies and practices promote gender equality and empower women in Mulanje district?
- How do religious teachings, beliefs, policies and practices impede gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- What is the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies on gender and women empowerment?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was four fold: Firstly, a good number of studies on gender equality have focussed on cultural factors that have hindered gender equality in Malawi. There are many studies on the influence of culture on gender equality in Malawi. These

studies have managed to provide a detailed analysis of different cultural practices and beliefs that impinge on human rights particularly the rights of children and women (MHRC, 2005; Society for the Advancement of Women, 2001; Women's Voice, 2000; Ntata and Sinoya 1999). Unfortunately, few studies have been done on the role religion plays in promoting gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. Furthermore, studies on gender equality and women empowerment have not made an analysis of different religious teachings and beliefs that impinge on human rights the way they have done with culture. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are religious teachings and beliefs that deserve special attention in Malawi as far as issues of gender equality and women empowerment are concerned. The study was therefore aimed at exploring from the perspective of women, men, religious leaders and other leaders the role that religion has played in promoting gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. The findings have uncovered religious factors that both promote and hinder gender equality and women in the district. The findings have implications for government, religious organizations, Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and other advocacy organizations. Using recommendations from this study, they will be able to review their organizational practices and develop programs that would enhance and strengthen gender justice. This will ultimately contribute to the empowerment of women in Mulanje district

Secondly, the immediate socio-economic implications of gender inequality and disempowerment of women in Malawi and Mulanje in particular necessitates researchers to identify as many factors as possible that both hinder and promote gender equality and women empowerment. As argued by Ngwira (2011), development of Malawi rests on promotion of gender equality and women empowerment (MDG 3). Nevertheless, religious factors that either promote or hinder gender equality and women empowerment cannot be ignored. A thorough analysis of religious factors will form the basis upon which action will be taken to promote or discourage some of the religious teachings and practices to ensure gender equality and women empowerment and ultimately socio-economic, political, cultural and human development in Malawi.

Thirdly, at the time religious institutions are taking an active role in the issues of governance in Malawi, promotion of gender equality and women empowerment remain one of the important governance issues. It makes a great sense therefore to learn from them the initiatives that have been taken to address issues of gender equality and women

empowerment. It also makes sense to understand the challenges that they face in their respective religious institutions if appropriate, long term and sustainable advocacy interventions are to be made.

Finally, the study would serve as a bench mark for other related studies that may be carried out in the near future. The study has identified more related areas to be researched.

## **1.7 An Overview of Research Methods**

The researcher adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research questions. Qualitative methods helped to explore in depth issues surrounding religion, gender and women empowerment and yielded new insights into the topic. Qualitative data was collected from men and women belonging to different religions, religious leaders, chiefs and leaders of some CSOs using Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and semi structured interviews. A total number of eighteen key informants were purposefully chosen and interviewed as key informants using an open-ended interview guide. These included; Roman Catholic religious leader, two Protestant leaders, two Pentecostal leaders, two Muslim leaders, a leader from other religious organization, two Group Village Headmen (GVH), two politicians, two Civil Society Organization (CSO) leaders, two Community Based Organization (CBO) leaders, gender desk officer and a representative from community policing.

FGD was conducted to women and men belonging to different religious institutions. Stratified random sampling was used to recruit participants for FGD. Thus the sample for FGD was drawn independently from Christians, Muslims and from other religions. Nevertheless, to avoid bias, systemic random sampling was used to sample participants for each stratum. Due to limitations in time and finance, four FGDs each containing 10 members was conducted. Homogenous samples of different religion were used to study each religious sub group in depth. The groups were as follows: one group of Christian women, one group of Muslim women combined with women from other religious organizations, one group of Christian men and one group of Muslim men combined with men from other religious institutions.

The emerging themes from the two qualitative stages formed basis of a Likert scale questionnaire to test the themes. This quantitative method was employed because the study wanted to generalize the findings to a larger population. A sample of 130 was drawn independently from 3 different stratum i.e Christians, Muslims and other religious organizations. However, to select elements from Christians, Muslims and other religious institutions, systemic random sampling was used. This was to ensure that every person in the three strata had an equal chance of being selected.

Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire for the semi-structured interviews and FGD while a Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. The construction of data collection tools was guided by the objectives of the study and ethical issues. During the process of data collection, the researcher observed all the rights of respondents and authorities. The ethical considerations included respect for the respondents' freedom, volunteerism, privacy, confidentiality and avoidance of harm.

Data analysis for the qualitative data begun with inducing themes from the recorded semi-structured interviews and from the FGD. This was followed by coding of data. For the Likert survey, data was coded, entered into the computer software SPSS followed by descriptive statistics. Conclusion has been made based on both qualitative and quantitative research findings and recommendations made to promote gender equality and women empowerment.

## **1.8 Operational Definitions of Key Concepts**

This thesis frequently used different concepts related to religion, gender equality and women empowerment. In the context of this study, these concepts were defined as follows:

**1.8.1 Discrimination:** This is the prejudicial treatment of an individual based on their membership in a certain group or category. It involves actual behaviours towards members of another group and includes such behaviours as exclusion or restricting members of one group from opportunities that are available to another group (Daffodil International University, 2010). The UN argues that an individual need not to be harmed to be discriminated against but just treated worse than others for some arbitrary reasons.

That's why its stance on discrimination includes a statement that: "Discriminatory behaviours take many forms but they all involve some form of exclusion or rejection.' (Daffodil International University, 2010). In the context of this study, discrimination is defined as beliefs, attitudes against individuals based on their sex.

**1.8.2 Gender:** The concept gender has been assigned different definitions by different scholars. Hesse-Biber and Carger (2000:91) defines gender as social attributes and opportunities assigned to male and female. These attributes and relationships are learned through socialization process and are time specific, changeable and context specific. This means that each society emphasises particular roles that each sex should play. WHO (2002:4) on the other hand defines gender as those characteristics of women and men which are socially constructed. This definition is not different from the one above in the sense that it also emphasises that gender is determined socially. Through socialization, people learn to be males and females and this determines the gender roles. This thesis subscribes to the definition by Borgatta and Montgomery (2000:1079) who define gender as a process through which boys, girls, men and women learn differently the community societal values, norms and beliefs, wisdom, philosophy which they accept and internalize resulting into gender roles and statuses. The choice of this definition is based on its emphasis on the fact that socially constructed attributes assigned to males and females result into differences in status and roles between males and females.

**1.8.3 Gender Equality:** This is defined as 'a social order in which men and women share the same opportunities and the same constraints on full participation in both the economic and domestic realm' (Bailyn, 2006). In the context of this study, gender equality means providing equal opportunities, rights, obligations and value in all aspects of life and according them equal treatment to both men and women.

**1.8.4 Gender Inequality:** This is the direct opposite of gender equality. Bosworth, (date not given), defines gender inequality as disparity between individuals due to gender. In this study, gender inequality is defined as unfair treatment of individuals, unfair access to opportunities and unfair constraints based on their gender.

**1.8.5 Gender Roles:** This involves allocation of certain tasks predominantly to women and others to men although both may do some. Nevertheless, the roles are

differently evaluated and rewarded. Gender roles unlike sex roles are not universal but are socially constructed and change with time and situations (Ministry of Finance; Uganda, 2006: vii).

**1.8.6 Religion:** IPS (2002:16) defines religion as a particular system of faith and worship based on belief in the existence of a god or gods. Religion dictates morality, ethics, religion laws and accepted lifestyles. Freedom to religion is a human right that is enshrined in the UN universal declaration of human rights article 18 (United Nations, 2011). In Malawi, freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution but religions are expected to be registered with Malawi government. In the context, religion will be defined as belief in supernatural powers.

**1.8.7. Religious Institutions:** These refer to all institutions created for religious purposes. These include denominations and congregations. In this study, religious organizations mean organization operating under common name, identity and tradition.

**1.8.8. Women Empowerment:** The term empowerment has been defined differently by different people. Some people have used the term self-reliance and self respect to define empowerment. UNIFEM in Cheston and Kuhn (2002:12-13) has defined empowerment as ‘gaining ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power, developing a sense of self worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life.’ It is about change, choice and power. In the context of this study, women empowerment is defined as having power and ability to make choices that affect ones life. These choices may be those related to education, participation, mobility, fertility, economic independence, political participation, awareness and exercising of rights.

## **1.9 Chapter Outline**

The thesis is divided into six chapters outlined as follows:

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter introduces the thesis. It provides a general background to the study and the research problem to justify the need for the research. Presented thereafter is the problem statement, the study objectives, significance of the study and operational definitions to explain and clarify key concepts used in the study. The chapter also gives a brief overview of the research methods used in the study. Lastly, the chapter gives an overview of the chapter outline of the whole thesis.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter reviews literature on the causes, status and effects of gender inequality in Malawi and other developing countries. It also examines religious teachings and beliefs that have an influence on gender equality and women empowerment. The review also analyzes related research studies done previously in relation to religion, gender equality and women empowerment both in Malawi and in other countries.

## **Chapter Three: Historical and Geographical Background**

This chapter outlines the profile of Malawi and a detailed account of religion in Malawi and Mulanje district to give an overview of the context in which the study was conducted.

## **Chapter Four: Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the research design and methods used in the study. It discusses the setting, the sample and the sampling methods, data collection methods, research tools used as well as the reliability and validity of the methods and tools used. This chapter also explains how data was analyzed and the appropriateness of the data analysis methods as well as the measures executed in the study to ensure participants rights were not infringed upon and that study did not cause any harm to the participants. Finally, the chapter discusses the factors that placed significant limitations to the study.

## **Chapter Five: Research Findings and Interpretation**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. Data is presented both in qualitative and quantitative way.

## **Chapter Six: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter concludes the thesis report by giving a summary of the findings of the study. The conclusion drawn from the study is also presented. The chapter presents recommendations to improve gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi as well as recommendations for future research. It ends with a conclusion for the whole study.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a background to the research, research problem, the study objectives and significance of the study to justify the need for the research. An overview of research methods have also been described in this chapter. Operational definitions have been included to explain and clarify terminologies used in the subsequent chapters. Lastly the chapter has presented an outline of the chapters of the whole thesis.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on religion, gender equality and women empowerment. The aim is to investigate and gain insights into the religious factors that influence gender equality and women empowerment. The chapter therefore reviews other studies done on similar or related topics to provide an overview of the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi and other countries, identify challenges, the best approach and methodology to use and ultimately make recommendations for practice and further research. This literature review covers national and international sources on the following sub topics: gender equality, women empowerment, gender and development, the status, causes and effects of gender inequality in other countries and in Malawi, religion and gender, religion and gender equality/gender inequality in Malawi and religion and gender equality/gender inequality in Mulanje.

### **2.2 Gender Equality**

Gender equality and women empowerment are universally acknowledged as human rights that lie at the heart of development (UNDP, 2009:4). It works to overcome the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices so that both sexes are able to equally contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural and political developments within society. According to the Ministry of Finance; Uganda, (2006: vii) gender equality may be understood in three dimensions; (i) equality in access to and opportunities in economic, political, social and other fields, (ii) equality before and under the law and (iii) equality in dignity (internal worth) between men and women. Gender equality entails levelling the playing field so that every person regardless of who they are and where they live has equal opportunity to grow and develop their potential (UN, 2008; UNFPA, 2006; UNICEF, 2008).

As alluded to in chapter 1, UN Millennium project recognizes gender equality as one of the goals to end poverty by 2015. The project claims that ‘every single goal in the MDG is directly related to women’s rights and those societies where women are not afforded equal rights as men can never achieve development in a sustainable manner’ (UN, 2008). The UN further argues that empowering women with focus on identifying and redressing

power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives is a critical aspect for promoting gender equality. In the context of this study, gender equality means providing equal opportunities, rights, obligations and value in all aspects of life and according equal treatment to both men and women. These rights and opportunities will be reviewed in line with the 3 dimensions mentioned above.

### **2.3 Women Empowerment**

Empowerment is an often-used but infrequently defined term. Some people have used the terms self-reliance and self respect to refer to empowerment. UNIFEM in Cheston and Kuhn (2002:12) has defined empowerment as ‘gaining ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power, developing a sense of self worth, a belief in ones ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life.’ UNIFEM went on to write that empowerment is the process of change by which individuals or groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives. Mayoux (2000:425-426) outlines three aspects of empowerment; economic empowerment, increased well being and social and political empowerment. The structure of power, who has it, its sources and how it is exercised directly affect the choices that women are able to make in their lives (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002:13). Thus, for a woman to be empowered she needs access to material, human and social resources necessary to make choices in her life (Mayoux, 2007: 423-424).

Women empowerment, just like gender equality is a human right that lies at the heart of development. It is a critical tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. It has been argued that empowering males and females produces similar improvements in their socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, empowering women produces many additional socioeconomic gains that benefit the entire societies. These benefits include; increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, delayed marriages, reduced fertility rates and improved health and survival rates for infants and children (UNFPA, 2011). In this study, women empowerment is defined as having power and ability to make choices that affect ones life. These choices may be those related to education, participation, mobility, fertility, economic independence, political participation, awareness and exercising of rights.

## 2.4 Gender and Development

MDG 3, which seeks to promote gender equality and empower women, is regarded as a foundation for all the development goals (UNFPA, 2006). Unless, this is achieved, it would be impossible to build knowledge and skills necessary to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat diseases and ensure environmental sustainability. Consequently, the whole development agenda will be put at risk.

In line with this thinking, many development practitioners have argued that promoting gender equality and women empowerment give societies better chance to develop (UNICEF, 2007:974-975). They argue that when men and women have relative equality, economies grow faster, children health improves and there is less corruption. The role of gender equality on economic growth could be illustrated in the participation of women in the labour force. When a woman is not involved in the workforce, her skills, abilities and talents are not exploited and utilized and thus economic resources are wasted. Another example could be involvement of girls in education. When girls do not go to school, they tend to marry earlier, have many children and do not contribute to family income and national productivity. Similarly, Klassen (1999: 6) noted that promoting gender equity in education may be among the few win-win development strategies. Women education advances their ability to participate in decision making as well as other activities that may lead to income generation, hence advancing economic prosperity and efficiency and promoting other essential human development goals. A woman who is educated is better informed and is in a better position to take care of her children in terms of health care, nutrition and even taking care of her own self in a better way. This is why one wise person put it this way; “educate a man and you educate one person, educate a woman and you educate a nation” (African Proverbs, 1999). This implies that integrating gender equality and women empowerment in development agenda is critical for reducing poverty, advancing universal primary education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases and ensuring environmental sustainability.

In their paper on gender and growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, Blackden, Canargarah, Klasen and Lawson (2007:63) contend that gender inequality plays a significant role in accounting for the poor growth performance in Africa. They argue that largely due to

gender inequality which currently is among the highest in the developing world, Sub-Saharan Africa's growth performance has lagged behind all other developing regions with large and rising income gaps compared with rapidly growing economies in East and South Asia. They further write that this poor growth performance has translated into a similarly poor performance in terms of poverty reduction, with Africa having the highest poverty rates in both incidence as well as depth using the international \$1/day poverty line. This was echoed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2011) who argued that gender inequality holds back growth of individuals, development of countries and evolution of societies to the disadvantage of both men and women.

Lavin-Loucks and Martin (2007: 16-18) therefore propose that when developing strategies to achieve MDGs, it is important to consider ways and strategies to reduce the deprivation experienced by women and girls and address the difficulties that women face in lifting themselves out of poverty rather than addressing poverty in aggregate terms. These would include well designed social programs such as job creation, employment opportunities, and access to assets, enhancement of women's entitlements and capabilities and reform of discriminatory policies and laws. Similarly, Theobald, Tolhurst and Elsey (2002:1) recommend that governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on men and women. Any intervention has to take into consideration the way in which gender affects the level and degree of access to and control of the resources men and women have. This requires experience, skills and resources to fund initiatives such as gender training, meetings and gender sensitive research and analysis (Theobald et al 2002:5)

## **2.5 The Status, Causes and Effects of Gender Equality in Developing Countries**

As alluded to in the previous sections, gender inequality is the most significant cause of poor socio-economic status of women and girls in development world. Macro-and microeconomic analysis of the links between growth and gender inequality have shown that gender disparities in basic human rights, resources, economic opportunity and in political voice is directly and indirectly limiting growth in sub-Saharan Africa, and that women and girls are bearing the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities

(Ministry of Finance of Uganda, 2006:1). In agreement with this is a recently published World Bank policy research report which argues that if Africa is to make strides towards pro-poor growth, then it has to unleash the enormous productive potential of its women (UNDP, 2009:4-5). The report further argues that women hold a key to accelerating poverty eradication, improving institutional practices; ensuring children are educated and healthy among others and therefore their interests, issues and concerns should never be overlooked in the development plans and programs. The sections that follow discuss the status, causes and effects of gender equality in developing countries.

### **2.5.1 Status of Gender Equality**

It is encouraging that the issues of gender and development have been recognized in a variety of international and legal instruments. Foremost among these are the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural rights and on Civil and Political Rights (ICESCR); Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), the world conference on human rights (1993), Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) (1995) and the MDG (2000); all of which have underscored the need for countries to take action against discriminatory practices and to empower women (Neuhold 2007: 632-634). In a review by the UN Habitat of numerous international declarations and documents, several aspects related to women rights were identified including women rights to: adequate standard of living and adequate housing; financial independence; earn a livelihood; own, manage and dispose of property and above all be free from discrimination (Steinzor, 2003:4). The placing of specific concerns in a human rights framework is useful to policy makers, NGOs, legal professionals and individuals worldwide working to promote women rights. According to Steinzor (2003:5-6) reference to international declarations and documents can give a campaign, case, or proposed legislation more weight and promote accountability, particularly when these documents have been signed and ratified by national governments.

Ironically, though most of the developing countries are signatory to these treaties and have been profoundly modernized since they embraced democracy, they remain very traditional as far as issues of gender equality and women empowerment are concerned. As a result translating established treaties into reality has been an enormous challenge (UNCHS, 1999:57 in Chiweza, 2005). Consequently, girls and women in developing

countries face unequal chances for education, inheritance, ownership of assets and discrimination in employment. The World Bank (in Kotze and Cornwell, 2007:3) asserts that there is no region where women and men enjoy equal privileges in terms of social, economic, political and legal rights. Women continue to have fewer rights, less income and less access to resources and decision making, lower education and health status. Yet, women's crucial roles in food production, income generation, management of natural resources, community organizations and domestic responsibilities are critical for sustainable development (Brett, 2007:103). It is undisputed fact that in most parts of the developing world, women especially those in rural areas engage in multiple economic activities that are critical for the survival of the poor households but are not remunerated. Rural women play an essential role in crop production and livestock care and they provide food, water and fuel their families need. This reduces their ability to engage in higher income earning activities.

### **5.1.2 Causes and effects of Gender Inequality**

It has been argued that though gender issues have been recognized in international and legal instruments, ratification of the same by developing countries has not been easy. Steinzor (2003:6) reckons that this is because national governments often view international norms as contradictory to their own interests and may therefore resist applying universal rights to their own social, economic and cultural systems. Steinzor further argues that ratification of a treaty does not mean its provisions are immediately applicable at national level. For instance, it has been established that most of the African countries are governed through a combination of statutory, colonial, tribal, Muslim and Hindu laws (Mbote-Kameri, 2002:4). In countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho and Kenya, discrimination is customary and personal law matters (such as inheritance) are still permitted in their current constitution (Benschop, 2004). This implies that although statutory laws prohibit discrimination against women and uphold the equality of women and men, there are legal exceptions with regard to laws that apply to marriage and family matters in these countries. As a result, there is widespread of application of customary laws and religious laws which in most cases do not offer protection to women and girls. Reconciling such entrenched norms with statutory laws is clearly not easy. For instance even though the Kenyan Registered Land Act of 1963 provides land title to

individuals, women are not registered as land owners because traditionally only men are viewed as heads of households (Mbote-Kameri, 2011:4). Such practices are at the root of 'property grabbing' by in-laws. In event of death of the husband, a woman may lose everything or may be blocked from working on the land. Similarly, in Tanzania, courts may apply 'a mode of life test' when faced with contradictions between customary and statutory laws in cases involving women's property rights (Steinzor, 2003:5). This implies that the former may be applied when plaintiffs and defendants are members of the community where traditional laws are established and accepted. It also has to be acknowledged that although most of governments in Africa have passed laws or revised a country's constitution to be more in line with principles of equal rights, the reality on the ground is that women and girls still face pervasive discrimination and are not accorded equal opportunities or access to resources. This is due to lack of awareness on the part of women on their rights and limited capacity of the law enforcement machinery to protect the human and civil rights of women (UNDP, 2004:4). To make matters worse, even today, laws and policies related to land and housing that explicitly discriminate against women still exist in some African countries. In Swaziland, for instance married women are specifically excluded from registration of title to land in their name (Benschop, 2004). In some countries, on the other hand such laws and policies are gender neutral but do not address existing discrimination. For example, many land laws allow for co-ownership of land but spouses have to mutually agree on this and take active steps to register as co-owners. In practice, it is only a small proportion of usually, well educated-urban based and relatively wealth people who do that. And even among this group, many women face cultural attitudes that favor registration of men. In countries such as Swaziland and Lesotho, married women are seen as legal minors who cannot enter into contracts without consent of their husbands (Benschop, 2004).

Furthermore, religious customs of the ethnics also govern such matters as position of women in general, property and inheritance. For instance, in Tanzania where 35% of the population in the mainland and 99% on the Island of Zanzibar are Muslims, such issues are governed by the Islamic teachings (Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, 2011). Islamic customs override laws that provide for equal treatment between men and women. As a result, the overall situation of Muslim women is less favourable than non-Muslim women in Tanzania. Muslim women face discriminatory restrictions on inheritance and

ownership of property although Marriage Act of Tanzania provide for inheritance and property rights for women (Songoso, 2011). Songoso (2011) argues that this is also because there is no law that defends owning of property by a woman. In addition, under the Zanzibar law, unmarried women under the age of 21 who become pregnant are subject to two years imprisonment (Social Development Tanzania, 2011). In some instances, the state itself has been responsible for officially exempting ethnic groups from statutory laws. For instance, in Kenya, the government passed the Law of Succession Act (LSA) to unify inheritance laws throughout the country in 1981. However, in 1990 an amendment was added to exempt Muslims and allow them to follow the Koran (Kenya country profile, 2011). This has in a way sanctioned several discriminatory practices among Muslims in Kenya, including the state rights of widows which are terminated upon remarriage, and wives receive much less than husbands upon the death of a spouse (Mbote-Kameri, 2002:6).

Another problem as noted by Steinzor (2003:5) is that statutory laws in Africa contain 'gray areas' that can be difficult to interpret or apply. Steinzor cites an example of Kenya's constitution which dictates that any Kenyan of sound mind over the age of 18 may own property. One section on the other hand also instructs that '---courts shall be guided by African customary law in civil cases----so far as it is applicable and not repugnant to justice or morality,' a type of interpretation many courts find it difficult to make.

It is because of the above challenges that gender discrimination and violence remain pervasive in most of the developing countries despite having international norms and national legal frameworks to protect the rights of women.

## **2.6 Gender Equality in Malawi**

Over the last two decades, the government of Malawi has actively promoted women's empowerment and gender equality in both legal and policy arenas. In this regard, a number of actions have been undertaken to address gender issues. Legal reforms have been introduced to amend laws which allowed discriminatory practices. These include reforms to the affiliation act, the marriage act, the wills and inheritance act. The constitution of Malawi also provides guarantees to the rights of women and children.

Under the constitution of Malawi, women have the right to full and equal protection of the law and the right not to be discriminated against based on their gender or marital status (WILSA Malawi, 2010:3). Furthermore, the government has put in place the National Gender machinery for the overall coordination of the gender policy formulation, implementation and mainstreaming of gender in all sectors. Malawi has a national gender policy which sets forth guidelines for recognizing and addressing gender concerns and for mainstreaming gender in all development sectors. The government has been calling for women to participate more actively in, and benefit equally from government programs and for a greater number of women in decision making positions in the public and private sectors. In addition, Malawi ratified CEDAW and CRC in 1987 and 1991 respectively to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms for women and children (UNICEF 2007:974). Guided by these validated universal ideals which also include the MDGs and Millennium declaration, the Malawi government made a commitment to address gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. In the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), government committed to strengthen the institutional capacity for implementation of the national gender policy, engender budgets, promote gender sensitive formal and informal legal environment , enhance women's participation in leadership and decision making process and eradicate gender based violence.

Through the above strategies, Malawi has made significant progress in improving the status of women and children. For the first time, in 2009 general elections Malawi managed a total number of 42 women out of the 192 members of parliament. This represents 22% from 14% in the previous sitting. Although this is still below 30% of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) threshold (Banda 2009:2), it is a step in the right direction. There have also been improvements in maternal and child health indicators. The most recent Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS, 2010) produced by National Statistical Office, (2010) has shown that Malawi Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has improved from 894 to 675 maternal deaths per 100, 000 live births while the 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) show a sharp decline in infant and under-five mortality rates per 1,000 live births from 104 and 189 deaths in 2000 to 72 and 122 in 2006 respectively.

On the downside, despite the progress that has been made, gender inequalities are still prevalent in Malawi. According to the UNDP (2008) Human Development Reports

(HDI) for 2007/2008, Malawi has a Gender Related development Index (GDI) of 0.432 compared to its Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.437 which certifies that large gender disparities between men and women still exists.

A question that one would ask is; why this persistent inequality between men and women despite the hard work by the government, NGOs and the donor community? Unfortunately gender inequality in Malawi does not seem to result from a single factor. It is a result of distinct though interlocking social relations and processes. Women's experience of inequality is mediated by social relations of gender. Malawi is governed by a culture whose beliefs, values, customs and a host of social practices have a powerful influence on community life and which systematically empower men to the detrimental of women.

In this literature review, gender inequality is reviewed in the context of capabilities (health and education), opportunities (employment, access to economic services) and levels of empowerment (ownership of productive assets, participation in governance and access to justice)

### **2.6.1 Health and Education (Capabilities)**

Health and education are important means of empowering women to participate fully in development.

#### **2.6.1.1 Health**

A paper on the situation of women and children in Malawi that was prepared by UNICEF (2011) identified factors that have improved the prospects for the child survival and improved maternal health in Malawi as prudent economic management, stable macroeconomic conditions and increasing agricultural production. The paper however noted that Malawi faces many challenges in order to achieve MDGs including weak institutional and human capacity coupled with deep-rooted harmful traditional practices. Enhancing human capacity for both men and women is therefore critical for achievement of MDGs.

There is considerable evidence however, that gender inequalities have given rise to inequalities between men and women in health status and access to health care in Malawi (WHO, 2010). For instance the 2011 UNICEF report on the situation of women and children in Malawi shows that for every 100, 000 live births in Malawi, 807 mothers die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth related causes. The report further explains that diseases such as malaria and HIV, nutritional deficiencies and women's low socio-economic standing underpin what is one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates in the world. This is a clear indication of the women's limited access to quality reproductive health services. As it is now, Malawi stands a very little chance of reaching MDG 5 of 155 maternal deaths per 100, 000 live births unless drastic measures are taken to improve maternal health. Although the government is increasing the availability of emergency obstetric care, accessibility of antenatal services and use of skilled health personnel during pregnancy, child birth and the post natal period at all levels, socio-cultural factors surrounding maternal and child health impede the struggle against maternal and child mortality.

Most of maternal and child health problems are related to the subordinate position of women within marriage and other relationships. The belief in superiority of men leaves women with no control over decisions that affect their lives. For instance, in a typical Malawian setting, the men of the family decide where and when a woman needs medical attention and this delays treatment. A man decides whether a woman should be on contraceptive for family planning or not and which method to use regardless of the suitability and convenience of the method to the woman. This has ultimately resulted into complications and even deaths of women (UNICEF, 2010). Other traditional beliefs that also contribute to deaths of women include the belief that 'women should have their first baby at home so that the father can confirm the baby is his.'

Malawi HIV and AIDS prevalence rate among adults aged between 15 and 49 years has stabilized at about 12% (UNAIDS, 2010) signifying a degree of progress in meeting MDG 6 of combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases. However, there is higher rate of HIV prevalence amongst women than amongst men: around 60% of adults living with HIV are females (UNAIDS, 2010). Many have attributed this trend to unequal gender relations within households. A report on the ARASA/OSISA civil society consultative meeting on the criminalization of the wilful transmission of HIV held on 11-

12<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, Seodi White, one of the Malawian human rights activists described how marriage within Southern Africa was a dangerous construct as it heightened women's vulnerability to HIV. With male infidelity and multiple sexual relationships being the norm, women become vulnerable to HIV as condoms are not generally used within marriage. This is exacerbated by low socio-economic status of women which makes it difficult for women to negotiate safe sexual relations with men or refuse sexual relations with husbands who frequent prostitutes. White had three female clients who were deliberately infected with HIV by their husbands. One reported that when she confronted her husband and asked him why he had infected her, he said; '*we must leave together.*' Other traditional reproductive roles and harmful cultural practices such as wife inheritance and early marriages put girls and women at risk of HIV (MHRC, 2005:20-21). It is therefore not surprising that girls and women in 15-24 age group account for 58 percent of HIV infections (UNICEF, 2011:3).

