



# NO VOICE, NO POWER:

MALAWIANS SHARE THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT  
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

Findings from Focus Group Discussions with Citizens in Malawi  
November 2011

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National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

and

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

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## **NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

The National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights.

Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, visit [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

## **CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) is the social justice and advocacy arm of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (Catholic Church) established in 1992 to awaken Malawians, to further understanding of social justice, leading to a greater awareness of human rights and consequent duties. It also is forming a critical conscience which empowers people to challenge and act to overcome unjust situations. The mandate of the Justice and Peace Commission is to contribute to the common effort of the Episcopal Conference and the whole Catholic Church in Malawi in the creation of a just and peaceful Malawian society that promotes integral development and lasting peace.

CCJP has eight diocesan offices in Chikwawa, Blantyre, Zomba, Mangochi, Dedza, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Karonga. These eight offices in total cover all 28 of Malawi's administrative districts. Below the diocesan offices, CCJP has 159 parish based structures across the nation in which justice and peace teams work in various projects. These lower structures are entry points into the wider communities where local chiefs, government extension workers, leaders of different faith groups make up justice and peace local committees. The Justice and Peace Commission reaches out to many people on the ground through its grassroots network that is one of the largest in Malawi. CCJP's cooperation with grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) on governance and civic education interventions adds value in reaching out to many people that the existing CCJP structures may miss.

## PREFACE

Over the past few years, Malawi has faced an increasingly tumultuous political landscape and a deteriorating economic environment. This study, based on 34 focus group discussions conducted from November 15 to 25, 2011, with 427 participants across 16 districts in Malawi, was designed to better understand how average citizens are responding to these difficult times and how the current atmosphere has impacted their relationship to government and more specifically, their local government. In the study, Malawians describe the hardships they face as well as their hopes and suggestions for creating a more responsive and effective government. Their answers demonstrate their desire and willingness to help create a better Malawi and a better government that can serve as a more authentic voice for its people.

**Focus Group Results and Usage.** Focus groups are semi-structured group discussions directed by a moderator and follow a pre-set guideline. Unless otherwise noted, the conclusions presented here represent views commonly and repeatedly cited during the group discussions. Minority views exist and are communicated in this report only when they are significant or can highlight an illustrative alternate opinion. The interaction between participants in a focus group provides insight into how citizens think and feel and is a helpful means of understanding why those attitudes exist. Information gathered in this way reflects citizen values and needs and is critical in helping decision-makers test their assumptions and incorporate the will of the people into policy-making.

**A Snapshot of Public Opinion.** Any public opinion research, including focus group discussions, is only a snapshot of opinion at the moment the research is undertaken. Public opinion is dynamic and evolves as people experience and react to major events, particularly in conflict-affected environments. Therefore, the conclusions of this report only represent opinions when the research was undertaken. After the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, Malawi experienced a dramatic event with the sudden death of President Bingu Mutharika and the inauguration of the country's first female president, Joyce Banda. As a result, some of the attitudes and opinions reflected in this study may have changed, although many highlight long-term issues that any public officials or government would need to address.

**A Qualitative Research Tool.** Focus groups are a qualitative, not a quantitative, research instrument. Although focus groups are a method of understanding the meanings behind commonly-held attitudes, the total number of participants in a focus group study is always relatively small. Attempts are made to ensure the groups represent a broad cross-section of society, but the participants in the study are not statistically representative of the larger population. Therefore, this report reflects the opinions of those citizens of Malawi who participated in this study. The focus group locations and participant demographic chart, as well as the methodology notes appearing at the end of this study, in Appendix A and B respectively, should be consulted to understand the subsets of participants interviewed for this study.

**Participant Perceptions vs. Political Realities.** The perceptions of participants in the focus group discussions do not necessarily reflect reality. People sometimes get facts wrong and often form their opinions based on inaccurate or semi-accurate readings of the world around them. Even if they do not represent reality, however, there is value in examining people's perceptions. Citizens make decisions based on what they believe. Without knowledge of these perceptions, policy-makers and other political actors will not be able to address them. Therefore, the goal of this research is to

report the perceptions and opinions of participants, regardless of their factual accuracy, to political and civil society leaders as well as the international community so they may better understand and respond to the concerns of the general populace.

While the death of President Mutharika has changed the political dynamics in the country since the fieldwork was undertaken in this study, the significant economic and institutional challenges participants describe remain. Even after a most difficult 2011 that included civil disturbances, the Malawians in this study indicate that if political change were possible they would be optimistic about their future. Now that the political change has occurred, it is up to the new government to address the fundamental and systematic issues that participants say are preventing them from participating fully in their own governance.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

NDI is grateful to the Malawians who shared their time and perspectives with NDI. This study is a collaborative effort between the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Chris Chisoni, CCJP national secretary, played a lead role in the design of the study and supervised the field research. Malawians from various ethnic backgrounds were trained to lead the individual group discussions.

The Institute expresses its appreciation to: Traci D. Cook, senior advisor for Southern and East Africa, who supported development of training, methodology and analyzed research data; and Antoinette Pearson, former country director for Malawi, who provided in-field insight regarding the current political context. In addition, the following NDI colleagues in Washington provided guidance and support to the research process and this report: Dr. Keith Jennings, regional director of Southern and East Africa and senior associate; Deborah Ullmer, deputy director for Southern and East Africa; Dale Archer, program manager for the Horn of Africa and Malawi; Robert Hurtekant, program assistant for Southern Africa.

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# MAP OF MALAWI



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library  
Map Collection, University of Texas Libraries

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB):** created by the Corrupt Practices Act No.18 of 1995, the ACB is intended to be an autonomous body vested with the power to investigate corruption, abuse of office and unexplained wealth of government officials.

**Area development committee (ADC):** a representative body of all village development committees (see below) working within a single traditional authority, whose main functions are to assist in the identification, prioritization and preparation of community projects and submit the proposal to local government bodies.

**Constituency development fund (CDF):** a funding mechanism for grassroots development initiatives created by parliament in 2006 whose use is managed by individual members of parliament. The stated intent of CDFs is to respond to “immediate, short-term community development needs” to complement national and district level development.

**District education managers (DEMs):** the chief civil servants within the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology responsible for primary and secondary education in each of Malawi’s 28 districts.

**District health officers (DHOs):** the chief civil servant responsible for overseeing government-provided health services and facilities at the district level.

**Duty bearer:** a term used in Malawi as a synonym for a government official, emphasizing their duty to serve citizens.

**Local development fund (LDF):** a fiscal transfer from Malawi’s Ministry of Finance to local government bodies, intended to improve community livelihoods and local service delivery within the context of Malawi’s decentralization efforts.

**Traditional authority:** a rural area, comprising several villages, in which a leader of an ethnic group exercises influence over law enforcement, dispute resolution and local development.

**Village development committee (VDC):** a representative body, composed of community members, whose main functions is the identification, prioritization and preparation of community development projects which are submitted to Area Development Committees (see above).

## THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Participants in this study say that what Malawians want most is to have a strong relationship with government that allows them to have a voice in important matters, especially those that impact the quality of their lives. Their insight into how the current situation is falling short of that ideal and their suggestions for reversing that are reflected in the sampling of quotations below.

*When we present our complaints they do not listen to us, and the government does not make any effort to assist us.*

*I have never heard that people are giving opinions on government policies...We are not given a chance to give opinions on government policies, we just see projects in our areas springing out...Even if we give our opinions, no one listens.*

*The way things are now, it is very painful because the views we have are kept to ourselves.*

*Most of the times, the work done by local government is not good because they don't include us villagers.*

*We do not actually know [about local development projects], because like we said, not any government department has ever come to explain any development project that is planned, or even showed us the money for that project.*

*We are now like orphans because we were used to going and surrendering our problems to the councilor, but now we have nowhere to go and the MP is nowhere to be seen.*

*Generally, it is fear [that prevents citizen input into local government]. We fear that if we voice out something, they will arrest us.*

*The people we elect or senior government officials should visit us and conduct meetings so that we can listen to the government policies and then they listen to our opinions.*

*If we had a councilor the way we used to, he could have been taking our concerns to the Assembly...The councilor is the bridge between people and the government...This is why the councilor becomes important to us.*

*[To increase citizen input into local government] ask non-governmental organizations to concentrate in rural areas like ours so that they look into our problems...We ask organizations [to] listen to our problems and take them to government.*

*Everyone has rights. One must have the right to speak, right to wealth or any rights. If they oppress these freedoms, one cannot air his views freely.*

*It is necessary [to know about local development plans] because the community can prioritize development projects which they need most...The community that benefits from development must have a say on the development of the area.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conclusions of this public opinion research study are drawn from 34 focus group discussions conducted from November 15-25, 2011, across 16 districts in Malawi. A total of 427 Malawi citizens participated in the research study. Each of the findings below is explored in more detail in the *Principal Findings* section of this report, where there also are quotations from participants that further illuminate their opinions on the key issues highlighted here.

### I. Local Government

- **The primary function of local government<sup>1</sup> is development, according to participants, and by that standard, most say it has failed. Participants judge the performance of the government's senior duty bearers<sup>2</sup> as equally poor, accusing them of being inaccessible and failing to correct major problems in services and infrastructure.** Participants have multiple complaints about basic services and infrastructure in their areas. Dissatisfaction with health and education are at the top of the list. Participants decry the poor treatment they receive in health facilities and the severe shortage of critical medicines, which they believe is caused by health staff hoarding medicines or selling them corruptly. They are equally troubled by the poor quality of education they say their children are receiving, due to the lack of adequate facilities and materials and the severe shortage of qualified and motivated teachers, particularly in rural areas. Lack of access to clean water, poor roads, and inadequate police protection are other areas where participants say the local government is failing in its duties. Aside from services and infrastructure, participants assign the local government blame for two other areas. The first is what they term the mismanagement and corruption of the fertilizer subsidy program, with coupons failing to reach the intended recipients and increased cost due to bribes. The second is the local government's failure to involve citizens in their own development. Participants say the local government cannot be effective unless it consults the citizens of the area.

Senior duty bearers, such as district health officers (DHOs) and district education managers (DEMs), receive much of the blame for poor local government performance because many participants consider the public servants they encounter the direct responsibility of these duty bearers. Thus, health workers who treat them poorly or teachers who are often absent are viewed as duty bearer failures. Participants also say the shortage in medicines and qualified teachers is *de facto* proof the duty bearers are not doing their jobs. Another major criticism of senior duty bearers is that they are not accessible to the average citizen. Participants say the duty bearers make no effort to interact with citizens and accuse them of mostly remaining in their office with no real understanding of what is happening in the area. The key to increasing satisfaction with the duty bearers' work, they indicate, is reversing this. Participants want a clear channel of communication between citizens and duty bearers, and they believe it is absolutely critical for the duty bearers to visit citizens where they live on a regular basis.

- **Participants are frustrated with the lack of citizen input into local government decisions and attribute it to the lack of a clear channel to government, officials' failure to consult their constituents, and a fear of speaking truthfully.** They say they have virtually no input into local government decisions and find this hurtful because they feel powerless to improve the

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<sup>1</sup> Some participants do not distinguish between local government and national government.

<sup>2</sup> In Malawian usage, duty bearers are synonymous with government officials emphasizing their duty to serve.

quality of their lives. Participants contend there is no reliable and method through which citizens can share their views with government because they lack dedicated leaders, due in part some say to the loss of councilors. Most often, though, participants attribute their lack of input into local government decisions to their current government officials' unwillingness to visit and consult with ordinary citizens. This is a charge leveled especially at members of parliament (MPs), who many describe as having disappeared after the election. Second to that, many say they hold back from sharing their views with government officials for fear they will be branded a trouble-maker or arrested. Increasing interaction between government officials, bringing back ward councilors, and activating non-governmental and community-based organizations to collect citizen views are three of the most common suggestions participants have for promoting the active participation of citizens in their own governance.

- **Participants have little knowledge about planned development projects in their areas but express a clear desire to obtain this knowledge so that they can participate in their own development, which they believe will be greatly improved by their input.** Participants say they often find out about a local development initiative only when it is underway and are almost never told the amount of funding available for development in their areas. They strongly desire this knowledge because they feel it would improve their chances of being involved in the planning and implementation of development projects in their area. With knowledge about development plans and funding, participants say they would make contributions, either through labor or money, to those projects; would use available money more efficiently; would address any local obstacles to the work; would ensure funds are spent on the most critical needs; and would demand accountability for how money is spent. Participants have some recognition of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and the Local Development Fund (LDF), but they have little understanding of how they work because, some say, their MPs have failed to educate them on the funds. The Village Development Committees (VDCs) and the Area Development Committees (ADCs) are well-known, but participants' views of these committees' performance is unclear, and thus merits further study.
- **Most participants say they cannot describe the role of their member of parliament because they have no relationship with him or her. As a result, they have little faith that members of parliament can help address their needs and find them a poor substitute for ward councilors, who they feel were more accessible and effective.** Most participants say their MP has never visited their area, and many are cynical that he or she will only show again during elections. They question how an MP can be said to represent them when there is no consultation. Participants contend that MPs have assumed little or none of the work of the previous ward councilors. Their recollection of councilors is that they were committed to consulting citizens about their problems, taking citizen views to appropriate authorities, and facilitating development with a hands-on approach. MPs, they say, do none of these. Participants view councilors' residence in their area as a key to their effectiveness, in contrast to MPs many of whom, they say, do not live in their constituencies.
- **Traditional leaders receive mixed marks from participants, some of whom praise them for working hard on development and some of whom label them as greedy and influenced by government.** Those who praise chiefs and headmen talk about their work in trying to bring development to their area and their skill at mobilizing citizens for self-help projects. Chiefs also work under difficult conditions, these participants note, because they are

provided with few resources with which to conduct their work. Others, though, hold strongly negative views of traditional leaders, calling them lazy, selfish, corrupt, and greedy. Chiefs are also accused by this group of being under the thumb of government, which results in their reluctance to represent citizens' true views. Regional differences are apparent in the responses on traditional leaders. Northern participants are mostly positive about the role of traditional leaders, Central region participants hold more negative views, and there are mixed views in the Southern region.

- **With no ward councilors, participants feel they have lost their main connection to government.** Participants say they saw councilors as their primary connection to government and felt confident in sharing their views with them. Now that councilors are not part of the governing structure, participants indicate they are isolated from government and describe the loss of councilors as the loss of a bridge to government. There is also a strong belief among participants that development has slowed in the absence of ward councilors. Many describe councilors as having played a leading role in local development projects, and so when projects are significantly delayed or fail to materialize, the loss of councilors is seen as a primary cause.

## II. Service Delivery

- **Fair-to-poor is how participants rate service delivery in four key areas – education, health, agriculture, and security.** Most participants say the quality of education in Malawi has declined significantly due to a lack of resources and oversight. They attribute this to a number of factors. School facilities are below par, with inadequate classrooms and teacher housing; there are insufficient learning materials; there is a shortage of qualified teachers, resulting in pupil-to-teacher ratios are as high as 150 to 1; and some teachers are neglecting their duties by teaching only 2-3 hours a day. The top complaint about health from participants is the shortage of medicines in health facilities, which they believe is due to corrupt behavior on the part of health workers. Other reasons participants rate health low are the lack of health facilities in rural areas; the lack of available transport to hospitals in emergencies; the shortage of qualified health professionals in existing facilities; and poor attitudes and treatment of patients by health staff. Agriculture services are viewed slightly more positively, but still only get a fair-to-poor grade. Problems with the fertilizer subsidy program are the main cause. Participants talk about unfair distribution of coupons, the necessity of bribing to purchase fertilizer even with a coupon, and/or the inability to buy subsidized fertilizer because it had been corruptly sold. Beyond the fertilizer program, participants are frustrated by high input prices and few markets for their goods, and some say extension workers no longer visit them in rural areas. Security for participants is associated with their local police force, and in this area, they express significant dissatisfaction. Corruption is the main complaint of participants, who say police officers either demand or accept bribes for their services. There are also too few policemen in some areas, according to participants, and they sometimes demand resources like fuel from citizens.

