

*National Democratic  
Institute for  
International  
Affairs*

**"It is The People Who Make  
a Leader a Leader"**

*A Report on a Series of  
14 Focus Groups Conducted in Malawi*

September 1995



# NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## **"NDI ANTHU AMENE AMAPANGA ATSOGOLERI KUKHALA ATSOGOLERI"**

**"It is The People Who Make a Leader a Leader"**

A Report on a Series of  
14 Focus Groups Conducted in Malawi  
from September 18 to 27, 1995



# National Democratic Institute For International Affairs

conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions



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NDI has supported the development of democratic institutions in more than 60 countries. Programs focus on six major areas:

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## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

As part of its two-year program to strengthen Malawi's democratic institutions, NDI conducted the second in a series of three focus group projects designed to assess the attitudes of Malawians toward the political transformation underway in the country. This report documents the findings of 14 focus groups conducted throughout Malawi from September 18 to 27, 1995 with a representative sample of 119 Malawian citizens (see Appendices A-C). NDI plans to widely circulate this assessment among political and civic decisionmakers so that they will consider the attitudes and sentiments of ordinary people when deliberating political and economic change.

Malawi's first competitive elections in May 1994 marked the culmination of the southern African nation's two-year transition to multiparty democracy. NDI's program is designed to promote the development of a stable political and civic environment in which Malawi's democratic institutions may evolve and in which Malawians can actively participate. NDI's first post-election focus groups conducted in September 1994 evaluated how Malawian's views of the democratic process had changed since the May elections (see Appendix D). The focus group findings helped define the roles that citizens expect political parties and civic organization to play in their democratic society and further helped identify the factors contributing to public detachment from political involvement.

The September 1995 focus groups were conducted in villages in the districts of Dedza, Mangochi, Mwanza, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota and Nsanje, and in urban townships in Lilongwe and Blantyre. The discussions in rural villages comprised four male and four female groups, as well as two mixed gender groups. Both urban groups comprised an equal number of women and men. One focus group each was held with a group of village headmen and a group of local political party leaders.

The findings from the new focus group research reveal that Malawians continue to positively view Malawi's political transition, and believe that the advent of multiparty democracy has produced tangible rights and freedoms never before enjoyed in the country. Despite recent economic hardships, virtually all Malawians believe that a democratic system of government offers the greatest hope for improvement in the quality of life of ordinary citizens. Malawians remain eager to

participate in the political process and view voting as a civic duty that they enthusiastically look forward to performing again. The notion that recent democratic gains are permanent and irreversible seems to be increasing among the population and few believe possible a return to dictatorial rule.

The research indicated a greater variation in opinion among participants and among people in different parts of Malawi than was the case in last year's survey. However, a number of ideas were widely held and transcend regional, ethnic and political divisions. As is the case in other political transitions, Malawians expect the political and constitutional changes taking place in the country to have an immediate impact on the social and economic conditions in their community. The following are the dominant themes of the focus group survey.

***Confusion About Local Government*** Although the level of knowledge about local government varies considerably, the majority of participants know very little about the current system and the responsibilities of their district councils or councilors.

***Enthusiasm for Local Government Elections*** When informed of the upcoming local government elections, virtually all participants expressed enthusiasm as well as their intention to vote. The fact that voters would be able to cast a ballot for someone from their area, someone they knew personally, represented the most compelling motivation to vote.

***Clear Preferences for Local Government Representatives*** Focus group participants shared a remarkably consistent description of their ideal candidate for local government elections -- the candidate should be: from the area he/she wishes to represent; polite; respectful of the electorate; educated; and willing to interact closely with ordinary villagers. Most participants feel that women have the potential to make good district councilors, provided they are educated and qualified for the position.

***Disillusionment With Members of Parliament*** Many participants indicated a dissatisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament. Participants complained that their MPs seldom visit

their districts and show little interest in their problems or concerns. The research revealed a strong desire for more direct contact with national lawmakers.

***Evolving Local Leadership*** As Malawi's political structures develop, participants are increasingly turning to village headmen and chiefs to assist with their day-to-day problems and disputes, while local political party leaders become less influential. The number of women in local leadership positions, and the status of women in general, seems to be decreasing in many areas.

***Declining Quality of Life*** Participants know little about government economic policy and do not understand the causes of current economic hardships. Many participants view the last several years of drought, hunger and economic decline as evidence of a deteriorating quality of life. While few blame these circumstances on the introduction of multiparty democracy, most feel that the government is failing to adequately address their problems.