### **2.6.1.2 Education**

According to the government of Malawi (2007:10-11), Government of Malawi is also committed to the attainment of the following MDGs by 2015:

- Achieving universal primary education by 2015-This is being effected through the implementation free primary education complemented by functional adult literacy programs
- Achieving gender parity by 2005 in primary and secondary and at all levels of education by 2015

The attainment of these MDGs would ensure a universal literacy rate for all Malawians.

Statistics show that the drive to put equal number of girls and boys into school has been achieved for primary education while the ratio of girls to boys in secondary education is improving (UNICEF, 2011:4). This means that Malawi is set on track to achieving MDG 3 target of eliminating gender disparities in education. What is worrying though is the high drop out rate of female pupils in primary school. According to Ligomeka (2002) Malawi has one of the highest drop-out rates in Southern Africa with 15% of girls dropping out between grades five and eight. Girls in Malawi are especially pressurized to

abandon their education because they have to help out with family chores, fall pregnant or are married off very young. Generally in Malawi, boys are favoured over girls for completion of education. With the belief that girls will get married and be provided by the husband, girls are mostly allowed partial education during which they are prepared for marriage. The HIV pandemic has also contributed to high dropout rate among girls. The HIV pandemic takes away breadwinners from many families and consequently the responsibility falls into girls to take care of their families. Added to this are sexual harassment and bullying especially from male teachers. Unfortunately sexual harassment is not specifically prohibited by law in Malawi but people can be prosecuted under existing sections of penal code such as indecent assault on a female, or insulting the modesty of a woman ( Klaveren, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams, Martin, 2009:11). The press plays a very big role in exposing the culprits by publishing articles on rape and other forms of abuse.

It is largely due to lack of balance and fairness in terms of women's and men's responsibilities and education opportunities that more women occupy less paying jobs which require less skill and with lower prestige which engender higher rates of poverty among women.

## **2.6.2 Opportunities**

These include employment opportunities and access to financial services which are crucial for reducing poverty and economically empowering women.

### **2.6.2.1 Employment**

Article 13 of the protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights on the rights of women in Africa states that; *parties shall adopt and enforce legislative and other measures to guarantee women equal opportunities in work and career advancement and other economic opportunities.* In line with this protocol, the constitution of Malawi upholds the principle of equal rights for men and women and prohibits any discrimination based on gender or marital status, including in the work place. The constitution (no.24 of 1994) is specific in mandating gender equality (section 13) and prohibiting discrimination (section 23) while Section 24 elaborates the rights of

women (Klaveren et al 2009:9-16). However, the means of enforcing of these rights are not specified other than in the general provisions of section 46 of the Employment Act referring to the Ombudsman and the Human Rights Commission. For this reason women still lag behind in formal and non traditional employment opportunities. Though the employment statistics are quite limited in Malawi, the 2005 household survey report produced by NSO (2005) indicated the rather higher unemployment of women of 10% which nearly doubled that of men which was at 5.4%. This agrees with a very recent audit of women and men in Malawi media houses which showed that women constituted only 23% of their workforce, whereas this was 41% in all SADC countries researched. The audit further revealed that women made up less than 30% in most departments, including in senior management positions while men dominated heavily in technical/ IT (94%), finance and administration, production and design departments, all with more than three in four men (Klaveren et al 2009:9-16). At regional level, the results are the same. According to the ILO 2008 report, African's women share of employment in the formal sector is still lower relative to men and their pay is on average lower than men's pay for the same work. While the report acknowledges that employment has increased more rapidly for women than for men over the last decade, it further reveals that women in Africa tend to be overrepresented in low-income, less secure employment. The ADF report (2008:12-14) outlines the challenges affecting the achievement of gender parity in formal employment as low educational level of women and girls, lack of skills, labor laws that still disadvantage women in most countries and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, child bearing and child care, which restrict the time and energy for income-earning activities. Furthermore, while men have higher hours in income generating work, women have higher hours in chores done extensively by women like firewood and water collection such that their total working hours are higher than those of men's (Wodon and Beegle: 2006:115; Winters, Paula de la O, Hertz, Davis, Zezza, Carletto 2008). Culturally in Malawi women are expected to perform the majority of household chores and childcare. Even when the woman has a full time job, she is still responsible for household work. Women are expected to cut down on their paid work, quit their jobs, take emergency leave from their place of work or refuse to take promotions for the sake of caring for children, sick husbands, sick in-laws or elderly parents. This has long term implications on the woman's experience on her career of choice and even on the woman's wage accumulation of pension benefits which leaves the

woman highly vulnerable to poverty in the event of death of the breadwinner, divorce and separation as she fails to cope both emotionally and economically. Other obstacles standing in the way of women employment opportunities include discrimination during selection for jobs and interviews. Some employers have advertised that they are seeking to employ men, whilst other selection panels ask gender insensitive questions such as questions on pregnancy, marital status and familial responsibilities. Sexual harassment is also common at work place where employers seek sexual favours from the prospective employees and from the employees.

The situation of women in the informal sector is not different from the formal sector. Although women dominate the informal sector in most Sub-Saharan African countries including Malawi, where they are found in the fields of trading, agriculture and food processing, their capacities are not being fully exploited due to limited access to the tools of production or denial of the same. Gender discrimination in access to and control over resources such as land, extension services and credit still persists in many African countries (ADF, 2008:13-14).

In the area of agriculture, women feature mainly as small scale farmers, producing 60-70 percent of the food requirements of many countries and a major role in the different aspects of agricultural production (ADF 2008:13-14). Over half (51.2%) of full time farmers in Malawi are women (De Wolf, 2011:10). Nevertheless, regardless of household size, women grow crops for consumption to a much larger extent than men, who are more likely to grow cash crops. For this reason, cash crops are considered men's crops and men control the income even though women do considerable amounts of work (Republic of Malawi, 2007:8). To make matters worse, in some areas, farmers are identified in relation to male gender and therefore exclude women in access to important services such as extension services. It's only recently that projects of NGOs have provided gender training for agricultural extension workers and have introduced credit programs for women; however, few women have succeeded in participating in the limited formal labour market in agriculture and to even accumulate even modest amounts of money (Republic of Malawi/EC 2007:15). Furthermore, the very nature of informal sector employment means that women are generally not covered by social security and other benefits such as maternity leave, pension and medical schemes. This also has long term implications for an overall assessment of GDPs due to the fact that informal sector work

though critical is generally not recognized. It is not surprising therefore that poverty in Malawi and other developing countries has a female face (WLSA Malawi, 2010:2).

### **2.6.2.2 Access to Financial Services**

Women access to legal financial services has proven to be a significant tool for improving the welfare of women and empowering them (Boros, Murray and Sisto 2007:90). In line with this, the government of Malawi recognizes women access to proven financial services as an integral part of the overall national development agenda. In the 2004 Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), the government observes that women in Malawi remain marginalized compared to men and are likely to have less access to credits and other financial services (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Malawi, 2004). This is attributed to high illiteracy levels among women coupled with socio-cultural factors that discriminate against women and girls by limiting their control of and access to financial services. In addition, women have less access to employment opportunities, both in public and private sectors and may not have equal access to technology and other key market information to support their business. The medium term expected outcome of the MGDS was to increase the productivity of women through improving access to financial services. It has to be acknowledged that women's equal access to financial resources is a human right issue which has been made explicit in the international human right treaties. Both CEDAW and BPFSA have made it clear that increasing access to credit is an important mechanism for reducing women's poverty and calls on governments to promote more equitable access to credit (Neuhold, 2007:638-639). Cheston and Kuhn (2002:16) have argued that because women contribute decisively to the well being of their families, investing in women brings multiplier effect. Thus improving women's direct access to and control over resources leads to higher investments in human capital and has a stronger impact on children's health, nutrition and education with important long-term implications for families and societies.

However, despite the various economic empowerment initiatives that Malawi has taken so far, many challenges remain that hinder Malawian women from exploiting their full potential. In their study on rural women's access to financial services: credit, savings and insurance, Fletschner and Kenney (2011:3) explain that legal restrictions and customary rules often restrict women's access to and control over assets that can be accepted as

collateral such as land and livestock. They further explain that women are less likely to have land titled under their name, even when their families own land and are less likely than men to have control over land, even when they do formally own it. Biased inheritance rights often bestow land to male relatives, leaving both widows and daughters at a disadvantage. This is true in Malawi especially in the northern part and some parts of southern Malawi (lower Shire valley) where the family structure is patriarchal. Even in countries where laws do protect women's land rights, these laws tend to be loosely regulated and implemented (Parada, 2008).

Socio-cultural factors are also one of the factors that prevent women access to financial services. In settings where socio-cultural norms restrict women's mobility, their interactions with members of opposite sex and their ability to attend trainings or receive formal training, women's access to information, institutions and markets is compromised. This is the case when women are prevented from interacting directly with men other than close relatives or when they feel awkward to do so or when they cannot get away from their household responsibilities (Primo, 2003; Aina 2006). As a result of these constraints, rural women tend to get information from informal networks reinforcing gender gap in access to information. The gap can be substantial; recent work to quantify it using data from Paraguay compares husbands' and wives' knowledge of financial markets and finds that rural women are 15 to 21 percent less likely than men to have basic information about the financial institutions in their communities (Fletschner and Mesbah, 2010). UNDP (2007) however argues that even when women have access to information on financial services and market opportunities available to them; they may be less equipped to process it. Their lower levels of literacy hamper women's ability to benefit directly from information that is provided in writing and to fully understand the conditions of complex financial products available to them. This matters as demonstrated by Cole, Sampson and Zia (2009) experimental work in India and Indonesia that finds financial literacy as a strong predictor of demand for financial services.

Cultural norms and family dynamics can also limit women's ability to exercise control over the savings they have or the semi-liquid assets they own. Mayoux (2000: 429-430) questions the assumption that women have control over loan use whether they are targeted or not. He reckons that women may simply be used as low-cost and reliable intermediates between program staff and male family members. One client for one of the

MFI in Malawi lamented that her husband controls how she spends her profits because he forces her to use her income for household expenditure while he uses his on other women (Mhone, 2009). This is why Anderson and Balland (2002) and Gugerty (2007) hypothesize that one of the reasons for the high level of female participation in Rotating Credit and Savings Associations (ROSCAs) is that this socially accepted strategy to save allows women to protect their savings from husbands and relatives. Alternatively, women may choose individual saving programs that allow them to keep details or even knowledge of these savings to themselves to avoid being subjected to pressure from others. Finally, social traditions can leave women in a particularly vulnerable position since, in addition to risks associated with pregnancy and child bearing; women are more likely to experience domestic violence, to experience greater hardships in case of divorce and to lose their assets when their spouses die (Banthia, Johnson, McCord and Matthews, 2009)

### **2.6.3 Levels of empowerment**

These include ownership of productive assets, participation in governance and access to justice which are critical for empowering women.

#### **2.6.3.1 Ownership of productive assets**

As discussed in the above sections, women are active in virtually every economic sector. In addition to producing much of the world's food, women make up an increasing proportion of the world's informal labor force. It is critical therefore that women have rights in, access to, and control over productive assets. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (1999:22) contends that women access to productive assets is the determining factor in women's overall living conditions, particularly in developing countries. It is essential to women's everyday survival, economic security, and physical security while others argue that it is the most critical factor in women's empowerment and their struggle for equality in gender relations (Steinzor, 2003:1).

The importance of securing women's property and inheritance rights has been recognized in a number of national laws as well as international legal instruments in the context of both development and equality. The International Covenants on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights (ICESCR), CEDAW and BPA explicitly recognize and enforce women's rights to inheritance and ownership of land and property. In line with this, countries have made commitments ranging from incorporating such issues in national constitutions or amending existing laws that do not effectively protect women, to enabling new laws that will protect and enhance women's property and inheritance rights (Chiweza, 2005). Malawi ratified CEDAW in 2000 and has developed a national platform for action responding to BPA. The country's Wills and Inheritance Act was also amended in 1998 to criminalize property grabbing.

Nevertheless, it is increasingly recognized in Malawi that while gains have been made on the legislative front with women's rights to own and inheriting property appearing in the constitutions and other statutory legislation, translating such legal provisions into reality has been an enormous challenge (UNCHS, 1999:57 in Chiweza, 2005). This has been attributed to customs and community practices which means that even when women have legal rights to own and inherit property, customs prevent them from exercising such rights. In other cases, it has been attributed to political and socio-economic climate that makes it difficult for women to own property (UNCHS, 1994: iii In Chiweza, 2005).

The negative impact of these ongoing male-traditions of property ownership is evident in the women socio-economic statuses. Women lack of property ownership means that they cannot take advantage of the wide range of benefits associated with ownership and control of property. Land and other forms of property not only provide sustenance, but can be the basis for income generation and is a marker of social status. Furthermore, in many countries, title to land is prerequisite for securing loans and credit for other activities from building a house to starting a business. In Malawi for instance, women tend to avoid labor intensive crops such as tobacco and cotton because of limited access to land, loans and credit in addition to failure to combine productive and reproductive labor. Unfortunately for the women, these labor intensive crops are the major exports for Malawi and provide a good source of income. Consequently, households headed by women have fewer assets, limited access to productive inputs and longer periods of food insecurity as compared to households headed by men.

### **2.6.3.2 Participation in Governance**

Women representation within the legislature, national and local government is critical to facilitate integration of their concerns into the various laws and policy programs. Without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. In 2008, the Malawi government of Malawi adopted affirmative action for women as a strategy for gender balanced representation at both national and local levels. The strategy termed 50-50 campaign was developed in response to the SADC Gender and Development protocol which commits countries to work towards the goal of having women in political and decision-making positions by 2015 (Fray & Pichegru, 2010). Following this, there has been tremendous increase in the number of women aspiring for parliamentary positions as well as those entering the national assembly. Between 1999 and 2004, 18 members of parliament (9%) were women, rising to 27 (14%) between 2004 and 2009 whereas the 2009 elections women occupy 42 seats (22%) (WLSA Malawi, 2010:5). It is assumed that the increased presence of women in decision making would shape policy and meet women's gender needs in Malawi (Fray & Pichegru, 2010). A study on affirmative action in Ugandan politics showed that that increased presence of women in decision making resulted in formulation of a gender-sensitive constitution and increased recognition of gender as central to poverty eradication (Ministry of Finance, Uganda, 2006:13).

Nevertheless, although Malawian women are seen to lead their communities as democratic representatives and participate in state politics, there is a limit to which this is done. This is because strong cultural constraints and belief systems relegate women to non-political roles in Malawi. According to traditional cultural beliefs, acceptable women's roles are those in the private sphere and not public life. For this reason, few women hold decision-making positions within the social, political and economic arenas. Women are under-represented at most levels of government, including ministerial bodies (WLSA Malawi, 2010: 5). This agrees with a mid decade review of the implementation of the Dakar and BPA in Africa which revealed that progress in the political empowerment of women in Africa has been slow. Only 10% of the members of legislative bodies were women in 1995 and the figure was only around 11% in 1999

(Mawaya, 1999). The paper further noted the reasons for the slow progress as challenges to be addressed and these included: cultural and traditional barriers; the persistent unequal of labor and responsibilities within households; civil wars/ strife; women inadequate education and training ; lack of enforcement of quotas and affirmative action; inadequate generation, dissemination and utilization of gender research and disaggregated data; the HIV and AIDS epidemic; the serious economic problems facing African economies and lack of political will (Mawaya, 1999). The situation is the same in Malawi. Currently, only 10% of Malawi's principal secretaries are women, and only 3 out of 25 high court judges are women (White, 2007: 28) while out of the 32 ministers, only 4 are holding full ministerial positions while 6 are deputies. Similarly, men dominate decision-making bodies at the district and village levels. Additionally, women in decision making positions face a lot of challenges as a result of patriarchal principles which pose challenges to women. The assumption that men are leaders and women are support groups is strong in Malawi hence women may be denied the right to effectively participate in decisions making. For this reason, women find it difficult to integrate women issues in the important policies and as a result having women in decision making positions in key sectors that impact on the lives of women has not necessarily resulted in gains for women (White, 2007:27-28).

### **2.6.3.3 Access to Justice**

Access to justice is a defining attribute to empowerment and a spur to poverty eradication and economic growth. A well functioning justice system is therefore a pre requisite to spur economic growth. Access to justice however, does not mean merely access to the institutions, but it also encompasses access to fair laws and procedures (Schärf, Banda, Röntsch, Kaunda, and Shapiro, 2011:3). People with effective access to justice are indeed empowered (WLSA Malawi, 2010:4). In line with this, the government of Malawi included a bill of rights that guarantees civil, political, social and economic rights in the 1994 constitution of Malawi and allowed for an emergence of an independent judiciary (Kanyongolo, 2006:4). With regard to women's access to justice, Section 24 in the constitution of Malawi clearly stipulates that women have the right to full and equal protection by the law which includes the right to be accorded the same rights as men in civil law, including equal capacity. It further states that any law that discriminates against

women on the basis of gender or marital status shall be invalid and legislation shall be passed to eliminate customs and practices that discriminate against women, particularly practices such as sexual abuse, harassment and violence, discrimination in work, business and public affairs and deprivation of property (WLSA Malawi, 2010:3). In 2006, the Government of Malawi (GoM) enacted the prevention of Domestic Violence Law Act No. 5 which was later assented to by the head of state on 15<sup>th</sup> May of the same year. This law represents one of the greatest achievements ever undertaken in the fight for gender equality and in particular violence against women. Nevertheless, though this is the case, the reality on the ground is that women experience pervasive discrimination within the legal system and are not afforded with equal opportunities or access to its resources.

A report by WLSA Malawi (2010:1-7) offers an extensive discussion on this issue and some insights on the implication for women in Malawi. The report notes that low level of education among women prevents them from accessing legal services in Malawi. If the less educated women are to access courts, then the court procedures must be simple. Unfortunately court procedures in Malawi are complex which makes it more difficult for the uneducated women to challenge their male counterparts who often than not have a tactical advantage over them (WLSA Malawi, 2010:7). Similarly, a study by Schärf et al (2011:43-44) on access to justice provided to the poor of Malawi by the lower subordinate courts and customary justice forums, women expressed that they lacked freedom to express themselves at traditional forums. Women felt that, due to their economic disempowerment, they fared worse in traditional forums of dispute resolution, since men were able to bribe the chief. The women also felt that domestic violence was not effectively dealt with by chiefs, mainly because chiefs were unable to enforce their directives. Furthermore, the report by WLSA Malawi (2010:8) reveals that there is lack of information and awareness among women about their legal rights, the appropriate means of resolving disputes and how to progress with their cases. This could explain why wife battery is usually tolerated and considered a normal part of marriage and consequently under reported in Malawi. Because domestic violence is under-reported and official statistics are largely absent, domestic violence rates are difficult to measure with any accuracy. There is, however general agreement that domestic violence rates are high in Malawi. An analysis of a study by CHRR (2005) as reported by White, (2007:25-26) shows that though the study was on Gender Based Violence (GBV) in general, domestic

violence emerged as the central issues of discussion among the respondents in the 8 districts visited. Similarly, a public hearing conducted by the MHRC on domestic violence in Malawi indicated that domestic violence was one of the most serious problems in Malawi (WLSA Malawi, 2002). The under reporting of domestic violence could also be a manifestation of deep rooted problems within the justice system. It could be a reflection of the fact that the law does not provide adequate mechanisms to minimize the discomfort of victims and to protect them from intimidation and retaliation. It is not uncommon in Malawi for victims of domestic violence to withdraw cases against the defendants on the grounds that they reported out of emotion, without carefully evaluating the consequences. In some cases victims would plead with the magistrate to withdraw the case against the accused after conviction on the grounds that they have nobody to support them. However, it has to be acknowledged that complaints of domestic violence are on the increase due in part to training on women rights in Malawi.

## **2.7 Religion and Gender**

Religion can be explained as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as a creation of a super human agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs (50/50a). In the world today, there are different kinds of religions, some of which are particular to specific regions while others are widespread throughout the world being found in many different countries. The most important examples of very widespread religions include; Christianity which is the world's biggest religion based on the teaching of Jesus Christ, Islam revealed in its final form by Prophet Muhammad and Buddhism based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (Francis and Wilcox, 1998:119). Each of these religions has its own narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or of the universe. Nevertheless, a closer look at each religion, one would find large number of different denominations, sects and cults, each with their own interpretations, beliefs and practices and indeed some of these varieties are so different from each other that they might almost be regarded as different religions. In case of Christianity, there are Catholics, numerous forms of Protestants Christianity found all over the world, examples being Methodists, Baptists, C.C.A.P and

Pentecostalism. Islam has its own share of variations. The most prominent division is that between the Sunnites and Shi'ites but within these two streams there are further variations. The funny part is that these various forms of Christianity, Islam or Buddhism usually consider themselves to represent the true tradition from which others have departed (IPS, 2002:15-16).

It has been argued that religion just like culture is a powerful institution within a society which plays a major role in shaping gender roles, social rules and behaviors (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Religious texts and teachings are persuasive, because they are considered sacred and hold divine authority for believers and as such they are often interpreted and used as a justification for either promoting or discouraging gender discrimination. Religious texts in almost all religions have been subjected to numerous interpretations, reinterpretations and translations. These are influenced by the viewpoints of the person making the interpretations which are in turn informed by the norms and values of the society (Mutonono, 2002:17). For this reason, the interpretations of many texts are still subject to debate and revision by theologians today. Paradoxically, while different interpretations come up from time to time, the text remains the same reaffirming that interpretation of religious text is arbitrary and is influenced by the perception of the one making interpretation about what the status quo should be at that particular time (IPS, 2002:17). This implies that while the same text could be used to challenge inequality and injustice in one religion, the same could be used to promote the same in another religion. For instance some Christian institutions have used Genesis 1:27 which states that “*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God, created He him; male and female, created He them. And so God blessed them and said, have many children so that your descendants will live all over the earth and brings it under control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds and all the wild animals. I have provided every kind of grain and all kinds of fruit for you...*”(Holy Bible,2001:1) to justify gender justice. To them, the text means that both man and woman were created from Gods image, they were both blessed and given leadership over the earth and were both given access to property. Other Christians on the other hand have used Ephesians 5: 22-24 which encourages wives to submit to their husbands to justify gender inequality (Holy Bible, 2001:185). The same could also be true within religions in different countries. For instance, differences in the interpretation of Quran in Sura 4:3 are noted in different Muslim countries. The verse

states that and I quote; “*And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course.*” While some Muslim countries such as Tunisia and Turkey have interpreted the text to mean preference for monogamy, other countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh have set up panels to determine terms for polygamy if need be (Mutoono, 2002:17-18). This has given Muslim men freewill to marry up to four wives without restrictions even though in most cases, it is not favourable to women. These gender attitudes and teachings to a greater extent shape a range of everyday behaviours and decision making; from choices about whether to educate daughters or sons when money is inadequate, whether to promote a man or a woman in a managerial position and whether to lay off a woman or a man during economic downturns. Seen in this light, one might as well expect that religions that reinforce patriarchal values would hinder government policy efforts aimed at closing gender gaps in important areas such as education and employment despite their other roles such as solace and even social support. So the question is: are there significant differences in well being outcomes among different religions holding different views about women role in the church?

Psacharopolous and Zafiris (1989) found that Muslims, Hindus and Catholics have lower rates of female labour force than other religions. This augurs well with a study that titled *women’s schooling and religious affiliation in Malawi at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century* which examined the relationship between religious affiliation and women schooling in Malawi. Using data from nationally representative 2000 demographic and health survey, the results of the survey show that there are substantial differences in women’s acquisition of school by religious affiliation. This study further found out that more non-religious and Muslim women had never been to school compared with women for C.C.A.P and Catholic denominations (Doctor, 2005). The study argues that the findings are related to the association of Christian groups with western societies and religions that emphasizes evangelization and recourse to schooling.

Similarly, recent studies identify Islam as significantly more patriarchal than other dominant religions on such measures as education and life expectancy (Dollar and Gatti 1999; Forsythe and Korzeniewicz 2000; Fish 2004; Balamoune-Lutz 2007). Leon

(2011:2) looked at whether religion moderates the relationship between women's domestic power and use of contraceptives for family planning in India. The study found that contraception is less extensively used by Muslim minority than the Hindu population. Leon explained that the reason for this is that domestic power is weaker among Muslim women. These findings are consistent with another study that was conducted in two regions of India (Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu) and one study in Pakistan (Punjab) which reported that being a Muslim reduced by half the likelihood of a woman using contraception as compared to being Hindu (Sathar, Callum, Jejeebhoy in Leon 2011:4).

Nonetheless, some recent empirical evidence challenges the above view (Donno and Russett, 2004; Noland 2005). For instance, Donno and Russett (2004), in a study of the determinants of gender inequality in education, political representation, and employment in 153 countries, found that the contribution of Islamic population to gender inequality holds only for women's share of parliamentary seats and the gender education ratio. If controls for Arab countries are introduced into the regressions, the effect of Islamic population becomes insignificant for measures of gender inequality in literacy, life expectancy, and economic activity rates. Read (2003) presents evidence that although Muslims are more patriarchal, it is the interaction of Muslim and ethnicity that matters most in shaping gender attitudes.

Studies done in Sub-Saharan Africa on the other hand revealed that religion was and to an extent is seen as a barrier to fertility decline and to family planning adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa (Caldwell and Caldwell in Yeatman & Trinitapoli 2008:1852). The reason for this is that most of the religious belief systems not only operate directly to sustain high fertility but also moulds a society in such a way as to bring rewards for high fertility. A study carried out by Yeatman & Trinitapoli (2008:1857), found a strong relationship between religion and contraception in rural Malawi. The study concluded that Catholic leaders are least likely to approve the use of modern family planning while Pentecostal and Muslim leaders are most likely to approve of such practices. However, the study found that the actual behavior of women within denominations operates in the opposite direction. Catholic women are among the most likely to use contraception while Muslim and Pentecostal are among the least likely. The reason for this trend could be that large congregations such as Catholic consists of sparse networks and thus provide forums for

regular interaction among heterogeneous women unlike in small congregations where dense networks would constrain access to new information.

## **2.8 Religion and Gender Equality/Inequality in Malawi**

This section discusses religious teachings and practices that have a significant impact on gender roles in Malawi. Focus will mainly be on Christianity and Islam which are the two largest religions in Malawi. This will help put into perspective the role of religion in promoting gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. The religious teachings will be discussed in line with the protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa whose rights has a bearing on women's experiences of discrimination both in religious institutions and in their families (Kounte, 2003). The protocol stipulates the following:

Article 2: Elimination of discrimination against women

Article 3 - Right to Dignity

Article 4 - The Right to Life, Integrity and Security of the Person

Article 5 - Elimination of Harmful Practices

Article 6 - Marriage

Article 7 - Separation, Divorce and Annulment of Marriage

Article 8 - Access to Justice and Equal Protection before the Law

Article 9 - Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process

Article 12 - Right to Education and Training

Article 14 - Health and Reproductive Rights

### **Article 2: Elimination of discrimination against women**

Article 2 of the protocol defines discrimination against women as any action preventing a woman from enjoying all rights recognized to all human beings and in all fields because

of her sex. The article urges states to ensure that in their constitution and in all other laws of the country, it is clearly stipulated that women and men are equal; they have the same rights (Kounte, 2003). Nevertheless, according to Feminist theory, religion helps legitimize gender inequality. Feminists argue that religion is a source of domination and oppression as it teaches and preaches the norms and values of men, helping to suppress and control women (Swatos, 2011). In line with this argument, some development practitioners have argued that patriarchal norms that dominate the social landscape are also reflected in the interpretations of religious texts in different religions (IPS, 2002:16-17). A gender audit of the church in Malawi by White (2008:35-41) revealed that women are discriminated in some churches.

### **Article 3 - Right to Dignity**

Article 3 of the protocol provides that women be protected against all forms of violence, all that harms a person physically or mentally. A gender audit of the church in Malawi conducted by White (2008:35-41) revealed that churches have developed a systemic response to GBV. All the sampled churches had marriage counselors who provided systemic counseling to couples when faced with domestic challenges. Nevertheless, the audit also found that most churches encouraged women to remain in abusive relationships.

### **Article 4 - The Right to Life, Integrity and Security of the Person**

The right to life, integrity and security of the person includes respect for the life of the woman, her integrity, security and protection of her person in her home, family, society and throughout the country. While Marxist theory argues that religion disguises the true nature of exploitation by providing explanations that justify exploitation, Functionalist theory argues that religion is an important agent of socialization (Theorysum06, 2011). Functionalists argue that religion operates as an integrative force for the members of society through the creation of collective conscious and providing aid in times of need.