## III. Governance and Voting

- **Participants endorse democracy as a good system of government for Malawi, though some say it is not practiced well.** Although they point out many deficiencies in the government's performance, most participants remained committed to democracy as the best option for the country. They describe democracy as empowering citizens to participate in their

own governance and talk about the importance of its protections for freedom of speech and association, something which they value greatly given their memories of life in a dictatorship. Some also appreciate that democracy allows them to freely choose their leaders based on who they judge can serve them best. Those who question whether democracy is the right choice for the country are mainly concerned that it is not implemented properly in Malawi because of undemocratic actions by government officials or officials' failure to fulfill their duties to citizens.

- **Corruption is pervasive in Malawi, according to participants, and few have confidence in any institution, including the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and the police, to address it in a neutral or honest way.** Participants talk about corruption as impacting all facets of life and existing at all levels, starting from the village up to Capital Hill.<sup>3</sup> Some describe it as so ingrained in society that they cannot conceive of solutions. Many participants are aware they can report corrupt acts to the ACB, but they do not accept the Bureau as a neutral player and view it as corrupt itself. They feel similarly about the police, saying any person that reported for a corrupt act would simply avoid arrest by paying a bribe. As a result, most participants see reporting corrupt acts as a futile exercise, and some fear that reporting such acts would make them the targets for arrest instead of the original culprit.
- **Bad governance, including dictatorial tendencies, led to the July 2011 demonstrations, say participants, although the immediate trigger was the fuel and financial crises. The demonstrations are deemed a positive event by most, but a significant minority indicates they were not the right tactic.** Participants directly link the demonstrations to ineffective and unresponsive government and speak of them as the citizens' response to bad government policies and management. Some feel the government's hardline approach and attitude also increased the chances that citizens would protest the government's actions openly. With bad governance as the backdrop, citizens' anger over fuel and foreign exchange shortages as well as the rising cost of basic goods reached a boiling point and triggered the demonstrations, according to participants. Most believe they were worthwhile because the demonstrations empowered citizens to have their voices heard and make the government aware of their grievances. A significant minority of participants, though, feel differently. They say there was no value in the demonstrations and that they only led to loss of life and property.
- **Most participants say they are committed to voting in 2014 because it provides them the opportunity to bring change, though some express disillusionment with value of voting.** Throughout the study, participants express their unhappiness with many parts of the government, and so, many relish the opportunity to make their views known through the 2014 vote. They state clearly that they intend to change those elected officials who have not met their expectations, particularly as it relates to development. Although a minority of participants, a significant number are discouraged by the failure of the electoral process to bring any change to their lives and indicate they will not vote in the next election.

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<sup>3</sup> Capital Hill is a metonym for the Malawian national government, stemming from the location of many government buildings in Lilongwe.

#### IV. Current Challenges and the Future

- **Participants identify Malawi’s biggest challenges as high prices and critical shortages of fuel, foreign exchange, and medicines and say they feel powerless to voice their concerns.** Malawi’s challenges are mostly economic, according to participants. The devaluation of the kwacha<sup>4</sup> has lessened their buying power and made even the most basic goods expensive for the average citizen. The fuel shortage is the challenge mentioned most often, in particular because the shortage has raised the cost of transportation not only in personal cars but also on mini-bus and other forms of transportation in rural areas. Participants also rate the shortage of medicines in health facilities as a top challenge for the country. Malawi’s current problems weigh heavily on participants and are adversely affecting their quality of life, but although they express a strong desire to do so, most say they have no way to communicate their concerns about these issues.
- **Their main advice to the president,<sup>5</sup> participants indicate, would be for him to consult more with the Malawian people, to better accept the counsel of others, and to treat all Malawians equally. Some also say that he should consider resignation so the country can move forward.** Participants feel the president is ignoring their problems and so many urge him to “develop a listening spirit”<sup>6</sup> so that he can understand and respond to their challenges better. They also say he would benefit from being more open to advice from others, including constructive criticism, and would be a better leader if he treated all Malawians – rich or poor, powerful or not, and from any region – equally. Some participants, particularly those from the Northern and Central regions, say if they met they president they would recommend he resign because it would allow for someone else to approach the country’s problems differently and perhaps more successfully.
- **Without significant change, including a change in leadership, Malawi faces a dire future, the vast majority of participants say.** Many believe that Malawi will be worse off in 2015 than it is today, and those in the Northern region are especially pessimistic. They talk of chaos, conflict, and even war. Most participants, though, including those in the North note that their views are contingent upon whether Malawi can undergo significant change in the near future. The change they believe is necessary to save Malawi from a Zimbabwe-like fate is a change in government, and more specifically a change in the presidency.

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<sup>4</sup> Kwacha is the national currency of Malawi, International Standards Organization designation 4217 MWK. In May 2012, the Reserve Bank of Malawi devalued the kwacha and unpegged it from the United States dollar.

<sup>5</sup> The fieldwork for this study was undertaken prior to President Bingu Mutharika’s death. All references to “president” in this study refer to him.

<sup>6</sup> Phrase is from a quotation in the Blantyre City-Lunzu group in Blantyre District.



## PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The findings outlined below are based on 34 focus group discussions conducted from November 15-25, 2011. The discussions were conducted in both rural and urban locations across 16 districts in Malawi, and a total of 427 Malawian citizens participated in the study. Group discussions were conducted with men and women of various ethnicities, age groups, and education levels. Consult the location and participant demographic chart in Appendix A for further information on group composition.

### I. Local Government

- 1. Development is the primary function of local government, say participants who define that as infrastructure, basic services, security, and agriculture promotion. The performance of local government leaves much to be desired, according to participants who have multiple complaints about its management of development work.**

Participants mostly identify the function of local government as development. Some participants do not clearly differentiate between local government and national government and so to them, the primary function of government, at whatever level, is development. Participants provide a long list of services and infrastructure that they say constitutes development and that frames their expectations for what the local government (or government in general) should be providing. These include building and maintaining local roads; ensuring quality education with well-maintained school blocks, qualified teachers in adequate numbers, and adequate learning materials; providing basic health services with adequate provision of critical medications; and offering a clean water supply relatively nearby. Two additional areas participants highlight as key functions of local government are maintaining a reasonable level of security, through deployment of adequate police units and commitment to law and order, and promoting agriculture, which is the lifeblood for many Malawians. Local government duties in agriculture, according to participants, are to combat hunger through the teaching of new farming methods and to provide critical farming input, such as maize seeds and fertilizer at affordable prices.

*The main functions of government in this area include providing development to its citizens, like building school blocks, drilling boreholes, and others...The government also combats hunger by sensitizing people to follow new methods of farming. (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)*

*The local government deals with development work. They deal with roads, boreholes, and school blocks. For example, the ones that we constructed on our own, the local government helps us with iron sheets or money for maintenance. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

*Overseeing development activities and also determining what people want in the area [is the primary function of local government]...The other function is to provide security to people. For example, in this area, they built a police unit which is helping very much to bring peace among people. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*The functions of the local government in this area include making sure that boreholes are available nearby, that is, not far away from one borehole to the next; that schools are found with all necessary learning materials, so that children do not learn under trees; maintaining roads; and making sure that hospitals are available. (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)*

*The government in this area is helping in terms of agriculture. It has brought the subsidy [fertilizer] program where people are receiving coupons that will benefit them. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

Participants are not without appreciation for the work of their local government. Some are complimentary of their local government's efforts. They applaud recently completed development projects in their areas and/or ongoing government programs, such as agriculture input support and the deployment of health surveillance assistants and agriculture farm input subsidy support, for improving their lives. Several are especially thankful for the provision of free primary school education. Most positive comments about local government performance are from participants from the Southern region, though some are from the Central region as well. Other participants have more mixed feelings about their local government's performance, saying "There are some things that they are performing very well, but there are others they are not doing well."<sup>7</sup> This group acknowledges some of the work undertaken by local government but is unsatisfied because either the lack of consultation with citizens or the work fails to benefit most citizens due to corruption.

*In this area, government does a lot. Some of the development projects that we see include the boreholes and hospitals that are nearby. This area was behind in terms of development. Now we see that there is improvement. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*There are some good things [the local government is doing], like the fertilizer subsidy. Because of this, we are very thankful...We are thankful for the boreholes they have constructed. Government is doing a good job especially by making sure that medicines are found in hospitals...In terms of health, it is also doing well. It is sending us health assistants who are all over the area. (Thekerani, Thyolo District)*

*I thank government for introducing free primary education. We failed to continue school because of school fees, but now it's free. (Dzalanyama, Lilongwe District)*

*We are satisfied with some development works; in the same vein, we are not satisfied with others. Some of us do not know the member of parliament for this area. We do not know him. If he was visiting the constituency, we could at least have a chance of telling him our concerns. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

*All in all, we appreciate what they do in this area like constructing the road and also bringing electricity to this area...[But] sometimes after government has approved the development projects, only a few people with power benefit from the projects and facilities. This is due to greed which leaves the poor people and the community at large suffering. (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)*

Most participants, however, have negative comments about the work of local government and view it as having failed to deliver on its most important task, development. They list multiple complaints about its performance. Primary among the complaints are deficiencies in health and education. In health, participants share their disgruntlement with the shortage of critical medicines in health facilities – which they attribute to corruption on the part of health staff – lack of available transport to health facilities, and bad patient care due to overworked and/or uncaring health workers. Complaints about education are centered on the inadequate school blocks, teacher housing, and learning materials and on the shortage of qualified and motivated teachers. Problems with access to

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<sup>7</sup> Quotation is from a group in Wovwe, Karonga District.

clean water, poor roads, and inadequate police protection are other basic services that participants fault the local government for not resolving to their satisfaction. Apart from basic services and infrastructure, there are two other complaints that feature prominently in participants' remarks about local government. The first is the management of the fertilizer subsidy coupon program. Participants blame local government for their perception that the coupons did not reach most of the intended recipients and that even those who held coupons had to pay bribes, sometimes to local police officers, to receive their fertilizer. The second is the lack of involvement of citizens in their own development. Participants say the work of local government cannot be effective unless they are consulted about their needs and opinions. A few Northern region participants argue that the lack of councilors has adversely impacted the work of local government, and a few other participants believe that their areas are not being developed because their MP is from an opposition party.

*I think they [local government] are not doing their duties well because they are supposed to bring development. (Nkhata Bay Town, Nkhata Bay District)*

*There is low supply of medicine in hospitals...The hospitals do not have medicine, and they only give us Panado<sup>8</sup> as for any condition. We request the government to help us because the medical staff is corrupt; they are selling medicines. (Mlombe, Phalombe District)*

*Government must rectify these problems. We want to see things work normally. Government must listen to our complaints. Schools should have enough learning materials. [There is a] shortage of medical drugs in hospitals and the poor attitude of nurses that people always complain about should be sorted out. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*In the past the government used to take qualified teachers from the TTC<sup>9</sup> to teach. But these days the government is taking any person who has certificate. These teachers have no idea on what it takes to make a lesson plan. I think in this way they are killing the future of the children in this area. (Nchenachena, Rumphi District)*

*I feel that the local government is failing to keep up good sanitation. For example, there is no water in Chilinde, women queue for water, and sometimes people go without water for days. (Lilongwe City-Kwale, Lilongwe District)*

*There is a road from here to the lakeshore. It is a very important road, but it is not repaired. The government has been talking about repairing it for a very long time, but nothing has happened until now. (Ntakataka, Salima District)*

*I will talk about security in this area. This area is very big, but it has only one policeman who works with community policing members. This makes this area to be insecure...There is also corruption where one cannot be given bail without bribing the police. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*On the farm input subsidy program, the government is not assisting us. This year, unlike previous years, those who have received fertilizer coupons cannot access the subsidized fertilizer. Police officers are controlling the sales of subsidized commodity at the sales unit. Coupons are sold at K1,000, and if this is not enough one has to cough up another K1,000 in order to reach the points of sale. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

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<sup>8</sup> Acetaminophen.

<sup>9</sup>“TTC” is a reference to the Teacher Training College.

*Most of the times, the work done by local government is not good because they don't include us villagers. (Mphemerbe, Mzimba District)*

*When we present our complaints they do not listen to us, and the government does not make any effort to assist us. (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)*

*I can say the role of local government is almost negligible, as there are no councilors who play a big part in development in rural areas... We thereby need councilors as they can immediately act to rectify local problems as they are close and hear from the people about their concerns. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*In this area, development is backward. Our MP is in the opposition, and he is being sidelined when it comes to development. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

**2. Most participants express dissatisfaction with the work of the senior duty bearers that are charged with delivering basic services to the population. Increased interaction between citizens and duty bearers<sup>10</sup> is the best way to remedy that, they say.**

Participant evaluations of the work of the government's senior duty bearers – for example, the district health officer (DHO) or the district education manager (DEM) – are mostly negative. In part, the judgments are based on the performance of public servants that the participants consider the direct responsibility of the senior duty bearers, especially in the education, agriculture, and health fields. Participants blame the senior duty bearers for health workers who treat them poorly or who they believe corruptly sell medicines, for teachers who are often absent or provide poor quality instruction, and for agriculture extension workers who no longer visit the villages. These participants also say the severe shortage of teachers and medicines in health facilities is *de facto* proof that the senior duty bearers are not performing well. The other major criticism of duty bearers is that they are walled off from citizens. Participants say that for the most part duty bearers make no effort to meet with or interact with citizens and rarely attempt to visit rural areas to learn about citizens' problems and concerns. "They just stay in offices instead of moving around and seeing for themselves how things are,"<sup>11</sup> is a common sentiment. Laziness and corruption are two additional charges participants make about duty bearers, although less often. A few participants are happy with the performance of duty bearers in their areas, saying they work hard and consult with them on their problems.

*These people [senior duty bearers] are not helping us. In the villages children are not learning because we have few teachers. The DEM knows about this problem, but he is not responding... We do not meet the DHO, but we really wish to meet him. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

*The other thing we are at pains with is that the District Health Officer or those responsible for health in this area are not interested to visit us as they do in other areas. We expect them to visit us and educate us on different health issues... This is an indication that they do not care about us. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

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<sup>10</sup> In the Malawi context, duty bearers are synonymous with government officials.

<sup>11</sup> Quotation is from a group in the Blantyre City-Lunzu in Blantyre District.