These findings suggest several recommendations:

- o In order to create a more informed electorate, the government should make a concerted effort to explain its economic programs and objectives to all Malawians, especially those living in rural areas. The government should stress the necessity for and the enormous hardships associated with major economic restructuring. Basic concerns, such as access to food, water, transportation and credit facilities, and protection from inflation and crime continue to shape the political perceptions of ordinary Malawians.
- o Since few rural Malawians know even basic details about current local government structure or responsibilities, an effort must be made to initiate a comprehensive civic education program to inform citizens about the function of local government before next year's elections.



- o Political parties should consider fielding local government candidates who reside in the area they wish to represent, since local, well-known candidates are favored by citizens in virtually all parts of the country.
- o Members of Parliament must increase the amount of time they spend in their constituencies listening to their constituents and maintaining a dialogue with them. Parliament and political parties should develop mechanisms to encourage MPs to better fulfill their responsibilities as representatives in order to dispel notions that MPs are uninterested or inaccessible.
- o Women should be encouraged to assume local leadership positions and to compete in local government elections in order to reverse the deteriorating status and political influence of Malawian women.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

This year's survey saw a greater variation in opinion and level of knowledge than were experienced last year. In some areas the participants were much more aware of political debates and issues than those in other areas. Men in general possessed a higher level of knowledge and were more willing to express their opinions than women. Women were particularly reluctant to participate in mixed gender groups held in rural areas. Urban residents were better informed about political issues than their rural counterparts, but otherwise expressed similar concerns and opinions. Local political party leaders were more aware of prominent political issues than most other participants and took part enthusiastically in the discussions, but village headmen exhibited a similar or lower level of knowledge than other male participants and answered questions only after much prodding from the facilitators. As in the past, the vast majority of participants were friendly, enthusiastic, open and helpful, and exhibited a great deal of respect toward the discussion facilitators and their fellow participants.

### *Mood and Outlook*

As was the case during last year's survey, participants spoke of the positive political changes engendered by the multiparty era, such as freedom of speech and expression, free primary education and the elimination of the poll tax and forced purchase of Malawi Congress Party (MCP) membership cards. Participants believed that democratic ideals are now firmly entrenched and that ordinary Malawians no longer have to fear their government. For most, however, economic problems were of primary concern, and the majority of participants felt that their quality of life has declined since the 1994 elections. Famine and drought, inflation and lack of safe drinking water were the most frequently mentioned problems, as well as crime, lawlessness, poor transportation and lack of access to credit and loans. Complaints over high inflation were especially intense. While last year's participants complained of price increases for basic household goods such as salt, sugar and soap, participants this year cited huge increases in the price of maize and fertilizer, the most essential commodities for poor Malawians. Notably, the negative view of the post-election period did not translate into a

of women leading their communities, a sentiment that was summed up by a participant in Nsanje who said "Women should be the helpers of men."

### *Members of Parliament*

With the exception of a few rural women, virtually all participants could identify the name and party of their MP. As was the case last year, participants expressed a strong desire for personal contact with their MP and wanted to play an active role in the political development of their country. Such political awareness and enthusiasm should be a source of pride for Malawians and contrasts sharply with many established western democracies, where few citizens know the name of their elected representatives or express a desire to influence the political process.

Despite the fact that participants knew the identity of their MPs, the widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of newly elected MPs revealed during NDI's 1994 post-election focus group survey seems to have intensified during the past year. Only a very small minority of participants believed that their MP is interested in their village or cares about their most pressing problems. As was the case last year, the root of the participants' dissatisfaction is the failure of MPs to visit their constituencies or to conduct meetings with constituents. Participants in Lilongwe, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota and Mwanza reported that their MP has never conducted meetings in their constituency since the elections, and many other participants said that their MP had visited only once or twice. A participant in Mangochi expressed his dissatisfaction with his MP, who had visited the area only once since the elections, by using a humorous proverb. He asked "Does a father who only buys a child one diaper really love the child?", suggesting that infrequent, cosmetic visits by the MP are not enough.

Participants also complained that their MPs fail to consult their constituents before returning to Parliament and therefore fail to perform adequately during parliamentary debates. Some participants claimed that their MP is *ogondera* (biased), *wamwano* (rude), that "he denies his responsibilities to his constituents," or that "he took the 50,000 kwacha he received and put it in his pocket, instead of distributing it to the people," referring to a recent scandal in which

A few participants believed that the government is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances and needs more time to follow through on its many promises. A participant in Mangochi reminded the group of the common proverb "A child cannot run in one day."