Parsons (in theorysum06, 2011) argues that there is a clear link between religion, morality, norms and statute laws. For example the commandment 'thou shall not commit adultery' promotes faithfulness in families. In the same way, functionalists would argue

that the greatest commandment that Jesus commanded in the Holy Bible ‘love your neighbour as you love yourself’ promotes respect and love amongst people regardless of the age, colour, sex and religion.

### **Article 5 - Elimination of Harmful Practices**

The harmful practices include all forms of female genital mutilation, removing certain private parts of young girls and women as well as making scars on their bodies (Kounte, 2003). However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in article 19 also includes those practices that result into suffering and degradation of children. While most religions consider cultural practices not compatible with religious values, one of the feminists, Saadawi (1980) in (Theorysum06, 2011) argues that Islam is responsible for oppressing women. She cites female circumcision, an approved religious surgery in Muslim countries as one of the ways in which religion not only seeks to control women ideology but takes control of their bodies.

### **Article 6 - Marriage**

Article 6 of the protocol on marriage stipulates that it is ideal that each man marries only one woman but in cases where a husband has many wives, appropriate measures or legislations be enacted to ensure the rights each woman is respected. This implies that the protocol recognizes monogamy. The protocol also set the minimum age for marriage for women as 18 years.

### **Article 7 - Separation, Divorce and Annulment of Marriage**

Article 7 of the protocol provides that women and men shall have the same rights to seek separation, divorce or annulment of marriage. A gender audit conducted by White (2008:35) revealed that most Christian churches consider vows that couples are sworn to when ever they are being married ‘till death do us part as definite and as such divorce separation or annulment of marriage is not allowed regardless of circumstances.

Islam on the other hand believes that marriage should not be broken except for compelling reasons. In other words, Islam recognizes the right of both partners to end their matrimonial relationship but does not encourage it (Mohammed, 2011). The Islamic

position of giving both the wife and husband the right to dissolve marriage is consistent with article 7 of the protocol which provides that women and men should have the same rights to seek separation, divorce or annulment of marriage.

### **Article 8: Access to Justice and Equal Protection before the Law**

Article 8 of the protocol provides that women and men are equal before the law and shall have right to equal protection and benefit of the law. Religious organizations have a social responsibility of ensuring women and men access justice and that are protected before the law. A study by WLSA Malawi (2010:8-10) revealed that churches are used by many people as places where they find justice especially for domestic matters. The challenge is that these informal justice systems still use religious laws which in most cases do not offer protection to women and girls.

### **Article 9: Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process**

Article 9 of the protocol encourages the participation of women in the political life of their countries on equal footing with men (Kounte, 2003). In line with this, government of Malawi has adopted affirmative action for women as a strategy for gender balanced representation both at local and national levels (White, 2007:7). However, despite this affirmative action, some religious teachings prevent women from participating fully in political and decision making processes.

### **Article 12 - Right to Education and Training**

This article provides for equal opportunity and access to education and success for boys and girls. The role that religious institutions have played in promoting education for boys and girls cannot be overemphasized. The majority of education institutions are provided by the religious institutions. Most of the religious institutions in Malawi have programs that specifically target girls with education. For instance the Catholic, C.C.A.P and Anglican churches and Islam have a number of girls' primary and secondary schools. Many religious institutions have scholarship programs that specifically target vulnerable girls with education.

## **Article 14: Health and Reproductive Rights**

The right to health and reproductive rights include; women's right to control their fertility, the right to decide whether to have children, the number of children and the spacing of the children, the right to self protection and to be protected from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) including HIV and AIDS (Kounte, 2003). A gender audit by White (2008: 35-41) revealed that some religious organizations in Malawi do not encourage women to exercise their freedom of choice with regards to sexual and reproductive rights.

### **2.9 Religion and Gender Equality/Inequality in Mulanje district**

Just like all the other districts in Malawi, religion has a huge presence in Mulanje. Over 98% of the population in the district subscribe to a religion (Government of Malawi, 2007). Nevertheless, religious beliefs are intertwined with cultural beliefs, values and customs and other social practices to influence community life and subsequently gender roles and relationships in the district. This means that the fusion of cultural and religious factors influence gender in Mulanje district.

Studies have revealed that despite the shifts towards gender equality and women empowerment at policy level, the situation is different on the ground where women including those in religious institutions remain subordinated. The most common cultural practices that increasingly impact negatively on rights of women are initiation ceremonies. From as young as 6 years of age, girls are socialized to believe that they are sex objects that have to satisfy a man sexually at all cost (MHRC, 2005:39). At the age of six years, girls are taken to isolated places where among other things are taught how to offer best sex to their male counterparts. They are also taught how to pull their labia manually. The main purpose is to offer sexual partners maximum pleasure during sexual intercourse. The MHRC report (2005:40) reveals that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is practiced in one of the Traditional Authorities (TAs) in Mulanje, TA Mthilamanja. The purpose is to widen the girl's vagina in preparation for marriage.

If progress is to be made on promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje, then religious institutions should take a stronger stand to challenge patriarchal power and how is it used to discriminate women in the district.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed that over the last two decades, most of the developing countries including Malawi, have actively promoted women's empowerment and gender equality in all development arenas. However, although these countries have embraced gender mainstreaming, it is evident that gender inequalities are still persistent in all aspects of women's life. Cultural beliefs and religious teachings and beliefs which embed social norms, thus shaping behavior and practices have been implicated in this discussion to have an impact on the rigidity of gender roles and attitudes. At the same time religious teachings and beliefs have been seen to promote gender equality and women empowerment. However, there is little research that investigates whether there is causal effect of religious teachings and beliefs and women decisions on different aspects of their lives.

## **CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND**

### **3.1: Introduction**

When interpreting research results, it is important to understand the context in which the study took place (Huntington et al, 2006). This is because the research context may influence the study results. This chapter therefore outlines the profile of Malawi and Mulanje district and a detailed account of religion in Malawi and Mulanje district. This is to give an overview of the context in which the study was conducted.

### **3.2 Context of the Study**

The study was conducted in Mulanje district in Malawi. To give the context in which the study was conducted, this section outlines the geographical location of Malawi, the socio-economic context and history of religion in Malawi and Mulanje district.

#### **3.2.1 Geographical Location and Population**

Malawi is a land locked country situated in Southern Africa. It shares borders with Tanzania to the north and north east; Mozambique to the east, south and south west; Zambia to the west and North West (<http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/contry/malawi>) (Refer appendix 8). According to the NSO (2008), the country is 901 Kms long and ranges from 80 to 161 Kms in width. The total area is 118, 484 square Kms in land area. Arable land accounts for 20.7% of the area of the country of which 1.2% of the land area is devoted to permanent crops and 36.2% of the country is covered by forests. The 2008 Malawi population and housing census gives a total population in Malawi as 13, 066,320 people. Of this population, 6,365, 771 (49%) are men while 6, 700, 549 (51%) are women. The population of persons aged 18 years and over is 6,216,432, of whom 3.2 million are females while 3 million are males. The population has increased from 9.9 Million in 1998 giving an overall population increase of 32%. There has been an increase in population density over the three decades. The population density has increased from 85 people per square kilometre in 1978 to 105 per square kilometre in 1998 to 139 per square kilometre in 2008 (NSO, 2008). At regional level, southern region has the highest

population of 5,876,784 (45%), this is seconded by central region with a total population of 5, 491, 034 (42%) and northern region with a population of 1, 698, 502 (13%) making it the least populated region.

### **3.2.2 Socio-Economic Context**

Malawi is ranked as one of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the world. In the year 2010, it was ranked the tenth poorest country in the world with annual per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 800 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011) while the 2008 UNDP Human Development Index ranked it at 162 of 179 with half of the countries below Malawi just recovering from war. Over 50% of the Malawi population survive on less than the national poverty line of US\$ 165 annually and about one fifth are extremely poor and cannot afford to meet the daily food requirements (Arrehag, Vyllder, Durevall & Sjoblom 2007:3). The country has a significant unequal distribution of income than its neighbouring countries with a Gini coefficient (measure of inequality) estimated at 0.38 (Arrehag et al 2007:23, Orr, Mwale & Chitsonga, 2009: 227).

The economy is largely dependent on agriculture as well as foreign aid. Tobacco, tea and sugar are Malawi's main exports. Economic growth has been sluggish over the past years with an annual growth per capita income of only 0.2 percent between 1975 and 2006 against an average population growth rate of over 1 percent in the same period (Matchaya, 2007:23). Weak exports, poor access to education, low life expectancy, environmental problems, HIV and AIDS and poor infrastructure are some of the factors that continue to contribute to poverty in Malawi. Poverty in Malawi is reflected in its poor demographic and health indicators. The country continues to have health indicators that are among the worst in the world. Infant and child mortality are highest in the region with one in every four Malawian children expected to die before their fifth birthday (WHO, 2007). Maternal mortality rates are very high with 1120 women per 100, 000 dying due to poor access to prenatal services, high fertility rates, short interval between births and HIV and AIDS (Geubbels, 2006: 2007). The education system is hampered by problems of poor access, high repetition and drop out rates, poor infrastructure and gender inequality. Literacy rate is 71.8% for those 15 years and older while for women, the literacy rate is 64.6%. This is higher than the average literacy rate for Sub-Saharan Africa which is at 62.3% (Education International, 2007).

Malawi is a former British colony that received independence on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1964. Since then, Malawi is a republic with the president as the head of state. From 1964, Malawi was under one party rule which ended in 1994 with a major transition to multiparty democracy. With democracy, Malawi has seen CSO taking an active role in promoting good governance. These CSOs which include religious organizations play an independent and complementary role to the government and private sector in ensuring good governance for development. Since the dawn of democracy, the relationship between the government and the CSOs has improved though it is still characterized by mistrust and fear (James and Malunga, 2006).

Paradoxically, naturally, Malawi is rich with a wide range of natural resources. Many people are drawn to the country because of its great water body; Lake Malawi and the beautiful mountains. It was the refreshing clear blue waters of Lake Malawi that attracted European settlers and Missionaries to Malawi in the mid 1800. The lake promised communication, commerce and religion (Thindwa, 2010:1). Since then, religion has widely spread in Malawi.

### **3.2.3 Brief Overview of Religion in Malawi**

Malawi has developed to be a diverse society as far as religion is concerned. According to the NSO (2008), 95.7% of Malawians belong to religious affiliations. The largest number of Malawians is Christians accounting for more than 79.9% of the population with the largest groups being affiliated to Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches. There are smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, Evangelicals, Seventh day and recently Malawi has seen a boom in Pentecostal churches (NSO, 2008). The second most prominent religion is Islam. Muslims account for approximately 12.8% of the population (NSO, 2008). The Yao tribe along the Southern lakeshore is most strongly associated with Islam. Indigenous religions account for about 3% of the population (NSO, 2008). Though, these are rarely discussed especially in Christian circles, their influence is profound. One would find a section or two for the traditional healers nearly at every market in Malawi. Gulewamkulu, an animistic religion among the Chewa in central region of Malawi is also common. There are also a smaller number of Hindus, Bahais and Rastafarians. The section that follows gives a brief history of Islam and Christianity which are the major religions in Malawi.

### **3.2.3.1 Brief History of Islam in Malawi**

The Islamic religion was introduced to Malawi by the Swahili Arabs from the East-African-coast. These traders had come to establish slave and ivory trade on the shores of Lake Malawi following a great demand for ivory and slaves in the east African markets namely; Zanzibar, Kilwa, Mombasa and Qualimane (Wright and Lary, 1971:550). According to Bone (1982: 126-127), one of the slave routes was Nkhotakota where one of the Swahili-Arab slave traders, Salim bin Abdullar (Jumbe) set up his headquarters on the shore of Lake Malawi in 1840. By virtue of his success as a trader and by his clever diplomacy, Jumbe attracted a large personal following such that he was able to establish them in the villages under his own headmen. Bone further writes that Jumbe secured further loyalty of his followers predominantly Yao traders and Chewa refugees, by insisting on their conversion to his own Islamic faith. Another slave route passed through the southern shores of Lake Malawi into Tete province and Zambezi valley in Mozambique. Here, the Mangochi Yao chiefs namely Mpondasi, Jalasi and Makanjira were converted to Islam faith and controlled this slave trade route. The other slave route passed through the southern highlands where the Yao chiefs namely Nyezerera, Mkanda, Chikumbu and Matipwiri were converted to Islamic faith and controlled this slave trade route. Following this contact with coastal traders, Malawian Muslims practice Islam the way they learnt it from the coastal traders coloured with indigenous practices related to rites-of passage such as initiation ceremonies (jando) and burial rituals highlighted by sadaqa (Alpers 1972:180). As Alpers (1972:194) put it, 'Islam provided an external standard to which people like the Yao—could compare and contrast their own values.' However, with the advent of more elaborate Asian inspired Islamic institution, most of the Islamic children now receive a kind of formal religious education, locally and abroad. This gives them a broader perspective of Islam. Consequently, there is noticeable tension between the young and the older Islamic generations within the community.

As already mentioned, today, Islam is the second largest religion in Malawi comprising of about 12.8% of the total population. The vast majority of Malawians are Sunni Muslims adhering to either the Quadriyya or Sukutu groups (Malawi Government 2011). Both groups adhere to the teachings of the Quran and subscribe to the five pillars of Islam which guide their daily lives. These pillars include; faith and belief in the

oneness of God, establishment of daily prayers, concern for and alms giving to the needy, self purification through fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca. They outline what Muslims must do to be worthy (50/50b). The contribution that Islam has made to development of Malawi cannot be overemphasized. Muslims have built mosques in the country and there are several Islamic schools which have mostly been built by the African Muslim agency based in Angola. Through a number of international Muslim organizations such as overseas Islamic higher institutions of learning, Malawian Muslims have been in contact with the international world and this has influenced their development in various ways. Most of these organizations are overtly in support of Islamic propaganda and have in different ways contributed to revival of Islam in Malawi. They have provided scholarships to Malawian Muslims in different fields both at under graduate and post-graduate levels. Upon completion of the studies, the scholars assume leading roles in various fields while others assume leading religious roles in their communities as teachers of religion (Imam).

### **3.2.3.2 Brief History of Christianity in Malawi**

Dr David Livingstone is one of the key players in the introduction Christianity in Malawi. According to Sindima (1992), a Malawian author, the evangelization of Malawi was a direct response to David Livingstone' appeal to establish commerce and Christianity into the interior of Africa. During his Zambezi expedition, he reached the Shire highlands in 1859 and while there he wrote Henry Venn, the secretary of the Church Missionary Society, appealing for a mission from the Church of England to this part of Africa. Livingstone had found the region providing possibilities for establishing successful commercial settlements which would be nucleus of 'civilization and Christianity.' According to Sindima, despite being mesmerized by the Zambezi and its surrounding structures, Livingstone was appalled by the slave trade that was being practiced by the Portuguese and was determined to bring an 'honest' trade to the people along the Zambezi River. Livingstone therefore returned from his first travel to Africa with a strong passion to make his dream of bringing commerce and Christianity to the people in Shire highlands a reality.

Following this, the Presbyterians missions commonly known as Church of Central Africa (C.C.A.P.) sent missionaries to Malawi. Both the Church of Scotland and the Free

Church of Scotland which are equally Presbyterian sent their missionaries. The Free Church of Scotland is a part that broke away from the Church of Scotland in objection to state intrusion in state affairs. In Malawi, the Church of Scotland settled in the South while the Free Church of Scotland settled in the northern part along the shores of Lake Malawi (Thindwa, 2010:5). The Portuguese on the other hand did not send permanent Catholic missionaries till 1889 though they had made contact with Nyasaland. The society of Catholic missionaries known as White fathers who arrived in 1889 were the first permanent Catholic to settle in Malawi (Malawi: Country Profile, 2011).

The following decades saw the addition of the Dutch Reformed Church (South Africa), Seventh Day Adventist, Church of Christ (US), Church of Christ (UK), and Anglican Church.

Unlike all the above churches, the growth of the Pentecostal churches in Malawi can be credited to native Malawians. Most of these churches were started by the natives after being dissatisfied by the way of worship in the mainstream churches. Although these churches came a little later than Presbyterian and Catholic missionaries, they are increasingly gaining popularity and increasing in number. In his book, *Pentecostalism in Malawi: A History of the apostolic faith mission*, Strohbehn (2005:9-11), an ordained pastor of the German Pentecostal movement attributes the growth in Pentecostal churches to its similarities with indigenous religion. He writes: 'Pentecostalism has many features, which are welcomed by Malawians in their time.' Many Pentecostal churches embrace the power of the spirit, a characteristic that Africans have always felt strongly about. The freedoms to cast out demons, heal the sick and dance in the church are some of the attracting features in some African communities.

Christianity has grown throughout the century and it continues to play a crucial position in the lives of Malawians and in the government affairs. Interventions of the Christian organizations support the socioeconomic needs of the poor Malawians as Christian organizations have brought health facilities, education facilities and other development initiatives closer to people. Most of the villages in Malawi have an extension of some Christian sect such as school, vocational skills, training centre and health centre. The role of the Christian organizations in ensuring good governance for development cannot be overemphasized. The Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), a Catholic organization

for instance is given credit to the role it played in transition from one party to multiparty democracy in Malawi. ECM in its pastoral letter titled '*Living our Faith*'; the seven bishops from all the dioceses in Malawi condemned the Banda's regime for its dictatorship and abuse of human rights. Ultimately, this saw Malawi changing from one party rule to multiparty system of government.

The study was conducted in Mulanje district which has its own features and characteristics typical of the district as described below.

### **3.2.4 Brief History of Religion in Mulanje**

Mulanje district, just like all other districts in Malawi is highly religious. According to the government of Malawi (2007), Christianity is the majority religion in Mulanje constituting 89.4% of the population. This is further divided into Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals and Charismatic churches. Islam constitutes 5% while other religious groups constitute 2%. There are also indigenous religions which constitutes 2% of the population.

#### **3.2.4.1 Islam in Mulanje**

As already discussed in 3.2.3.1, the presence of Islam in Mulanje is attributed to the slave trade that was introduced in Malawi by Swahili-Arab traders in 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Yao chiefs who had been converted to Islamic faith controlled slave trade routes. Among the chiefs included; Nyezerera and Mkanda who controlled the sub route passing between Mulanje and Michesi hill in what is now called Phalombe district. The other two chiefs Chikumbu and Matipwiri controlled the sub routes passing through the southern part of Mulanje Mountain. Due to their control of the slave routes, these Yao chiefs became very rich and influential and commanded respect from their subjects. This made their subjects to follow them to Islamic faith (The Malawi National Commission for UNESCO 2011:1-11). Nevertheless, the introduction of Christianity in Mulanje district in 1887 disturbed the growth of Islam the growth of Islam in Mulanje. Christianity has continued to grow at a very faster rate in the district. It is therefore not surprising that today only 5% of the population in Mulanje is Muslim (Government of Malawi, 2007). Nevertheless, this is not to say that the impact of the religion is not felt in the district. Through MAM,

Muslims in the district continue to uplift the standard of life, morality and education of the most deserving and needy people in the district. Islamic activities in the district focus much on education and development targeting youths, women and rural poor as the focus of programs. This is in line with one of the five pillars of Islam which obligates Muslims to have concern for the needy. There are two private Islamic primary schools which compliment the governments' efforts in improving education.

### **3.2.4.2 Christianity in Mulanje**

According to the UNESCO report (2011:1-11), the introduction of Christianity in Mulanje district was in response to slave trade activities that was being practiced between the Arabs and the Yao chiefs in exchange for clothes and guns. Appalled by the slave trade, the Scottish missionaries reckoned Christianity would promote faith and stop slave trade in the area. In 1887, Henry Henderson and his wife from Blantyre mission made an exploratory trip to Mulanje region to inspect sites for a new mission. They were warmly welcomed in the villages. However, there were some problems and it wasn't until three years later that another Scottish missionary from Blantyre mission by the name of DR Scott finally selected a site and sent Robert Cleland to plant the mission. This led to the birth of Mulanje mission. The villages in the area welcomed the missionaries except for Chikumbu who launched an attack on neighboring village. In ensuing years, Mulanje mission grew more and flourished. Today it is known as a class A mission station because it has a church, a school and a hospital. It also houses Mulanje Presbyterian headquarters and operates a Likuni Phala maize mill.

C.C.A.P remained the only dominant denomination in the district till 1925 when the Catholic missionaries established themselves in the district. In their book; *'Catholics, peasants and Chewa resistance in Nyasaland'*, Linden and Linden (1974:233), explain that before 1925, the Catholic missionaries had been rejecting the district because they felt it was under populated. However, by 1925 immigration from Mozambique by Alomwe laborers had made it a desirable mission place. Linden and Linden (1974:234), reckon Catholicism gained popularity because it provided alternative society in which Africans could attain positions of authority and prestige denied to them elsewhere. While they could still remain as outsiders in the long established protestant churches, they were welcomed with open arms by the Catholic missionaries who were themselves new

arrivals. However, the tremendous influx of Alomwe into Mulanje area which continued into the 1930's finally gave rise to a large number of other churches such as Anglicans, Seventh day, Apostolic church, Baptists e.t.c. In 1979, the Comboni missionaries of Catholic Church established four parishes in Mulanje district; Phalombe, Chiringa, Muloza and Gambula and this increased the number of Catholic followers in the district (Comboni missionaries, 2011). As the years went by, the district saw a boom in the number of independent Pentecostal churches which answered needs that institutional churches were unable or unwilling to satisfy (Linden and Linden, 1974: 194-198).

Today, the district boasts of 89.4% of Christians belonging to Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (Government of Malawi, 2007). The church forms an integral part in the socio-economical and political lives of Malawians in Mulanje district. The Church has partnered with the state to provide basic socio amenities such as schools and health facilities. In the matter of health care, the church provides affordable health care which is vital to the population that cannot afford private medical treatment. For instance, Mulanje mission hospital run by Blantyre synod of the C.C.A.P. is the second largest health facility after the district hospital in Mulanje. The hospital with over 290 employees serves an immediate catchment area of around 75, 000 people including provision of primary health care activities to 72 villages (Lipato, 2009). The mission has also a nursing school which trains nurse-midwife technicians. In addition, with support from the Scottish missionaries, the mission has constructed community shelter and sank boreholes in the catchment area. Similarly, the Catholic Church is running health centers, primary schools, community day Secondary schools and one nation girls' secondary school in the district. The Church has also taken an active role in the fight against HIV and AIDS in the district. Faith Based Organizations (FBO) are working with the community groups and local leaders to provide preventive, care and support and advocacy services to those affected and infected by HIV and AIDS.

### **3.2.5 Brief Overview of Socio-Economic Context of Mulanje**

Mulanje District is on the Eastern side of Malawi in the Southern Region and shares borders with Mozambique to the East, Thyolo to the West, Chiradzulu to the North West, Zomba to the North and Phalombe to the North East (Refer appendix 9). The

district is home to the highest mountain (Mulanje Mountain) in Malawi and in Central Africa.

Mulanje has a population of 525, 429 in 6 TAs. Females outnumber males by ratio of 1:1.2. (NSO, 2008). The district has a population density of 300 people per square kilometre (Government of Malawi, 2007) which is an indication that the district is highly populated. The problem of high population density in the district could be attributed to the district's fertile soil, cold weather and tourism features such as Mulanje Mountain and the green vegetation which attracted a lot of settlers in the district. The influx of Mozambican refugees who settled in the district between the late 70's and early 90's and never returned back after the civil war in Mozambique also contributed to the high population density in the district (Moyo, O'Keefe and Sill, 1993). The district occupies a total of 202, 100 hectares, of which 71, 125 ha is cultivatable, while 21, 660 ha are occupied by tea estates (Immink, 1995:38). For this reason, over 60 percent of 200, 000 small holder farmers cultivate plots of size below 0.3 ha (Immink, 1995:5). Consequently, there are many chieftaincy and land disputes in the district. Although the district is richly endowed with natural resources, environmental problems are very rampant mainly due to the high population. There is deforestation and extinction of some tree species.

The main ethnic groups in Mulanje are Lomwe, Yao and Mang'anja which traditionally follow matrilineal system of descent and kinship. In this system, the responsibility of the children in the family lies in the hands of the maternal uncles. This means that a man will exercise responsibility not over the children he fathers but exclusively over his sisters children who are viewed as 'his own flesh'. A study carried out by MHRC (2005:31-33), revealed that this system offers security to the woman in times of divorce or death of a husband because the husband's side finds it hard to grab property. However, contrary to this finding, this system does not offer the much needed social security to the woman and her children because the husband does not feel obliged to invest in the village of the woman let alone in his biological children's future because he feels he will not live in that village forever. Furthermore, the position that the woman assumes is inferior to the man as decisions are mostly made by an uncle with the woman on the receiving end.

Economically, Mulanje is one of the districts with high poverty levels. According to the Integrated Household Survey of 2004/5 provided by the NSO (2005), the district has a proportional of 30.60% ultra-poor people and 68.6% in the poor bracket compared to 22.40% ultra-poor and 52.4% poor people nationally. At regional level (south rural), the rates are at 31.5% and 64.4% in the ultra-poor and poor brackets respectively. This conclusively shows that Mulanje district poverty rates are significantly higher than those at national and regional level.

Access to social services such as education, health and water is constrained by poor and inadequate delivery system. People generally have to walk a long distance to access these services. Furthermore, all government departments are understaffed (Government of Malawi, 2007).

The prevalence of HIV stands at 20%, which is a lot higher than the national prevalence rate of 12% (NSO, 2005). This has substantially increased the demand for health services in the district.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the socio-economic context of both Malawi and Mulanje district to help readers understand the context in which the study was conducted. It has also provided a brief history of religion both in Malawi and Mulanje district with emphasis on Christianity and Islam which are the largest religions in Malawi.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the methods that were used to answer the research questions and the justification for the methods used. The research setting, data collection techniques, the instrument which was used and the validity and reliability of the instrument are described in detail in this chapter. The chapter further discusses how data was analyzed and justifications for the data analysis methods. The chapter also explains measures that were executed in the study to ensure participants rights were not infringed on. Finally, the chapter concludes with the factors that placed significant limitations on the study.

### **4.2 Research Design**

According to Durrheim (2006:37), designing a research requires a researcher to make decisions along four dimensions: (1) the purpose of the research, (2) the theoretical paradigm informing the research, (3) the context or the situation within which the research is carried out and (4) the research techniques employed to collect and analyze data. Durrheim further explains that these four dimensions woven together in a coherent research design maximize the validity of the research findings. Taking into considerations all the four dimensions, this research adopted both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Stevens (2003:28) describes qualitative research as one that attempts to study human action from a perspective of the social actors themselves and the primary goal is to describe human behavior. He also describes it as method that can be used when one is looking for people's feelings (experiences, attitudes and behaviors) and can also be used for ground breaking so that one can ably quantify after understanding the reality from participants perspective. In this research, the overall objective of the research was to assess the role of religion in promoting gender equality and women empowerment hence the need to get rich context-bound information from the informants themselves.

The choice of qualitative design for this study was further justified by the specific objectives of the study which displayed features that theoretically required qualitative design. The focus was to explore in depth and get insights into issues surrounding religion, gender equality and women empowerment. Furthermore, since little was known about the impact of religion on gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje

district, there was need that themes for quantitative methods emerge from the informants themselves.

Quantitative methods are formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data are used to obtain information about the world (Burns and Grove, 2003:19). The choice of quantitative methods in this study was justified by objective number two (refer, section 1.4.2) which sought to provide a detailed assessment of the current status of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. This objective needed numerical data to validate the findings and hence the choice of quantitative methods. The choice of quantitative methods was further justified by the need to generalize the findings to a larger population (Van der Riet and Durrheim, 2006:91). Lastly quantitative methods triangulated the information from qualitative methods. This validated data that was collected through qualitative methods (Kelly, 2006:380).

In this study therefore the themes that had emerged from the qualitative methods formed a basis for the development of questionnaire to test the themes using quantitative methods and the findings from this will be generalized to the whole district.

### **4.3 Research Setting**

The study was conducted in two of the six Traditional Authorities (TAs) in Mulanje district. These are TA Njema and Nkanda. The choice of these two TAs was based mainly on two factors; Firstly, World Vision International (WVI) is working in these two TAs which provided convenience to the researcher in terms of time and resources since the researcher is a WVI employee. Secondly, these two TAs have distinct features due to their distinct geographical locations which gave different perceptives to the research question. T.A Njema borders Mozambique and the population is a mixture of Malawians and Mozambicans. TA Nkanda on the other hand borders Zomba district which is a city. The choice of Mulanje as a case study on the other hand was based on a number of factors. Firstly, the researcher had some insights with regard to religion, gender, women empowerment and culture in Mulanje as she has worked and lived in Mulanje since May, 2010. As a program manager, the researcher had interacted with different stakeholders both at community and district level. It is this connection that the researcher took advantage of to get access to the respondents.

Secondly, as already explained in chapter 3, Mulanje is one of the districts with high levels of poverty. Unfortunately, just like all districts in Malawi, women bear a disproportionate burden of poverty (Government of Malawi, 2007). A deliberate choice of Mulanje was therefore made to engage religious leaders, CSO leaders and government in finding sustainable means of promoting gender equality and empowering women in the district.