*On the part of education, the officer [senior duty bearer] should try to visit rural areas so that he sees for himself the problems that people are facing...In addition, if he could make sudden visits in distant schools because teachers tend to knock off before working hours. If the officers do not go around, they cannot know how schools are running. (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)*

*I think we can appraise these duty bearers based on the quality of their respective services. For example, poor health services reflect lack of competency of the District Health Officer...I think health officers and agricultural officers do not have impacts in rural areas as they do not go there. For example, rural health centers do not have medicine to help people in these areas. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*Most people working at the Agriculture Extension Planning Area are absent from their duty stations. Similar with health surveillance [assistants]; they do not visit our homes anymore... If you try to criticize them [duty bearers] they tell you that they are employed by the government; therefore, he is answerable to it, not to villagers. (Ntakataka, Salima District)*

*We would be happy to know the people who hold these positions [senior duty bearers]. Most of the time, our hospitals don't have drugs, and we cannot meet the DHO to tell him our problems. Even if we met him, he would not assist us. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*Here our leaders [senior duty bearers] just oppress us. When they go out there to represent us, they receive materials for the development of people in the villages, but they end up using them for themselves instead of giving to the target groups. For instance, when we had an earthquake, people and organizations gave us relief items like blankets but what the leaders gave us were only water guards...Is that what helping people means? (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*We can say they [duty bearers] are doing their work well because when we have a problem and consult them, they come and help. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

The key to increasing citizen satisfaction with duty bearers is to have greater interaction between them, according to participants. They offer two primary two suggestions to accomplish this. First, participants advocate the establishment of a clear and accessible channel of communication between citizens and senior duty bearers. Many note that they either are blocked from access to senior officers or do not feel comfortable to approach them in the current structure. They also say that efforts must be made to reduce bureaucratic processes they feel are preventing them from presenting their views to senior duty bearers. Second, participants feel that it is absolutely critical for senior duty bearers to get out of their offices and visit citizens where they live, particularly in rural areas. They urge duty bearers to hold regular meetings where citizens can be updated on the status of basic services and where citizens can share their needs and concerns. Other less-mentioned solutions participants recommend are creating a stronger link between duty bearers and the VDCs and ADCs, forming robust community committees, bringing back councilors to serve as a link between citizens and duty bearers, and undertaking civic education campaigns that educate the populace on the responsibilities of duty bearers and how best to communicate with them.

*We do not even know how they [senior duty bearers] look like we just hear about them. We lack proper channels. We are prevented from reaching the big men even if we would like. Usually, the senior people prevent us; probably they fear that we may disclose the bad things they do. However, given the chance, we can always go. (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)*

*People are discouraged by the long bureaucratic procedure it takes to present an issue to the DHO...The channel of communication with these duty bearers is too long, as such it takes long for them to respond to issues raised. Further, these duty bearers are not accessible to persons at local level. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*Honestly, we don't meet them [senior duty bearers]; just imagine a person like me meeting the District Health Officer. I cannot be allowed. Who am I to meet such a senior person? There is no way I can meet such personalities. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*[A communication] channel [to duty bearers] is the answer... the channel should be obvious enough so that every resident knows about it...More or less, we are in the dark because we do not know where to channel different kinds of concerns...This is the crux of the matter; all we need is awareness. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

*He [a senior duty bearer] shouldn't just read reports; instead he should come to witness the problems we are facing. (Mwanza Town, Mwanza District)*

*For the DEM, we would like him to visit the rural areas and all other areas to see for himself what is happening. The same should apply to the DHO...I suggest that we should have meetings with them once or twice a month. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

*Perhaps the ADC/VDC could take a leading role in reaching out to these people [senior duty bearers] explaining to them our problems. (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)*

*The only way [to increase citizen interaction with duty bearers] is to elect a separate committee to communicate the people's ideas because they may not know on their own the problems a particular village is facing. (Ntunthama, Kasungu District)*

*I concur with colleagues that we need a ward councilor so that s/he could be our bridge to local government for our development needs. (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*I think many leaders are taking advantage of our ignorance of not knowing what is to be done in our area. Therefore, there is need for us to be informed on the duties of these leaders so that we know if they are helping us or not. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

**3. There is significant frustration among participants about the lack of citizen input into local government decisions. The key obstacles they cite are the lack of a clear channel to air their views, officials' failure to consult with citizens, and citizens' fear of speaking truthfully.**

Most participants describe their level of input to local government decisions as nil. This is not only frustrating, participants say, but hurtful, as they find themselves mere witnesses to decisions that largely determine the quality of their lives. Some participants cite possible avenues for citizen input into local government decisions, such as agriculture and health workers, chiefs/village heads, area and village development committees, and MPs, but these are not functioning in ways that are fully satisfactory.

*We have never had a chance to inform the appropriate authorities in local government [about our views]. This is the first time in my life to find the opportunity for discussing our problems and giving our views to people like you. (Domasi, Zomba District)*

*I have never heard that people are giving opinions on government policies...We are not given a chance to give opinions on government policies, we just see projects in our areas springing out...Even if we give our opinions, no one listens. (Salima Town, Salima District)*

*The [local government] officials are the ones that are stingy. They don't include people in such things [local government decisions]...All we ask is that whenever there is development, it should be in the hands of the villagers because we have the zeal to help out in any way we can. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

*The way things are now, it is very painful because the views we have are kept to ourselves. (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)*

*The reason why local people don't take part is because of the decentralization program which has left all the powers to and VDC and ADC. This structure doesn't work properly. We would discuss that we need four kiosks of water yet they would suggest constructing a road. There is no connection between the local people and the local government. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

Participants highlight several reasons they believe are hindering their participation in local government. Some simply say they have no channel through which to provide their input. They blame this on the lack of dedicated leaders who do not seem concerned with the average citizen's views, due in part some say to the loss of councilors. The most commonly mentioned obstacles to citizens' having more say in their local governance are government officials' failure to visit and consult with their constituents and citizens' fear of speaking out. Participants repeatedly lament the lack of effort on the part of their representatives, especially MPs, to visit them and seek out their views. They express a feeling of abandonment by MPs, whom they voted into office but have not seen again, and of bewilderment about how they are supposed to participate in government without active officials or MPs. Fear of retribution also works to significantly limit citizen input into local government, according to participants. Participants say they fear they will be branded a trouble-maker or will be arrested if they share their true opinions with government officials. The last major obstacle to greater citizen participation in local government that some participants identify is politics. These participants say that local government issues, including those related to development, have become politicized. They say representatives from different political parties are not willing to help or listen to anyone outside of the party, and they contend that the views of those supporting opposition parties are especially ignored.

*We get government decisions that other people have reached. We just receive them as they come, but we do not have that chance to make our input...People can have the ideas but where to channel them is what matters...Maybe if there could be a specific person whom we could be contacting, telling him our problems, we would be open enough to present our views to him. (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)*

*We do not have dedicated leaders. People have concerns, but they do not know where to channel them. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*The problem is that we don't have councilors. The councilor is the one who brought development projects through the chief. The chief would ask the people what they need, and he would in turn report to the councilor.*

*Currently the chief is not doing any development work in this area, and the local government is not helping in any way because we don't have the channels to convey our messages about development. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*It is hard for us to have our input into decisions made by the local government because the representatives we chose do not come here anymore to get our grievances to the government. (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)*

*What happens is that the government already decides what it wants to carry out, and they come to implement...We do not have any chance for making any input since our only hope is the MP who does not visit us to listen to our opinions and problems...But again, we are never consulted to make our input; how can we [then] make input? (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*We do not have leadership here because we do not have anybody who can represent us when we want our views known. We do not have an MP and chiefs are not available to us, so we just stay without making our views known. Otherwise, whom can we send to present our views to government? If the MP were visiting us, we would not be suffering. Since we voted the MP into office, he has not come here again. (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*I have the urge to speak [about local government issues] but I fear...They think you are a rebel. (Dzalanyama, Lilongwe District)*

*Generally, it is fear [that prevents citizen input into local government]. We fear that if we voice out something, they will arrest us. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

*There is a problem with local government. It is difficult to channel concerns as development is politicized, as such people do not agree on several issues due to different political affiliations...Just to add, traditional leaders are supposed to relay issue to MPs, but this is not possible due to partisan politics. Even VDCs are not effective due to partisan politics. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*I feel like the differences in political parties is also another obstacle [to citizen input into local government]. If you come from the opposition, you do not count. (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)*

Participants offer a multitude of suggestions for increasing citizen input into local government decisions. Three of the most popular are increasing interaction between citizens and government officials; bringing back ward councilors; and activating more non-governmental organizations to collect and communicate citizen views. Participants urge officials, particularly MPs, to take the initiative to visit their constituents in their home areas and recommend that regular meetings or forums be established. By undertaking these two activities, participants say their needs will be better understood and their ideas will more easily be incorporated into local government decisions. Some participants, especially Northern region participants, see councilors as the missing link. They say their past experience with councilors demonstrated that they are the most effective way to link citizens and local government. Throughout the study, participants exhibit a relatively high level of trust in non-governmental and community-based organizations. As such, some believe they can play a vital role in connecting citizens and local government by collecting citizen views, particularly in rural areas, and then distributing them through appropriate government channels. Other less mentioned participant suggestions for increasing citizen input into local government decisions are: reinvigorating the role of chiefs in consulting with citizens and representing their views in



government; guaranteeing basic rights, specifically freedom of speech; ensuring traditional authorities are politically neutral; and involving youth more in local government issues.

*The important thing [for citizen input into local government] is that government should first ask people what they need, and then people can easily put up their suggestions. (Thekerani, Thyolo District)*

*The people we elect or senior government officials should visit us and conduct meetings so that we can listen to the government policies and then they listen to our opinions. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*I just want to emphasize that organizing meetings and debate sessions on the problems that we have here could be a major solution to that [lack of citizen input into local government]. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*The MP should have time to come to the village and hear the problems that are in the village. (Nkhata Bay Town, Nkhata Bay District)*

*If we had a councilor the way we used to, he could have been taking our concerns to the Assembly...The councilor is the bridge between people and the government. People talk directly to the councilor and councilor informs the MP...This is why the councilor becomes important to us. (Nchenachena, Rumphi District)*

*[To increase citizen input into local government] ask non-governmental organizations to concentrate in rural areas like ours so that they look into our problems...We ask organizations like yours to sit down with us, listen to our problems and take them to government. (Dzalanyama, Lilongwe District)*

*[To increase citizen input into local government] there is need for chiefs to be meeting with their people and discuss the problems because any development work is first discussed with the chief before it reaches the local assembly. (Mlombe, Phalombe District)*

*Everyone has rights. One must have the right to speak, right to wealth or any rights. If they oppress these freedoms, one cannot air his views freely. (Salima Town, Salima District)*

#### **4. Participants cite numerous examples where citizens have mobilized to contribute to local development projects, but some feel their efforts are futile because the projects at times are not brought to fruition.**

In every focus group, participants tell multiple stories of how they have worked with their fellow community members to improve their own development situation. Participants say they are often asked by chiefs or local government officials to mobilize as area citizens to contribute labor, money, or items to planned development projects. Examples of citizen efforts include the collecting of sand and stone for boreholes, the collecting of logs for bridges, the molding of bricks for schools and teacher housing, the building or maintaining of local roads, and contributing small amounts of money toward similar projects. In all of these, participants indicate they happily oblige. However, some also recount how at times their efforts have gone to waste. These participants talk about projects fizzling because they lack additional support, resources, or expertise; because their contributions are stolen; or because the government fails to fulfill its promised part of the project. This is discouraging, participants say, to citizens who have provided their part of the development project in good faith.

*There are many examples [of citizens mobilizing to contribute to development projects]...Right now, we are building a house for a health worker...We decided to construct a road joining the main road...We build houses for teachers. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*[Citizens] mobilized each other to maintain a road that was impassable. This was done after they had noted that there were problems for them to move from one place to the other using that road. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

*Parents and teachers at the school met to discuss the shortage of a school block, and they managed to build an extra block. (Lilongwe City-Kawale, Lilongwe District)*

*On our own, we collected sand and stones after we had seen that we need a borehole. However, all that did not yield anything...We also had a problem of the bridge somewhere there. Therefore, people agreed to bring logs for the construction of the bridge. We did that, but again to no avail...With that, we get discouraged because on our part we try, but the government does not seem to be concerned. (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)*

*The people in this area are very united when it comes to development initiated by anyone...An example is our MP. He asked us to mold bricks, but in the end he took the bricks away to build his house. This is fraud. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*One example is that last year, they [government officials] asked us to contribute money towards construction of a clinic. Each family contributed 100 kwacha to buy bricks, sand, etc. The materials were bought, but until today nothing has happened. (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)*

- 5. Almost all participants say they have little or no knowledge of development projects planned for their area or of funding available to implement them. They argue they need that knowledge to participate fully in their own development and say that development will be greatly improved by their input.**

Most participants describe the local development process as top down. They say citizens are not consulted about future development projects, and often only find out about a local development initiative when it is being implemented. Some participants indicate they are given advance notice of large development projects, like the building of a tarmac road or of a large health center, but few are aware of or involved in smaller projects, such as plans for boreholes or teacher housing. Even fewer participants have any knowledge of funds available for development in their area. Almost all, however, feel strongly they should not only know about area development plans and funding, but that they also should be centrally involved in initiating and implementing it. Participants offer a number of reasons why they believe their involvement would greatly improve local development efforts. First, they say they are willing if given advance notice to make a contribution, within their means, to any development project in their area. Participants also argue that knowing about development project plans will help make more efficient use of the funds available, ensuring that reasonable projects are undertaken within budgetary limitation, and will allow them to address in advance any local obstacles to the development work. What participants focus on most, however, is that knowledge of development projects and funding will empower them to provide input into their own development. They feel there is no substitute for local knowledge and only with their active participation can development truly meet their needs, particularly by guaranteeing that funds are spent on projects they view as priorities. Also, only by understanding the amount of money

designated for a project can they demand accountability for how that money is spent. Their belief is that informing citizens of funds available for local development projects would help reduce corruption significantly.

*We are not aware of what has been planned for us. We are only aware of what is happening when development projects have been implemented or initiated. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*We do not actually know [about local development projects], because like we said, not any government department has ever come to explain any development project that is planned, or even showed us the money for that project. (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)*

*We have never seen anyone come to tell us about how much money is available for development projects in our area. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*We are the ones who know about our problems. So we are the ones who should find solutions to these problems...If we remain silent, our problems are not going to come to an end. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

*It would be useful [to know about local development projects] because we would get prepared for the projects that are coming. Moreover, we would make available the materials needed in good time. We can do our part, such as collecting sand, stones, and the like. (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)*

*I think that it would be helpful to know [about local development projects and funding] because then we would be making reasonable budgets on the things we want to have in relation to the amount of money available. (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)*

*[If local development projects were known] we would be taking part by planning in advance for the development projects; as such work would be done smoothly without any problems. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*It is very important that we know the kind of development that is coming in our area. They can bring a development that we do not want or a development that is already done. (Ntchenachena, Rumphu District)*

*It is necessary [to know about local development plans] because the community can prioritize development projects which they need most...The community that benefits from development must have a say on the development of the area. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*We can make suggestions on how the money can be used optimally [if funding for local development projects is made public]...It would help us in making a follow up on the money and accountability on the part of the supervisors of the project. (Lilongwe City-Kwale, Lilongwe District)*

*If we knew the amount [of funds available for local development projects,] it would reduce corrupt practices because we would account for every penny on a project. (Domasi, Zomba District)*

Responses from participants across this study reveal there is no single process for initiating development projects at the local level. Some talk about development beginning at the VDC level, some say traditional authorities or chiefs lead the process, others credit non-governmental or

community-based organizations with jumpstarting the process, and still others indicate MPs are the initiators. In some cases, participants note, citizen needs are incorporated into the development process, and in other cases, they are not. Most participants say their preference for how the development process should be undertaken is for citizens to provide their views to VDCs and/or to chiefs to have them represent their views at higher levels. A few feel that MPs should initiate development projects, since they promise development during their campaigns, and they have the power to allocate resources for it in parliament. Regardless of the process, participants make it clear that they want their voice to be a significant part of it.