### *Local Government*

Translating the term "local government" into local languages presented a challenge. The most common translation of local government in Chichewa is *maboma aang'ono*, literally "small governments." When asked to define local government and its responsibilities, the majority of participants did not know. Those that thought they recognized the term often provided incorrect descriptions. Some thought *maboma aang'ono* meant small districts, such as Ntchisi or Dowa, or districts in which little development had occurred. Others believed local government was the District Development Committee, village headmen or chiefs.

*Khonsolo*, the most common translation of District Council, elicited greater recognition, but many participants, especially rural women, still did not recognize the term. Some participants said that their District Council collects market fees, cleans the *boma* (district capital) or maintains roads and sewers, but many participants either did not know the role of the council or said it plays no role.

With the exception of local political party leaders, village headmen and male participants in Nkhata Bay and Nsanje, the large majority of participants did not know the identity of their *khansala* (ward councillor). Questions about councilors also caused confusion. Several women in Nkhotakota thought they had two councilors, while one of the male participants asked "are you asking about the UDF (United Democratic Front) councillor or the MCP councillor?", referring to two of the country's major political parties. A participant in Mwanza said "We knew the old councillor, but there are no longer councilors now that the government has changed," and participants in Mangochi talked about their *nduna*, or chief's councillor. The few that did know their councillor were less sure of the councillor's responsibilities. Many said that

the councillor looks after schools in the area. Others said that the councillor works for or with the Member of Parliament, the District Commissioner or the District Development Committee. Only one participant in the entire survey recognized his local councillor as a member of the District Council.

Given the general lack of knowledge concerning the role and structure of local government, it is not surprising that few participants expressed satisfaction with the performance of their District Council or councillor. Many complained that the District Council "is only good at collecting fees without providing any services." Dirty markets, rude employees, and the view that resources were more heavily concentrated in the *boma* were other common complaints. Urban residents in Blantyre and Lilongwe were especially critical, complaining of high city rates and poor services.

While the overall assessment of local government performance was negative, the research also revealed that those individuals who were the most knowledgeable of the roles and responsibilities of local government were also the most positive about their District Council and councillor. A participant in Nkhata Bay said "The District Council knows our problems better than the national government. The Council is closer to the people," while a woman in Nkhosakota said "The District Council works quickly because they are close to us." The proximity of the District Council to the people, the knowledge councillors possess about the problems faced in the villages and the speed at which local government can work are seen as positive attributes and should be emphasized in any voter education efforts undertaken before local government elections.

### *Local Government Elections*

Very few participants had heard of the upcoming local government elections, with the exception of urban adults, political leaders and men in Mangochi and Nsanje. When told that they would have an opportunity to vote for local government representatives next year, the participants were extremely positive and enthusiastic. The majority of participants felt that the ability to vote for someone from their area, who they know personally, will be the greatest motivation to vote.

Participants in many groups said "Local government elections are important because we will know the person we will vote for." A participant in Lilongwe said "Our councillor will work hard to be reelected," and a woman in Mangochi said "We will be able to vote for someone who comes from our own area."

In addition to being a resident of the area he or she represents, the ideal councillor, according to the participants, is polite, respectful, educated and active. Most importantly, the participants want a councillor who will show *ulemu*, or respect, and will, in the words of a participant in Nsanje "demonstrate good manners." Many participants remembered political party leaders and Members of Parliament during the single-party era who were condescending or disdainful of mixing with ordinary people and contemptuous of village traditions of ritual respect and politeness. The participants felt that such leaders have no place in a democratic Malawi, and that a councillor now needs to understand and interact closely with those that he or she represents.

The majority of participants felt that women could be effective councilors. Participants throughout the country said that female candidates should be educated and qualified for their positions, an opinion most commonly held by male participants. Most women were enthusiastic about the prospect of being represented by a female councillor. A woman in Nkhata Bay said "With a woman councillor, we will be represented like men." Another member of the group added "Men do not take our problems seriously." Both men and women thought women would be honest, efficient councilors who would possess an intimate knowledge of their problems and "show motherly love to the village." A few participants thought that women are unfit to serve as local government representatives because they are *olongolola* (noisy), they should stay home to look after the family, or they have "biological problems," such as pregnancy, that would interfere with their work. While men represented the majority of those who held these views, some women, including young, relatively well-educated urban women, expressed similar sentiments.