Lastly, Mulanje district is inhabited by people who despite being Lomwe, Yao and Mang'anja tribes speak Chichewa. This is the only local language that the researcher is conversant with. This means that the researcher was able to communicate effectively with respondents without going through an interpreter which could have diluted the meaning of responses.

#### **4.4 Study Target Population**

A population refers to the larger pool from which sampling frame is drawn and to which findings of the research are generalized (Durrheim, 2006: 133). Wassenaar (2006:71) argues that the population selected for the study should be those to whom the research question applies. He also argues that those most likely to benefit from the outcomes of the research should bear the burden of the research. Taking these factors into consideration, the study targeted adults' only i.e persons over 18 years of age. These included; men and women belonging to different religious organizations, religious leaders, CSO leaders, CBO representatives from government departments, politicians and chiefs. The outcome of this research has implications for women and men, CSO, religious organizations, government which justified the need to target adults only. It was also believed that the adults would be able to provide extensive and reliable information about their experience.

#### **4.5 Research Methodology**

Van der Riet and Durrheim (2006:82-83) describe research methodology as detailed methods of collecting and analyzing data in the process of undertaking a research in social science. It describes methods used to collect data, the tools used and procedures followed the sample and sampling methods. It also describes the data analysis procedure.

In this study, three research methods were used; Key Informants Interviews, FGD and Likert Survey. The section that follows describes these three methods in detail.

### **4.5.1 Key Informants Interviews**

According to Ritzer (2007), key informants are generally associated with qualitative research in which a researcher interviews knowledgeable participants as an important part of the method of investigation. Key informant interviews allow exploration of a subject in depth and the give and take of these interviews can result in a discovery of information that would not have been revealed in a survey (OASIS, 2004). In this study, semi-structured interviews were specifically aimed at capturing the key informants understanding of and views on gender and women empowerment issues in the district, their assessment on the role religion is playing in promoting gender equality and women empowerment and their assessment on the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies. The semi-structured interviews also captured the key informants' recommendations on how to improve gender equality and women empowerment in the district. Open ended guiding questions were used to get the respondents' opinions, assessment, perception and recommendations on the issues of religion, gender and women empowerment since in qualitative data collection methods, the respondents' responses cannot be predicted and predetermined (Refer appendix 3 and 4). The advantage of using open ended questionnaire was that it offered flexibility and allowed the researcher to probe some of the specific issues mentioned by the respondents. Categories of the respondents that were interviewed using semi structured interviews include; religious leaders, CSO leaders, CBO leaders, GVH, politicians, gender desk officer and a representative of community policing. The reason for getting different categories of respondents was to get broader and diverse views on the issues of religion, gender and women empowerment in the district but also to triangulate data from different sources.

#### **4.5.1.1. Construction of Interview Guide**

The construction of the guiding interview questions for the key informants was influenced by the objectives of the study. Items in the interview guides included those addressing objectives 1-7 which were:

- To explore how women, men religious and other influential leaders understand gender equality and women empowerment;
- To provide a detailed assessment of the current status of gender, equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To categorize religious teachings and beliefs related to gender in Mulanje;
- To analyze elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To analyze the elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that contribute to gender inequality and women disempowerment;
- To analyze the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies; and
- To make recommendations to promote gender equality and women empowerment in religious institutions.

An in-depth study of relevant literature on religion, gender equality and women empowerment was done to draw the content of the semi structured interview guide (Refer appendix 3 and 4). The researcher also made use of her experience on issues of gender equality and women empowerment to serve as a framework to construct the tool.

#### **4.5.1.2 Sampling and Field Research Procedure**

Durrheim (2006:133-134) defines a sample as a subset of a population that is included in the study and from which inferences about the nature of the total population is made. Sampling is therefore the process of selecting a sample to be included in the study. Durrheim argues that for sampling to be scientific, it requires careful thinking not only about how many elements should be included for observation but which elements should be included and how they should be selected. The researcher settled for a judgemental sampling procedure to identify key informants to be interviewed. According to Varkevisser, Pathmanathan, Brownlee (2003:221), judgmental sampling refers to the sampling procedure where the researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study. In this case, the researcher used her experience and judgment to choose key informants to be interviewed. A deliberate effort was made to ensure participants came from a range of age, sex, religious, educational, location and leadership backgrounds (Marshall 1996:524). Due to limitation in time, a total number of

18 key informants were purposefully chosen and interviewed. According to UCLA Centre for Health policy Research (2011: 4), 15-25 interviews are enough to provide a range of opinions. Altogether, interviews took place with 18 leaders. The break down was as in table 1 below:

**Table 1: Key Informants Who Took Part in Semi-Structured Interviews**

	<b>Targeted religious/social leader</b>	<b>Number</b>
1.	Roman Catholic religious leader	1
2.	Protestants leaders	2
3.	Pentecostal leaders	2
4.	Muslim leaders	2
5.	Leader from other religious organizations	1
6.	Group Village Headmen	2
7.	Politicians	2
8.	Civil Society Organization leaders	2
9.	Community Based Organization leaders	2
10.	Gender desk officer	1
11.	Representative of community policing	1
	<b>Total</b>	18

The limitation of this sampling procedure is that it is subjective which could tempt the researcher to choose between objectivity and convenience. However, the researcher used her experience in interacting with different stakeholders in the district to choose respondents with experience on issues of religion, gender and women empowerment. The advantage of this sampling procedure was that only information rich cases provided

information (Wambugu, Baillie, Sithole and Smith In *Van der Riet and Durrheim* 2006:97).

After sampling, definite appointments were made with sampled interviewees. During the appointment, the researcher introduced herself, described the research; its aim and benefits and provided an explanation of the purpose of the interview. This was followed by an explanation of what the interview would entail and how the information from the interview would be used. The researcher also explained that she would tape record the interview and that she might quote the interviewee in the research report. The interviewee signed consent form (Appendix 2). A one to one interview was conducted with the sampled key informants at their convenient time and place. The interview was tape recorded. This facilitated easy flow and direction of interviews which could be disturbed by taking notes. Nevertheless, at the end of each interview, the researcher jotted down her impression of the interview-things that the tape recorder could not pick up. The notes helped the researcher to remember and explore the process of the interview.

#### **4.5.2 Focus Group Discussion**

This is a qualitative research technique in which a rapid assessment, semi-structured data gathering method is done to a purposively selected set of participants (Landlof & Taylor 2002:179). The aim is to gather issues and concerns from the participants based on a list of key themes drawn up by the researcher/facilitator (Kumar in Escalada and Heong 2011:1). In this study, FGD was conducted to women and men belonging to different religious institutions using a pre-determined FGD questionnaire to guide the discussions (Appendix 5). FGD produced data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in group setting as pointed out by Landlof & Taylor (2002:182). FGD also 'provided direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusion from *post hoc* analyses of separate statements from each interview' (Morgan, 1997:292). Furthermore the use of open ended semi structured questionnaire allowed flexibility in response patterns and probing tactics. The use of probing tactics were encouraged in qualitative research to deepen the response to a question, increase richness and depth of responses and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that was desired as pointed out by Malata (2004).

The FGD methodology was used to capture wide views of the religions women and men on issues of religion, gender and women empowerment. It also saved time. Specifically, FGD was used to generate reliable data on the understanding of gender equality and women empowerment, their assessment on the current status of women in relation to men in the district, their assessment on the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and regional policies and protocols, religious teachings and beliefs related to gender and women empowerment and how these affect the relationship between men and women, the position of women in religious institutions and their assessment on the role religion is playing in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. FGD also captured recommendations on how gender equality and women empowerment could be promoted.

#### **4.5.2.1 Construction of Interview Guide**

The construction of the guiding questions for FGD was influenced by the objectives of the study and ethical issues. Items in the FGD guide included those addressing objectives 1-7 (section 1.4.2). An in-depth study of the relevant literature was done to draw content of the FGD guide. Furthermore, the interviews with the key informants gave a glimpse of the reality that helped clarify ideas about what information was required. The researcher also used her experience on issues of religion, gender equality and women empowerment to serve as a framework to construct the tool. Lastly, the educational status of the respondents was taken into consideration in the formulation of the FGD guide. The tool was composed of open ended questions that required lengthy narratives from the participants.

#### **4.5.2.2 Sampling and Field Procedure**

Stratified random sampling was used to recruit participants for FGD. According to Durrheim and Painter (2006:134), stratified random sampling is a method of sampling that involves the division of a population into smaller groups known as strata. The strata are formed based on members shared attributes or characteristics. In this case, the sample was drawn independently from the three strata i.e. Christians, Muslims and from other religions. To get a sample from each stratum, the researcher obtained a list of all

registered religious organization for each stratum from the FBO i.e a list of registered Christian churches, Islamic organizations and other religious institutions.

The researcher then used systematic random sampling to select religious organizations from each stratum independently. To do this, the researcher calculated the sampling interval by dividing the sampling frame size by size of the sample to get a fixed distance between elements for each stratum. The researcher then selected the first element randomly and selected every N element until a sample size was reached for each stratum (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:135). Sampling of religious organizations from each stratum was in proportion to the overall population (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:137). Out of the eight religious organizations were sampled, five of the religious organizations were sampled from the Christian stratum, two from Islamic stratum and one from other religious organizations. This helped to reduce sampling error by ensuring that the sample size of each stratum mirrored the population from which it came (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:136) which has the largest number of Christians, followed by Muslims and the least is other religious organizations. The main advantage with stratified sampling is that it captures key population characteristic in the sample (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:136). However, to avoid bias, systematic sampling was used to sample participants from each sampled religious organization. The researcher asked for a list of adult registered members from each of the sampled religious organizations and calculated the fixed distance between elements. The researcher then used this fixed element to sample 5 participants from each sampled religious organization. This ensured that each member in the sampled religious institution had the chance of being selected into the FGD. The researcher made sure that both men and women were sampled. A total of four FGD was conducted to gain an in depth understanding of the issues. According to Eliot and Associates (2005), it takes more than one FGD to produce valid results on any topic. Three to four FGDs are therefore recommended. Thus the FGD consisted of one group of Christian women, one group of Muslim women combined with women from other religious organization, one group of Christian men and one group of Muslim men combined with men from other religious organizations. Thus the researcher considered cultural factors to separate men from women during FGD so that each gender felt comfortable to contribute to the discussions during FGD. Each group comprised 10 participants which is the recommended optimal number of participants for FGD

(Escalada and Heong 2011:5). In total, forty participants (twenty women and twenty men) were included in the FGD.

After sampling, an invitation of the sampled participants to participate in the FGD was done. At each session, the researcher introduced herself, described the research; its aim and benefits and provided an explanation of the purpose of the FGD. This was followed by an explanation of what the FGD would entail and how the information from the FGD would be used. The researcher also explained that the discussion would be tape recorded and explained that she might quote directly the discussion on the research report. Each participant signed a consent form (Appendix 2). The FGD took place at an appropriate neutral place that was free from distractions and where participants were able to talk freely. The discussion was largely unstructured but a number of predetermined questions and probes guided the discussion (Appendix 5). To minimize boredom, FGD did not go beyond two hours (Escalada and Heong 2011:5). The FGD was audio taped and the recorded conversation made up the data set. This facilitated easy flow and direction of discussion which could be disturbed by taking notes. Nevertheless, at the end of each FGD, the researcher jotted down her impression of the discussion-things that the tape recorder could not pick up. The notes helped the researcher to remember and explore the process of each FGD.

### **4.5.3 Likert Scale Questionnaire**

The emerging themes from the two qualitative stages formed the basis of a Likert scale questionnaire to test the themes (Marshall, 1996:524). These themes included:

- Benefits of promoting gender equality and women empowerment;
- Disadvantages of promoting gender equality and women empowerment;
- Factors that have contributed to gender equality and women empowerment;
- Impediments to achieving gender equality and women empowerment;
- Role of religion;
- Role of leaders in promoting gender equality and women empowerment;
- Consistency between religious teachings and legal and policy framework on gender;
- Role of religion in the lives of women;

- Role of women religious groups versus men religious groups; and
- Role of women in religious organizations

According to (Varkevisser, et al 2003:194), Likert scale measures respondents attitudes by asking the extent to which they agree or disagree with a particular question. In this study, a self-administered Likert questionnaire was administered to the sampled women and men (Appendix 6). According to Olsen & St George (2004:9), a questionnaire is a form containing a set of questions especially one addressed to a statistically significant number of subjects as a way of gathering information for a survey. They further argue that for the questionnaire to yield effective results, the questions should be both understandable and relevant to the purpose. The questionnaire was prepared in English and was translated into Chichewa (local language). All questions were close ended to elicit standardized set of responses from all the respondents and thus ease comparative data analysis (Kanjee, 2006:487). It was pre-tested to a group not included in the study. A total number of thirteen people which was ten percent of the sample size were used for pilot study (Hertzog, 2008:181). Piloting was done to determine whether the instrument had been clearly worded, free from biases and appropriate for the type of information envisioned (Varkevisse et al 2003:272). Revisions were made where necessary.

#### **4.5.3.1 Questionnaire Design**

According to Crawford (1990), a formal standardized questionnaire is required if the researcher is looking to test and quantify hypothesis and the data is to be analyzed statistically. In this study, a Likert scale questionnaire was designed to be used to collect quantitative data. The construction of the Likert questionnaire was guided by a number of factors; firstly it was based on the themes that emerged from the qualitative methods. Secondly it was based on an in-depth study of relevant literature on religion, gender equality and women empowerment. In respect of the secondary data, the researcher analyzed what had been done on the same or similar problems in the past, what factors had not yet been examined and how the present survey questionnaire could build on what had already been discovered (Crawford, 1990). The researcher also considered the educational status of the respondents. Scaled questions which consisted of statements or

questions, followed by a rating scale where respondents indicated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the item was formulated (Kanjee, 2006:488). Lastly, the pre-testing exercise was used to make necessary adjustments to the questionnaire.

#### **4.5.3.2 Sampling and Field Research Procedure**

Stratified random sampling was used to recruit participants to the quantitative survey. Thus the sample was drawn independently from three different strata i.e Christians, Muslims and from other religious institutions. According to Durrheim & Painter (2006:136), stratified sampling establishes a greater degree of representativeness in situations where a population consists of subgroups or strata. In this case, the sample was drawn independently from the three strata i.e. Christians, Muslims and from other religions. To do this, the researcher obtained a list of registered religious organizations for each stratum. The researcher then used systematic random sampling to select religious organizations from each stratum. To calculate the sampling interval for each stratum, the researcher removed all the religious institutions that had been sampled during FGD and then divided the sampling frame by the size of the sample to get a fixed distance between elements for each stratum. This ensured that FGD and Likert scale questionnaire did not target the same religious institutions. The researcher then selected the first element randomly and then selected every Nth element until the sample size for each stratum was reached (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:135). Sampling of religious institutions from each stratum was in proportion to the overall population (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:137). Out of the eight religious institutions sampled, five were sampled from the Christian stratum, two from Islamic stratum and one from other religious organizations. This helped to reduce sampling error by ensuring that the sample size of each stratum mirrored the population from which it came (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:136) which has the largest number of Christians, followed by Muslims and the least is other religious organizations. The main advantage with stratified sampling is that it captures key population characteristic in the sample (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:136). However, to avoid bias, systematic sampling was used to sample participants from each sampled religious organization. The researcher asked for a list of adult registered members from each of the sampled religious organizations and calculated the fixed distance between elements. The researcher then used this fixed element to sample 130 adult participants

from the 3 stratum. This was calculated based on the population of persons over 18 years in Mulanje district. According to the 2008 Malawi Population and housing census, Mulanje has a total of 253, 003 people over 18 years of age. The rule of the thumb on sampling ratio states that a sampling ratio i.e sample size/population size multiplied by 100 of about 0.025% is required for a very large population of about 10 million (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:134). This gave a sample figure of 63. However, in view of the recommendation made by Bailey (in Randal and Gibson, 1990) that a minimum sample size of 100 can help reduce sampling error, a sample of 130 was selected. To further control the sampling error, 89.4% n=117 of the sample were Christians, 5% n=7 were Muslims and 6 were those belonging to other religious groups. This ensured that the sample represented the parameters of the population which has highest number of Christians, seconded by Muslims and then other religious groups (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:135). Using the calculated fixed element for each religious organization, a total number of one hundred and seventeen Christians, seven Muslims and six people from other religious organization were sampled for quantitative survey. Systematic random sampling ensured every person from the sampled religious organization had an equal chance of being selected into the quantitative survey.

Self administered questionnaires were used to collect data from the sampled participants. The questionnaires were distributed to 130 sampled participants to respond and return them to the researcher. All the participants returned back the questionnaires to the researcher. Self administered questionnaires were relevant for this study to ensure higher response rate (Mouton, 2003:358). Moreover people were free to answer on paper as a result would give true information. Self administered questionnaires also saved time for both researcher and respondents. However, considering that there were some participants who could neither read nor write among the sampled participants, the researcher was available in the community to assist those who could not read and to answer and clarify any queries. A covering letter was attached to the questionnaire (Appendix 1). The letter introduced the researcher and explained the nature and purpose of the study. Each participant signed consent form which is considered as an agreement for the participation in the study upon full understanding of the study and its implication.

## **4.6 Validity and Reliability**

Durrheim and Painter (2006:147) define validity as the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure. He argues that it is vital for a test to be valid for the results to be accurately applied and interpreted. The reliability of a research instrument concerns the extent to which the results of the research are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study. While the terms reliability and validity are criterion for quality in quantitative research, the terms credibility, conformability, consistency and transferability are essential criterion for quality in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba in Golafshani, 2003:601). Since this study used both qualitative and quantitative methods, the issues of validity and reliability were considered in both the qualitative and quantitative methods.

### **4.6.1 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Methods**

According to Polit and Hungler (1995), qualitative researchers ensure validity and reliability by evaluating the quality of their data and findings. In line with this thinking, issues of validity and reliability were considered by the researcher throughout the process of qualitative research process. This was established using the 4 criterion of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Polit and Beck, 2004). In this research, steps were taken to improve and evaluate the credibility and dependability of data obtained. This was done through peer review where the results and interpretations of the research were discussed with the experts in the field of gender and religion. The results were discussed with the research supervisor. Credibility was also achieved through investments in sufficient time in data collection activities in order to have in depth understanding of the views of the group under study. Furthermore, triangulation of data from semi structured interviews with that of FGD ensured credibility of the data.

Transferability which refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings other than the one being researched (Kelly, 2006:383) has been achieved through providing adequate descriptive data of the research process in the research report in order for people to be able to evaluate the applicability of data to other settings or groups. The researcher has also provided a detailed explication of the arguments for the different choices of the methods

in the report. As explained in sections 4.5.1.2 and 4.5.5.2, discussion during semi structured interviews and FGD were audio taped which minimized bias and ensured that data could be confirmed.

## **4.6.2 Validity and Reliability in Quantitative Methods**

For a study to be deemed valid and reliable, it has to be accurate, useful and true (Van Lill & Visser 1998:14). In this study, validity and reliability was ensured by undertaking an extensive literature review, giving operational definitions of the concepts which are specifications of the operations that the researcher must perform to collect the required information and by ensuring the consistency among the research objectives, methodology, findings and recommendations (Polit and Hungler, 1995:31).

As alluded to in the previous sections, the research instrument for the quantitative methods (Likert scale questionnaire) had no degree of reliability and validity since it was produced by the researcher. Nevertheless, measures were taken to ensure that the instrument was valid and reliable. Firstly, the researcher consulted different sources on religion, gender equality and women empowerment to inform the Likert scale questionnaire. Secondly, the researcher asked gender experts to criticize and improve it before submission to the supervisor. The supervisor also criticized and provided recommendations for improvement. Lastly, the instrument was pre-tested to a population which was not part of the study and revisions were made.

## **4.7 Data Analysis**

Since data that was collected in the study was both in qualitative and numerical or quantitative form, qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze data to obtain research results.

### **4.7.1 Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative nature of data that was gathered through interviews with key informants and FGD naturally required qualitative data analysis. Babbie, Mouton, Vorster and Peozesky (2001:490) define qualitative analysis as analysis of data that was gathered using qualitative techniques regardless of the paradigm used to govern the research. In this type of analysis,

data is sorted, sifted and classified according to type, class, sequence, process, patterns or wholes. The aim is to assemble it into a meaningful or comprehensive pattern. Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly, (2006: 322-327) explain that the major stages of qualitative data analysis are; familiarization and immersion, inducing themes and patterns using the language of the informants to label the categories, coding data marking different sections of the data as being instances of or relevant to the themes, elaboration and finally interpretation and checking. In line with this, the first stage of data analysis was to induce themes from the recorded semi structured interviews and from the FGDs using the language of the informants to label the categories. This was followed by coding of the data which entail marking different sections of data as being instances of or relevant to the themes. An analysis of the way in which accounts of gender equality/inequality and women empowerment/disempowerment were constructed and whether the accounts made by key informants differed from those made by women and men during FGD was made. Counter themes and dilemmas on talking about the role of religion in facilitating individual and collective segregation of women were identified. An exploration on whether there were any systematic differences in the accounts of Christians, Muslims and other religious organizations and even within the Christian community whether there were differences in the accounts of the mainstream religious organizations and the Pentecostal/ Charismatic were made.

#### **4.7.2 Statistical Analysis**

Statistical methods are used to analyze quantitative data (Durrheim, 2006: 188). Descriptive analysis was performed in this study to analyze quantitative data collected;

In this study, data was coded, entered into the computer software SPSS version 16.0 then descriptive statistics were done. Descriptive statistics that have used are frequencies and cross tabulations which involved tabulating the results of one variable against the other. These have been presented by means of tables, bar charts and pie charts.

#### **4.8 Ethical Considerations**

This study has been approved by UNISA. Before conducting the study, an approval was obtained from UNISA research ethics review committee. Therefore this research was conducted with the ethical research standards and procedures of UNISA. The researcher

sought permission from the District Commissioner (DC) of Mulanje district council to carry out the study in the district. Considering that the study fell under the jurisdiction of T.A Njema and T.A Nkanda, the researcher also obtained consent from these two TAs. After this a detailed explanation of the study was done to the participants when first approached for them to make an informed choice. All participants signed consent forms (Appendix 2) related to issues of autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, confidentiality, non-maleficence and beneficence and justice (Wassenaar, 2006:67-68). Thus participation to the study was voluntary and participants were free to pull out at any time. The researcher also endeavoured to ensure the discussions were in line with the community protocols, cultural values, religious and moral issues. FGDs were carried in community's usual meeting places to allow free flow of information among respondents and to eliminate disturbances on social events. Audiotapes of interviews and FGD and questionnaires were kept at a secure place where only the researcher had access to and all FGD participants were asked to respect the confidentiality of the focus group by not divulging details of the discussion to others. Participants were debriefed at the end of the research.

#### **4.9 Limitations of the Study**

This study has provided a detailed assessment of religious teachings, beliefs, culture and policies vis a vis how they differently influence gender equality and women empowerment in each of the sampled religious organizations. Nevertheless, the study has not analyzed whether there are significant differences in well being indicators of women belonging to different religious organizations with different teachings, beliefs and policies on gender. This question has not been pursued in this study because the focus was to analyze how different religious teachings, beliefs, policies influenced gender equality and women empowerment and not on their outcomes and secondly this question, though interesting would have been beyond the reach of the researcher given the limited time and resources to carry out this study.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the research design and the methodologies that were used to answer the research question. It has shown that the research adopted both qualitative and

quantitative research designs because of the nature of the research objectives which required both qualitative and quantitative methods. Sampling procedures and their justifications have also been explained in the chapter. The chapter has also presented data analysis procedures for both qualitative and quantitative data. The chapter has explained the measures that were taken to ensure participants' rights were not infringed on. Lastly, the chapter discussed limitations of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents research findings, analysis and discussions of the data from interviews with key informants, FGD and Likert scale questionnaire. The scope of the analysis of these sources cover the specific objectives explained in chapter 1 section 1.4.2. These objectives are:

- To explore how women, men religious and other influential leaders understand gender equality and women empowerment;
- To provide a detailed assessment of the current status of gender, equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To categorize religious teachings and beliefs related to gender in Mulanje;
- To analyze elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To analyze the elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that contribute to gender inequality and women disempowerment;
- To analyze the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies; and
- To make recommendations to promote gender equality and women empowerment in religious institutions.

The presentation of the research findings and analysis of data is based on data collection methods and the objectives of the research. This is done to provide comprehensive analysis and discussion and ultimately provide valid conclusions. It is argued that this kind of data presentation and analysis helps data triangulation (Malawi-Ministry of Health, 2008). The chapter is consequently divided into three main parts: Demographic data presentation and discussion, qualitative data analysis and discussion and lastly data and discussion from Likert scale questionnaire.

## 5.2: Demographic Characteristics

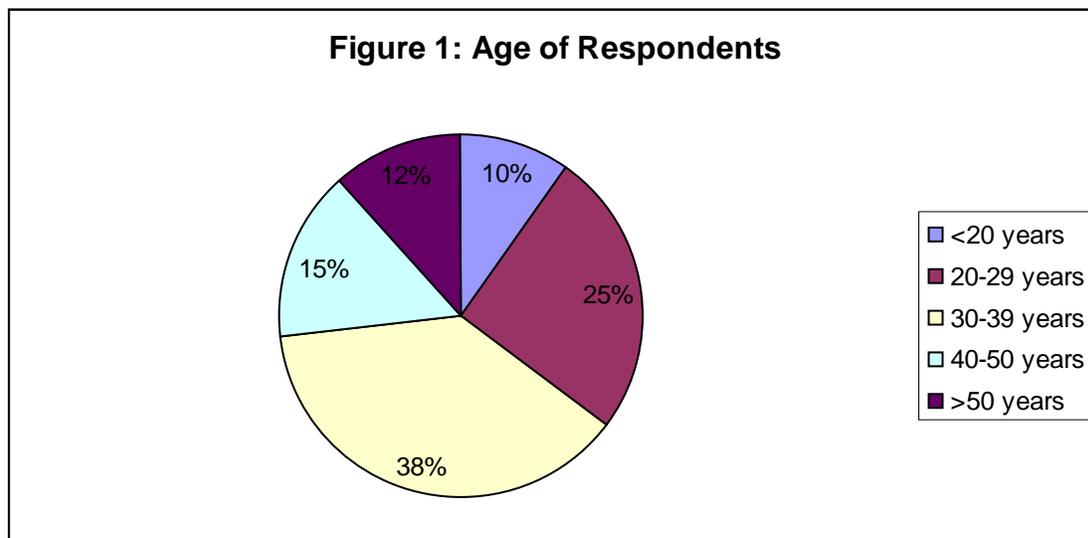
Demographic information was collected and analyzed to determine the characteristics of the participants who took part in the quantitative survey. It covered the following areas: sex, age, tribe, marital status, number of children, religious denomination and level of education of the participants. Analysis of the data yielded the following results:

### 5.2.1 Sex of participants

Of the 130 respondents, 48.5% (n: 63) were males while 51.5% (n: 67) were females. This sex distribution confirms the general profile in Malawi as about 49% of the population is male while 51% is female (NSO, 2008).

### 5.2.2 Age of the Participants

The respondents' ages ranged from 18 years to over 50 years of age. The majority of the respondents (38% n: 49) were aged between 30-39 years; 25% (n: 33) were in the range of 20-29 years; 15% (n: 20) were between 40-50 years; 12% (n: 15) were over 50 years old while the least (10% n: 13) were below 20 years.



### 5.2.3 Respondent's Tribe

Table 2 below shows five categories of tribes that were included in the study. The majority of the respondents (68.5% n: 89) were Lomwes. Other tribes were; Yao (6.2% n: 8); Mang'anja (17.7% n: 23); Chewa (6.2%, n: 8) and Sena (1.5% n: 2). The findings are not surprising considering that the main tribes in Mulanje are Lomwe, Mang'anja and Yao. However, the presence of Chewa and Sena could be because of inter-marriages and migration.