*Development needs to start from the people themselves. People should be able to write proposals outlining what they need in their area. (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)*

*I believe it is us the citizens [who should initiate development projects] because the development is ours and we have to take part. In this way there cannot be any corruption...If government wants to bring development, it's the people who can lead the development. (Salima Town, Salima District)*

*I would like to emphasize that we should be on the forefront to initiate development projects because we know our problems better. Outsiders cannot know our problems and may end up initiating development projects that are not our priorities. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

## **6. There is some recognition of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and the Local Development Fund (LDF), but few participants understand their purpose or how they are used.**

Some participants claim ignorance of the CDF and LDF, but more say they are aware of the funds, if only vaguely. These participants recall hearing about the CDF and LDF, especially on the radio. Even among those with some knowledge of the funds, however, most have little understanding about what type of projects the funds are meant to support or how the funds are dispersed. As a result, some participants blame their MPs for not educating them about the funds and question the accountability and transparency of the funds. Northern participants are more knowledgeable about the funds, and of the two funds, the LDF is better understood by participants. Some participants, again mostly from the Northern region, tend to associate the LDF to spending on local school projects, such as the purchase of desks, stationery, new school blocks, and teacher housing.

*We have never heard of these [CDF and LDF] funds, and [this] is our first time to hear of it. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*We just hear about them [the CDF and LDF], but we never know how they work. In fact, we have never seen the money. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*We don't know even the difference between the Local Development Fund and Constituency Development Fund. There is no one who can explain how this works, how the money comes we don't know, we just wait and receive as people. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

*We just hear them [the CDF and LDF] from the radio. We just hear that MPs are responsible for supervision [of the funds], but it is all about the same problems that he does not visit the area. In addition, if he does not come for any other different activities, what can he do that with the money? (Thekerani, Thyolo District)*

*We have heard of it [the CDF], but we are not clear on the financial transactions...We just hear that the government has allocated money in constituency development fund...The MP is in charge of the constituency fund, but the problem is he does not make himself available and does not talk about it. (Kande, Nkhata Bay District)*

*There is no transparency [in the CDF] on whether the money has been disbursed and to what use it is being put. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*We know about these funds but the money comes through our leaders. For example, in Matheni not long ago we received money from Local Development Fund, which we used to buy desks. (Metheni, Mzimba District)*

**7. There is widespread knowledge of the existence and role of Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs). Participants indicate women are the most represented of marginalized groups in these committees.**

The vast majority of participants say they are aware of VDCs and ADCs, and most can articulate the role of the committees, if at times somewhat vaguely. Participants generally describe VDCs as committees which are responsible for development work at the village level. That task, they say, includes assessing local problems, developing proposals for needed development work, reporting issues to the ADCs and/or authorities, and managing and supervising local development projects. ADCs are primarily responsible, according to participants, for compiling proposals from VDCs for presentation to high levels of government, especially the district assemblies. Although the question of the VDC/ADC's relationship to citizens was not asked explicitly, some participants commented on it. Among those who did, there are mixed views on whether VDCs and ADCs adequately incorporate or represent citizen opinion. Some participants talk about VDCs as being a bridge to government and as a forum where they can easily provide their views. This is in contrast to answers to other questions in the study, whereby the vast majority of participants say they have no mechanisms through which to communicate to government. Other participants, however, say either the VDCs or ADCs are ineffective, do not solicit citizen views, or are corrupt due to their involvement in the distribution of fertilizer coupons. Because there were no direct questions in this study about the effectiveness of VDCs and ADCs or their incorporation of citizen input, further study is needed on this issue to clarify opinion on them.

*The VDC is an overseer of all development projects in the village whether development is initiated by NGOs or government...The VDC knows the problems that people have in a particular village...The role of the ADC is to receive the development projects from the VDCs. (Ntchenachena, Rumph District)*

*The role of the VDC is to collect people's problems in the village and at the group headman's level. These problems are transferred to the ADC. (Domasi, Zomba District)*

*VDCs are committees that are selected to represent the relevant development projects in that area, and they take the different problems to the ADC. The ADC compiles all development projects to the [district] assembly. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*They [VDCs and ADCs] have a number of roles. They look after development projects in villages and in this area, but also they encourage us to work hard and commit ourselves to these projects...We work with these people right here, so it becomes easy to give our suggestions. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*People of this area do not have any input into these [VDC and ADC] committees because the committees do not meet us. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

*The VDCs are very corrupt. As we said earlier, when distributing fertilizer coupons, they just share amongst themselves, the poorest people are not considered...At first, the VDC members were taking our problems to the ADC where they reported to the MP, but because they could not get feedback, they are now incapable. (Nambuma, Lilongwe District)*

*They [VDCs and ADCs] do not give us any chance...We elect committee members, but they are ineffective. They do not communicate with the chief to check progress on development projects. Therefore, it is more or less having no ADC. (Mlombe, Phalombe District)*

In response to a question asking about the representation of three marginalized groups – women, youth, and the disabled – in the VDCs and ADCs, participants most often note that women are well-represented,<sup>12</sup> and at times serve in important positions like secretary or chairperson. Youth, according to participants, serve on ADCs and VDCs in some areas but not in others. In areas where youth are not represented, reasons given include the immaturity of youth, the disinterest of youth, and/or a lack of respect for youth by elders. The disabled are the least represented on ADCs or VDCs of the marginal groups based on participant responses. While a few participants say that the disabled serve on their local committees, many more comment that this group is discriminated against and marginalized in their areas.

*Women normally hold positions of committee member on VDCs and ADCs...Some may become secretaries and treasurers...The youth are not found in these committees. (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)*

*In our VDC in Matheni, we have some [youth]. Mostly they hold the position of committee member because they are diligent in doing whatever they can be asked to do. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*The elders usually consider youths as unruly, and therefore, they are not entrusted with responsibilities [on the VDCs or ADCs]. Because of this, they are discriminating against us. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*There are no youths in VDCs and ADCs, but women have joined a lot...These youth think that ADCs and VDCs are for old people. (Ntchenachena, Rumphi District)*

*The way I see it, it is only the elders that are mostly found in these committees [VDCs and ADCs]...I also feel that if the youth take part, it would not be serious. That is why the elders take a bigger role than the youth. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*We have not seen any disabled person in these committees [VDCs and ADCs]. They are discriminated against. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

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<sup>12</sup> This study does not purport to provide data about the actual representation of marginal groups on ADCs or VDCs. Instead, the conclusions on marginal group representation are only meant to reflect the perceptions of the participants who took part in the study.

8. **Many participants are not able to articulate the role of the member of parliament in their area because they report the member does not visit or consult them. They say members are not adequate replacements for ward councilors, who participants describe as more accessible, approachable, and effective.**

Most participants asked to talk about the role their MP plays in their area are unable to provide any description at all. The reason they cite for the lack of knowledge is that they have no relationship with their MP. The vast majority say they have never had contact with their MP, and to their knowledge, the MP has never visited their area. There is a cynical view among many participants that MPs only show up in their areas during campaigns, and so they do not expect to see the MP again until the election nears. As a result, participants question how the MP can be said to represent them when there is no assessment of their problems or consultation on their views and have little faith that their MP can address their most critical development needs. A few participants say their MPs' lack of effectiveness is because they are independents or from opposition parties. Only a handful of participants say their MP is representing them well.

*We have never seen her [the area's MP]; we do not know her.* (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)

*There is nothing that he [the area's MP] is doing; we know him by his name, but we don't know him by face...Our MP has never come to conduct a public meeting and to listen to our problems.* (Nambuma, Lilongwe District)

*He [the area's MP] is not serious...What I mean is that, if he is failing to visit his people how can you expect him to deliver the most needed development in the area? Visiting the people is the only way he can know the problem that his people face.* (Kande, Nkhata Bay District)

*He [the area's MP] does nothing. When we voted for him into parliament, he disappeared, and we do not see him. The only time we saw him was on the polling day on the ballot paper.* (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)

*If the MP could be visiting us, we could take our concerns to the government through him. Now that we don't even know him we wonder how he is going to help develop this area, will it be through the telephone?* (Bembeke, Dedza District)

*The MP does not have a chance to play his role because he is from the opposition. He is being sidelined on development projects and because of this, there is very little that is taking place.* (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)

*Our MP has done a lot of things for us...here at Mpherembe he has done a lot. He built teachers houses, school blocks, and a clinic at Mlangeni.* (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)

Comparing the role their MP currently plays in their areas to the role ward councilors played in the past, most participants say there is a large gap between the two. MPs, they contend, have assumed little or none of the work of the previous ward councilors, and so they view MPs as very poor substitutes for councilors. Again and again, participants describe councilors as far more accessible, approachable, and effective than MPs. Their recollection of councilors is that they were committed to consulting citizens about their problems and diligent about taking those views to appropriate leaders. Participants also talk about councilors as having a hands-on role in facilitating development;

something they say is not true of MPs. As such, participants' perception of councilors is that they were much more effective at delivering development than MPs, and so there is a strong belief that the loss of councilors has significantly impacted development in their areas. A key to the councilors' effectiveness, according to participants, was their residence in the area. They indicate this allowed the councilors to continually consult citizens and to recognize problems quickly. It is clear as well that participants have a greater comfort level with councilors than with MPs, often saying they felt they could easily find and speak with councilors. In contrast, not only are MPs difficult to get in touch with, but they are also viewed as "big men," who are difficult for the average villager to relate to or approach. A few participants express contrary views, indicating that either their councilors were not effective or that their MP is just as good as or better than having a councilor.

*The councilor used to find out the challenges we were facing and reported them to the necessary authorities and the problems were being solved in no time. However, the MP does not help us with anything. (Luchenza (Rural Area), Thyolo District)*

*The councillor used to bring boreholes to the community; the councillors were visiting their people. However, our MP is doing completely nothing all. What he knows is to be in the office all the time. We could see the developments of the councillors. (Kande, Nkhata Bay District)*

*The councilor was taking our concerns to the responsible people with diligence, unlike the MPs who most of the time are not even seen in our area. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

*I just wanted to say that it is easy to reach the ward councilors and tell them about the problems the area is facing unlike the MPs who are difficult to reach. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*The difference is that the councilor was staying here, and they were readily available for development work and discussions, and the projects were always successful. But now it is a challenge. (Domasi, Zomba District)*

*MPs are always busy and live far from the areas they represent, and hence it becomes difficult for people or chiefs to meet them and discuss the problems they are facing. On the other hand, ward councillors lived together with us in the area and could go around to different areas to hear people's problems. (Namwera, Mangochi District)*

*Councilors were also approachable and available...I just want to stress the importance of councilors and that they used to listen to our complaints and took action. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*The MP is a VIP, and the councilor is below him. We feel comfortable associating with the councilor and telling him our problems. He also knows best what our problems are and ways to solve them. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*There is a difference because Billy [the area MP] works hard compared to the councilor. The councilor was not doing anything. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

While some participants profess not to understand where money for MP-sponsored development projects originate, most are able to identify government as the source, with some naming the CDF. Some participants even note that they consider the project money is citizens' money because it is obtained through taxes. Only a few participants say that the MP contributes his personal funds for development projects.



*We don't know where the money comes from [for MP-sponsored development projects].* (Luchenza (Rural Area), Thyolo District)

*Funds [for MP-sponsored development projects] come from government because government prepares an annual budget.* (Dedza Town, Dedza District)

*Funds from government, such as the Constituency Development Fund, are given to MPs for developing their areas so that people can see change.* (Ntakataka, Salima District)

*It [funds for MP-sponsored development projects] comes from the government through taxes...It is our money.* (Nvera, Dowa District)

*Sometimes he [the MP] draws the money from his pocket [for area development projects].* (Thekerani, Thyolo District)

**9. There are mixed views on the performance of traditional leaders. Some participants praise traditional leaders as working hard for development, while others label them as greedy and under government influence.**

There are a wide range of views on traditional leaders among participants. Some participants describe their primary task as development and say that in this regard the chiefs are working hard and doing a good job, especially in helping to mobilize citizens for self-help projects. Other participants say the picture is mixed – some chiefs are corrupt, while others are fair. This group also points out that chiefs have a difficult task because the government does not provide them with enough resources or assistance to serve their people well. Another group of participants, however, hold very negative views of traditional leaders. They call chiefs lazy, selfish, greedy, and corrupt, in some cases pointing to their unfair distribution of fertilizer coupons as an example. These participants also strongly criticize traditional leaders for being under the influence the government due to the salaries they receive. These power dynamics, they say, result in an unwillingness among chiefs to bring citizen problems to the government. A regional pattern is detectable in the responses to this question. Participants from the Northern region have mostly positive opinions of their traditional leaders, participants from the Central region have more negative views of their traditional leaders, and participants in the Southern region have mixed feelings about their traditional leaders, with some saying chiefs are a positive influence and others criticizing their behavior.

*Chiefs are working hard to have us come together and work on our development... Chiefs mobilize us so well in self-help projects.* (Kingu, Karonga District)

*They are trying their best in initiating development projects...They also make sure that any problem they notice is reported to government to make sure that people live better lives.* (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)

*Some chiefs like corruption, but others are fair.* (Nambuma, Lilongwe District)

*Is it possible for a chief who looks after 50 villagers to receive 3 coupons which are equivalent to 6 bags of fertilizer? How will 50 people share? It is sometimes difficult for the chief to help his people because of little resources from the government.* (Mtunthama, Kasungu District)

*They try their best to work with government through the MPs. However, they have many challenges because they cannot do anything if the MP or the government does not help them. (Mwanza Town, Mwanza District)*

*Most of them [chiefs] are greedy and selfish. They like accumulating and taking advantage of whatever comes without any concern for the poor. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*When the chiefs get the fertilizer coupons from the government, they do not distribute them fairly to the people, and the poor who are the intended beneficiaries do not benefit much; instead, the chiefs' sons and grandchildren benefit more from the fertilizer. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*The chiefs are now under government influence maybe because they receive a salary. They have forgotten their duty towards their subjects. Chiefs have joined politics, and they belong to government and ignore opinions and complaints of the people towards government. They don't report bad things to government, but they always praise it because it is where their bread and butter come from. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

#### **10. The absence of ward councilors has left citizens without their main connection to government and has slowed the pace of development, according to participants.**

Most participants greatly lament the loss of ward councilors. They view the councilors as having been their primary connection to government. With councilors, they not only felt comfortable sharing their views but also had greater confidence in the government's ability to make progress in development. Now that ward councilors are no longer their link to government, participants express feelings of isolation from the government and comment that the loss of councilors has left them without any avenues to express their views on problems in their areas. They often describe it as having lost a bridge to government. Part of the benefit of councilors, participants note, is that they lived closer to the people and thus were more accessible, unlike their primary connection to government now – their MP – who often does not live in the constituency. There also is a strong belief among participants that the loss of ward councilors is directly linked to the slowing of development in their areas. Many describe ward councilors of the past taking a leading role in local development projects, and so their absence is viewed as a primary cause when local projects, such as boreholes or teacher housing, are significantly delayed or fail to materialize.