The participants recognized that they will need information on local government organization, the responsibilities of councilors and voting procedures before next year's local government elections. Most participants thought that posters, campaign meetings conducted by the various political parties, radio programs and officials at polling stations on voting day were their most important sources of information on the 1994 general elections, and the same voter education media were favored for local government elections. Posters and the radio were universally popular, and mobile video shows were extremely popular among participants in Nsanje and Mangochi who were able to watch voter education videos before the 1994 national elections.

Most participants currently view voter registration as an established part of the voting process and therefore did not oppose registering again before the local government elections. A woman in Nkhotakota explained "If we do not register, we will not be able to vote. It is our duty to register." This sentiment was echoed throughout the country. Participants are not necessarily enthusiastic about registering again, but most will register if it is a prerequisite that must be met in order to vote. Participants reacted enthusiastically when told of proposed new voter identification systems, including photo identification cards. Repeat voting, vote buying and voting by ineligible individuals were seen as common problems by many participants.

### *Local Leadership*

As was the case in 1994, participants identified village headmen and chiefs as the most important leaders in their day-to-day lives. Participants turn to village headmen to settle disputes, supervise local development projects and ensure the welfare of the village. Although their basic responsibilities have not changed since the elections, many participants said that village headmen and chiefs are now free to carry out their duties without political interference. In the words of a participant in Nkhotakota, "The headman is no longer inferior to the party chairman." The advent of multipartyism has reduced the power and influence of local MCP functionaries, and political pluralism has prevented officials of other parties from assuming a dominant role in local decisionmaking. The participants reported that many of the problems that would have been shared with the local MCP chairman in the past are now taken to the village headman.

The majority of the participants felt that their village headman is politically neutral, or at least does not show bias toward followers of a particular party, despite his or her personal political preferences. Political neutrality on the part of village headmen and chiefs was identified as a very important attribute; participants felt that headmen should ensure unity among villagers of different political persuasions. Many participants said that "The village headman must look after all people, regardless of the party they support."

Very few participants reported regular contact with local political party leaders since the elections. Most said political party committees are not active in their areas, and some were unsure if political parties even had local representatives. The number of participants who identified political party officials as important local leaders was also significantly lower than last year. Ordinary people, village headmen and political leaders themselves said the decline in the importance of local political party officials stemmed largely from a lack of *mgwirizano* (unity) among political leaders. Political divisions and disunity in the village were cited as important problems by many participants and were seen as a major cause for concern. Traditional village decisionmaking processes, which rely largely on consensus, do not function properly when people realize that various leaders refuse to cooperate with one another. As a result, participants reported that they increasingly turn to politically neutral village headmen to solve disputes and provide leadership. As a participant in Lilongwe said "The chief unites us."

Participants cited the difficulty of implementing self-help development projects since the elections as an instance of how political differences hindered local cooperation and reduced the prestige of party leaders. Self-help projects, in which people contributed unpaid labor or materials to local development projects such as school or road construction, were common during the single-party era and were often supervised by local MCP officials. Many participants said that politicians called self-help projects *thangata* (the hated forced labor system of the colonial period) during the 1994 election campaign and discouraged people from participating, despite the fact that many participants viewed self help as a positive practice. Political party leaders in Mwanza said "Self help has been distorted by politicians. We called it *thangata* and divided the people." Village headmen are now perceived as the only leaders who can overcome



the political differences of their followers and bring together villagers for self-help projects. A participant in Mangochi summed up the sentiments of many other participants by saying "political divisions hinder development."

### *The Role of Women*

Many participants described the multiparty era as a time of decreasing rights and influence of women. As was the case last year, women participants continued to complain of chronic inequities, stating that men have more economic power than women, that men are the heads of households, that men find wage employment more easily than women and that "women do far more work than men." In addition to these long-standing problems, however, participants said that since the elections women possess fewer rights in their relationships with their husbands, their influence over local decisionmaking processes has declined, and "women no longer participate in politics." Most cited the decline in importance of local MCP committees, in which women played a prominent role, as the cause of this trend.

Some women said that since the elections they are free to run businesses, and many female participants viewed increased economic opportunity and independence as the best ways of increasing their overall status in society. The emphasis on economic independence echoes last year's survey findings, and women continue to call for increased access to capital and loans to start small businesses. A woman in Blantyre explained the link between financial independence and greater rights by saying "There is equality between men and women when both the husband and wife have a job."