**Table 2: Respondent's tribe**

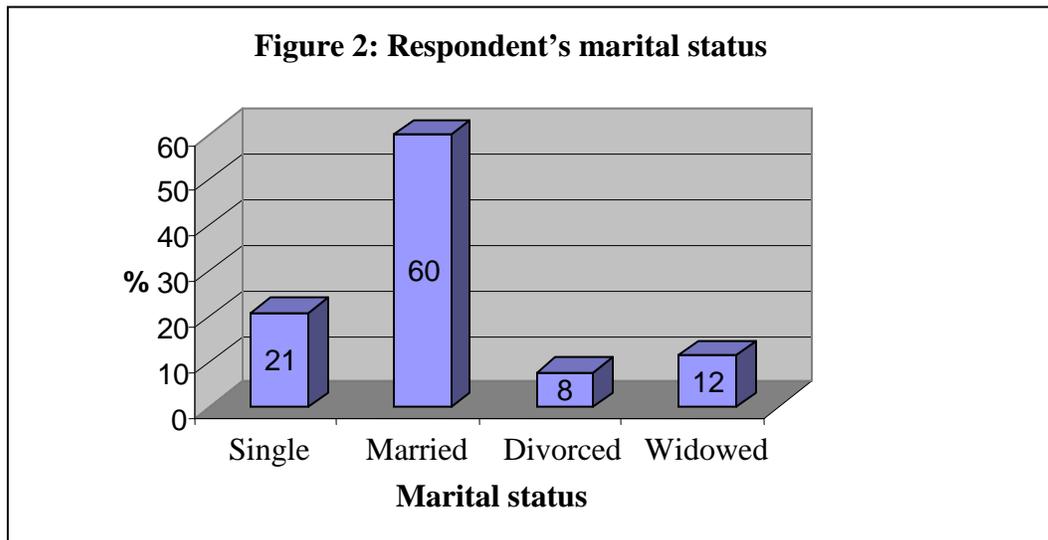
	Frequency	Percent
Lomwe	89	68.5
Yao	8	6.2
Mang'anja	23	17.7
Chewa	8	6.2
Sena	2	1.5
Total	130	100

While it is appreciated that Malawian ethnic groups share a commonality in cultural practices, there are certain cultural practices that are unique to certain tribes. Some of

these cultural practices can impact on gender equality and women empowerment. This justified the need to include respondents of different tribes.

### 5.2.4 Respondent's Marital Status

The majority of the respondents (60% n: 78) were married at the time of the study. 27 respondents (21%) of which 11 were males and 16 females were single. 8% (n: 10) were divorced and another 12% (n: 15) were widowed at the time of the study. Figure 2 below shows marital status of respondents



Marital status could influence decisions that people make in their lives with regard to money, food, pregnancy, contraception, sexual relations and HIV prevention behaviors. This could ultimately influence the status of women and women in society.

### 5.2.5 Number of children of Respondents

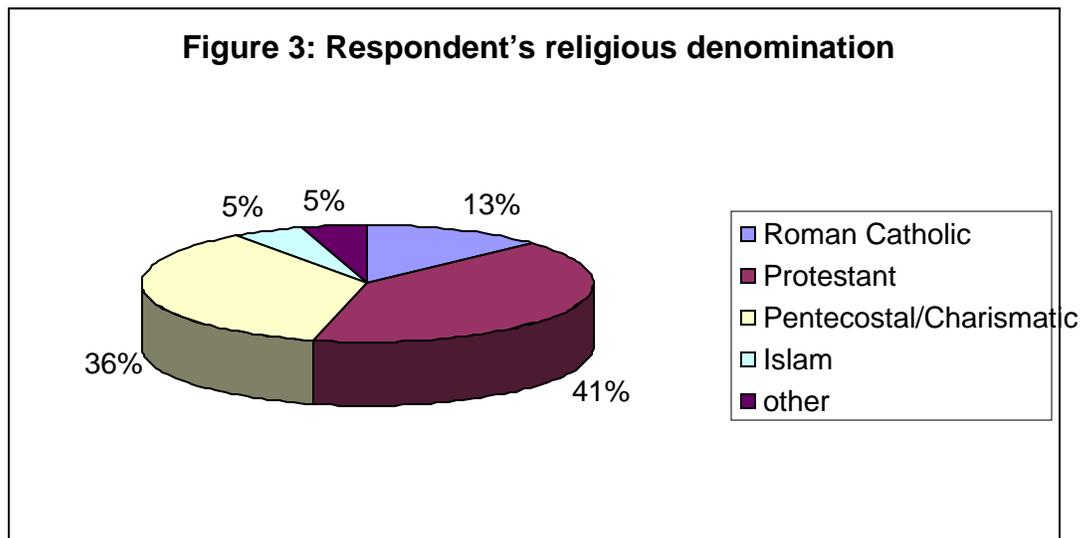
The majority of respondents (34%: n: 44) had 4-5 children at the time of the study. This was seconded by those who had 1-3 children (32%, n: 42). 17% (n: 22) had more than five children and the same number did not have any children at the time of the study. Refer table 3:

**Table 3: Respondent's number of children**

<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
None	22	17
1-3	42	32
4-5	44	34
>5	22	17
Total	130	100

### **5.2.6 Respondent's Religious Denomination**

Five categories of religious denominations were used in line with the major religious denominations in Malawi. These included the category of Christian denominations which were divided into Roman Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations. These differ in their teachings and ideologies. The other categories were Islam and other religious denominations. Refer figure 3:



The majority (41%, n: 53) of the respondents were Protestants belonging to different churches. 36% (n: 47) of the respondents were Pentecostal/Charismatic followers while 13% (n: 17) were Roman Catholic faithful. The least number of respondents (5%, n: 7) and 5% n: 6) belonged to Islam and other religions respectively.

### 5.2.7 Respondent's Level of Education

Six levels were used in line with the schooling system in Malawi. Level one consisted those who had never been to school. Level two comprised those who attempted primary education but did not go as far as grade eight. The third category consisted of those who had Primary School Leaving Certificate while the fourth category consisted of those who had Junior Certificate of Education (JC). The fifth and sixth categories comprised those who had Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) and those who had completed tertiary education respectively. The table below shows the findings of the respondents' level of education.

**Table 4: Respondents Education level**

	Frequency	Percent
Never been to school	14	11
Below grade 8	41	32
Primary School Leaving Certificate	29	22
Junior Certificate	31	24
Malawi School Certificate of education	10	8
Tertiary education	5	4
Total	130	100

## **5.3 Qualitative Results- Presentation and Discussion**

The analysis of the qualitative data that follows is based on the in depth interviews and FGD which the researcher had with the sampled key informants and women and men belonging to different religious groups respectively. Interviews with key informants comprised the following participants: 8 religious leaders, 2 Group Village Headmen (GVH), 2 politicians, 2 CSO leaders, 2 CBO leaders, 1 gender desk officer and 1 representative of community policing. Religious groups in the FGD were represented by the following: Catholic Church, C.C.A.P., Assemblies of God, Islam, Seventh day, Jehovah's Witness, Ethiopian Church and African mother Church. Several themes emerged from the data, addressing each of the specific objectives outlined in chapter 1.

### **5.3.1 Understanding Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

The first questions that were put forward to the key informants were aimed at gaining their understanding on gender equality and women empowerment. To this end, the participants were asked their understanding on gender equality and women empowerment, benefits, and disadvantage of promoting gender equality and women empowerment. Two themes were identified: benefits of promoting gender equality and women empowerment and disadvantages of promoting gender equality and women empowerment.

#### **5.3.1.1 Benefits of Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment to the Family**

Key informants and FGD participants gave different definitions of gender equality. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority (83%, n: 15/18) key informants and (73% n: 29/40) FGD participants defined gender equality as balance in terms of power, access and opportunities between men and women. This definition agrees with definition provided by CARE in literature review section who defined gender equality as a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all aspects of life. When asked further to give examples of gender equality, the participants mentioned equal opportunities in access to education, health services, loans, equal representation of men and women in decision making positions etc.

Participants were further asked questions that could reflect their understanding on women empowerment and other related issues. When asked to define women empowerment, participants gave a variety of definitions as outlined in table 5 below.

**Table 5: Participants’ Definition of Women Empowerment**

<b>Definition</b>	
Women self reliance	78%
Women economic independence	75%
Women political participation	51%
Women ability to speak out when faced with injustice	24%

Although the majority especially in the FGD could not articulate well, they were able to say something on women empowerment. The knowledge of this aspect by the majority of participants suggests that they are well informed about issues of women empowerment. This is not surprising considering that there are a number of NGOs and CBOs working on women empowerment in the district. These include Church Action in Relief and Development (CARD), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and World Vision. The following are the narrative statements indicating the participants’ knowledge on women empowerment.

Participant 1: *An empowered woman is the one who is well educated or is doing her own business.*

Participant 2: *An empowered woman does not look down upon herself but makes important decisions on her own without consulting the husband, brother or any other male figure.*

Participant 3: *An empowered woman does not depend on her husband for survival but rather contributes to the running of the family.*

Participant 4: *During meetings, an empowered woman contributes to the deliberations objectively.*

Both the key informants and the FGD participants agreed that promoting gender equality and empowering women has a lot of benefits. The majority mentioned that it allows both

men and women to contribute to the family income and this reduces the burden of providing for the family on one person.

Participant 5: *Two heads are better than one. By the end of the day, it's our family that benefits. My wife brings home money for some necessities which I cannot afford single handedly. Together, we see to it that our children not only eat and dress decently but go to school.*

The majority of the women agreed that empowerment gives women independence, respect and freedom.

Participant 3: *When my business began to grow, I began to feel a sense of independence, especially on household decisions; I would buy my own clothes and those of my children, I would take my children to the hospital, I would go the maize mill without begging from my husband.*

The men groups in the FDG however all agreed that women are good financial managers, are more sensitive to the needs of others and are more transparent than their male counterparts. They argued that while most men would spend their income on beer and on other women, a woman is always sensitive to the needs of her household. A woman would spend her income on her children's nutrition, health care and education. These findings are consistent with a number of studies that have suggested that putting earnings in women's hands speeds up development and overcomes poverty as argued in section 2.5 of chapter 2. It was not surprising that the majority of the key informants and FGD participants felt that every woman regardless of her marital status should be given opportunity to earn an income and be self reliant.

The men also concluded that women are less likely to be involved in bribery and corruption. These sentiments agree with argument made in chapter 2: section 2.5 which contends that when men and women have equality, there is less corruption.

The majority of the key informants and some of the FGD participants felt that women should be allowed to participate fully in political and decision making processes. They argued that this ensures that women are heard and their needs and priorities are reflected

in the government policies and programs. They also explained that empowered women are able to demand their rights.

### **5.3.1.2 Disadvantages of Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

While the majority of key informants and FGD participants demonstrated an understanding of the benefits of gender equality and women empowerment, others dismissed gender equality as an alien concept that is being advocated by successful single women to confuse women who are in stable marriages. They further argued that gender equality was a far fetched dream that could not be achieved because men and women are different in terms of their physical and emotional make up. The following narrative statement reflects how some participants perceive gender equality:

*Key Informant 1: 'Much as I appreciate that there is justification behind promoting gender equality, I think men and women cannot be equal. I don't understand that they are some people who believe that women can handle anything that their male counterparts can handle. This is not true and let us not deceive ourselves into believing that this can be achieved.'*

Ironically, the above argument came from a well educated key informant. This just shows how some people still associate gender equality with women issues and concerns. On disadvantages of promoting gender equality and women empowerment, both the key informants and the FGD participants agreed that promoting gender equality and empowering women has its fair of disadvantages. The majority of the male participants explained that women are hiding behind gender equality and empowerment to disrespect their husbands and this is bringing confusion in families;

*Participant 6: Women become so stubborn; love fades away when you allow these women to start business. Some women go to the extent of killing their husbands to inherit their business*

Some women in the FGD also agreed with the men. They argued that gender equality and women empowerment has done more harm than good to the marriage institution; women have lost touch with their culture due to education to the extent that most of them despise

cultural values as primitive; women have forgotten their roles and responsibilities as mothers and wives in pursuit of money.

Participant 7: *If women could stick to their traditional gender roles, cases of divorces would be reduced.*

A Muslim key informant summed up by arguing: *The most important thing is that there must be equity-which means having the chance to prosper under similar circumstances and not equality.*

Others explained that some women are abusing gender equality by engaging in some antisocial behaviors such as heavy drinking, smoking and prostitution

Participant 8: *Just go to Chitakale, you will find married women scantily dressed, drinking beer at a pub and one wonders what kind of examples are women of today giving to their children. Is this gender equality or something else?*

In Malawi, the principles of gender equality are being used to inform and guide policies, service delivery and political representation. It is important therefore for all the stakeholders to have a clear understanding of gender equality in order to have a holistic understanding of issues around gender equality.

### **5.3.2 Current Status of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

After exhausting the discussion on the understanding of gender equality and women empowerment, the researcher wanted to understand the perception of the participants on the current status of gender equality and women empowerment in the district. Two themes were identified: factors that have contributed to gender equality and women empowerment and impediments of achieving gender equality and women empowerment

#### **5.3.2.1 Factors that have contributed to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

Both the key informants and FGD participants had different perceptions on the current status of girls and women vis a vis boys and men in Mulanje district. Some participants

felt the status of girls and women has improved a great deal and in many cases girls and women are catching up to boys and men in terms of access to education, credit, employment opportunities, productive assets and formal labor force participation. The participants gave the following as the factors that have contributed to the improved status of girls and women:

- Government is promoting gender mainstreaming in all development policies and programs and is also promoting women advancement for them to participate fully in development;
- The free primary education introduced by the government in 1994 which has greatly improved girls' access to education;
- There have been several initiatives and programs that specifically target women for instance World Vision has programs that specifically target the girl child with interventions on education;
- NGOs have been raising awareness and sensitizing the community on gender issues and this has opened up people's minds to the issues of gender equality and women empowerment;
- The donor community is also promoting gender equality; and
- The increased access of women to microfinance institutions.

One of the key informants argued that the government of Malawi's commitment to promoting gender equality is confirmed by the government commitment to pass the national gender policy in 2000 whose aim is to provide a guiding framework for the implementation of gender mainstreaming activities in Malawi. He further explained that in light of this; Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Development was designated as the national gender machinery to provide oversight coordination of gender policy and program. However, the study established that at a district level, there is no gender department and that gender is treated as a crosscutting issue and incorporated in all interventions. The study also established that the Department of Social Welfare has established a Community Victim Support Unit (CVSU) at T.A level to respond to GBV and counsel victims of GBV.

### **5.3.2.2 Impediments to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

Despite the commitment of the government to champion gender equality and women empowerment, this study has found that there are a number of impediments to promoting gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. While the situation of gender equality and women empowerment is rosy on paper, the situation is different on the ground. An interview with key informant at the Social Welfare Department revealed that previously issues of gender were coordinated by the department of Community Development but this responsibility had been transferred to department of Social Welfare. The key informant explained that the transition from the Community Development to Social Welfare Department had not been easy. At the time of interview, Social Welfare had not appointed a Gender Desk Officer and there was no one responsible for coordinating gender issues at district level. The key informant explained that officers were overwhelmed with increased responsibilities so much so that they did not put much effort in gender issues. He also indicated that Mulanje district did not have a District Technical Working Group for gender. This Technical Working Group is responsible for providing technical support to various line ministries and groups on issues of gender. Without this technical working group at the district, there is a gap in the implementation and monitoring of implementation of gender policy.

When the researcher asked for the gender policy, the key informant did not have one in the office but assured the researcher that he had one at home. Asked whether the gender policy was shared with the communities, the key informant explained that the challenge was that the policies were in English. He however explained that during gender training, gender policies were included as one of the training materials. This was confirmed when the researcher visited the sampled CBOs and found that none had gender policies. The researcher also found that the CBOs had been trained in gender but the training had been confined to awareness on gender and not on how CBOs could effectively mainstream gender. One of the key informants from a CSO lamented that on paper, gender situation was very friendly but in practice, very few women were given opportunity to pursue their dreams. She argued that it was not enough for the government to ratify or sign protocols without implementing them. These findings confirm the challenges that are there to translate government commitments to promoting gender equality into action.

Other participants felt women still trail men in formal labor force participation, access to credit, inheritance and ownership rights. The participants explained that due to high levels of illiteracy among women, women fail to take advantage of services available to them such as extension services. They further argued that even in the political arena, most women fail to competently articulate issues and convince the electorates because of their low levels of education. Nevertheless, some participants blamed the women themselves of looking down upon themselves, lacking the confidence and having low self esteem. One female participant had this to say:

*Participant 8: Men are not the problem. The problem is us women. We underestimate our importance and value. We often think less about ourselves. This is why we feel incomplete without a man.*

However other participants in the FGD felt that socio-cultural factors contributed to the low self-esteem among women. They argued that from young age, girls are socialized to believe that they are second class citizens. The participants further argued that amid growing calls for gender equality, women were still expected to dance to the tune of men. Women fail to make decisions on their own and sometimes fail to decide even when to have a child. This happens despite the fact that women constitute a bigger percentage and contribute enormously to development.

*Participant 9: Culturally, a woman is not a woman until she is married and has children of her own. This is why a woman will still stick to a man-even if the man abuses her to avoid the stigma that goes with being single. This further harms her image and self confidence.*

*Participant 10: During our marriage send off, elders indoctrinate us to go and obey the husband and never to challenge him, persevere and bear him children.*

These sentiments were corroborated by some of the key informants who argued that cultural practices, beliefs and attitudes are the major constraints to women empowerment in Mulanje district. The key informant particularly mentioned practices such as Chinamwali (initiation ceremonies) as one of the factors contributing to increased school drop out among girls in the district. They explained that sex education offered at these initiation ceremonies encourages pre-marital sex and subsequently early pregnancies and

school drop outs. However, during FGD some participants argued that in light of HIV and AIDS, early marriages help children especially girls to settle down with one man thereby avoiding promiscuity. Marriage patterns (matrilineal) were mentioned by both the key informants and FGD participants as one of the factors that have significantly contributed to the low status of women in the district. While some participants argued that in this kind of marriage pattern, a woman is in control since in principle, the land that the family cultivates belongs to her, others argued that cultural beliefs that men are the heads of families and are more capable than women still restrict women to make important decisions over the land. They argued that although the land belongs to a woman in matrilineal system, it's the husband who decides how much area to be cultivated and which crops to grow. The women also bemoaned men lack of responsibility in this system of marriage.

*Participant 8: They are only interested in sleeping with us. Once they are satisfied that they are done with us, they leave us for younger and more beautiful women. They don't care what the children become. I guess this is because of the cultural belief that children are the responsibility of the maternal uncle. Overburdened by the responsibility of providing for the children single handedly, we marry them off at very tender age. It's very unfortunate because this only provides temporary relief. It forms a vicious cycle.*

The group village headmen interviewed explained that although marriages are registered with them, they feel powerless to protect the women during divorce. The chiefs said the maintenance fee that men are required to pay their estranged wife is minimal (MK2500) which is equivalent to less than US\$20. The woman is paid this amount once divorce is granted. To make matters worse, most of the men get away without paying the maintenance fee. This contradicts the Constitution of Malawi Section 24 that provides for a fair maintenance, taking into consideration all the circumstances and, in particular the means of the former husband and the needs of any children upon dissolution of marriage.

When asked where people seek justice with regards to domestic violence, the majority of participants explained that domestic issues are considered private and families usually opt to resolve them within the confines of their families. When this fails, the matter is either taken to the chief or church depending on circumstances. All religious institutions that were sampled indicated that they had developed a systematic response to GBV. Each of

the religious institution had marriage counselors who provide systemic counseling to couples when faced with domestic challenges. Unfortunately, religious institutions use religious norms and customs side by side with formal laws as argued in chapter 2 section 2.8. The study also revealed that most of the people including the educated ones were not very much conversant with some of the Acts such as the deceased estates (Wills Inheritance and Protection Acts). All the key informants that were interviewed failed to articulate the act though some indicated that they had heard about it. This may imply that gender advocates are not reaching out to people or are not targeting the right people. For instance, Seodi White, one of the gender activists in Malawi has a column in local newspaper (Weekend nation) in which she educates the public on their rights but unfortunately it is in English and there is too much law jargon which makes it difficult for an ordinary person to understand.

On access to health services, participants in the FGD explained that distance to health facility is a barrier to access to health facility with the majority of community members living 10-15 kilometres away from the government health centre. In Njema, participants said the only government health facility is about 10 km away while in Kamwendo it is 18 kilometers away. In addition, the health facilities lack essential drugs and there are inadequate health personnel. The other participants complained that health personnel are rude. The participants felt this was one of the factors that discourage women to deliver at the health facility. The majority of key informants also explained that cultural practices such as administration of herbs to induce labor and beliefs of associating obstructed labor with infidelity delay treatment and have contributed to complications and avoidable deaths in some cases.

While both the key informants and FGD participants agreed that women access to financial services has improved due to women increased access to micro finance services, some participants felt that women had not benefited much from these services. The participants attributed this to the high interest that microfinance institutions charge. They argued that the proceeds from business go back to the micro-financial institutions as interest. It was learnt that the interest that financial institutions charge ranges from 35% to 50% percent. Other participants felt the loan that microfinance institutions provided was very little and therefore did not enable women to make any long lasting income change for the household. High illiteracy levels amongst women was also mentioned as

one of the factors that prevent women from benefiting much from the loans. Participants argued that illiteracy creates a situation of dependency on others that predispose women to exploitation and limits prospects for empowerment. Women also felt that sometimes they fail in their business because they fail to balance increasing business responsibilities with their household responsibilities. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that ratification of international and national treaties on gender equality and women empowerment have not made significant impact at local level.

### **5.3.3 Religion and Gender/ Women Empowerment**

Religion is a powerful institution within society that shape the way people think, respond to and perceive issues. In line with this, the researcher wanted to find out from the participants to what extent their religious beliefs influenced the way they perceive gender equality and women empowerment. Three themes emerged from the discussion: role of religion; role of leaders in promoting gender equality and women empowerment and consistency between religious teachings and legal and policy framework on gender.

#### **5.3.3.1 Role of Religion**

Almost all the participants agreed that religion was very important in their lives in the sense that it guides their daily lives. They also agreed that religion shape their moral values, behavior and practices. As believers, the majority of participants asserted that they believed in a world where God reigns and this world is where justice, peace and freedom prevail. Some participants further argued that the issue of gender equality and women empowerment had their basis in the holy books (Bible and Quran) and therefore the holy books influenced their perception on gender equality and women empowerment. However, a small number of participants explained that their perception of gender equality and women empowerment was influenced by the fusion of religion, human rights and socio-cultural issues. When religious leaders were asked about how their religious institutions perceived gender issues, a majority of them explained that gender justice was in line with the word of God which promotes love and justice. A Pentecostal pastor referred to Galatians 3:28 which teaches that in Christ, there is neither male nor female. This implies that the Holy books can be powerful instruments to advocate for gender justice.

The study has also established that in principle the majority of Christian churches have programs that contribute towards gender justice. The Catholic Church for instance indicated that they have a gender desk under the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) which is mandated to initiate civic education as well as gender mainstreaming in all structures of the church. Similarly, the Seventh Day Adventist and C.C.C.P. indicated that they have gender programs under Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA Malawi) and Blantyre Synod Development Commission (BSDC) respectively. However, there was very little evidence of systematic response of gender injustice at local level.

### **5.3.3.2 Role of Leaders in Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

Almost all the key informants agreed that they had a very important role in ensuring gender equality and women empowerment. As leaders, the key informants agreed that they had a role in educating others about their rights. They also mentioned that as leaders who were conversant with gender and women empowerment having gone through different trainings on gender, they were role models to others. To prove the point, one GVH in Njema said he had balanced the composition of his ndunas (counselors) to include equal number of men and women. This followed the order that was given by the TA that each chief should make sure the composition of counselors was balanced. The politicians explained that they had a very big role in influencing public policies that promote gender equality and empower women. Some religious leaders suggested that leaders should pay special attention to gender justice in their preaching and practice. These findings show that leaders appreciate the role they have in advocating for gender justice.

### **5.3.3.3 Consistency between Religious Teachings and Legal and Policy Framework on Gender**

When asked on their assessment on the consistency between religious teachings/policies and legal and policy framework, participants responses varied. Some participants felt there were some consistencies between the two. Their argument was that though Malawi is a secular country, the policies are informed by religious teachings and beliefs to some

extent. One participant in the FGD explained that the issue of gender equality that the government is promoting is based on the biblical message of love. Similarly, the human rights that the government is promoting are synonymous with the biblical principles of justice which underpins the gospel message. Participants therefore concluded that gender equality and women empowerment should be promoted not only because it is the human right but is in line with the word of God. The study also found that practices that violate the dignity of women are considered not compatible with the word of God and therefore are not condoned. Such practices include rape, forced prostitution and forced marriages. This further confirms that holy books can be powerful instruments to advocate for gender justice.

The majority of participants on the other hand felt that legal and policy framework contradict religious beliefs and teachings. Participants particularly mentioned the legal policies on divorce, family planning, dressing, condom use and abortion as some of the policies that contradict religious teachings and beliefs. One religious key informant had this to say: *I find it difficult to comprehend the arguments raised by the so called gender activists. They demand rights selfishly without taking responsibility. The bible is clear that every woman has the responsibility to sustain life of unborn but they demand the right to kill the unborn whenever the woman feels like. This is ridiculous!*

When the participants' arguments were analyzed against the protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights of women in Africa, the study established some inconsistencies between what the protocol is calling and religious teachings and practices on the same. For instance while the protocol discourages discrimination based on sex, the study found that women are discriminated against in religious institutions because of their sex. The study found that some religious institutions embraced the belief that a woman is a helper of a man and felt that any attempt to advance women's rights contradicts religious and cultural values. Some key informants and Christian participants in the FGD based this argument on the bible in Genesis 2:18: *and the Lord God said; It is not good that a man should be alone; I will make him a helper for him.* For this reason most of the religious institutions encourage total submission of wives to their husbands. For Muslims, women are discriminated against in terms of inheritance. According to the Sheikh that was interviewed and FGD with both male and female Muslims, a woman inherits fifty percent of what a man inherits. The majority of Muslims justified this by arguing that a

man has more family obligations than a woman. They explained that in Islam, it is the responsibility of the man to fend for the family. This study has also established that in Islam, there are more restrictions on dressing and a number of sex partners on women than there are on men. While Islam men can marry up to four wives, a Muslim woman can only have one husband. Because of these beliefs and teachings, women continue to be oppressed while men take up more dominant and leading responsibilities in various sectors including in religious institutions.

This study has also found that many women experience abuse and violation of their rights in marriage. It was also noted that most religions encourage women to remain in abusive relationships and to continue praying for their abusive husbands. One Pentecostal woman failed to get consent from her church to leave her abusive husband.

*'Realizing that I married in church, I went to my pastor to complain about the physical and emotional abuse my husband was subjecting me into. My pastor promised to help me with prayers. We prayed and fasted but this yielded nothing. After some time I had to take matters in my own hands and left the man.'*

To matters worse, the Catholic and C.C.A.P. churches do not permit divorce irrespective of the circumstances in the marriage. Religious leaders from these churches argued that denying couples divorces regardless of the circumstances does not infringe on peoples' rights in any way because the word of God is clear on issues of separation and divorce. The leaders referred to Mark 10:9, Luke 16:18 and Romans 7:1-3 to substantiate their arguments. Although the Catholic key informant indicated that the Catholic Church allows annulment of marriage if there is sufficient evidence that the marriage was not right from the beginning, FGD revealed that the process is long because such cases are referred to Vatican where decisions are made. The study also found that Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Assemblies of God, Ethiopia church and African Mother church forbid divorce except in cases of adultery by one partner and they justified this position by referring to the scriptures (Matthew 5: 31-32, Matthews 19:3-9). Nevertheless, these religious institutions agreed that even in cases where one partner cheats, the other partner is encouraged to forgive him or her in line with the word of God in Matthews 18:21-22 which teaches about limitless forgiveness. In the world where HIV and AIDS is rampant, this may be considered a death sentence. 50% (N: 4/8) of religious

leaders also argued that those who endure in an unhappy marriage will be rewarded in heaven. One Pentecostal church leader had this to say: *“There is hope even in his suffering for an innocent person who bears the burden of suffering in this world for the years lost become gained for eternity.”* The religious groups consider re-marriage after divorce as adultery which force ill-mated couples to stick together to avoid ‘committing adultery’. Forcing ill-mated couples to remain together against their will is not only a torture but an abuse of their human rights.

The study has also established that although the protocol stipulates that marriage will only take place with full consent of both parties, Muslims believe it is acceptable to arrange marriage so long as both parties are agreeable. Furthermore, while the protocol sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years as discussed in the literature review, Jehovah’s Witness and Islam argued that they do not have minimum age for marriage. They explained that followers are encouraged to marry when they are physically and emotionally mature. FGD further revealed that Muslims also believe that marriage should not be delayed to avoid zina (sex outside marriage). The study has therefore revealed that cases of early marriages still persist in most of the religious institutions despite the government recommended age of 18.

The study has also established that while the protocol encourages promotion of right to health including sexual and reproductive health, the Catholic Church disallows use of artificial contraceptives and condoms. The Church encourages total abstinence for the unmarried and natural family planning for the married women. The Catechist interviewed however explained that in light of HIV and AIDS infection, the Catholic Church has softened its stand on Condoms. Condoms are now allowed if one of the legally married partners is HIV positive. Nonetheless, the Catechistic explained that the church’s stand on the issue does not stop the followers from accessing modern family planning methods. This may imply that Catholic followers may find that their opinions on the use of family planning and condom differ from beliefs advanced by their leaders and as such they often find themselves in a situation where they have to choose between correct action and personal circumstances. The Protestants and Pentecostal Churches on the other hand believe contraceptives and condoms should only be used in marriage and not outside because they feel allowing use outside marriage would encourage promiscuity. In communities where adolescents start sexual activities at very tender age, the unmarried

youths may also find themselves in situations where they will have to choose between personal circumstances and corrective action.