*We are now like orphans because we were used to going and surrendering our problems to the councilor, but now we have nowhere to go and the MP is nowhere to be seen. (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)*

*We lack a place to go with our problems since it is the councilors we used to report to...The councilors were acting as a bridge between the people and the MP. (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)*

*A ward councilor was a link between the people and the MP, and their absence has left a big development gap. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

*A councilor is very important because he is always with us. The MP lives in town far away. (Ntakataka, Salima District)*

*We normally stayed with the councilors in the area, but the MPs do not stay in the area. At least the councilor could see the problems while assisting us. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

*If we had councilors there would be many development projects taking place because he would take a leading role in the development of the area. (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)*

*Development has stalled in the wards...If the Malawi government doesn't call for election of councilors, it will lose a lot of development since Councilors were supervisors of development in the villages. (Salima Town, Salima District)*

*Our development plans would be running better [with councilors], but we do not have councilors to carry our development views and reports to relevant officers. (Kingu, Karonga District)*

## II. Service Delivery

- 1. Participants rate service delivery in four key areas – education, health, agriculture, and security – as fair to poor.<sup>13</sup> They say education suffers from a lack of resources and oversight; health is being negatively affected by bad patient care in too few facilities; agriculture is declining because of a lower profit margin and an unfair fertilizer program; and security is deteriorating because of a corrupt and inadequate police force.**

When discussing education services in Malawi, most participants talk about a significant drop in the quality of education being delivered. Some say, for example, that students as high as standard seven level cannot speak or write English and/or Chichewa properly, with some students unable to perform a simple task like writing a letter or even their name. They attribute the poor state of education to a number of factors. School facilities are below par with inadequate classrooms and poor teacher housing. There are insufficient learning materials for all students, and despite the promise of free primary education, pupils are asked to contribute some fees. Low teacher salaries and significant delays in receiving salaries are demotivating teachers, participants indicate. This forces some teachers to take on additional tutoring or other jobs, which then results in them performing poorly at school. Participants say that some teachers are so distracted by other jobs that they are in school for only 2-3 hours a day. The biggest concern participants express about education in Malawi is a severe shortage of teachers, particularly in rural areas. They report pupil-to-teacher ratios as high as 150 to one in some areas. Rural participants also claim that many teachers assigned to their areas are unqualified. Some participants attribute the overall drop in the quality of education to the reduction or discontinuation of school inspections. The only other significant education issue noted by participants is among those in the Northern region, some of whom believe the quota system for university admission is unfair to students in their region. Positive assessments from participants about education are primarily based on the provision of free primary education, which they say has resulted in an increase in enrollment and in education being valued by all. A few also praise the introduction of a school feeding program, and the work ethic of some teachers who perform well despite difficult circumstances.

*[Education services are poor]. To begin with primary education, pupils no longer receive pencils and textbooks. There is a high pupil-to-teacher ratio, for example, only five to six teachers a school. There is lack of adequate school blocks and lack of desks. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

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<sup>13</sup> Participants were asked to rate the quality of each of the services on a four point scale comprising of excellent, good, fair, or poor.

*They [schools] request K200 for enrollment. If one does not have the money, they leave them out. (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)*

*There is a lack of learning materials, such as textbooks, in schools...There is still illiteracy in our children even though they go to school, and there is a lack of interest in the teachers to teach the children...In the past, we had primary school inspectors that enforced quality education, but these days the school inspectors are no more. (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)*

*Teachers are not motivated to teach because of many problems, such as poor housing, lack of teaching materials, and problems in accessing salaries. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*There are few teachers so the teacher-pupil ratio is so big; for example, one teacher against 150 pupils, so the attention of the class is mostly lost. (Zomba Town, Zomba District)*

*Qualified teachers are few. Those sent in rural areas did not even step in the corridors of college...Education is indeed poor because when we look at the performance of pupils it is catastrophic. A standard 5 pupil fails to read or speak English and many more skills. The situation is pathetic. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*Government is not serious in the education sector. For example, we have many teachers, but they don't teach most of the time. Instead, they are found doing their businesses. (Nambuma, Lilongwe District)*

*The introduction of the quota system is very unfair. For instance, someone from the Southern region with 34 points goes to university, while someone from the North with 10 points fails to go to university because of the quota system. This is very unfair to the people from the North. (Nkhata Bay Town, Nkhata Bay District)*

*The rate of school dropout is low compared to what it was during our time. People have now realized the benefits of school...In the past, we used to pay for primary education, but now it is free and this has motivated a lot of children go to school. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*[Education services are] good because after the introduction of porridge in schools, children are motivated to go to school because they know they will have something to eat. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*Here in our area, there are more than a thousand students in one class, but the teachers work very hard to give them their best education...I just want to congratulate the teachers for a job well done because there was never a time when students failed to go secondary schools. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

Comments about health services in Malawi are mostly negative. The top complaint among participants is lack of basic medicines at hospitals and clinics. They report severe shortages and indicate the shortage is at least in part due to corrupt health staff that either sell the drugs to private clinics and pharmacies or hoard them for themselves or influential people. Participants also note that health service delivery in Malawi is severely impacted by the lack of health facilities in rural areas. They talk about having to travel long distances to reach medical care and the lack of available transport and ambulances to help them reach care in a timely manner. A few say this is especially a concern for mothers delivering babies since the government has encouraged them to deliver in hospitals and not at home. Hospital staffing is an additional concern expressed by participants, who say that there is a shortage of qualified staff even in existing facilities and that, partly as a result of the shortage, patients are often disrespected and treated poorly. A few participants highlight a

peculiar practice on the part of hospital staff that they find particularly offensive: refusal to treat more than one family member at a time. Positive aspects of health services in the country are commented on by some participants. These focus mainly on the benefits of free anti-retroviral medications, effective programs by health surveillance assistants, and good quality care at clinics aimed at treating children under five.

*[Health services are poor] because of lack of medicine in our hospitals, and when the medicine comes from the government, doctors sell them to private hospitals...Also, there is a shortage of medical personnel in our hospitals. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*They [hospital staff] give you aspirin when you are seriously sick. If you complain, they say there are no medicines in the pharmacy. However, when an influential person or a medical staff is sick, they receive all the medical drugs. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*Things are worse now. There is no ambulance. When someone is sick, they say that there is no ambulance, so a patient should find his own transport...The government has stopped the village mid-wives, so when a woman is about to deliver she ends up dying because there is no transport. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

*Things [health services] are not well...We don't have a dependable hospital nearby, and even the medical personnel are not qualified...There are very long distances to health centers and getting to health centers is a big problem. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*We see that many nurses do not know their job. They do not take care of the patients quite well. They are full of impudence. (Mwanza Town, Mwanza District)*

*Health services are poor. First, you when you go to the hospital for treatment, the doctors tell you that if you are two sick people who are related, for example you and your child, only one receives medicine because they say you cannot fall sick at the same time. (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)*

*I say things [health services] are at least fair because those for on ARVs<sup>14</sup> their medication is readily available. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*It [health services] are fair because in the village, we have Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) to help us when our children get sick...The HSAs help the community by advising them on health practices...The HSAs are also given a medical box where they keep some medicine. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*We have under-five clinics where children below the age of five receive medication, and they provide other services. (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)*

There are more positive comments from participants about agriculture services overall than the other areas rated but most still rate them only in the fair-to-poor range. Problems with the fertilizer coupon program are a primary cause for low satisfaction with agriculture services. Participants say the coupons were not distributed fairly this year and that few went to intended recipients, and especially not to the poorest. Even where coupons were available, participants report bribes were necessary to buy fertilizer or that the subsidized fertilizer was not available because it had been sold corruptly to vendors. Participants also express grave concern about the lack of development of

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<sup>14</sup> “ARVs” is a reference to anti-retroviral medications used to treat HIV infection.

markets for their crops. The lack of markets, along with high input prices, is making agriculture a frustrating and unprofitable venture, they say. There are mixed views on government agriculture extension workers. Some participants praise them for working hard and teaching farmers modern techniques, but others complain they no longer visit rural areas and are not as qualified as previous workers. The positive aspect of agriculture services that participants mention most often is that Malawi has enjoyed greater food security, in part due to subsidized fertilizer, and bumper harvests the past few years.

*[Agriculture services are] poor because almost three-quarters of the people did not receive coupons. In addition, those who have coupons cannot find fertilizer. (Mlombe, Phalombe District)*

*In terms of farming, we can say that things are not going on well because the president<sup>15</sup> promised us coupons, but what I see is only the chief with his family receives fertilizer. The coupons are available but they do not get to us. Only the DC [District Commissioner] and the chiefs receive coupons. (Nkhata Bay Town, Nkhata Bay District)*

*[Agriculture services are] poor because the fertilizer subsidy, though it is cheap, is not accessed by the intended people, and even if they access, they are still charged extra amounts of money to buy fertilizer. (Zomba Town, Zomba District)*

*[Agriculture services are] poor because we have nowhere to sell our tomatoes, and we end up selling the whole basket at K50 because we know it will spoil. There is no market demand. We could have appreciated if the government could facilitate the establishment of a tomato sauce company to buy more tomatoes from us. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*I think things are not alright because of the high prices of farm inputs. Currently, the price for a bag of fertilizer is K7000, and it is very difficult for many of us to get that amount of money. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*Agriculture is poor because they don't give us extension workers who have reached the college level of education. Instead, they give us a pensioner who steals instead of helping us...It is poor because in the past agricultural extension workers visited farmers frequently even in the fields...They were advising the farmers, but nowadays they are nowhere to be seen. (Nambuma, Lilongwe District)*

*My view is that agriculture [services] are fair for the reason that farmers are able to follow modern ways of farming which results into bumper yields...Agriculture advisors also help us to not depend on fertilizers only but also manure. Further, they teach us to make box ridges to avoid soil erosion, so those who follow the advisors' advice properly benefit. (Ligowe, Mwanza District)*

*Agriculture is somewhat good because we have subsidized fertilizer, and when some people receive coupons, they have good harvests. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

Most participants associate security with their local police forces, and on that count they express significant dissatisfaction. Their main complaint is that many policemen are corrupt. Police officers, they say, often solicit bribes before opening a case or receive bribes from those charged or

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<sup>15</sup> The fieldwork for this study was undertaken prior to President Bingu Mutharika's death. All references to "president" in this study refer to him.

imprisoned to dismiss cases and/or release prisoners. This leads to a sense among participants that involving police in local law and order matters is futile. In addition, even if the police are not corrupt, they often require citizens to pay for fuel, likely due to lack of resources locally, before initiating any action, according to participants. In some areas, participants report there are too few policemen assigned to their area to provide adequate security or to appropriately investigate crimes. There are mixed views on community policing. Some participants believe community policing has helped reduce crime in their areas but other participants talk about community police being corrupt or harassing the local population. Some participants who are in areas where additional formal police units have been deployed indicate that the units have been successful in shortening response times and in reducing crime.

*When the thugs or thieves get caught and one is locked up in prison, they easily come out due to corruption and that is what is causing high theft rates in our area. (Namwera, Mangochi District)*

*Security is fair because police officers are abusing their authority. They are always looking for bribes from culprits. They force people they capture to pay and get freed. (Salima Town, Salima District)*

*Police units are there, but most of the times they are also corrupt. You find that when you take your case there to report they also demand a little something from you which is very difficult for most poor people and [so] only the rich get helped out. (Zomba Town, Zomba District)*

*Even after reporting an incident to Kafukule police unit, we could not be assisted because they would demand that we buy fuel for vehicles, so there is nowhere to get help. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*Security is not sufficient. Just imagine, the whole of this area we have only one police station at Chapananga. (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)*

*Security is at least okay because there is a reduction in crimes because of the police unit which we have. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*Things are fair because in every village there is community police called Inkata. (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)*

*Members of the community police require money to help you. Without money, they cannot help. (Mlombe, Phalombe District)*

### **III. Governance and Voting**

- 1. Democracy is endorsed by most participants as a good system of government for Malawi, primarily because it allows for citizens to express their views and to choose their representatives. Some participants say however that democracy is not practiced well in Malawi.**

Despite expressing many complaints about Malawi's government, most participants still fully embrace democracy. They view it as the best option for the country because it empowers citizens to participate in their own governance and because, especially given memories of life in a dictatorship, citizens are allowed to express their views freely and to associate with whomever they wish. Some add more specifically that democracy allows citizens to make critical judgments about who can serve

them best and to replace those leaders when they fail to perform. A few female participants note as well that democracy has been beneficial in improving their status. Participants who question the value of practicing democracy in Malawi mostly say that it is not implemented properly in the country either because the government acts undemocratically at times or because elected officials ignore their duties to citizens. A few participants view democracy as not culturally right for Malawi because it has allowed some women and youth to dress inappropriately.

*It [democracy] is a good idea because it allows us to contribute our views to the running of the government unlike when leaders impose their views. (Domasi, Zomba District)*

*People are more involved [in a democracy]. They have stake in what is happening and help in making and implementing policies. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*Citizens can talk freely [in a democracy]...Citizens take part without intimidation [in a democracy]...It is the best because citizens of contrary opinions can live and work together; we used to fear each other in the past. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*I feel that democracy is good because it brought multiparty system of government. We now have freedom of association, which was not the case in the past as they forced us to follow one thing. Currently, if you are not happy with a political party, for instance, you can either quit or start your own party. That is what democracy is all about. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

*It [democracy] is good because you have freedom to elect the one you want who can help you. (Mlombe, Phalombe District)*

*You choose your own leader [in a democracy], and you can evaluate the way the person is performing and after five years, you would know what to do. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*Democracy is good because now we women have the right to do whatever we want. At first, we were just relying on men but now we can stand on our own. (Ntchenachena, Rumphi District)*

*I feel that democracy was good in the earlier days when it started. Presently we no longer enjoy democracy the way we were supposed to. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

*I am saying that democracy is good but not important because it is just used to bluff people that it is the system in operation while in fact the government is using other ways of running its affairs. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*I feel democracy is not a good system because when you elect a person he should be supporting people's needs. As we have already said, once a person is elected he or she does their own thing. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

*Democracy is bad because it has brought freedom of dressing which sees some women and the youth dressing shamefully. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

- 2. Almost all participants describe corruption as a significant problem and say it impacts all facets of life. There is widespread knowledge of the Anti-Corruption Bureau but few have confidence in it or the police to act neutrally and honestly on reports of corruption.**



Participants perceive corruption to be a pervasive problem in Malawi. They talk about corruption as playing a role in almost every aspect of life and say it is present at all levels, from the village to Capital Hill, and describe it as so rooted in society that they cannot conceive of any solutions, at least in the short term. Corruption examples which participants provide most often are: bribes taken by police and chiefs in ways that pervert justice; government-funded medicines corruptly sold by health staff; bribes and corrupt selling of fertilizer in the subsidy coupon program; bribes necessary to gain employment in private or government jobs and/or nepotism in employment; and government leaders either embezzling money or gaining financially through deals offered to them solely because of their position.