Many male participants agreed that women have fewer rights and freedoms than men and hoped that the position of women would improve with Malawi's new political climate. A significant minority of men, however, were extremely hostile to suggestions of increased freedom for women. A participant in Mwanza said "Women should be behind men." This sentiment was echoed by others who felt that women are inherently and naturally inferior to men, and that the former MCP regime distorted this natural arrangement by according women political power and

enforcing their rights. A male participant in Mangochi said "Men and women are now equal. Under the MCP women were more powerful. Now women no longer boss families." Several participants referred to the UDF as *chipani chaamuna*, or "the party of men," in contrast to the MCP, which, in their opinion, was dominated by women. As was the case last year, many male participants viewed freedom of dress as an unnatural and unwanted change in the rights of women. A young man in Lilongwe said "Women should stop dressing provocatively," and political leaders in Mwanza spoke angrily and at length of the deficiencies of the Malawi Constitution, which "allows women to put on trousers."

For many the abolition of the practice of demanding that women dance at political functions, as was common under the former regime, symbolizes the change in the status of women brought by the multiparty era. Male participants complained of "being deprived of our wives" when women left to dance at political rallies, and resented the fact that as husbands they had no say in whether or not their wives could leave the house for several days at a time. While female participants may not have enjoyed being forced to dance for hours in the hot sun, many said they did appreciate the freedom and independence from their husbands they experienced when traveling to rallies.

Despite male opposition to increased rights for women, most participants felt that women could make good leaders at the local level. While few participants could identify women who currently fill important leadership roles in their area, most said that given the right educational background and qualifications, women could fill such roles in the future. Female participants were especially enthusiastic about being led by women, saying "women could lead other women in business activities," "women can lead development activities" and "we would be able to tell other women our problems freely, without being intimidated." A man in Dedza praised the nurturing leadership of women, saying "women are the god of the whole world," a common proverb meaning women guide and protect all people in the village. However, many participants, both men and women, felt that women should lead only women, or their leadership roles should be confined to traditional pursuits like teaching, giving homecraft courses or leading funeral societies. A minority of male participants were again extremely negative to the notion

of women leading their communities, a sentiment that was summed up by a participant in Nsanje who said "Women should be the helpers of men."

### *Members of Parliament*

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Despite the fact that participants knew the identity of their MPs, the widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of newly elected MPs revealed during NDI's 1994 post-election focus group survey seems to have intensified during the past year. Only a very small minority of participants believed that their MP is interested in their village or cares about their most pressing problems. As was the case last year, the root of the participants' dissatisfaction is the failure of MPs to visit their constituencies or to conduct meetings with constituents. Participants in Lilongwe, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota and Mwanza reported that their MP has never conducted meetings in their constituency since the elections, and many other participants said that their MP had visited only once or twice. A participant in Mangochi expressed his dissatisfaction with his MP, who had visited the area only once since the elections, by using a humorous proverb. He asked "Does a father who only buys a child one diaper really love the child?", suggesting that infrequent, cosmetic visits by the MP are not enough.

Participants also complained that their MPs fail to consult their constituents before returning to Parliament and therefore fail to perform adequately during parliamentary debates. Some participants claimed that their MP is *ogondera* (biased), *wamwano* (rude), that "he denies his responsibilities to his constituents," or that "he took the 50,000 kwacha he received and put it in his pocket, instead of distributing it to the people," referring to a recent scandal in which

UDF and Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) MPs were secretly provided funds from the Poverty Alleviation Fund with apparently no requirements for accounting for the disbursement of the money. Dissatisfaction, although intense, was not universal. Participants in Dedza and Nsanje expressed happiness with the performance of their MPs, who they said visit regularly, conduct meetings, treat constituents with respect and perform well in Parliament.

It is important to note that participants made clear distinctions among their MP, the government and the political parties. Participants never spoke of the party affiliation of their MP, nor did they feel that an MP from a different party might do a better job than their current MP. They called for a more responsive and effective individual, regardless of the party he or she would represent. Participants also looked at the performance of their MP and the performance of the government separately. For example, participants in Mangochi were strongly critical of their MP, yet were happy with the performance of the government, while participants in Nsanje expressed satisfaction with their MP and criticized the government. It seems likely that in 1999, participants will make voting decisions based on the performance of their individual MPs and the quality of competing candidates, rather than on the party affiliations of those running for Parliament.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This project comprised 14 focus groups in a total of eight locations throughout Malawi. A focus group is a semi-structured discussion on specified topics, with five to 15 participants. A professional moderator guides the discussion, which lasts approximately two hours, and carefully notes the responses for subsequent analysis.