According to the Islam key informants that were interviewed, Quran is not explicit about the morality of contraceptives but it encourages procreation. In light of this, Islam does allow use of contraceptives so long as the following conditions are met: The wife and husband both consent to the use of family planning; the method should not cause permanent sterility and should not harm the body. However, the sheikh emphasized that Islam emphasizes that a woman should never deceive her husband by deliberately avoiding conceiving.

Abortion is considered sinful regardless of the circumstances or the reason for considering it. Participant's arguments were based on the premise that life begins at conception and therefore it must be valued and protected. They further argued that no human being has a right to end life. As indicated in section 2.8 of Chapter 2, the Malawi government penal code (149 and 150) prohibits abortion in any case except when the life of the mother is under serious threat. Some of the key informants reckoned that this law was framed under considerations of the country's cultural and religious factors. Other key informants argued that due to illegality of abortion and religious institutions stand on this issue, girls and women resort to unsafe abortions that put their lives at a huge risk.

This study has also revealed that religious institutions do not recognize marital rape. Religious leaders and men in the FGD argued that by consenting to marriage, it means the wife has consented to sexual intercourse with the husband during the existence of the marriage. The women in the FGD however argued that while this could be true, men need to take into account the wife's health and circumstances. One of the gender advocates interviewed attributed the high incidences of marital rape to weak laws on the issue and cultural factors. She explained that marital rape is not legally recognized in Malawi. The implication for this is that women reproductive and health rights are not protected. This has implications for their right to life considering that they are living in an environment that is rife with HIV and AIDS.

Although traditional practices are considered not compatible with religious values, FGD revealed that the following practices were common but unfortunately were overlooked by

religious groups: kulowakufa (*where a widow or widower sleeps with a relation to the deceased as a cleansing ceremony*), Chimwanamayi (*wife swapping*), fisi (*some couples hire a man to impregnate the woman if the couple is finding it hard to conceive*) and kuthuna (*pulling of the labia to give the girls' partners maximum pleasure during intercourse*). Ironically, the study established that most of the people who promote these harmful practices belong to different religious groups. Four Key informants explained that religious institutions are so powerless to intervene because these practices are done in secret.

### **5.3.4 Position of Women in Religious Organizations**

The protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights on the rights of women in Africa authorizes affirmative action to promote equal participation of women including their equal representation in elected office. In line with this, the researcher wanted to find out to what extent women play in decision making in religious organizations. However, it has to be mentioned at the outset that it is very difficult to generalize the findings across the religious organizations because each religious institutions interviewed had different view on the issue. Three themes emerged; role of religion in lives of women, role of women religious groups versus male religious groups and position of women in religious organizations

#### **5.3.4.1 Role of Religion in Lives of Women**

This study has also revealed that religion plays a very crucial role in the lives of people. The majority of key informants agreed that in light of the economic hardships, HIV and AIDS and other social hardships, many people especially women are turning to religion for comfort, hope, identity and for a sense of belonging. Two key informants reckoned that religion provides an alternative society in which women attain position of authority denied to them in a broader society. They gave examples of women who were mere office assistants in organizations but chaired successful women organizations in their religious institutions. Nevertheless, other key informants had different view on this matter because they felt that the way women are perceived and treated in the religious institution reflects the way they are treated in society at large and vice versa. They argued that religion is very powerful in influencing the way people behave and relate to each

other. For instance, the biblical interpretation that a man is a head of the family just like Christ is the head of the church is reflected in the workplace and political arena where men dominate decision making positions while women are found in supporting and caring roles. Participants felt that the religious teachings that say a woman is a helper for a man and the belief that male gender is supreme over the female discourage girls to work hard in school because they feel it is the responsibility of the man to fend for them. Other participants particularly singled out Islam where many women lag behind in terms of education as a reflection of how religion encourages women to accept oppression as part of life.

#### **5.3.4.2. Role of Women Religious Groups versus Male Religious Groups**

One thing that all the religious leaders that were interviewed and the FGD agreed was the indispensable role that women play in religious institutions. The interview with religious leaders revealed that women were engaged in a number of roles and responsibilities that kept the religious institutions going such as general cleaning of the religious institution premises, counseling, teaching, visiting and praying for the sick, helping the poor, singing in religious institutions and preaching in some churches. This was confirmed during FGD where women explained that it was their responsibility to see to it that the religious institution was clean even in cases where the religious institutions had full time employees. It was also revealed that there were more well organized women groups than there were male religious groups; For instance, there were women groups such as amai a Chifundo and legion of Mary in Catholic Church, Women guild (Amai a Mvano) in C.C.A.P., Ethiopia church and African Mother church, Amai a Dolika in Seventh Day Adventist, amai otumikira mwa chikondi in Assemblies of God and Muslim sisters in Islam. The roles and responsibilities of these women groups are well aligned to women's reproductive roles: caring for the sick, the orphans and other vulnerable groups. It has to be mentioned that C.C.A.P. has a men's guild (mvano wa abambo) which has similar roles and responsibilities as women guild but the membership is lower. The key informant explained that the registered members were not as active as women members and attributed this to the roles and responsibilities which are more suitable to women. These findings suggest that religious organizations implicitly participate in and sustain patriarchal structures that subordinate women.

### **5.3.4.3. Position of Women in Religious Organizations**

This study has revealed that despite the important role that women play to sustain the religious institutions, women are largely excluded from decision making positions and sacral roles in most of the religious institutions. This position was justified by the interpretation of the word of God and the doctrines. For instance according to the Muslim key informant that was interviewed, the Quran expresses two views on the role of women. One view states that men and women are equal in terms of their religious duties while the other view states that women and men are not equal in terms of inheritance. He further explained that the fundamental belief in Islam is that women and men should not mix unnecessarily and for this reason Islam does not allow women to stand on pulpit and preach to men. This is done to prevent temptations among male worshippers. He also implicitly suggested that Islam regards a woman as a weaker sex. According to the key informant, a woman in Islam is only allowed to hold a position of influence among fellow women. The same applies to preaching. A woman can only preach in the presence of fellow women. Similarly, interview with key informant and FGD revealed that Jehovah's Witnesses do not allow women to preach in the presence of men nor are they allowed to become elders. According to the key informant, Jehovah's witnesses base this on 1st Timothy 2:13-14 where God through the apostle Paul restricts women from serving in the roles of teaching and having spiritual authority over men. However, he explained that women are allowed to go out door to door to spread the word of God. It was also discovered that most of the decision making positions were held by elders who were men. Elders were responsible for managing finance; manage distribution of booklets and general operations of the church. The Roman Catholic Church's position about women's ordination to priesthood was rather dogmatic; both the interview with the key informant and FGD revealed that the Catholic tradition does not allow women to be ordained as sacred priests. According to the Catechist who was interviewed, the church doctrine believes that by not ordaining women, the church is following the footsteps of Jesus and his disciples. This view was shared by the Seventh Day Adventist who explained that the church gives restrictions on the woman pastor's authority. It was argued that although there is no policy that restricts women from becoming pastors, women pastors cannot offer baptism, cannot offer Holy Communion and cannot bury the dead. In cases where there is only a woman pastor, these responsibilities are done by an elder who is a man.

The key informant however maintained that the church holds women in high esteem. He explained that the fact that the church regards one of its founders, Helen G. White as a prophetess attest to the fact that women are recognized and respected in the church. It was also felt that a woman cannot take the pulpit if she is having her periods because she is considered unclean. This view was held by representatives from Islam, Seventh Day Adventist and C.C.A.P. who argued that this was one of the factors that delayed the debate on the ordination of women in C.C.A.P. and it also split the Seventh Day Adventist some years ago. These findings confirm the role that religion plays in sustaining patriarchal control and discrimination against women and keeps them from fully sharing their God given potential.

Paradoxically, all the above views contradicts the social doctrines of most of the sampled religious groups on creation which view women and men as having equal value and same dignity because both in their differences were created in the image of God. For instance the Roman Catholic Catechist defended the church's position on the dignity of women by referring to article 240 of Catholic catechism which affirms that *'man and woman are both with one and the same dignity 'in the image of God' in their 'being-man' and in their 'being woman' they reflect the creators wisdom and goodness.* Similarly, the Muslim key informant referred to Quran in Sura, 4:1 which states that men and women are created from a single soul and argued that this implies that one person does not come before the other, one is not superior to the other and one is not derivative to the other.

C.C.A.P., Ethiopian church, Assemblies of God and African Mother Church on the other hand all agreed that the bible nowhere restricts women from sharing the gospel and argued that the exhortation to evangelize in the holy bible is directed towards all followers of Jesus Christ. These churches quoted scripture that encourages women to serve in many roles that are crucial in missionary work. For instance the churches quoted Matthews 28:18-20, Acts 1:8 and 1 Peter 3:15. Two Pentecostal key informants argued that religious organizations that discriminate against women somehow pick out one verse out of context and dwell on it to breed a doctrine that promotes gender injustice. These churches agreed that a woman should never be denied an opportunity to stand on a pulpit and preach because of her sex and should be included in religious leadership and sacral roles just like men.

The constitution of these churches in principle allows for the ordination of women. In reality, however, the case was different. In all these churches, there was no female reverend/pastor. Hierarchies in the sampled religious institutions were still male dominated. It was only in the African Mother church that the deputy bishop of the church was a woman. These lower figures were attributed to a number of factors: low levels of education of women, poor self esteem among women to take up challenging positions, women failure to balance sacral roles and the reproductive roles. The church has a social responsibility of uplifting the status quo if women are to participate effectively in decision making and sacral roles in these churches. Some key informants also argued that the absence of women in leadership positions in religious institutions was not a result of the unwillingness of religious institutions to include women in leadership position but rather it was an issue of perception by the society at large. They argued that though women may be eligible, they may not be voted into leadership position because naturally society has less confidence in women.

FGD with Christian women also revealed that position of influence in churches were along class lines. The women explained that the more economic muscle one has, the more likely that she will be given a position of authority in the church. As the saying goes ‘united we stand, divided we fall,’ women who are divided along class lines may not speak with one voice against their common experiences of oppression in religious institutions.

## **5.4 Quantitative Findings and Discussions**

The analysis of the quantitative data that follows is based on the Likert scale questionnaire that was administered to 130 sampled men and women belonging to different religious denominations. The n value indicates the number of respondents for each item on the 5 scale Likert scale.

### **5.4.1 Dignity of Men and Women**

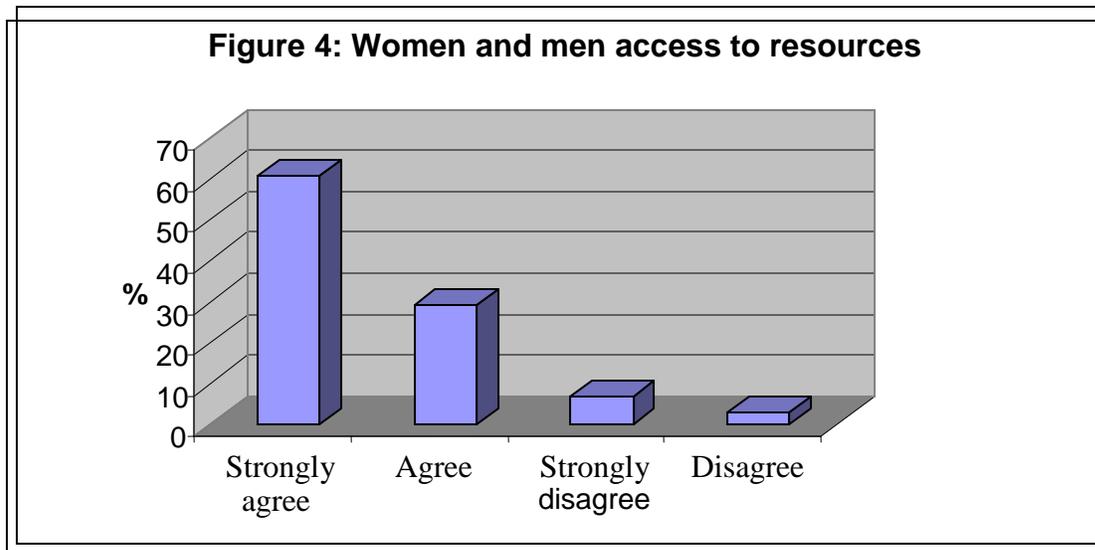
Respondents were asked to state how much they agreed with the statement that ‘*men and women have the same dignity and are of equal values because they are both created in the image of God.*’ The findings are summarized in the table 6 below

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	74	56.9	56.9	56.9
	Agree	35	26.9	26.9	83.8
	I don't know	2	1.5	1.5	85.4
	Strongly disagree	14	10.8	10.8	96.2
	Disagree	5	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

From the findings, it is clear that most people affirmed that men and women have the same dignity and value. This is consistent with what most of the participants in the FGD asserted that both men and women were created equal in the image of God. However, there were some who believed that men and women do not have the same dignity and value. This may have implications on the way women are treated in society. The belief that women are equal to men may be reflected in the way society treats women-value their contributions, not demand their submission and respect their self worth. A woman who feels is equal to a man on the other hand may not look down upon herself, may demand her rights and may have self confidence. This belief may also influence government policies and its commitment on gender equality and empowerment of women. It may be for this reason that the government of Malawi made it clear in the constitution that no one should be discriminated on the basis of gender. On the other hand, the belief that men and women are not equal may be the reason why some sectors of society including some religious institutions discriminate against women.

### 5.4.2 Men and Women and Equal Access to Resources

For women and men to realize their rights, they must have equal access to resources (UNFPA, 2011). In line with this, the researcher wanted to measure the respondents' attitudes by asking the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that men and women should have equal access to resources. The majority of the participants (61% n: 79) strongly agreed that women and men should have equal access to resources. 29% (n: 38) strongly agreed with the statement while 7% (n: 9) strongly disagreed and 3% (n: 4) disagreed with the statement. Refer figure 4 for the results:



It is clear from the findings that they correlate well with the findings on dignity as most of the respondents also agreed that women and men have the same dignity and value. This could be the reason that respondents believed that women and men should have equal access to resources because they have the same dignity and value. This belief may have implications on the way resources are prioritized and allocated.

### 5.4.3 Women Achievements compared to that of Men

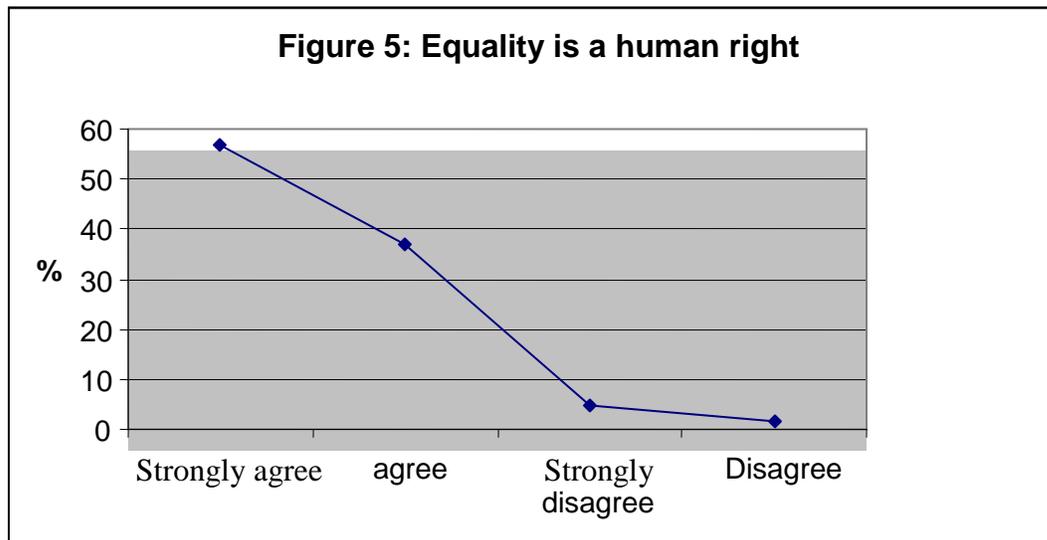
54% (n: 70) of the respondents strongly agreed that given an opportunity, a woman can achieve as much as a man can while 33% n: 43) agreed to this statement. Only 7% (n: 9) strongly disagreed to this statement while 3% (n: 4) disagreed. Refer to the Table 7 below.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	70	53.8	53.8	53.8
	Agree	43	33.1	33.1	86.9
	I don't know	4	3.1	3.1	90.0
	Strongly disagree	9	6.9	6.9	96.9
	Disagree	4	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

This attitude that ‘whatever a man can achieve a woman can also achieve’ can have implications on women empowerment. It may motivate those committed to the empowerment of women to design programs that would empower women to reach their full potential. It may also motivate women to aim high and work towards reaching their full potential. The gender stereotype that ‘a woman is limited in her capability’ on the other hand may hinder women to participate in development programs or to engage in social change and politics. It may also discourage women from working towards reaching their full potential.

#### 5.4.4 Equality between Men and Women and Human Rights

Gender equality is a human right that is recognized in international, regional and national treaties. It is critical for full enjoyment of human rights by both men and women and therefore needs to be promoted at every level (UNDP, 2009:4). 57% (n: 74) of which 46% were men and 54% women respondents strongly agreed that equality between men and women needed to be promoted while 37% (n: 48) of which 48% were men and 52% were women agreed. 4.6% (n: 6) and 2 % (n: 2) strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.



This in principle would mean that efforts and programs to promote equality between men and women would be supported by both men and women. Furthermore, if women understand that gender equality is their human right, they will be able to demand it and will not tolerate any discrimination of any kind on the basis of their sex. Men and women who disagree that gender equality is a human right may resist policies and programs that attempt to promote equality between men and women and empower women. Women who do not agree that gender equality is their human right may not challenge public policies and socio-cultural factors that perpetuate discrimination against women.

### 5.4.5 Women and Self Reliance

Self reliance is one of the critical aspects of women empowerment. It gives women control over their lives and power to make their decisions in their own interest (UNFPA, 2011). 55% (n: 72) of the respondents strongly agreed that women should be self reliant regardless of their marital status. 6% of the respondents on the other hand strongly disagreed that every woman should be self reliant. The findings are summarized below:

**Table 8: Women should be self reliant regardless of their marital status**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	72	55.4	55.4	55.4
	Agree	41	31.5	31.5	86.9
	I don't know	1	.8	.8	87.7
	Strongly disagree	8	6.2	6.2	93.8
	Disagree	8	6.2	6.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

The implication of this would be that programs that empower women to be self reliant would be supported by the majority. Nonetheless, those who disagree that women should be self reliant are more likely not to support programs and policies that empower women to be self reliant.

### 5.4.6 Women Participation in Political and Decision making process

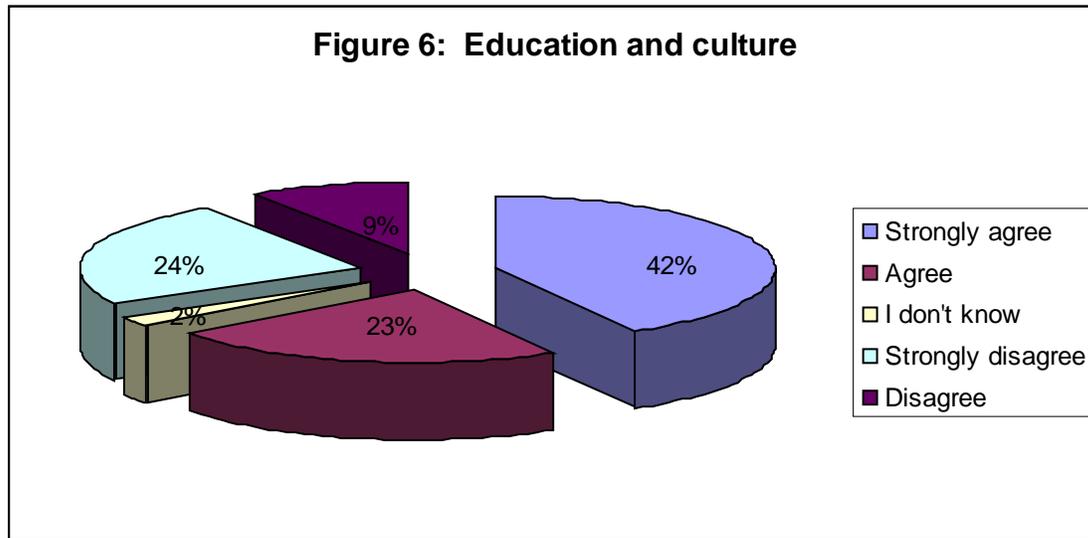
Women active participation in politics and decision making process ensures their priorities and needs are reflected in the policies, programs and interventions. 58% (n: 75) of the respondents strongly agreed that women should be allowed to participate fully in political and decision making process while only 7% (n: 9) of the respondents strongly

disagreed that women should be allowed to participate in political and decision making process. The findings are summarized below:

<b>Table 9: Women should participate in decision making</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	75	57.7	58.6	58.6
	Agree	36	27.7	28.1	86.7
	I don't know	3	2.3	2.3	89.1
	Strongly disagree	9	6.9	7.0	96.1
	Disagree	5	3.8	3.9	100.0
	Total	128	98.5	100.0	
Missing	99	2	1.5		
Total		130	100.0		

In principle, what this means is that women who aspire for positions in politics and other decision making positions would be given equal treatment and would not be discriminated against based on unrelated issues. Nevertheless, those who disagree that women should participate fully in political and decision making process may not support women in decision making positions and may discriminate against women in decision making position based on their sex.

### 5.4.7 Women's Education and Culture



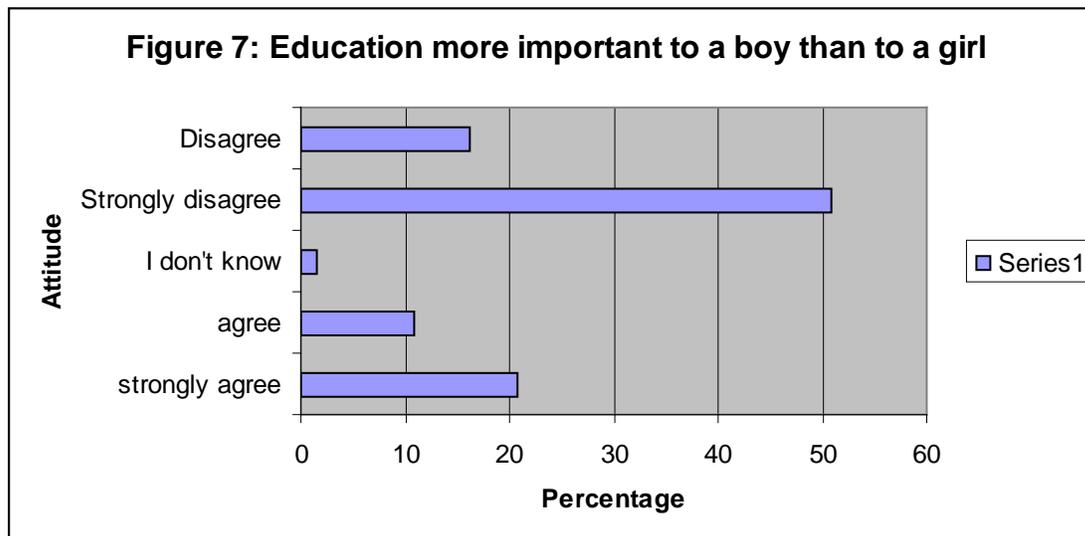
The majority of the participants (42%, n: 54) strongly agreed that highly educated women lose touch with their culture while 24% (n: 31) disagreed strongly with the statement. All but one of the Moslems that were interviewed strongly agreed that educated women lose touch with their culture. Similarly, the majority of the protestants (and 40% n: 21) and Pentecostal/Charismatic (40%: n: 19) agreed strongly to the statement (refer Table 6). These statistical figures suggest that there is prevailing negative perception about women education in Mulanje. FGD established that Islam consider women as second class citizens. Some churches also teach total submission of women to men which means any attempt to empower women with higher education may be seen as a threat to cultural and religious norms. This may have implications on women empowerment as public policies that promote attainment of higher education of women may not be fully supported. On the other hand those who disagree that women who are highly educated lose touch with their culture will be more likely to support public policies and programs that promote women attainment of higher education. Women who disagree with the statement may not be discouraged to work towards achieving high levels of education.

**Table 10: Denomination versus education and culture**

		Highly educated women lose touch with culture				
		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Respondents' denomination	Roman Catholic	6	3	0	7	1
	Protestant	21	14	1	9	8
	Pentecostal/Charismatic	19	10	2	13	3
	Islam	6	1	0	0	0
	Other	2	2	0	2	0
Total		54	30	3	31	12

### 5.4.8 Importance of Education to a girl vis a vis a boy

Education opportunities for women empower them to take control of their lives and to make informed decisions about their health and general well being and to improve their economic prospects thus offering the most accessible and viable way out of poverty for women (UNFPA, 2011). In line with this, the research wanted to measure the respondents attitude with regard to importance of education to girls vis a vis boys. The results are summarized as below:



The majority of participants 51% (n: 66) disagreed strongly that education is more important to a boy than to a girl as compared to 21% (n: 27) of the respondents who strongly agreed with the statement. More women (55%, n: 37) than men (46%, n: 29) disagreed strongly with the statement. This could mean that women are gaining the confidence to claim or reclaim their space in society. The study has also established that the respondent's attitudes were affected by level of education. For instance 70% (n: 7) of the respondents who had high school certificate (MSCE) strongly disagreed with the statement compared to 32% (n: 13) whose educational status was below grade 8.

This could mean that girls' education would be supported in an environment where people are educated and would not be supported fully in an environment where people are not educated. This may imply that education is an important tool to support women empowerment.

#### **5.4.9 Prioritization of Resources in Families**

The majority of respondents agreed that in situations of inadequate resources, men should be given priority because they are heads of families. 29% (n: 38) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. The same number of respondents also agreed with the statement. 19% (n: 25) of the respondents on the other hand agreed with the statement while 15% (n: 20) disagreed with the statement. 6% (n: 8) of the respondents were not sure. All in all, the majority of the participants (48%, n: 63) were of the view that men should be given priority compared to 45% (n: 58) who disagreed. These statistical

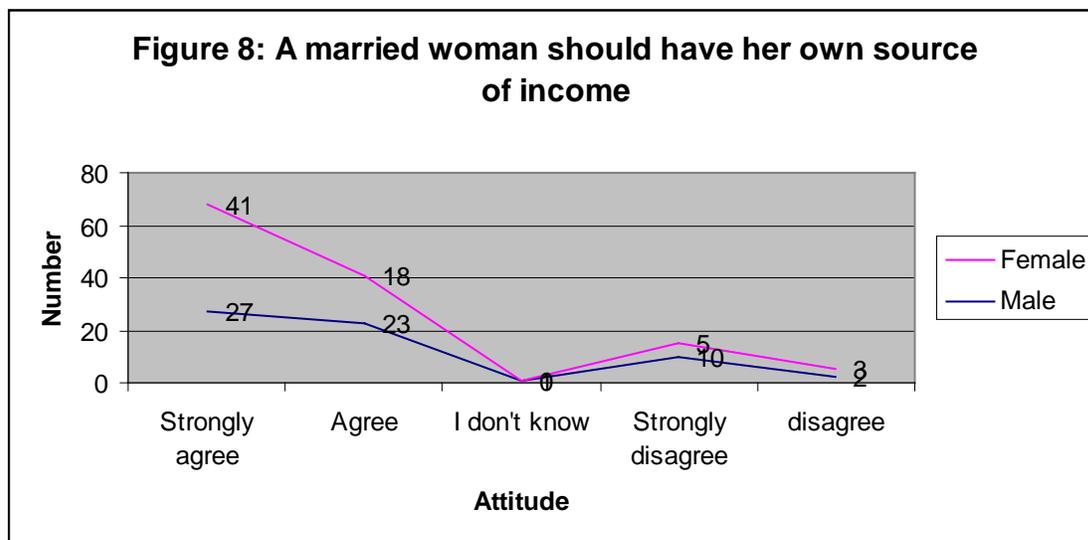
figures, though insignificant to make a dent on the prevailing perception about the attitudes towards prioritizing resources to men, they cannot be ignored. The fact that almost half of the participants agreed that priorities should be given to men confirms that negative attitudes towards women empowerment still prevail as argued in literature review. As argued in the literature review, discrimination against women is one of the factors contributing to feminized poverty. Improving women’s access to and control of resources however is a significant tool to improving the welfare of women and their families.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	38	29	29.45736
	Agree	25	19	19.37984
	I don't know	8	6	6.20155
	Strongly disagree	38	29	29.45736
	Disagree	20	15	15.50388
	Total	129	99	100
Missing	99	1	1	
Total		130	100	

Disaggregating data by denomination, Islam had the highest percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with the statement. 57% (n: 4) of Muslims strongly agreed and 29% (n: 2) agreed with the statement while 14% (n: 1) strongly disagreed with the statement. The FGD and interview with key informants revealed that in Islam it is the responsibility of the man to feed, clothe and provide shelter for the wife and children. This could be the reason why the majority of Muslims felt that priority should be given to a man. Nevertheless, this may have implications on women empowerment. It would put a woman in a situation where she doesn't have control over her life.