*Corruption in Malawi is the order of the day in offices, hospitals, villages and on the roads. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*I just want to emphasize that corruption is rampant to the extent that you can't even start discussing a solution at the moment. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*Corruption is very much, and we do not know how this problem can end...This is a very big problem, even the police are corrupt...If you are arrested, and you want to be freed, you give out some money. In other words, the police receive bribes. (Thekerani, Thyolo District)*

*Corruption has spread all over. Here at home when we quarrel, the offended complains to the village chief, but the chief rules in favor of the offenders because she has bribed the chief. (Dzalanyama, Lilongwe District)*

*Even in the health sector, there is a lot of corruption. The drugs that the government buys end up being sold to private hospitals by health personnel. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*Even in the fertilizer subsidy program there is corruption. Sometimes one is asked to pay K500 to get a coupon. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*Corruption has gone deep in our villages, and nobody dares even to bring culprits to book...If you go to the district there, they will only employ you if you corrupt somebody. No corruption, no job. (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*There is nepotism. Only those people whose relatives are employed get employment. (Domasi, Zomba District)*

*Most of the people who are involved in corruption practices are people in high levels. I can give an example of the recent scenario where the Malawi Housing Corporation was selling houses at a cheaper price to Ministers only and denying selling to the general public at a cheaper price. (Zomba Town, Zomba District)*

When asked where they could report corrupt acts, many participants demonstrate knowledge of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), and some even note there is a toll free number that can be used for such purposes. However, there are few participants who believe reporting a corrupt act to the ACB would result in any significant action, primarily because they view the ACB as corrupt as well. Confidence in the ACB is also damaged, according to participants, by its unwillingness to investigate people in power. Participants have similar feelings about the police. They do not view police as a viable option for reporting corruption because they believe the person that committed a corrupt act

could avoid arrest by bribing the police. Many participants feel they have nowhere to report corruption because they view none of possibilities that come to mind – the ACB, police, chiefs – as neutral and honest actors. Thus, few express a desire to report corrupt acts because they view it as a futile exercise. Fear also plays a role in the willingness to report corrupt acts, as some participants say that those who make such reports are often targeted instead of the original culprit.

*Where can one report [a corrupt act]? Even if you report, they are all corrupt.* (Ntakataka, Salima District)

*The ACB has a certain number which can be used to report corruption... It's difficult for me to report corruption because the ACB is corrupt itself.* (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)

*The problem is that many people do not know where to report corruption cases. Even those who are in the ACB practice corruption.* (Kande, Nkhata Bay District)

*You can report your case to the ACB...The problem is these days it is difficult to report corruption because even though you report, people will still go and pay a little something and then the case just dies, so it is demotivating to report corruption, even if you personally saw it happening.* (Zomba Town, Zomba District)

*It [reporting corruption] has never been possible; we just watch. It is even a hopeless case when you think about it since corruption starts with the police themselves.* (Chapananga, Chikwawa District)

*We can't report to police because they are also involved in acts of corruption, and it is very doubtful if they assist.* (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)

*We do not know where to report [corruption]. Actually, even if we may report [it], it would be to someone who practices corruption. Therefore, we just leave it like that.* (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)

*You can go many places to report [corruption], but you put yourself in trouble if you do. I cannot [report corruption] because they would arrest me instead.* (Bembeke, Dedza District)

*We are afraid to report because if those with money realize this and report us to police, we can find ourselves in trouble...Sometimes the police intimidate people who like to report [corruption].* (Ntunthama, Kasungu District)

**3. Most participants define the term “human rights” as freedoms, and especially freedoms related to expression and the ability to have control over one’s life. Many say there are no avenues to report human rights violations, but some indicate non-governmental organizations are one option.**

Participants offer only vague definitions of the term, “human rights.” They mostly associate the term with the ability to live life as they want. The human right that is mentioned most often by participants is freedom of expression. Most participants note also that the provision of human rights comes with a responsibility to respect the rights of others. Many of the participants indicate that they have no knowledge of where to report an abuse of human rights or say categorically that there is no place to report such abuse. Among those who can identify where they would report a human

rights abuse case, most say they would opt to bring it to a non-governmental organization specializing in human rights. Other possible avenues for reporting human rights violations participants mention less frequently are the police and the local chief. Victim Support Units within the police are mentioned multiple times as an option that some would choose. However, some of these participants indicate reporting human rights abuses to the police or chief would be less than ideal because they may be part of the system that is causing the violations. A few participants say they would not feel comfortable reporting a human rights violation of another person unless that person asks for their help.

*Human rights means doing whatever you want while respecting the rights of others. (Ntakataka, Salima District)*

*[Human rights are] birth rights and mean that one has the right to do anything with freedom but in line with the duty to respect other people's rights. (Salima Town, Salima District)*

*It [human rights] is freedom to live...It means saying your opinion freely. (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)*

*We have no proper channels for reporting such [human rights abuse] cases. Sometimes we are just abused but cannot do anything about it. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*Sometimes [reporting human rights abuse] is a question of a lack of knowledge. We do not know about the rights or even where to report. (Thekerani, Thyolo District)*

*In Matheni, we have a human rights community-based organization, and when one's rights have been violated proper action is taken to report it to appropriate authorities. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*If someone's rights are broken, the best thing is to report it to the police. (Dzalanyama, Lilongwe District)*

*It is very difficult to know where to report because if you talk of the police, they are involved in corruption and may not assist. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*That [reporting a human rights violation] depends on whether the victim complains to you or not because one cannot just take it upon themselves to report abuse on behalf of the victim without being asked to do so. (Chikwawa Town, Chikwawa District)*

- 4. The July 2011 public demonstrations were the result of bad governance, dictatorial tendencies, and the immediate crises of high prices and fuel and foreign exchange shortages, according to participants. Most view the demonstrations as a positive event but a significant minority says the demonstrations were not the right tactic.**

Participants directly link the July 2011 demonstrations with ineffective and unresponsive government. They characterize the demonstrations as the citizens' response to perceptions of bad policies and management that brought the country into economic crisis. Some add that the government's hardline approach and attitude to the country's serious and multiple problems only heightened the likelihood of an adverse citizen reaction. These participants talk about the government acting as if it is ruling in a one party state or displaying dictatorial tendencies. While bad

governance is the key driver for the demonstrations overall, the immediate trigger for the protests, many participants say, was rising prices coupled with severe fuel and foreign exchange shortages. Citizens' anger over those issues, they indicate, had reached a boiling point. Most participants view the demonstrations to have been a worthwhile endeavor. They say the protests gave citizens a way to voice their grievances and make the government aware of the depth of their problems in the hope action would be taken. A significant minority of participants, though, see no value to the demonstrations. This group of participants emphasized the loss of life and property that occurred during the protests and says that the protests accomplished no real change. They believe that dialogue is the only legitimate avenue for expressing grievances.

*They [the July 2011 demonstrations] were caused by the fact that this country is not being well governed. Things are not moving. The president<sup>16</sup> does not listen to people's views and people of Malawi are very angry. Because the president does not respect people's views, people then decided to demonstrate as a way of expressing their anger. (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*Money, fuel, and commodity prices have rocketed. They [citizens demonstrating] wanted government to rectify these problems. (Ntakataka, Salima District)*

*They [citizens demonstrating] were not happy with the president's dictatorial tendencies...I think and believe that the demonstrations were successful because at least the authorities are aware of the people's grievances and that is why some of the problems are being solved. (Chulu, Kasungu District)*

*I think the demonstrations had positive results because they managed to expose the ills of the government. (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)*

*I feel that it [the demonstrations] was good so that the government knows that things are not going well, including the services it is supposed to provide to people. (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*They [the July 2011 demonstrations] were not good because they increased the problems. The best way could have been dialogue. (Thekerani, Thyolo District)*

*I was not happy with the demonstrations because people died, which didn't help anything. They just died for no reason. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

**5. Most participants express a strong desire to vote in the 2014 elections, saying it is their opportunity to bring change and to usher in new leaders focused on development. Disillusionment with the efficacy of voting is evident among some participants, however, who say past voting did not bring change.**

Many participants who are unhappy with the state of affairs in Malawi say they will embrace the opportunity to vote in the 2014 elections and will use that right to bring about change. In addition, participants view voting as an essential right that is their best opportunity to have a voice in governance. Participants make clear that they see the electoral process as their primary tool for judging the performance of their elected officials and that their intention is to replace those who have not met their expectations, particularly as it relates to development. However, although a

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<sup>16</sup> The fieldwork for this study was undertaken prior to President Bingu Mutharika's death. All references to "president" in this study refer to him.

minority, there are a significant number of participants who feel otherwise. They have become discouraged by the failure of the electoral process to bring any real change to their lives. These participants say the result is the same – politicians get rich while they remain in poverty – no matter who they elect.

*It [voting] empowers us to remove one from power if he is not delivering or confirm one if he is delivering.* (Chulu, Kasungu District)

*Yes, it is important [to vote]...For me, it is because the current leaders have not fulfilled what they promised, so my vote in the 2014 elections will remove them and replace them with truthful leaders.* (Thekerani, Thyolo District)

*We need change taking into consideration the problems we are facing. For that change to take place, we need to vote.* (Domasi, Zomba District)

*Yes, it is necessary for us to vote...Because we want to choose a president who will bring the development we want in our country...I will vote because I am not satisfied with this president, maybe my vote will make another person to win; somebody to change the country.* (Nkhata Bay Town, Nkhata Bay District)

*As for me, it is better not to vote again at all...Because we voted for the president who does not help us, and we voted for the MP who does not help us either. It is a waste of time voting for the people that do not help us.* (Kingu, Karonga District)

*There is no difference in voting or not voting. The MP does not consider our inputs...I too see that voting or not voting have the same outcome.* (Mlombe, Phalombe District)

*The problem is that we vote to make them [politicians] get more wealth while we languish in poverty.* (Dedza Town, Dedza District)

## **6. Politicians' manifestos, level of education, place of origin, past deeds, and development agendas are the primary criteria by which voters determine who to elect, participants say.**

When judging candidates for elective office, participants indicate the most influential factors are the policies and promises offered by a candidate. They speak about how they carefully consider what a candidate is offering and to the best of their ability determine who is the best choice based on both the candidates' words and their judgment of how his/her background and experience impacts their ability to deliver what they have promised. Some participants express frustration, however, that despite their careful consideration many times the candidates do not fulfill their promises once elected. The second most important factor for voting decisions is a candidate's level of education. Having representatives who are educated is viewed by participants as essential to their performance. They value high levels of education in parliamentary candidates, but even more so in presidential candidates. Where a candidate originates from also is of major importance to participants. Many mention that a president must be Malawian and even more say they consider the home area of parliamentary candidates when casting their vote. Some say they not only consider a candidate's home area but they look for parliamentary candidates that actually reside in their constituency, as opposed to Lilongwe or Blantyre. Past behavior and work experience are additional factors voters consider, according to participants. Some note specifically that they look for evidence that a

candidate has been successfully engaged in development work, whether privately or through a previous government position. The last area participants talk about having a significant influence on voters are the development agendas put forth by candidates during campaigns. Development is a priority for most so special attention is paid to how candidates handle the issue. Other factors participants mention less often but are noted as being important to some are the honesty of a candidate (seen as especially important for presidential candidates) and the willingness of a candidate to listen to and represent citizen opinions (viewed as especially important for a presidential candidate). A few participants note that political party affiliations carries some weight in voting decisions, and a few say that the provision of money or items to voters from candidates plays a role.

*We consider the candidate's manifesto. If he promises good things, we vote for him.* (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)

*We look at his behavior, his policies, and if he has the capacity to govern the country.* (Nvera, Dowa District)

*The truth is that once we vote people into office they do not help us. They may convincingly tell us during campaigns what development agenda they have for our area, but when they go to the parliament that is the end of it. It is very frustrating.* (Kingu, Karonga District)

*When voting in 2009, for the president's second term we looked at whether he achieved or not [and], second we look at education. Is he or she educated, [and] can he help us?* (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)

*He/she [a presidential candidate] must be an indigenous Malawian.* (Dedza Town, Dedza District)

*We try to find out if the person [parliamentary candidate] would be staying in the area because most of the times these people stay in the cities...[The parliamentary candidate] should be a person who loves people from his area, meaning that he should not stay far from his people.* (Bembeke, Dedza District)

*We choose a candidate who has brought some development in the area before, even when he had no position in government.* (Domasi, Zomba District)

*He [a presidential candidate] must be accountable, honest, and transparent.* (Chulu, Kasungu District)

*Sometimes we elect an MP because he belongs to a certain political party we want to see in power.* (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)

*We vote for the one who is gives us free gifts, such as salt, clothing, and money.* (Mlombe, Phalombe District)

#### IV. Current Challenges and the Future

1. **Participants identify Malawi's biggest challenges as high prices and critical shortages of fuel, foreign exchange, and medicines. Most say that they have no way to voice their concerns about these challenges and suggest that members of parliament, civil society, or the church should fill that role.**

The issues raised repeatedly by participants as Malawi's biggest challenges are mostly economic in nature. High and escalating prices for even the most basic, necessary goods present significant problems for the average citizen, they say. Related to the costs of goods, participants note, are problems with the devaluation of the kwacha and the lessening of its buying power. The challenge mentioned more than any other, though, is the fuel shortage. Participants, including those in rural areas, say they are adversely affected by the severe shortages, even though they do not own cars because of the high costs of other forms of transportation, such as mini-buses. Although they do not elaborate on the connection, most are able to relate the fuel shortages to foreign exchange shortages, and therefore view that as a critical issue as well. The other major challenge participants highlight is a persistent shortage of medicines in health facilities. A few participants cite a decline in the quality of education and corruption as major challenges for the country.

*Things are so expensive. This is a huge problem that I have no idea how it will end. Imagine paying K50 for a tablet of laundry soap! (Bembeke, Dedza District)*

*The biggest current issue that Malawi is facing today is that the value of our kwacha is so low. Our kwacha is about useless these days (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*There is also no fuel. This has not only affected car owners but also us. Just to go to Mthwalo it costs us a lot of transport money, but we don't have money. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

*There are shortages of drugs in the hospital. In the past we were able to find drugs in the hospital, and it was difficult for a person to die just because there is no medicine. But now you find that a person can go to Rumphu for 3 days in the hospital without getting medicine. (Nchenachena, Rumphu District)*

*The major problem is forex shortage...Goods are expensive...Shortage of medicines in hospitals...Shortage of fuel...Corruption. (Nvera, Dowa District)*

*Education has gone down such that a pupil who is in standard eight does not know how to write in English. We see that this problem is increasing. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

Although they articulate in detail the country's current problems and the effects of those on their lives, the participants contend they have no way to convey their concerns and opinions on these issues to the government. They say they either do not have anyone in government to relay their feelings to or there is no one who will listen, in part because it is the government officials who have created the problem. Participants indicate they have a strong desire to share their concerns about the current state of the country and believe that MPs, civil society, and/or the church may be the best at fulfilling that role.

*We can currently say there is no method for channeling our concerns to the right authorities...There is currently no practical way for that. (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)*

*We do not have any channels that we use because the government itself is to blame. We are looking forward to the next general elections.* (Domasi, Zomba District)

*My view is that I can go through the church because the church also takes part on how the government is run.* (Nkhata Bay Town, Nkhata Bay District)

*If organizations like CCJP can regularly visit us, most of our problems can be channeled to relevant authorities. I think the government should allow journalists or NGOs to visit rural areas to collect people's views, complaints, and opinions.* (Dedza Town, Dedza District)

*Through the member of parliament [is the best way to communicate our views on Malawi's challenges], who later goes to deliver our problems to the government in Parliament during deliberations.* (Namwera, Mangochi District)

**2. Participants' primary advice to the president<sup>17</sup> is to consult with his people, accept wise counsel, and serve all equally. Some also urge the president to resign so that new approaches can be taken to address the many crises Malawi faces.**

Participants were asked to imagine a five-minute conversation with President Mutharika. Their responses indicate a significant desire to be heard and consulted on the many problems that are making their lives difficult. They feel the government is ignoring their plight and that the president has a deaf ear to their troubles. One participant suggestion that the president needs to “develop a listening spirit”<sup>18</sup> is echoed by many others. Similarly, participants say they would tell the president to be more accepting of the views and wisdom of others as well as to be more open to constructive criticism. Serving and treating all Malawians equally is another theme participants say they would address with the president if given an opportunity. Their concerns are the difference in treatment of the rich and poor and those in power and out of power, as well as preferential treatment for certain regions or areas. Prominent among the specific issues participants say they would ask the president to address if they could speak to him personally are the fuel shortage, high price of commodities, lack of medicines in health facilities, corruption, and re-building partnerships with donor countries.<sup>19</sup> Some participants, particularly those from the Central and Northern regions, say if they met the president, they would recommend he resign. These participants believe the president has failed to adequately address the economic crisis and that his resignation is necessary to allow for a different approach to the problem.