Focus group research is internationally recognized as a reliable method of producing qualitative data. While it does not have the statistical validity of a quantitative baseline survey, it does provide an understanding of public attitudes at a particular point in time. Focus group research is used widely in Africa because of the cultural adaptability of the methodology, and the general lack of reliable sampling for quantitative surveys. This survey is the third undertaken by NDI

since it established a field office in Malawi in 1993. NDI has conducted similar projects in Mozambique, South Africa and Ethiopia in the recent past.

The questions posed in a focus group discussion are more open-ended than in a typical polling questionnaire. Rather than eliciting simple "yes" or "no" answers, they are designed to allow participants to respond in their own words and manner. As a result, focus groups do not generate quantitative results such as would be generated by a poll. Instead, focus groups allow detailed discussions of complex issues, and reveal how participants have developed the opinions they voice during the survey.

### *The Focus Group Team*

The project was managed by focus group advisor Naomi Mpemba. Ms. Mpemba is a lecturer in psychology at the Kamuzu College of Nursing in Lilongwe, and served as the advisor on both previous focus group projects conducted by NDI in Malawi. Ms. Mpemba also has extensive experience working on health-related focus group surveys sponsored by international organizations.

Ms. Mpemba worked with NDI field staff member Brent Preston to design the question outline for the discussions, and to select the sites for each group. Preston and NDI Malawi Director Traci Cook conducted numerous meetings with representatives of political parties, NGOs, Parliament and donor organizations to gather input and suggestions on the discussion outline before initiating the survey. Ms. Mpemba directed the work of the four Chancellor College students (Timothy Chikoti, Kondwani Mwangalwe, Mary Msusa, and Ethlet Phazi) who moderated the groups, and all of whom have worked on previous NDI focus group projects. In each discussion, one moderator led the discussion in the local vernacular language, while a second took detailed notes in English. The discussions were also tape recorded. Following each focus group, the moderating team prepared a detailed report in English based upon their notes and the tape recording.

### *Method of Selecting Sites and Forming Groups*

Because of the lack of telephone communication in the rural areas and the remoteness of most of the focus group locations, making advance arrangements or recruiting participants before the day of the discussion was not possible. Recruiting was carried out on the spot when the focus group team reached the site of the discussion. In keeping with Malawian custom, Ms. Mpemba would seek out the chief or village headman, greet him or her, and explain the purpose of the visit. She would request his permission and assistance in assembling groups of participants. In every instance the traditional leader was gracious and willing to assist, and the focus groups were quickly assembled. The discussions were then held in the open, usually in the shade of a tree or on the porch of a house.

In order to gauge differences among various segments of Malawian society, various demographic criteria were used to assemble the discussion groups. In rural areas, a total of eight groups -- four consisting entirely of voting age men and four of voting aged women -- were assembled. In rural Malawi, single sex groups increase the level of participation of women and promote more honest answers to questions of women's rights. Two rural, mixed-gender groups were also held. In Lilongwe city a mixed-gender group of young people was assembled, while the Blantyre urban group comprised men and women over the age of 30. Chiefs and other local authority figures, such as political party chairmen or police officers, were not included in any of these groups. In Dedza a discussion was held with a group of village headmen, and in Mwanza a group of local political party leaders, including Branch, Area and Constituency committee officials of the UDF, AFORD and MCP, participated in a discussion. The locations of the focus group discussions were the same as those used in last year's survey. In each location as many participants from last year's discussion as possible were located and included in the group. The inclusion of repeat participants helped to identify changes in perceptions and opinions of individual participants and the public in general during the previous year. A total of 25 previous participants participated in this survey.



In keeping with the regional distribution of the country's population, two of the 14 groups were held in the Northern Region, (14 percent of the national population), five groups were held in the Central Region (39 percent of national population), and seven were held in the Southern Region (46 percent of national population).

Similarly, two of the 14 groups were held in urban areas: one group in Mchesi Township in Lilongwe, and one in Ndirande Township in Blantyre. The other 12 groups were held in rural areas, which comprise approximately 85 percent of the population. Some of the rural sites were very remote, such as the village of Usisya on the shore of Lake Malawi in the Northern Region, where the only source of regular transport is a weekly passenger boat. Others sites, such as the village of Neno in the Southern Region, were near local trading centers that frequently receive visitors and news from other parts of the country.

The focus groups in the Northern Region were conducted in the Chitumbuka language while those in the Central and Southern Regions were conducted in Chichewa.