### 5.4.10 Married Women and Income

The majority of respondents agreed that a married woman should have her own source of income. 52% (n: 68) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. Of these, 60% (n: 41) were women while 40% (n: 27) were men. 12% (n: 15) of which 67% (n: 10) were men and 33% (n: 5) were women strongly disagreed that a woman should have her own source of income. This means that more men than women had negative attitudes towards allowing a woman to have her own income. During FGD with men belonging to different religious organizations, men expressed that women become disrespectful when empowered to stand on their own. This kind of thinking may be limiting to women. Denying a woman access to have her own income disempowers her to take control of her life.

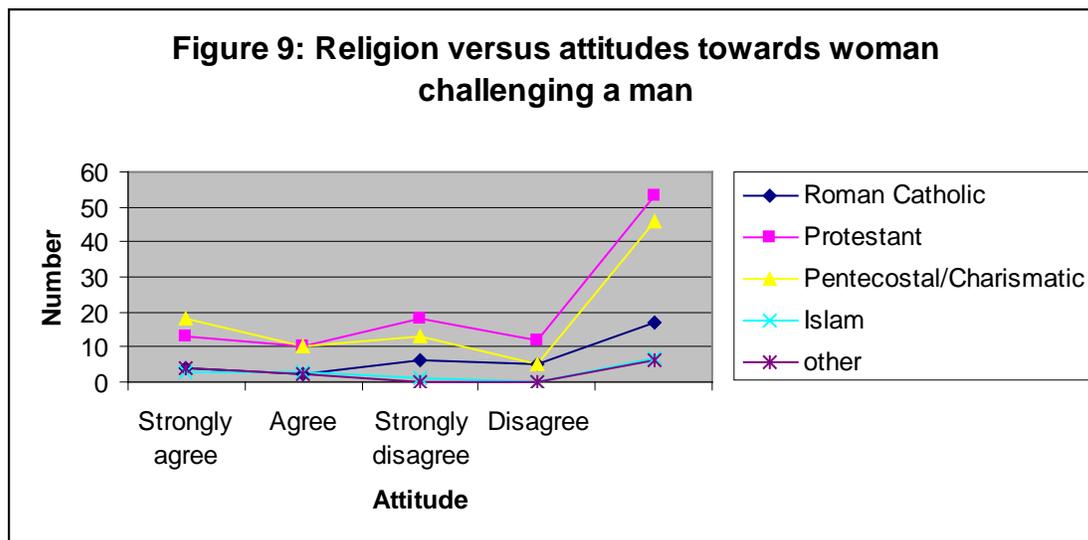


### 5.4.11 Women Income and Marital Problems

Despite the majority of respondents agreeing strongly that a married woman should be allowed to earn her own income, an overwhelming majority 53% (n: 69) strongly agreed that when a woman has higher income than her husband, marital problems are bound to rise. 12% (n: 16) of the respondents agreed to the statement. Nevertheless, 22% (n: 29) of the respondents disagreed strongly while 12% (n: 15) disagreed with the statement. This could mean that most people believe that it is okay for a married woman to earn an income of her own so long as it doesn't exceed what her husband earn. This could limit women's engagement in profitable business and gainful employment opportunities with decent wage. It could also discourage women from furthering their education and skills conducive to decent employment and business.

### 5.4.12 A Woman position in the Family and culture

There were no significant differences in terms of percentages between those who strongly agreed with the statement that culturally, a woman is not supposed to challenge a man and those who strongly disagreed with the statement. 32% (n: 42) strongly agreed that a woman is not supposed to challenge a man while 29% (n: 38) disagreed with the statement. 21% (n: 27) of the respondents agreed with statement while 17% (n: 22) disagreed with the statement. Overall, there were more respondents who affirmed that a woman should not challenge a man.



The results show that the majority of the Muslims affirmed that a woman should not challenge a man (57% n: 4 strongly agreed while 29% n: 2 agreed). Similarly, all respondents from other religious organizations affirmed that a woman should not challenge a man. The trend was different from Roman Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal/Charismatic where the majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Given that that Christianity is the major religion in Mulanje, this in principle could mean prevailing positive attitudes towards a woman challenging a man. Nevertheless, the prevailing negative attitudes across religious denominations revealed by this study should not be overlooked. It could be because of this negative thinking that most women are not confident to take up challenging positions and most of them are subdued and do not speak in the presence of men. Unless this attitude is changed, achieving equality will still remain an uphill battle.

#### **5.4.13 Women Roles versus Men's Roles**

The majority of the respondents (54% n: 69) strongly disagreed that women are more suited to do clerical duties than technical roles while 16% (n: 21) strongly agreed. 9% (n: 11) of the respondents agreed with the statement against 21% (n: 27) of the respondents who disagreed. This implies that the majority of the respondents were in the view that a woman should not be limited in her choice of career. This is a step in a right direction considering that for a long time, roles have been characteristically gender determined in Malawi. Furthermore, in a country where career opportunities are very limited, technical skills provide self employment for the youths. Having positive attitudes towards women engagement in technical skills is what is needed to increase career prospects for women.

#### **5.4.14 Inheritance of Parents' Property: Male child versus Female child**

The majority of the respondents (58% n: 75) disagreed strongly that a male child was more suitable to inherit his parents property than a girl child. 15% (n: 19) of the respondents agreed with the statement. Refer to the table below

**Table 12: A male child is more suitable to inherit**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	19	15	15
Agree	6	5	5
I don't know	4	3	3
Strongly disagree	75	58	58
Disagree	26	20	20
Total	130	100	100

The positive attitude towards girl child's inheritance could be attributed to matrilineal system of descent and kinship practiced in Mulanje district. FGD and interview with key informants revealed that in matrilineal system, parents are comfortable to have their girl child inherit than the boy child because a girl child stays in the village forever while the male child leaves and settles in his wife's village. However, both literature review and FGD have revealed that men do feel reluctant to invest in the woman village because he feels he will not stay in the village forever. This could mean that practically a girl child has very few items to inherit from parents.

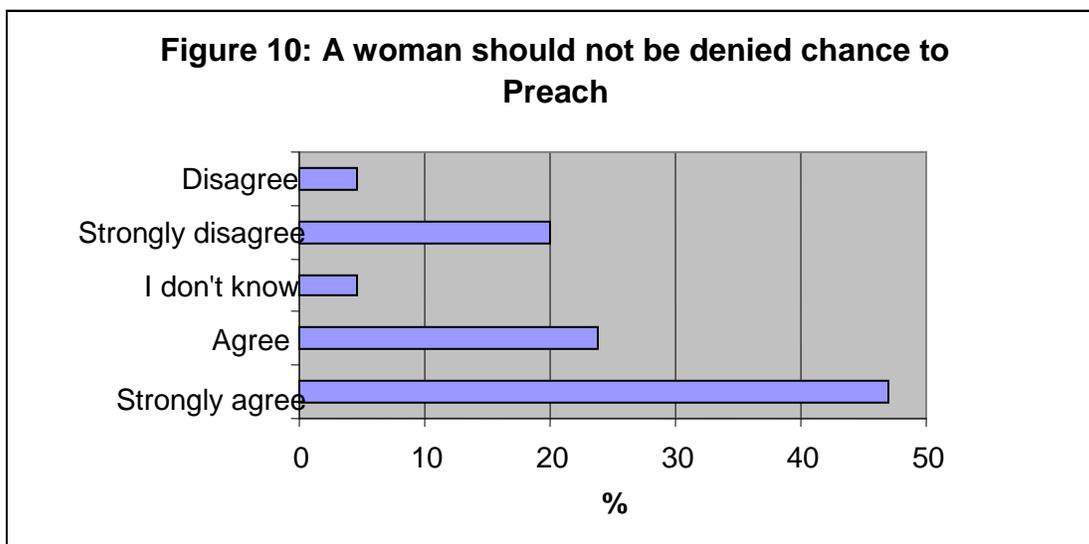
#### **5.4.15 Gender Equality versus Religious Values**

In spite of the majority of respondents demonstrating a clear understanding of gender equality and women empowerment in section B above, some respondents considered gender equality as a foreign concept that is not consistent with religious values. 25% (33) of the respondents agreed strongly to the statement that gender equality should not be promoted because it is a foreign concept that is inconsistent with religious values. 21% (27) of the respondents agreed with the statement. 36% (n: 47) of the respondents on the other hand strongly disagreed with the statement while 15% (n: 20) agreed with the statement. Nevertheless, desegregation by religious denominations did not show any

significant differences among religious denominations. This study has found that interpretation of the holy books with regard to gender equality has been subjective to an extent and as such there hasn't been a consensus on the issue. This could explain why within one religious denomination some people feel that gender equality is in line with the word of God while others feel it contravenes the word of God

#### 5.4.16 Women and opportunity to stand on pulpit and preach

The majority of the respondents affirmed that a woman should not be denied an opportunity to stand on a pulpit and preach because of her sex.



Although both literature review and interview with key informants revealed that Catholic Church does not allow women to be ordained as priests, 53% (n: 9) of the Catholic respondents strongly agreed that women should not be denied an opportunity to preach. This could imply that the followers' beliefs on women preaching differ from the teachings advanced by their church. One possible explanation for this could be that followers are becoming more aware of their rights. 71% (n: 5) of the Muslims on the other hand strongly disagreed with the statement. This is consistent with both the FGD and interview with key informants which revealed that Islam considers women as second class who cannot stand on the pulpit and preach in the presence of men.

### 5.4.17 Role of Women in Religious Institutions

Both interviews with key informants and FGD revealed that women and women’s organizations play a considerable role in the work and ministry of the religious organizations. It also revealed that women are largely excluded from leadership roles at the highest levels. The Likert scale questionnaire therefore wanted to measure the respondents’ attitude towards decision making roles versus housekeeping roles. The majority of the respondents (52%, n: 68) strongly disagreed that women should perform housekeeping roles and leave decision making roles to men. This shows prevailing positive attitudes towards empowering women with decision making responsibilities. Only 15% (n: 20) strongly agreed with the statement. Nevertheless, disaggregating data by religious denominations revealed myriad variations across religions.

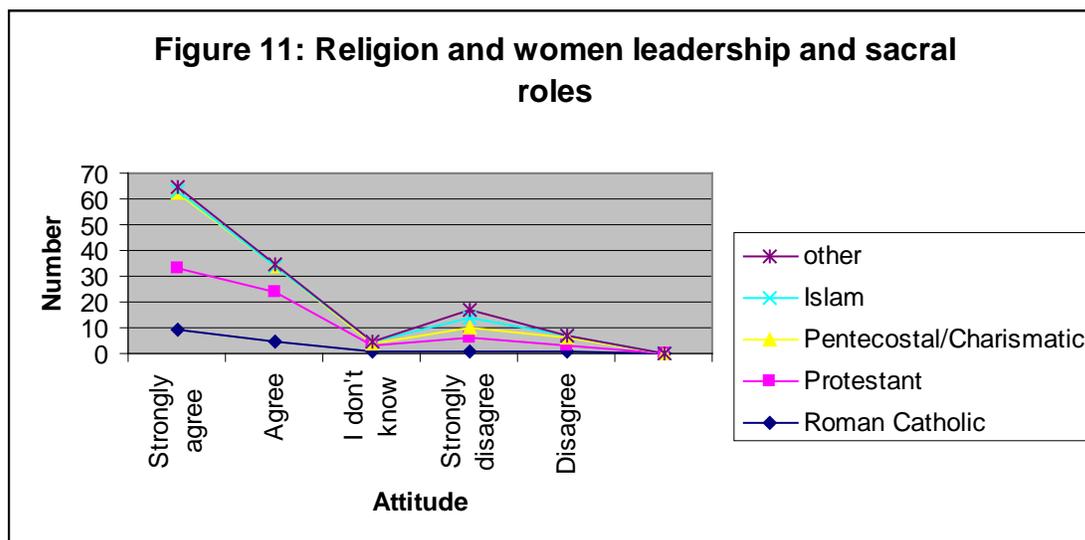
<b>Table 13: Women should perform housekeeping roles and leave decision making to men</b>					
	Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Roman Catholic	4	4	1	6	2
Protestant	8	8	0	26	11
Pentecostal/Charismatic	4	3	4	34	2
Islam	3	1	0	2	1
Other	1	4	0	0	1
	20	20	5	68	17

The majority of the Pentecostal/Charismatic followers (72%, n: 34) strongly disagreed with the statement that women should be restricted to housekeeping roles in the church. These are perhaps one of the exemplary churches with regards to support for women leadership roles in the Church. 47% of the Catholics (n: 8) on the other hand affirmed that women should perform housekeeping roles in the Church. This kind of thinking

could be one of the factors that have limited women to take leadership positions both in the Church and society at large.

### 5.4.18 Women Leadership and Sacral Roles in Religious Institutions

The majority of respondents (50%, n: 65) strongly agreed that women should be included in religious leadership and sacral roles just like men. 13% (n: 17) strongly disagreed with the statement. However, disaggregating data by religious denominations revealed myriad variations across religions.



The majority of the Catholic respondents 53% (n: 9) strongly agreed that women should be included in religious leadership and sacral roles. 29% (n: 5) of the respondents agreed with the statement. Only 6% (n: 1) strongly disagreed and the same number disagreed with the statement. Ironically, the Catholic Church does not allow ordination of women. This could mean that the Catholic followers do not share the Church’s stand with regard to women ordination. It could also mean that the church’s social doctrine that promotes equality between men and women is empowering women to claim their position in the Church. The majority of the Muslim respondents (57%, n: 4) strongly disagreed that women should be included in religious leadership and sacral roles. This agrees with the findings of FGD and interview with key informants which revealed that Islam women are excluded from position of authority on the basis of their gender. Similarly, 50% of the respondents from other religious organizations disagreed strongly that women should be included in religious leadership and sacral roles.

#### 5.4.19 Religious Groups' Attention to Gender in Preaching and Practice

The majority of the participants (46%, n: 60) strongly agreed that religious groups should pay special attention to gender in their preaching and practice. 30% (n: 39) strongly disagreed with the statement. Refer to Table below:

**Table 14: Attention to gender in preaching and practice**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	60	46	46
Agree	24	18	18
I don't know	4	3	3
Strongly disagree	39	30	30
Disagree	3	2	2
Total	130	100	100

There were some consistencies between the belief that gender is a foreign concept and attitudes towards attention to gender in their preaching and practice. 70% (n: 23) of the 33 respondents who strongly agreed that gender equality was a foreign concept strongly disagreed that religious groups should pay special attention to gender equality in their preaching and practice. Only 21% (n:7) of the 33 respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This means that the reason why the respondents felt that religious groups should pay special attention to gender equality and women empowerment could be because they felt it was consistent with the word of God. It is important to mention that paying special attention to gender equality in preaching will ensure that almost 98% of the population in the district is reached with gender messages given that religion is the highest institution to which the majority of the population belongs.

## 5.4.20: Religious Groups and Policies and Structures on Gender and Women Empowerment

The majority of the respondents 37% (n: 48) agreed strongly that each religious group should have clear policies and structures on gender and women empowerment. Another 29% (n: 37) agreed with the statement while 28% (n: 36) disagreed strongly with the statement. Refer Table 15 below.

**Table 15: Religious groups should pay special attention in their preaching and practice \*  
Each religious group should have clear policies and structures on gender Cross tabulation**

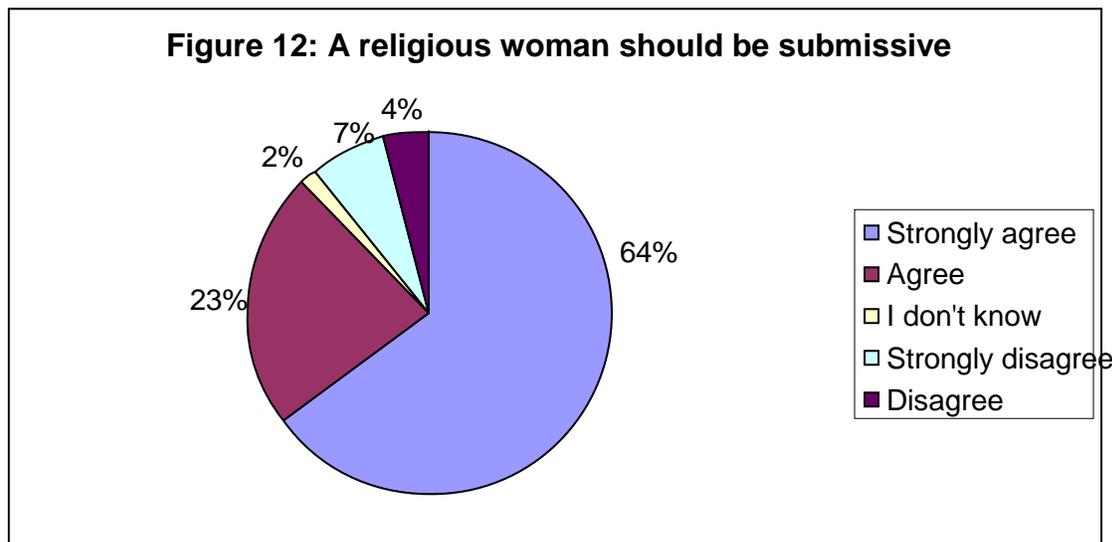
Count							
		Each religious group should have clear policies and structures on gender					
		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Total
Religious groups should pay special attention in their preaching and practice	Strongly agree	39	19	2	0	0	60
	Agree	7	16	1	0	0	24
	I don't know	1	0	1	2	0	4
	Strongly disagree	0	2	2	33	2	39
	Disagree	1	0	0	1	1	3
Total		48	37	6	36	3	130

Of the 48 respondents who strongly agreed that each religious group should have clear policies and structures on gender, 81% (n: 39) strongly agreed that religious groups should pay special attention to gender in their preaching and practice. Similarly, out of 36 respondents who strongly disagreed with the statement that each religious group should

have clear policies and structures on gender, 92% (n: 33) strongly disagreed that religious groups should pay special attention to gender in their preaching and practice. This shows that there is a very strong correlation between the two. This could mean that some respondents felt gender equality is consistent with the word of God and therefore felt it needed to be included in the preaching and policies while others felt it contravenes the word of God and therefore felt religious organizations should have nothing to do with issues of gender. It is also important to mention here that although a good number of respondents affirmed the need for religious organizations to have clear policies and structures on gender, most of the religious organizations represented in the FGD and interview with key informants did not have clear policies and structures on gender. This could mean that religious organizations are not meeting the needs of their followers as far as issues of gender equality and women empowerment are concerned.

#### 5.4.21 A religious woman and submission to her husband

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (65%, n: 84) strongly agreed that a religious woman should be submissive at all cost. Only 7% (n: 9) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. The findings are summarized below



These findings are not surprising considering that literature review; FGD and interview with key informants have revealed that both the bible and the Qur'an have texts that have

been interpreted to mean God sanctioned the idea that a woman was made for a man and should therefore be subservient to him. This just shows that women are still chained to the limiting belief patterns and societal or religious conditioning that have kept them suppressed and subdued. This study has also found a strong correlation between ‘a religious woman should be submissive at all cost’ and ‘culturally, a woman is not supposed to challenge a man.’ Of the 42 respondents who strongly agreed that a woman should not challenge a man, 71% (n: 30) strongly agreed while 21% (n: 9) agreed that a religious woman should be submissive at all times. It is obvious from these findings that to an extent the issues of total submission of women to men have their roots deep in religious beliefs and teachings. The implication for this is that women may not be able to exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms in marriage.

#### **5.4.22 Women and Men Position in Marriage**

Although the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that a religious woman should be submissive to her husband at all cost, the majority (54%, n: 69) strongly agreed that women and men should enjoy equal rights and be regarded as equal partners in marriage. Only 3% (n: 4) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that women and men should enjoy equal rights and be regarded as equal partners in marriage. This could be explained by the religious doctrines which encourage partners to respect each other in marriage. Nevertheless, these inconsistencies indicate that there is quite a great confusion among religious leaders and followers as regards position of women in marriage in accordance to what the holy books teach.

#### **5.4.23 Religious Institutions Response to GBV**

61% (n: 79) of the respondents strongly agreed that religious institutions should have clear policies and procedures to respond to GBV. Only 4% (n: 5) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. The results are summarized below:

**Table 16: Religious groups should have clear policies and procedures to respond to GBV**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	Strongly agree	79	61	61	
	Agree	39	30	30	
	I don't know	4	3	3	
	Strongly disagree	5	4	4	
	Disagree	2	2	2	
	Total	129	99	100	
Missing	99	1	1		
Total		130	100		

The fact that the majority of the respondents affirmed the need for religious groups to have clear policies and procedures to respond to GBV is a step in the right direction. FGD and interview with key informants revealed that religious organizations were already responding to issues of GBV. Almost all the religious organizations had marriage counsellors who deal with marriage disagreements. However, interview with key informants and FGD revealed that couples are usually encouraged to work through their differences which sometimes hinder women from leaving abusive relationships. It is important that religious institutions provide counsel and information that is empowering to women.

#### **5.4.24: Divorce versus the word of God**

There was consensus across religious denominations that religions should never authorize divorce for marriage is ordained by God. 49% (n: 64) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that religious should not authorize divorce. Of these 64 respondents 11

were Catholics, 21 were Protestants, 26 were Pentecostals/Charismatic, 3 were Muslims and 3 belonged to other religious organizations. 12% (n: 16) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

These findings are not surprising considering that divorce is considered inconsistent with the Word of God by religions. FGD and interview with key informants revealed that most of religious institutions held the belief that no marriage can be dissolved by any human power or by any other cause other than death. Other religious institutions consider cheating by one partner as a basis for divorce. This means implicitly religions force incompatible couples to stick together. This is tantamount to abuse of human rights.

#### 5.4.25 The word of God and number of Sexual Partners

An overwhelming majority of respondents (74%, n: 96) strongly agreed that it was against the word of God to have more than one sexual partner. Only 8% (n: 10) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

<b>Table 17: Respondents' denomination * It is against the word of God for any man to have more than one sexual partner Cross tabulation</b>						
Count						
		It is against the word of God for any man to have more than one sexual partner				
		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Respondents' denomination	Roman Catholic	16	1	0	0	0
	Protestant	38	12	1	1	1
	Pentecostal/Charismatic	37	7	1	2	0
	Islam	0	0	0	6	1
	Other	5	0	0	1	0
Total		96	20	2	10	2

The results show that all Muslims disagreed that it was against the word of God for any man to have more than one sexual partner. Literature review, FGD and interview with

key informants have revealed that Islamic teachings permit men to marry more than one wife but set the maximum at four. The fact that even women disagreed with the statement shows how far religion has shaped women to accept oppression in the name of religion.

#### **5.4.26 Women Right to Decide the Number, Timing and Spacing of their children**

54% (n: 70) of the respondents strongly agreed while 27% (n: 35) agreed that every woman has the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children. Only 9% of the respondents (n: 12) strongly disagreed with the statement. Literature review in this study has revealed that most of the maternal and child health problems in Malawi are related to subordination of women. Having the right attitude towards right of women to decide freely the timing and spacing of their children is empowering to women.

Interview with key informants and FGD revealed that Catholic Church is very conservative as far as issues of family planning are concerned. Nonetheless, the majority of the Catholics (53%, n: 9) strongly agreed while 24% (n: 4) agreed that every woman has the right to freely decide the number, timing and spacing of her children. The trend was the same in Protestant and Pentecostal/ Charismatic churches although the teachings of these churches confine the use of family planning within marriage. This means that followers of religions support women right to family planning regardless of their religions stand on the issue. This could imply that the opinions advanced by leaders of religious leaders do not meet the needs of their followers. This may put followers in very difficult position of choosing between correct action and personal circumstances.

#### **5.4.27 Use of Contraceptives in a Religious Family**

The majority of the respondents (69%, n: 89) strongly disagreed with the statement that use of contraceptives should not be considered in a religious family. This implies wider acceptance of contraceptives by the majority of respondents. Only 5% (n: 7) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. These results are not surprising considering that FGD and interview with key informants revealed that Pentecostal churches/ Charismatic, Protestants and Islam support the use of family planning by legally married couples. The fact that 82% (n: 14) of the Catholic respondents disagreed

with the statement that use of contraceptives should not be considered in a religious family could imply that Catholic followers disagree with the church's prohibition on family planning. This may have implications on the adoption of family planning by religious followers.

<b>Table 18: Respondents' denomination * Use of contraceptives should not be considered in a religious family Cross tabulation</b>							
Count		Use of contraceptives should not be considered in a religious family					
		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Strongly disagree	Disagree	
Respondents' denomination	Roman Catholic	1	1	0	14	1	
	Protestant	3	3	3	32	12	
	Pentecostal/Charismatic	2	3	2	35	5	
	Islam	0	1	0	5	1	
	Other	1	2	0	3	0	
Total		7	10	5	89	19	

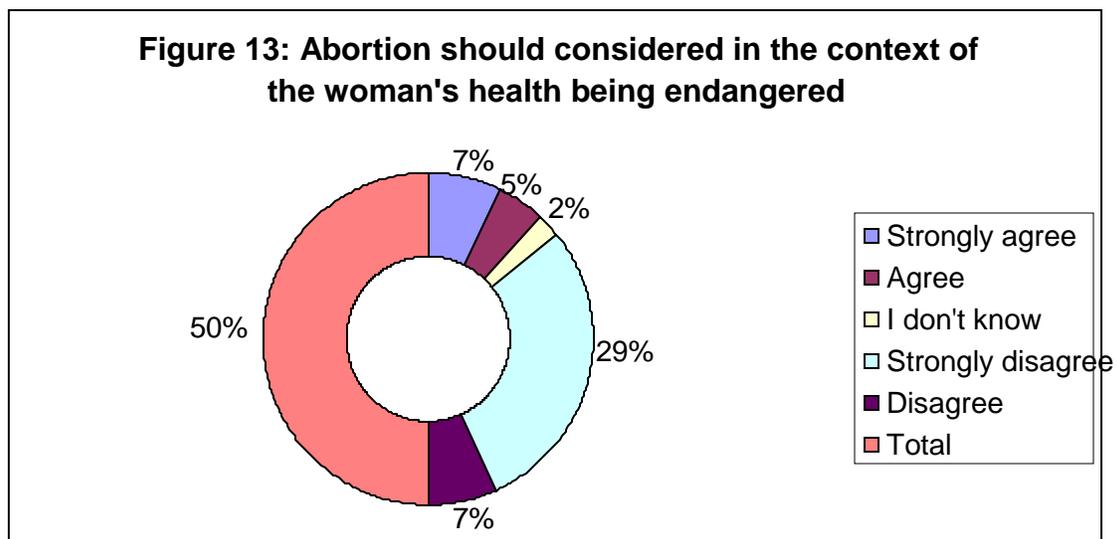
#### **5.4.28 Use of Condoms in a family where one of the partners is HIV positive**

53% (n: 69) of the respondents strongly agreed that use of condoms should be considered if one of the partners is HIV positive. 32% (n: 41) agreed with the statement while only 10% (n: 13) strongly disagreed with the statement. FGD and interview with key informants revealed that religions encourage the use of condoms in legal marriage if one of the partners is HIV positive. This is one way of preventing HIV transmission within marriage in light of the literature that has revealed that marriage heightens women's

vulnerability to HIV. Having positive attitudes towards condom use if one of the partners is HIV positive is critical for HIV prevention within marriage.

#### 5.4.29 Abortion in the Context of Woman's health being endangered

The majority of the respondents (58%, n: 76) strongly disagreed that abortion should be permissible in the context of woman's health being endangered. Only 15% (n: 19) of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. These results are consistent with results for FGD and interview with key informants which revealed that religious organizations consider abortion sinful regardless of the circumstances for considering abortion. This lack of empowerment for women to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive rights may have implications for women's right to life especially in this environment where cases of rape, defilement and HIV and AIDS are very high. With stigma attached to abortions, underground unsafe abortions will continue at the expense of woman's health. If religious institutions could change their stand to consider circumstances under which abortion is considered, women may be able to access safer abortions.



#### 5.4.30 Religious Leaders' Role in Challenging Gender Injustice

The majority of the respondents (63%, n: 82) strongly agreed that religious leaders have a role in challenging gender injustice. 32% (n: 41) of the respondents agreed with the statement. Only 3% (n: 4) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 2% (n: 3) disagreed with the statement. All in all the majority of respondents were of the view that religious

leaders should challenge gender injustice. This has implications for the promotion of gender justice in religious institutions. As argued in the Chapter two; section 2.7, religious texts are very persuasive because they are considered sacred, religious leaders could use religious texts to challenge gender injustice.