*I would tell him [the president] to listen to people's concerns and advice because there is nobody who knows everything...I would ask him to make consultations first before implementing a decision.* (Blantyre City-Bvumbwe, Blantyre District)

*I would tell him [the president] to listen to what people are saying about the problems that they are facing. A leader should be able to do what his people want.* (Dowa Boma, Dowa District)

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<sup>17</sup> The fieldwork for this study was undertaken prior to President Bingu Mutharika's death. All references to “president” in this study refer to him.

<sup>18</sup> Quotation is from a group in the Blantyre City-Lunzu in Blantyre District.

<sup>19</sup> This latter issue of repairing relationships with donor countries is mentioned most often, but not exclusively, by Northern region participants.



*The first would be to ask the president to listen to other people's advice because he is not the only person who is wise...The president should take advice from other people. (Mangochi Town, Mangochi District)*

*I would advise him [the president] not to shout at his critics. He is the citizen number one, he should not be rude. He must listen to good advice from churches, non-governmental organizations, and people of all walks of life. (Dedza Town, Dedza District)*

*I can tell him [the president] to govern this country by listening to what people are saying without favoring one region because we are all Malawians. (Matheni, Mzimba District)*

*I can tell him [the president] that there is no fuel in the country so you need to do something that we should be able to access fuel without any problem. (Wovwe, Karonga District)*

*I would advise him [the president] on the rising commodity price so that he does something...I would advise him on the need to reduce corruption so that people are able to buy subsidized fertilizer with ease. (Nkhulambe, Phalombe District)*

*I would tell him [the president] to be partners with outside governments that provide funding in Malawi so that things should start to go well. (Mpherembe, Mzimba District)*

*We would tell him that he has failed his job as things are not moving. We would ask him to resign so that somebody would govern better. (Kingu, Karonga District)*

*To myself, I will tell him [the president] to resign because as it is now things are not okay...The reason would be for others to take over so that we can see a change. In so doing, those who will be coming would be ready to address those issues, thereby improving everyone's life. (Zomba Town, Zomba District)*

### **3. The vast majority of participants believe that without significant change, and especially a change in government leadership, Malawi faces a dire future.**

Participants overall have a bleak outlook on Malawi's future. When asked to describe what the country would be like in 2015, most predict a Malawi that will have "more problems than now,"<sup>20</sup> be the "poorest of all,"<sup>21</sup> and "face great challenges."<sup>22</sup> Participants in the Northern region are especially pessimistic. They see calamity in Malawi's future and speak of looming chaos and conflict, often using the term "war," a word that is not uttered often by participants from other regions. Participants of all regions, however, note that their views about the country's future are dependent upon on whether there can be significant change in the near future. The change the vast majority of participants believe is the key to whether the country can be saved from a "Zimbabwe-like" fate is a change in government, and more specifically a change in the presidency. Therefore, many view the 2014 elections as critical to Malawi's future and say that a full break with those associated with the current government is necessary to get the country back on the right track.

*If the current situation continues, Malawi will be very poor...There shall be indescribable poverty. (Lilongwe City-Kawale, Lilongwe District)*

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<sup>20</sup> Phrase is from a quotation in the Ntakataka group in Salima District.

<sup>21</sup> Phrase is from a quotation in the Domasi group in Zomba District.

<sup>22</sup> Phrase is from a quotation in the Wovwe group in Karonga District.

*Projecting from the way things are, Malawi will be very poor and both the economy and democracy will have been destroyed [by 2015]...I think we will be like Zimbabwe.* (Mzuzu City, Mzimba District)

*I think by that time [2015], this country will be in a catastrophe. We will be faced with hunger, disease and poverty.* (Ntunthama, Kasungu, District)

*To me, I feel like if we continue the way we are doing now things will be worse; unless the president changes, things will be worse...There will be war, because the president doesn't want to listen to what people are saying. Now it's like the government is fighting against the people.* (Ntchenachena, Rumphi District)

*If we shall still put DPP<sup>23</sup> in power [in 2014], things will become worse.* (Blantyre City-Lunzu, Blantyre District)

*If this country is going to be ruled by the president's brother, then things will be worse. It is better that in 2014 people should not vote for someone from DPP...I think things will be different if we elect someone else in 2014. But if we stick with these people, then we will still have problems.* (Matheni, Mzimba District)

*It will be a good country if people vote wisely in 2014.* (Salima Town, Salima District)

## V. Information Sources

### 1. Participants indicate they receive most of their information about events in Malawi through the radio, with private radio stations noted as the most popular sources. Private radio stations, particularly Zodiak, are perceived to provide the most trustworthy information.

Radio is, by a significant margin, the most consumed information source in Malawi, according to participants. When asked to specify their most listened to radio stations, participants most often cite private radio stations, especially Zodiak which is named by four times more participants than any other private outlet. Radio Maria, Joy Radio, Capital FM, Power 101, and MIJ FM are other private radio stations participants mention multiple times. Government-owned radio stations, Radio 1 and Radio 2, are part of some participants' listening patterns but, based on participant responses, do not approach the listening levels<sup>24</sup> of the private radio stations. International radio news sources, such as BBC and Al Jazeera, are noted by a few participants, primarily in Northern region, as important information sources.

Newspapers are a less important source of information than radio in Malawi, participants say, though they are more important in urban areas and district capitals. *The Nation/Weekend Nation* and the *Daily Times* are mentioned most often by participants as Malawi's key newspaper sources. A relatively small number of participants say that their regular information sources include television and the internet. Of those who do, most cite Television Malawi (TVM) as their key television source and Nyasatimes.com as the most visited internet source for news on Malawi. A few participants say that they also receive important Malawi news from friends and churches.

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<sup>23</sup> "DPP" refers to the Democratic Progressive Party.

<sup>24</sup> This study does not purport to reveal accurate audience levels for radio stations in Malawi; rather it only reports participants' descriptions of their listening behaviors. Obtaining accurate measurements of audience listening levels would require a statistically-based survey.

Zodiak is not only the most popular Malawi news source but also is the most trusted based on participant responses. Zodiak is praised for its wide reach and coverage as well its reputation for reporting events quickly. It also is credited for not showing favor and for its willingness to report accurate information, regardless of the subject matter. A few participants, however, criticize Zodiak for not reporting the whole truth. While not mentioned as often by name, participants also indicate they view other private radio stations as being trustworthy information sources, though as with Zodiak they have some doubt they are receiving the full story. The number of participants who say government-owned radio stations are trustworthy is relatively small, primarily because of a perception they favor government. Other non-radio information sources that at least a few participants cite as providing truthful information are *The Nation* newspaper and the internet site, Nyasatimes.

*I like to listen to Zodiak because they have journalists in many areas, and they report incidences quickly while they are happening.* (Bembeke, Dedza District)

*It [trusting Zodiak] is because when something has happened, they announce right away either at night, in the afternoon, and whether the government or opposition. They don't take sides; even if it's the president, MPs, duty bearers, or ministers, they are not scared of anything.* (Wovwe, Karonga District)

*Sometimes they [Zodiak] don't report the truth; they hide real news.* (Dedza Town, Dedza District)

*At least the private radio stations give truthful information.* (Nvera, Dowa District)

*These radio stations have 100% correct information; however, they fail to release everything because they are afraid the government may close the stations. At least they give us 90% correct information about what is happening in the country, we trust the private stations so much...Even on the other radios, it is the same thing. I think that in Malawi the journalists do not have freedom.* (Lilongwe City-Area 18, Lilongwe District)

*I like any private radio that says the truth. We listen to MBC for other news, such as Zammaboma and issues to do with government activities.* (Matheni, Mzimba District)

*Private radio stations tell the truth...MBC just praises.* (Chulu, Kasungu district)

*I trust Radio 1 MBC because it focuses so much on developmental issues rather than issues that can bring disturbances in the country. For example, issues to do with CBOs<sup>25</sup> and agriculture.* (Wovwe, Karonga District)

*We believe in the Nation newspaper, although it is expensive...It presents issues without bias.* (Domasi, Zomba District)

*Nyasatimes says the truth, and they are not afraid...Nyasatimes is very trustworthy.* (Salima Town, Salima District)

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<sup>25</sup> "CBOs" refers to community-based organizations.

## **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Malawian participants in this study describe the many hardships they face as a result of the multiple crises caused by the economic meltdown in the country. However, despite the real pain many feel and the great sacrifices many are making, the theme participants raise repeatedly is not their economic misery but instead is their anguish over their broken relationship with government. They no longer feel connected to government and talk of being isolated from it and abandoned by it. The disconnection from government leaves them without any opportunity to communicate their problems or to offer their opinions about what can be done to address them. Without the ability to have a voice in their own governance, participants say they feel hopeless and powerless over their own lives. Nevertheless, they have not lost faith in good governance. Participant responses demonstrate that they firmly believe in the power of their participation and have great faith that if the government can better listen and better respond to its citizens the country can quickly return to better days. Malawi's economic problems will take years to resolve, but participant contributions in this study suggest that greater citizen inclusion in government can increase satisfaction with it even independent of a major financial turnaround. Recommendations, based on these contributions, for how to accomplish that are below.

### **Increase Interaction and Consultation between Government and Citizens**

The top complaint of participants in this study is the failure of government officials to consult them. They do not understand how a government can be said to be representative when the citizens' views are not taken into account, except once every five years during elections. Without government efforts to include them in decisionmaking, participants say they have no other alternatives for participating in government. There will be no improvement in citizen satisfaction with government until citizens' basic desire to be heard is met. Without ward councilors (see below), participants pin most of their hopes for increasing their input into government on their MP, and so efforts to improve the relationship between the MP and his or her constituents should be a priority. To be effective those efforts would need to include multiplying face-to-face constituent visits, the establishment of regular meetings or forums across the constituency and the consideration of stricter requirements for residency in the constituency. Aside from the MP-constituent relationship, there also must be greater consultation at the district level with senior duty bearers. Citizens care most about their local environment, and so senior officials must work to make citizens feel they are contributing to its betterment. This can be accomplished in part by increasing the number of field visits duty bearers undertake, the establishment of regular meetings and forums between citizens and duty bearers, and the creation of and communication about channels through which citizens can provide their views to duty bearers. The isolation from government that participants describe is so profound that similar initiatives to better consult and include average citizens in their own governance should be considered by all relevant government officials and those who perform government functions, such as traditional leaders and VDCs.

### **Encourage Robust Involvement of Citizens in Local Development**

The most direct way to foster feelings of citizen participation in government is through development at the local level. Today, citizens feel mostly shut out of the process, with little knowledge of local development plans or funding. Participants in this study, however, make clear that they believe involvement in local development decisions is not only their right but also that

development will be immeasurably improved with it. To meet this demand, government must make citizens aware of and involve them in development planning processes. This will require communication to the widest possible audience. While VDCs and traditional leaders can serve as a useful link to the populace, it is evident from this study that many times they are not effective. Therefore, it is incumbent upon government officials to ensure that all citizens, regardless of their status, understand the development situation of the area. Increased transparency on funding available for development is a necessary component of that communication. Participants say citizens will be good stewards of government money if it will commit to sharing information about development funding with them. It is likely as well that satisfaction with government will increase if citizens can feel confident that what is allocated to them is spent well and on their priorities, even if the government fails to address all of their needs immediately. In this regard, there is need for greater civic education on the CDF and the LDF, specifically relating to what funds are available, who has access to them, and how spending of the funds is tracked. None of these efforts will be effective, however, if the government does not work to ensure that development is de-politicized. No citizen will feel comfortable in sharing their views on development or feel they are adequately represented by government until they are confident development decisions are made neutrally and without political bias.

### **Reinstate Ward Councilors or Establish an Effective Alternate Channel for Citizen Views**

It is unknown whether the many recollections from participants in this study about the effectiveness of ward councilors are mostly nostalgia or fact. What is apparent is that participants feel the discontinuation of councilors has been a great loss and is largely responsible for their isolation from government. According to participants, councilors assessed local problems, communicated those problems to government, facilitated local development projects, and most importantly, maintained regular contact with citizens. MPs, whether intended to or not, have not fulfilled that role in the absence of the councilors. It will be difficult for any government to win the confidence of its people without reestablishing the type of local link to government that councilors represented. Ward councilors are a familiar concept, and so their reintroduction would likely be welcomed by Malawians. However, it is not the form of linking citizens and government representatives that is important. Any alternate channel to government that citizens believe is accessible, approachable and effective at accessing their problems and communicating their views would be equally successful.

### **Demonstrate More Responsive Service Delivery**

In this study, participants outline their specific criticisms of service delivery in four key areas. While service delivery issues are often difficult to resolve, participants say that citizens' concerns about service delivery currently are not even acknowledged. As a first step, government could begin to gain the confidence of the public simply by giving voice to the major impediments to better service delivery that are well-known and highlighted by participants in this study; for example, the shortage of medicines in hospitals and clinics or the high pupil-to-teacher ratio in rural schools. This will at least confirm to citizens that they are not being ignored. The second step to creating greater confidence in government is for public officials to begin addressing key service delivery deficiencies, even if those actions are relatively small-scale initiatives such as participant suggestions to reintroduce school inspections, enforce minimum teacher qualifications, or implement a program to encourage empathy and compassion among health care professionals. Whatever the tactics, citizens will only believe they have a representative government when they see officials recognizing their concerns and being responsive to their needs.

### **Reaffirm Commitment to Freedom of Speech**

This study highlights participants' hesitance to share their opinions with government officials for fear of retribution. The relationship between citizens and government can only flourish when citizens feel free to express their true views in all situations. The confidence to do that, however, has been shaken in the last few years, and there needs to be a public re-commitment by government that this basic right will be respected and encouraged.

### **Take Visible and Believable Steps to Tackle Corruption**

If the problem of corruption is as pervasive at all levels as participants in this study suggest, it will require a massive and sustained effort over a long period to bring under control. However, even in the absence of a total solution, government action to address the problem in limited ways can go a long way to re-build the trust that has been eroded by the perception that corruption is sanctioned by government. That action could be aimed at the highest level to reinforce that no one is above the law or at one of the systematic corruption issues that participants say adversely impact their daily lives, such as the corrupt selling of government medicines. Regardless of the action taken, it must be more than mere window dressing. There is a high degree of skepticism that any institution in Malawi can effectively address corruption, especially the police and Anti-Corruption Bureau, and so only visible, demonstrable victories against corruption will be believed by the population.