#### **5.4.31 Religious Leaders' Role in Sensitizing their Members on Their Rights**

The majority of respondents (59%, n: 76) strongly agreed that religious leaders have a role in sensitizing their members on their rights. 29% (n: 37) agreed while 2% (n: 3) were not sure. 8% (n: 10) on the other hand strongly disagreed while 3% (n: 4) disagreed with the statement. This aspect of religious leaders sensitizing their members on their rights has implications on promotion of gender justice. It also raises the need for religious leaders to understand gender justice from human rights point of view.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on analysis of research data, presentation of findings and its interpretation. The findings are presented in sections mirroring the various study questions and according to themes that were identified from the data collected. Data has been presented both in qualitative and quantitative manner. Qualitative data findings have been enriched with narrations taken directly from the respondents. Descriptive statistics have been used in the presentation of demographic data findings and findings from Likert scale questionnaire in form of graphs, pie charts and tables.

## **CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter concludes the research report with a summary of the main findings, the conclusion drawn from the study and the recommendations made to improve gender justice in religious institutions. It also makes recommendations for further study with regards to gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. The chapter ends with conclusion of the whole study.

### **6.2 Summary of Main Findings**

The main objective of the study was to assess the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. The research has assessed and analyzed how religion influences gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje. The study addressed the following specific objectives to achieve the main objective and to answer the research questions:

- To explore how women, men religious and other influential leaders understand gender equality and women empowerment;
- To provide a detailed assessment of the current status of gender, equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To categorize religious teachings and beliefs related to gender in Mulanje;
- To analyze elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district;
- To analyze the elements of the different religious teachings and beliefs that contribute to gender inequality and women disempowerment;
- To analyze the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies; and
- To make recommendations to promote gender equality and women empowerment in religious institutions.

The following are the research questions that the study sought to answer;

- How do women, men religious and other influential leaders in Mulanje district understand issues of gender equality and women empowerment?
- What is the perception of men and women on the current status of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- What factors have contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- What factors have impeded promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district?
- How do religious teachings, beliefs, policies and practices promote gender equality and empower women in Mulanje district?
- How do religious teachings, beliefs, policies and practices impede gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district? And
- What is the correlation between religious doctrines, teachings and policies and the regional protocols and policies on gender and women empowerment?

In light of the objectives and research questions, the following is the summary of the main findings:

### **6.2.1 Understanding Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

The study has established that the majority of the participants have an understanding of gender equality and women empowerment and related issues. The majority of respondents affirmed that gender equality and women empowerment is a human right that needs to be promoted. Participants also argued that promoting gender equality and empowering women benefits both the woman and her family. Nevertheless the study has also established that there are some people who still associate gender equality and women empowerment with women issues and concerns and as a result feel that promoting gender equality and women empowerment destabilizes families.

### **6.2.2 Current Status of gender equality and women empowerment**

The study has established that the status of women and girls vis a vis men and boys in Mulanje district has improved in recent years. This has been attributed to government commitment to mainstream gender, free primary education and NGOs and donor

community commitment to improve the status of women and girls. The study has also established that increased awareness of the community on gender issues has opened up people's minds to the issue of gender equality and women empowerment. For instance the majority of the respondents agreed that a woman should be allowed to have her source of income. Nevertheless, the study has established that despite progress that is being made to improve the status of women, women still trail men in terms of access to education, health services, formal labor participation and access to credit. This has been attributed to limited capacity of the Ministry of gender, child welfare and community development to effectively implement and coordinate gender policy. Socio-cultural and religious practices, beliefs and attitudes have been identified by the study as major constraints to women empowerment.

### **6.2.3 Religious Teachings and Beliefs that Promote Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

The study has found that religious practices, beliefs, teachings and practices have promoted achievement of gender justice and empowerment of women in religious institutions. Most of the religious institutions in the study were of the view that man and woman have the same dignity and value because they are both created in the image of God. Consequently, religious institutions recognized the right to dignity of all people and the principle of non-discrimination based on sex. The study has also found that most of the cultural practices that degrade the dignity of women and girls are considered not compatible with religious values and as such they are discouraged. Religious teachings on marriage where mutual love, honor, respect and responsibility is encouraged and where monogamous union is encouraged is empowering to the women.

### **6.2.4 Religious Teachings and Beliefs that Hinder Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

This study has established that religious teachings and beliefs have been to an extent a barrier to achievement of gender equality and women empowerment both in religious institutions and society at large. The study has established that although women and women's organizations play a critical role in the life, work and ministry of religious institutions, women are largely excluded from leadership and sacral roles. Some religious

institutions such as Catholic, Jehovah's Witness and Islam do not permit ordination of women based on their interpretation of the holy books. Although, churches like Seventh Day Adventist do not restrict women from ordination, ordained women have limitations. The study has also established that Protestant and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are very liberal with regards to giving women authority. Nevertheless, even in these churches hierarchies are still male dominated. The study has also established that socio-economic status play important role in determining roles that women play in religious institutions.

Most of the religious institutions still believe and teach that woman is subordinate to man and such should not have the same opportunities and privileges as a man. Some of the religious institutions openly preach the submission of women to their husbands in marriage while almost of the religious institutions encourage women to remain in abusive marriage.

### **6.2.5 Correlation between Religious Doctrines, Teachings and Policies and the Regional Protocols and Policies**

The study has established that there is a correlation between some of the religious teachings and regional protocols and policies on gender equality and women empowerment. Religious teachings and beliefs on elimination of harmful practices, upholding the integrity of every person, on marriage-religious institutions discourage forced marriages and access to justice and equal protection before the law are consistent with the protocol on human and people's rights of women in Africa. Nevertheless, the study has established that negative attitudes towards gender equality which are embedded within some theological ideas, interpretations of scriptures and doctrines take precedence over government policies and regional instruments on gender equality and women empowerment. For instance, the study has established that religious institutions stand on women reproductive health, Separation, Divorce and Annulment of Marriage contradict the protocol on human and people's rights of women in Africa.

## **6.3 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.3.1 Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that religion influences gender equality and women empowerment. Religious institutions have affirmed the equality of women in human nature under God and this has had positive effect on gender justice in some religious institutions. As powerful shaper of social attitudes and practices in as far as issues of gender equality and women empowerment are concerned, religion can make a difference in promoting equality and women empowerment in religious institutions. Religious teachings and principles of justice and mutuality could be advanced to promote gender justice. Nevertheless, as long as religious teachings and beliefs continue to be used as justification for gender discrimination, women will continue to be discriminated against, excluded, silenced and subordinated in the name of religion. This raises questions as to whether religious institutions are self-critical of their contributions to the social and cultural practices that disempower women. Perhaps it's time religious institutions took a right based approach to gender equality and women empowerment

### **6.3.2 Recommendations**

In view of the findings of the study, the researcher makes following recommendations to the government of Malawi, religious institution, religious leaders and CSO to improve gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. It is important to mention that some of the recommendations were made by the key informants and FGD participants during interviews and FGDs respectively.

#### **6.3.2.1: Recommendation to the Government of Malawi**

In view of the findings that there is limited capacity for the implementation and coordination of gender issues both at the district and community levels, the study recommends that the government should consider improving the staffing levels at the department of Social Welfare. It should also improve the capacity of government staff especially those working at the department of Social Welfare in Mulanje, religious, CSO and CBO leaders in gender mainstreaming. The research also recommends that the

government should translate the gender policy into local language and should ensure that the translated policies are duly shared with the community structures and organizations. It is also critical that the government appoint a gender point person at Mulanje district Social Welfare department. The appointed gender point person should be provided with Terms of References (TORs) which should stipulate the clear mandate for the position and a specific percentage of time the appointed person should be allocated for gender work. The gender point person should support other departments and community structures to mainstream gender in their programs.

This study has revealed that there are some inconsistencies between national, regional and international policies and protocols on gender and some of the religious teachings, doctrines and practices. In order to address this gap, the researcher recommends that the government should build the capacity of religious leaders and CSO leaders on national, regional and international policies and protocols on gender equality and women empowerment. This will address the gap between gender issues being addressed in the secular arena while being overlooked in religious institutions. Furthermore, the government should work with religious institutions to align the religious policies, teachings and doctrines to national, regional and international protocols and policies on gender. The government should also work with religious institutions to develop programs that deliberately target religious leaders to improve their understanding of the principles and application of gender justice from which they can preach and minister. In addition to this, the government should work with leaders of religious institutions to develop a range of advocacy and sensitization programs around issues of gender justice that can be used at different levels within religious institutions. Finally, the researcher recommends that the government deliberately develop and implement a systematic appraisal tool to appraise both the local and international organizations including religious institution's compliance to national, regional and international policies and protocols on gender equality and women empowerment.

### **6.3.2.2 Recommendation to Religious Institutions**

In view of the finding that there is a gap between national, regional and international policies and religious teachings, doctrines and practices on gender and women empowerment, the researcher recommends that each religious institution appraises its

theology, governance and practice against the national, regional and international protocols and policies on gender and women empowerment. Following the appraisal, each religious institution should revise its doctrines and policies to align them to national, regional and international policies and protocols. Each religious institution should then develop and implement a gender policy which should be aligned to national, regional and international protocols and policies on gender and women empowerment. It is also recommended that each religious institution develop and implement policies and procedures to respond to GBV. Catholics should learn from Pentecostal and Protestants to get insights into the scriptures that promote women to stand in the pulpit and preach. It is important that each religious institution adopts a right-based approach to gender equality and women empowerment so that both men and women should be able to challenge religious institutions on the basis of infringements on their rights to equality and justice and not based on religious doctrines.

The researcher also recommends that religious institutions should take concrete steps for developing gender justice, promoting gender equality and women empowerment at different levels in religious institutions. In setting out these steps, there is need for religious institutions to develop and implement programs that support women's spiritual and personal formation to become confident and contribute effectively to the running of religious institutions. They should also develop and implement programs that equip women with leadership skills at all levels and this should be supported by policies that deliberately create space for women in religious institutions with regards to leadership positions, governance and ordination. In addition, religious institutions should target men with skills for participatory ministry with women. Finally, they should consider developing and implementing programs that improve the socio-economic status of women.

### **6.3.2.3 Recommendations to Religious Leaders**

As the custodians of religious texts, religious leaders are better placed to guide and influence their followers on the issues of gender equality and women empowerment. It is therefore recommended that each religious leader make an effort to understand the national, regional and international protocols and policies on gender equality and women empowerment and find a point of convergence between these policies and protocols and

religious teachings and doctrines. Furthermore, religious leaders should pay special attention to gender equality and women empowerment in their practice and preaching using their religious texts to promote awareness and knowledge and should deliberately promote responsible behaviours that respect the dignity and rights of all persons irrespective of their sex.

#### **6.3.2.4 Recommendations to CSOs**

It is important that CSOs especially those working in the field of gender transformation understand the human rights approach to gender justice to effectively support individual religious institutions to:

- Develop and implement gender policies that are aligned to human rights instruments;
- Develop and implement processes to equip women for leadership within and outside religious institutions;
- Build the capacity of religious leaders on gender mainstreaming;
- Develop and implement a range of advocacy and sensitizations programs around issues of gender justice that can be used at different levels within religious institutions;
- Deepen their understanding of religious texts so that they are not interpreted out of context in order to promote injustice;
- Educate followers on their rights in line with the human rights instruments; and
- Develop and implement programs that improve the socio-economic status of women

#### **6.4 Recommendations for Further Research**

The study has unveiled a number of issues with regards to constraints to promoting gender equality in religious institutions that are worthy of further study. Some of the questions that need further exploration are:

- To what extent do religious women in Mulanje understand their rights?

- How accommodative are religious institutions to provide leadership skills to all women regardless of their socio-economic status?
- To what extent do followers of religious institutions influence doctrines and policies of their religious institutions? This in light of the findings that have revealed that respondent's opinion on certain issues differed from what their religious institutions preach
- To what extent do religious doctrines and beliefs influence government policies and policy implementation? This in light of the argument that some key informants made that the abortion law in Malawi was framed in consideration of Malawi's cultural and religious factors
- To what extent do government policies and human rights instruments influence doctrines and policies of religious institutions?

## **6.6 Concluding Remarks**

The goal of this study has been to assess the influence of religion on gender and women empowerment in Mulanje district. The study has therefore attempted to explore the understanding of gender equality and women empowerment by religious and influential leaders and religious women and men; provide an assessment of the current status of women vis a vis men in the district, establish elements of different religious teachings and beliefs that have both promoted and hindered promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in the district. The study has also made recommendations to the government, religious institutions, religious leaders and the CSO to improve gender equality and women empowerment. These recommendations have been made based on the factors that have been identified as obstacles to gender equality and women empowerment in religious institutions under study. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that these obstacles do not occur uniformly in all religious institutions. The researcher therefore would like to encourage religious institutions to recognize those relevant to them. It is the hope of the researcher that the findings of this study will inform the government, religious institutions and CSO to take appropriate actions to promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district. Religious women are also encouraged to challenge oppression that is being done in the name of religion.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Information to Study participants**

#### **PURPOSE**

I am Caroline Kajawo, a development worker, working with World Vision Malawi in Mulanje. I am currently pursuing a Masters Degree course in Development studies with University of South Africa. The requirement for this course is to do a research which can add value to development. I am assessing the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment.

I therefore invite you to participate in the study.

#### **PROCEDURES**

I am going to ask some questions to get your views on the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment. Please feel free to express your views and be honest. Let me point out that this is not an examination and as such there are no wrong or correct answers. I want to assure you that this discussion will be used for academic purposes only. I have with me audio tapes which I will record the discussion. Let me assure you that these will be kept at a secure place where only me will have access to and will be destroyed after the study. To maintain confidentiality, let's confine the discussion within the walls of this room and not divulge details of the information to others. However, let me mention that I might quote you in the research report.

#### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

By participating in this study, you will help to uncover religious factors that either promote or hinder gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. It's our hope that the results of the study will promote gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi.

Your participation in this study should be voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate or not to answer any question that you feel uncomfortable with. Let me assure you that refusal to participate or to answer questions that you are not comfortable with

will not have any negative repercussions on you. If you change your mind about participating during the course of the discussion, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If there is anything that is not clear or you need further information, you are free to ask.

## **Appendix 2: Declaration of the Respondent**

I have understood about the study. I have been given chance to ask questions about the study and questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Therefore, I consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

Signature/Thumb print of respondent:----- Date-----

Signature of interviewer:----- Date-----

### **Appendix 3: Guiding Questions for Interview with Key Informants (Religious leaders)**

Name of interviewer.....

Name of interviewee.....

Sex of the interviewee-----

Designation of interviewee.....

Religion of the interviewee.....

Date of interview.....

#### **Understanding Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

What is your understanding of the concept gender equality? Probe for examples

What is your understanding of the concept women empowerment? Probe for examples

Are there benefits for promoting equality between men and women? Please explain

1. Are there benefits for empowering women? Please Explain
2. Are there disadvantages for promoting gender equality? Please explain
3. Are there disadvantages of women empowerment? Please explain

#### **Current Status of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

1. How do you compare the status of women and girls to that of men/boys in Mulanje district? *Probe on access to education, health services, employment opportunities, access to financial services, justice and access to productive assets*
2. What do you think are the reasons for the status quo?
3. What are some of the factors that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district? *Probe on socio-cultural factors including government policies.*
4. What are some of the impediments for achieving gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje? *Probe on socio-cultural factors including government policies.*

## **Religion and Gender/ Women Empowerment**

1. How has your religious beliefs influenced the way you perceive issues of gender equality and women empowerment?
2. How does your religious institution perceive gender issues? Is it consistent with your religious and cultural values? Please explain
3. What is your assessment on the consistency between religious teachings/ policies and legal and policy framework (*probe on issues of equal rights between men and women, equal access to resources e.t.c*)

## **Position of Women**

1. What is your religious institution's stand on the position of women in both religious organization and society? *Probe for scripture references*
2. What does the word of God say about the position of women? *Probe for scripture references*
3. What role do women play in your religious institution?
4. What role do men play in your religious institution?
5. Do you have women groups/organizations within your religious institution? If you have, what is their role?
6. Do you have men groups/organizations within your religious institution? If you have, what is their role?
7. What is your religious institution's stand on ordination of women? Is this in line with the word of God? Please explain (*Probe for references*)
8. Are women allowed to stand on the pulpit and preach in your religious institution? Is this in line with the word of God? Please explain (*Probe for references*)
9. To what extent do women influence decisions in your religious institution?

## **Religious Teachings/Doctrines/ Policies and Gender/Women Empowerment**

1. How far has your religious institution mainstreamed gender (*probe on gender policy, its contents and how it is reinforced?*)

2. Could you explain your religious institution's teachings on the following?
  - Elimination of Discrimination against Women
  - Right to Dignity
  - The Right to Life, Integrity and Security of the Person
  - Elimination of Harmful Practices (Probe for the religious institution's stand on incest, adultery e.t.c)
  - Marriage (provides that women and men should enjoy equal rights
    - and be regarded as equal partners in marriage) *Probe on their stand on polygamy*
  - Separation, Divorce and Annulment of Marriage
  - Access to Justice and Equal Protection before the Law
  - Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process
  - Right to Education and Training
  - Health and Reproductive Rights (*Probe on religious institution's stand on men and women access to family planning, condoms, abortion and their stand on marital rape e.t.c*)
  - Protection against gender based violence
3. How does your religious organization respond to issues of gender based violence?
4. Does your religious institution provide pre- marital counseling? What piece of advice is given to the young couple?
5. In general, what is your assessment on the impact of your religious doctrines, teachings and policies on the rights of women? *Probe for examples*

## **Recommendations**

1. As a religious institution, what recommendations would you make to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the district?
2. In what ways can your religious institution help bring issues of gender equality into the national agenda of the government?

## **Appendix 4: Guidelines for Non-religious Leaders (CSO, CBO, GVH, Politicians e.t.c**

*Name of interviewer.....*

*Name of interviewee.....*

*Sex of the interviewee-----*

*Designation of interviewee.....*

*Religion of the interviewee.....*

*Date of interview.....*

### **Understanding Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

1. What is your understanding of the concept gender equality? *Probe for examples*
2. What is your understanding of the concept women empowerment? *Probe for examples*
3. Are there benefits for promoting equality between men and women? Please explain
4. Are there benefits for empowering women? Please Explain
5. Are there disadvantages for promoting gender equality? Please explain
6. Are there disadvantages of women empowerment? Please explain

### **Current Status of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

1. How do you compare the status of women and girls to that of men/boys in Mulanje district? *Probe on access to education, health services, employment opportunities, access to financial services, justice and access to productive assets*
2. What do you think are the reasons for the status quo?
3. What are some of the factors that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district? *Probe on socio-cultural factors including government policies*

4. What are some of the impediments for achieving gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje? *Probe on socio-cultural factors including government policies*

### **Religion and Gender Equality/Women Empowerment**

1. How important is religion in your life?
2. How has your religious belief influenced the way you perceive issues of gender equality and women empowerment?
3. As a leader, what is your role in promoting gender equality and women empowerment?
4. How compatible are the concepts of gender equality and women empowerment with religious teachings/policies and doctrines?

### **Position of Women**

1. In your opinion, what should be the position of women in society? Please explain
2. What is your assessment on the consistency between positions that women hold in society with the position that they hold in religious organizations?
3. How do you compare the role that women play in religious institutions with the roles that men play?
4. What is your assessment on the extent to which women influence decisions in religious institutions?
5. What role does religion play in the lives of women?

### **Religious Teachings/Doctrines/ Policies versus Legal and Policy Frameworks on Gender and Women Empowerment**

1. To what extent do you mainstream gender in your activities? *Probe on gender policy, its contents and how it is reinforced?*
2. What is your assessment on the extent to which religious institutions mainstream gender?
3. What is your assessment on the impact of religious doctrines, teachings and policies on the rights of women? *Probe for examples*

4. What is your assessment on the consistency between religious teachings and legal and policy framework with regard to:
  - Elimination of Discrimination against Women
  - Right to Dignity
  - The Right to Life, Integrity and Security of the Person
  - Elimination of Harmful Practices (Probe for the religious organization stand on incest, adultery e.t.c
  - Marriage (provides that women and men should enjoy equal rights
    - and be regarded as equal partners in marriage) *Probe on their stand on polygamy*
  - Separation, Divorce and Annulment of Marriage
  - Access to Justice and Equal Protection before the Law
  - Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process
  - Right to Education and Training
  - Health and Reproductive Rights (*Probe on church stand on men and women access to family planning, condoms, abortion and their stand on marital rape e.t.c*
  - Protection against gender based violence
5. What role does religion play in promoting gender equality and women empowerment?
6. Do you think religious institutions are doing enough to redress the issues of gender balance at various levels? Please explain.

## **Recommendations**

1. What would you recommend to promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje?
2. In what ways can religious organizations help bring issues of gender equality into the national agenda of the government?

## **Appendix 5: Guiding Questions for FGD**

*Date.....Religious organizations represented.....*

*Group Represented .....*

*Place of Discussion.....*

### **Understanding Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

1. What is your understanding of the concept gender equality? *Probe for examples*
2. What is your understanding of the concept women empowerment? *Probe for examples*
3. Are there benefits for promoting equality between men and women? Please explain
4. Are there benefits for empowering women? Please Explain
5. Are there disadvantages for promoting gender equality? Please explain
6. Are there disadvantages of women empowerment? Please explain

### **Current Status of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

1. How do you compare the status of women and girls to that of men/boys in Mulanje district? *Probe on access to education, health services, employment opportunities, access to financial services, justice and access to productive assets*
2. What do you think are the reasons for the status quo?
3. What are some of the factors that promote gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje district? *Probe on socio-cultural factors including government policies*
4. What are some of the impediments for achieving gender equality and women empowerment in Mulanje? *Probe on socio-cultural factors including government policies*

## **Religion and Gender/ Women Empowerment**

1. How has your religious beliefs influenced the way you perceive issues of gender equality and women empowerment?
2. How does your religious institution perceive gender issues? Is it consistent with your religious and cultural values? Please explain
3. What is your assessment on the consistency between religious teachings/ policies and legal and policy framework (*probe on issues of equal rights between men and women, equal access to resources e.t.c*)

## **Position of Women**

1. What is your religious institution's stand on the position of women in both religious organization and society? *Probe for scripture references*
2. What does the word of God say about the position of women? *Probe for scripture references*
3. What role do women play in your religious institution?
4. What role do men play in your religious institution?
5. Do you have women groups/organizations within your religious institution? If you have, what is their role?
6. Do you have men groups/organizations within your religious institution? If you have, what is their role?
7. What is your religious institution's stand on ordination of women? Is this in line with the word of God? Please explain (*Probe for references*)
8. Are women allowed to stand on the pulpit and preach in your religious institution? Is this in line with the word of God? Please explain (*Probe for references*)
9. To what extent do women influence decisions in your religious institution?

## **Religious Teachings/Doctrines/ Policies and Gender/Women empowerment**

1. How far has your religious institution mainstreamed gender (*probe on gender policy, its contents and how it is reinforced?*)

2. Could you explain your religious institution's teachings on the following?

- Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- Right to Dignity
- The Right to Life, Integrity and Security of the Person
- Elimination of Harmful Practices (Probe for the religious institution's stand on incest, adultery e.t.c
- Marriage (provides that women and men should enjoy equal rights

and be regarded as equal partners in marriage) *Probe on their stand on polygamy*

- Separation, Divorce and Annulment of Marriage
- Access to Justice and Equal Protection before the Law
- Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process
- Right to Education and Training
- Health and Reproductive Rights (*Probe on religious organization's stand on men and women access to family planning, condoms, abortion and their stand on marital rape e.t.c*
- Protection against gender based violence

3. How does your religious o institution respond to issues of gender based violence?

4. Does your religious institution provide pre- marital counseling? What piece of advice is given to the young couple?

5. In general, what is your assessment on the impact of your religious doctrines, teachings and policies on the rights of women? *Probe for examples*

## **Recommendations**

1. What recommendations would you make to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the district?
2. In what ways can your religious institution help bring issues of gender equality into the national agenda of the government?

## **Appendix 6: Likert Scale Questionnaire**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for accepting to take part in this survey. The purpose of administering this questionnaire is to assess the influence of religion on gender equality and women empowerment. By participating in this study, you will help to uncover religious factors that either promote or hinder gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi. It's our hope that the results of the study will promote gender equality and women empowerment in Malawi.

The questionnaire consists of five sections namely:

Section A: Demographic information

Section B: Understanding gender equality and Women empowerment

Section C: Understanding the status and causes of gender inequality in Mulanje

Section D: Religion and gender equality/women empowerment

Section E: Recommendations

Please answer all questions as honestly, frankly and objectively as possible and according to your own personal opinion and experience. This is not an examination and as such there are no correct or wrong answers. Let me assure you that all information herewith provided will be treated with confidentiality. The information provided will be used for educational purposes only. Nevertheless, it may be presented at meetings and/published in professional journals, books or any other purpose that University of South Africa (UNISA) considers proper in the interest of education and dissemination of information. However, information will not be presented in any manner that will identify you by name.

## Instructions

- Answer the questions by marking with a  $\surd$  in the box corresponding to the alternative which is applicable to you or write down your response in the space provided
- Give one best most appropriate answer

### PART ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS.

1.0 Indicate your sex	Male	Female
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
2.0 How old are you?		
<20 years	1	
20-29	2	
30-39	3	
40-50	4	
>50	5	

3.0 Which tribe do you belong to?	
Lomwe	1
Yao	2
Mang'anja	3
Chewa	4
Sena	5
Tumbuka	6
Other (specify).....	7

4.0 What is your marital status?	
Single	1
Married	2
Divorced	3
Widowed	4
Other (Specify)-----	5

5.0 How many children do you have?	
None	1
1-3	2
4-5	3
>5	4

6.0 Which denomination do you belong to?	
Roman Catholic	1
Protestant	2
Pentecostal/ Charismatic	3
Islam	4
Other (specify)-----	5

7.0 What is your highest level of education?	
Never been to school	1
Below grade 8	2
Primary School Leaving Certificate	3
Junior Certificate	4
Malawi School Leaving Certificate	5
Tertiary education	6

**PART B: UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a ✓ in the appropriate box

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Don't know (3)	Strongly disagree (4)	Disagree (5)
8.0 Men and women have the same dignity and are of equal value because they are both created					

in the image of God					
9.0 Women and men alike should have equal opportunities and equal access to resources because they are equal					
10.0 Given an opportunity, a woman can achieve as much as a man can					
11.0 Equality between men and women should be promoted at every level because this is a human right					
12.0 Every woman should be self reliant regardless of their marital status					
13.0 Women should be allowed to participate fully in political and decision making process					

**PART C: UNDERSTANDING THE STATUS AND CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN MULANJE**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Don't know (3)	Strongly disagree (4)	Disagree (5)
14.0 Women who are highly educated lose touch with their culture					
15.0 Education is more important to a boy than to a girl					
16.0 When resources are inadequate, men should be given priority because they are heads of families					
17.0 A married woman should be allowed to have her own source of income					
18.0 Marital problems are bound to rise when a woman has more income than her husband					
19.0 Culturally, a woman is not supposed to challenge a man					

20.0 Women are more suited to do clerical roles than technical roles					
21.0 A male child is more suitable to inherit his parents property than a girl child because the boy continues the family name					

**PART D: RELIGION AND GENDER EQUALITY/WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Don't know (3)	Strongly disagree (4)	Disagree (5)
22.0 Gender equality should not be promoted because it is foreign concept that is inconsistent with religious values					
23.0 A woman should not be denied an opportunity to stand on a pulpit and preach because of her sex					
24.0 Women should perform housekeeping roles in religious institutions and leave decision making roles to men because generally men make good leaders than women					
25.0 Women should be included in religious leadership and sacral roles just like men					
26.0 Religious groups should pay special attention to gender in their preaching and practice					
27.0 It is important that each religious group should have clear policies and structures on gender and women empowerment					
28.0 A religious woman should be submissive to her husband at all cost					

29.0 Women and men should enjoy equal rights and be regarded as equal partners in marriage					
30.0 Religious institutions should have clear policies and procedures to respond to Gender Based Violence (GBV)					
31.0 Under no circumstances should religions authorize divorce for marriage is ordained by God					
32.0 It is against the word of God for any person to have more than one sexual partner					
33.0 All women including religious women should have the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of their children					
34.0 Use of contraceptives should not be considered in a religious family as it is against the word of God since it prevents possibility of life					
35.0 Use of condoms should be considered if one of the partners is HIV positive					
36.0 Abortion should be permissible in the context of woman's health being endangered					

**PART E: RECOMMENDATIONS**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Don't know	Strongly disagree (4)	Disagree (5)
37.0 Religious leaders have a very important role in challenging gender injustice					
38.0 Religious leaders have a role in sensitizing their members on their rights					

## Appendix 7: Map of Malawi



Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/Malawi.html>