### **Ensure the Political Neutrality of Traditional Leaders**

One option for creating stronger citizen-government interaction is to reinvigorate traditional leaders to better perform their roles. Traditional leaders already play that role to a certain extent but this study demonstrates mixed views about their performance. While they maintain legitimacy in the eyes of some, other participants describe traditional leaders as tainted by politics and thus unable or unwilling to properly represent citizen views. Therefore, de-linking traditional leaders from politics would be a necessary step to legitimize them as a voice for all citizens.

### **Better Employ Civil Society to Act as a Liaison to Government**

While not a focus of this study, it is clear from participant responses that their trust in non-governmental and community-based organizations is relatively high. They also view civil society as neutral actors who would be skillful and honest in communicating citizen views to government. While civil society should not assume government's responsibility for communicating with its citizens, there should be greater efforts to utilize the links and trust non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations have engendered in communities when appropriate to bring citizens and government together.

## APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

DISTRICT	LOCATION	GENDER	ETHNICITY	RELIGION	AGE GROUP	EDUCATION LEVEL
<i>Northern Region</i>						
Mzimba	Matheni	Male	Tumbuka	Christian	Middle	Secondary
Mzimba	Mpherembe	Female	Tumbuka	Christian	Older	Up to Standard 8
Mzimba	Mzuzu City	Male	Mixed	Christian	Younger	University
Karonga	Wovwe	Male	Ngonde	Mixed	Older	Up to Standard 8
Karonga	Kingu	Female	Ngonde	Mixed	Middle	Up to Standard 8
Nkhata Bay	Nkhata Bay Town	Female	Tonga	Christian	Younger	Secondary
Nkhata Bay	Kande	Male	Tonga	Christian	Younger	Up to Standard 8
Rumphi	Ntchenachena	Female	Tumbuka	Christian	Middle	Up to Standard 8
<i>Central Region</i>						
Lilongwe	Nambuma	Male	Chewa	Christian+ TB <sup>26</sup>	Older	Up to Standard 8
Lilongwe	Dzalanyama	Female	Chewa	Christian + TB	Younger	Up to Standard 8
Lilongwe	Lilongwe City – Kawale	Female	Mixed	Christian	Middle	University
Lilongwe	Lilongwe City – Area 18	Male	Mixed	Christian	Younger	Secondary
Kasungu	Chulu	Male	Chewa	Christian + TB	Middle	Up to Standard 8
Kasungu	Ntunthama	Female	Chewa	Christian + TB	Older	Up to Standard 8
Dowa	Nvera	Male	Chewa	Christian	Middle	Up to Standard 8
Dowa	Dowa Boma	Female	Chewa	Christian	Younger	Secondary

<sup>26</sup>Traditional beliefs.

DISTRICT	LOCATION	GENDER	ETHNICITY	RELIGION	AGE GROUP	EDUCATION LEVEL
Dedza	Dedza Town	Female	Chewa	Christian	Middle	Up to Standard 8
Dedza	Bembeke	Male	Ngoni	Christian	Younger	Up to Standard 8
Salima	Salima Town	Male	Chewa	Mixed	Middle	Secondary
Salima	Ntakataka	Female	Mixed	Mixed	Younger	Up to Standard 8
<b><i>Southern Region</i></b>						
Blantyre	Blantyre City – Lunzu	Male	Mixed	Mixed	Middle	University
Blantyre	Blantyre City – Bvumbwe	Female	Mixed	Mixed	Younger	Secondary
Mangochi	Mangochi Town	Male	Yao	Muslim	Middle	Secondary
Mangochi	Namwera	Female	Yao	Muslim	Younger	Up to Standard 8
Phalombe	Nkhulambe	Male	Lomwe	Christian	Younger	Up to Standard 8
Phalombe	Mlombe	Female	Lomwe	Christian	Middle	Up to Standard 8
Thyolo	Thekerani	Male	Lomwe	Christian	Middle	Up to Standard 8
Thyolo	Luchenza (Rural Area)	Female	Lomwe	Christian	Older	Up to Standard 8
Zomba	Zomba Town	Female	Mixed	Mixed	Younger	University
Zomba	Domasi	Male	Mixed	Christian	Older	Up to Standard 8
Mwanza	Ligowe	Male	Ngoni	Christian	Younger	Up to Standard 8
Mwanza	Mwanza Town	Female	Ngoni	Christian	Middle	Secondary
Chikhwawa	Chikhwawa Town	Male	Sena	Christian	Younger	Secondary
Chikhwawa	Chapananga	Female	Sena	Christian	Middle	Up to Standard 8



## APPENDIX B: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY NOTES

**Focus Group Research:** Focus group discussions are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following a pre-set guideline. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of participants who are recruited for the exercise. Focus groups are particularly useful in gaining a deeper appreciation for the motivations, feelings, and values behind participants' reactions. In addition, the group format enables participants to participate in an exchange of ideas – thus revealing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held – that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of participants, typically 8-12 per group. However, depending on the situation, groups may be slightly smaller or larger than the ideal. In the Malawi context, for example, a women's group in a more isolated area may benefit from being larger because it is likely that one or more of the participants will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed. NDI's methodology in this study was to conduct a relatively large number of focus groups to ensure the views of different regions, genders, age groups and education levels could be captured. In general, the number of focus groups conducted varies widely based on the goals of the research, but the total number of participants is always relatively small and cannot be considered statistically representative of the larger population.

**Group Composition:** Focus groups are recruited to be as homogeneous as possible to enhance the comfort level of the participants and to clarify the views of a particular sub-group. To the greatest extent possible, the focus groups in this report were stratified by gender, ethnicity, age, region, and education. Men's groups and women's groups were held separately, for example, and most groups were comprised of a single tribe. In areas where smaller tribes reside, mixed ethnicity groups were sometimes held. In addition, groups were organized by three broad age categories. The age categories used were broadly defined as younger (up to age 25), middle (ages 26-40), and older (over age 40). Given the difficulty of gathering participants in largely rural areas, the categories are used as a general guideline rather than a strictly enforced criterion. Participants sampled in the focus groups had widely varying degrees of education, ranging from none through university. As much as possible, participants were placed in focus group discussions with other participants of relatively similar educational backgrounds.

**Authority Participation:** All focus group discussions in this study were conducted with ordinary Malawian citizens. No traditional authorities or local government officials were allowed to participate or sit in on the discussions, even as observers.

**Ethnic Composition by Location:** Participants in the focus group discussions are generally drawn from the largest ethnic population of a particular area.

**Staffing:** All focus group discussions were led by trained Malawian moderators who conducted the discussions in languages appropriate to the local area.

**Facilities:** In rural areas, appropriate for focus group discussions are sometimes difficult to locate. As a result, groups are sometimes conducted in open-air settings, although this reduces the privacy of the group. Classrooms, church premises or village compounds were used as venues during group discussions.

**Remote Areas:** Groups are only conducted in locations that are reasonably accessible by vehicle. Efforts were made to penetrate deep into rural areas, but due to poor road networks the number of groups conducted in remote areas is limited.

**Outside Influence:** In some cases, local authorities are informed of the research activities before they begin. However, every effort is made to ensure there is no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. The focus group guideline is not shared with local authorities prior to the group. Also, the participants are gathered in as randomly as possible, based on local conditions. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from findings in the other groups overall, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

## APPENDIX C: MODERATOR'S GUIDELINES

### I. INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am working on a research project for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), a faith-based organization (FBO) with its national offices based in Lilongwe. We are trying to learn more about what citizens of Malawi think about the important issues in this area. I am neutral and am **NOT** working for the government or any political party. I am the facilitator for today's discussion.

- There is no right or wrong answers.
- Everyone's opinion is equally important. We want everyone to speak.
- If you disagree with someone, that is okay.
- This discussion is only between those of us here.
- I have this recorder to help me when I write the report. Your name will not be used in the report. The report will only say a [woman/man] from [location] said this or that.
- The person here is taking notes to help with the report.
- Please speak loudly so the recorder can pick up your voice.

Thank you. Any questions before I begin? Now let us begin.

### II. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

What are the main functions of the local government in this area?

1. What is your opinion of the job the local government is doing in this area?
2. How do citizens in this area have input into decisions made by local government?
3. What are the things that prevent citizens in this area from having more input into local government decisions?
4. What can be done to increase the input citizens have into decisions made by local government?
5. Give me an example of when citizens worked together to address a problem in the community. [FOLLOW-UP:] What caused the citizens to mobilize to address the issue? [PROBE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF MOBILIZATION AND WHY]

[IF PARTICIPANTS CANNOT GIVE AN EXPAMPLE ASK:] What would prompt citizens in this area to work together to solve a problem in the community?

6. Do you know what development projects are planned for your area? [IF YES:] Please describe them. [IF NO:] If you did know about development plans in your area, would that be useful to you?

- a. Do you know how much money is available for development projects in your area and for which sectors (for example in education, health, agriculture)? [IF YES:] How is that information useful to you? [IF NO:] If you had information on the money available for development projects in your area, would that be useful to you?
7. Who initiates development projects in your area? [PROBE FOR WHAT IS THE PROCESS (HOW IT IS DONE) OF INITIATING AND DEVELOPING THOSE PROJECTS ]
  - a. Who do you think should be in charge of initiating development projects here?
8. Have you heard of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and the Local Development Fund (LDF)? [IF YES:] How do you as citizens in your area access these funds and for what projects?
9. Have you heard of the Area Development Committees (ADCs) and the Village Development Committees (VDCs)? [IF YES:] Please describe the role they play in local government. [PROBE EFFECTIVENESS AT INCLUDING CITIZEN INPUT AND SOLUTIONS FOR MORE CITIZEN INPUT] [IF KNOWN FROM OTHER VILLAGES BUT NOT THEIR OWN, EXPLORE KNOWLEDGE AND ASK 'A' BELOW]
  - a. [SKIP IF 'NO' TO ABOVE QUESTION] How much influence does each of the following groups have on the VDCs and ADCs: [PROBE IF ANY HOLD POSITIONS ON THE VDCS AND ADCS]
    - Women
    - Youth
    - Disabled
10. What is your opinion of the duty bearers – the technicians that serve in the local government, such as the district health officer or the district education manager, and are responsible for implementing development projects – in your area?
  - a. How often do you interact with these duty bearers and in what ways?
  - b. What are your suggestions for increasing interactions between citizens & duty bearers?
11. What role does the member of parliament (MP) that represents your constituency play in affecting what happens in your area?
  - a. Is there a difference in the role your MP now plays in your area and the role that Ward Councilors used to play in your area? [FOLLOW UP:] Please explain your answer and provide examples.]
  - b. When an MP initiates a development project in your area, where does that money come from?
12. What is your opinion of the job that traditional leaders are doing in your local government?

13. What has been the impact of not having Ward Councilors in this area?

- a. If there were Ward Councilors, would that make a difference in improving service delivery in this area? [FOLLOW-UP:] Please explain.

### III. SERVICE DELIVERY

1. First, let's talk about education in your area. How would you rate the quality of education in this area – is it Excellent, Good, Fair OR Poor? [FOLLOW-UP:] What is the reason for your answer? [DO A COUNT AT THE BEGINNING]
2. Let's move on to health services in your area. How would you rate the health services in your area – are they Excellent, Good, Fair OR Poor? [FOLLOW-UP:] What is the reason for your answer? [DO A COUNT AT THE BEGINNING]
3. Now on to agriculture. How would you rate the agriculture services in your area – are they Excellent, Good, Fair OR Poor? [FOLLOW-UP:] What is the reason for your answer? [DO A COUNT AT THE BEGINNING]
4. How do you rate the services you are receiving related to security – are they Excellent, Good, Fair OR Poor? [FOLLOW-UP:] What is the reason for your answer? [DO A COUNT AT THE BEGINNING]

### IV. AVENUES FOR CITIZEN REPORTING

1. How much of a problem is corruption in Malawi – Very Much, Somewhat, A Little OR Not at All? [FOLLOW-UP:] Please explain your choice. [PROBE FOR EXAMPLES OF CORRUPTION]
2. If you see an act of corruption, what can you do to report it? [PROBE KNOWLEDGE OF AND AVENUES FOR REPORTING CORRUPTION IN THEIR AREAS]
3. When I say 'human rights,' please tell me how you would define that term.
4. Human Rights are commonly understood as fundamental rights to which every human being is entitled simply because she or he is a human being. Human rights are basic rights and freedom and can be political, social, cultural or economic. Human rights abuse means taking away or limiting these rights. If you know of a situation where someone's human rights are being abused, how can you report it? [PROBE KNOWLEDGE OF AND AVENUES FOR REPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THEIR AREAS]

### V. VOTING

1. What is your definition of democracy? [FOLLOW-UP] : Is democracy a good thing or not for Malawi?
2. Now, let's think about democracy just as a system of government. Democracy as a system of government calls for the active participation of its citizens and one element is that these citizens

chose their representatives through free and fair elections. Do you think that democracy is a good system of government for Malawi?

3. During elections, how do you decide who to vote for?
  - a. What are the two most important factors in determining who you will choose in voting for the President?
  - b. What are the two most important factors in determining who you will choose in voting for a member of parliament?
4. Did you vote in the 2009 elections? [ASK **ALL** PARTICIPANTS THIS QUESTION] [IF NO:] Why not?
5. Do you think it will be important for you to vote in next national elections in 2014? [FOLLOW-UP:] Why or why not? [DO A COUNT OF THE WHOLE GROUP – GET THE NUMBER OF THOSE THAT WILL VOTE AND GET THE NUMBER OF THOSE THAT WILL NOT VOTE in 2014]

## **VI. CURRENT ISSUES**

1. What are the biggest challenges facing Malawi today?
  - a. Do you have ways to voice your concerns about these challenges? [IF YES:] What are these? [IF NO:] Do you have any suggestions for how your voice could be heard about these challenges?
  - b. Earlier this year there were demonstrations organized by some civil society groups. What were the reasons for those demonstrations?
  - c. What is your opinion of those demonstrations?
2. If you had five minutes with the President, what advice would you give him for improving your quality of life?
3. Now, let's think into future to 2015, four years from now. What do you think Malawi will be like?

## **VII. INFORMATION SOURCES**

1. Where do you get most of your information about what is happening in Malawi?
2. Which of the ones you name do you trust most to give you truthful information?

**Thank you very much for your time and participation.**

## **APPENDIX D: ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Traci D. Cook** is the senior advisor and resident director for qualitative focus group research for the National Democratic Institute's Southern and East Africa region. An experienced opinion researcher, Cook has designed and authored public opinion studies in Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe and the Caribbean nation of Grenada. She previously served as senior director for strategic and corporate communications at the Women's National Basketball Association and as vice president of marketing communications at SS+K in New York City. Cook also led a parliamentary and civil society strengthening program as country director for NDI in Malawi during that country's transition to democracy. Complementing her work in the field of international development and in the private sector is her experience as political director for the Mississippi Democratic Party, legislative work on Capitol Hill, and research work for various U.S. House and Senate campaigns.

**Chris Chisoni** is national secretary of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. A locally long experienced social and opinion researcher, Chisoni has worked with numerous research institutes in Malawi and in Southern Africa region bringing to the fore, socio-economic, political and cultural issues influencing and impacting on citizen participation in governance processes in Malawi and Southern Africa. Chisoni coordinates numerous governance programs in Malawi dealing with parliamentary accountability and responsiveness; promotion of vertical accountability between citizens and their representatives and strengthening local governance systems and structures in Malawi. His role also implies an advisory role to the Episcopal Conference of Malawi on advocacy and lobbying processes in socio-economic, political and cultural development areas.









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