
**THE QUEST FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE BUDGET: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
ROLE OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS DURING BUDGET SESSIONS
IN MALAWI**

By

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***A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters Degree in
Women's Law, Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for Women's Law,
University of Zimbabwe
2006***

Abstract

This research seeks to improve Malawi's national budget making process in Parliament by making it more responsive to the gendered needs of its population, especially its poor rural women who represent the majority of its citizens. The researcher does this by conducting an initial investigation into the weaknesses of the current process which is heavily male-dominated and pays lip-service to existing interventions aimed at gender mainstreaming. As a result, Malawi's budget marginalises women (i.e., female constituents and MPs alike) and perpetuates inequalities between men and women on a national scale in violation of Malawi's Constitution and its various commitments under regional and international human rights instruments. Linking relevant women and development theories to appropriate methodologies, especially the grounded Women's Law Approach (WLA), the research journey captures and makes sense of a wide range of vital data (including legislation, human rights instruments, policy documents, reports, Hansard transcripts of Parliamentary proceedings, personal observations of budgetary proceedings, interviews and discussions with male and female MPs and rural women voters) which ultimately reveals the need to create and foster a strong link between rural women and their female MPs as a first step in the design of a gender-sensitive budget. This involves maximising the value of the on-going shared lived realities of these two groups of women. Their common experiences enable the strategic needs of the one group of women (who may be less articulate and educated) to be properly understood and championed by the other group at every level and in every step of the budget making process in Parliament. Furthermore, the unique grounded quality of the WLA also encourages male MPs to become partners with women and champions of their causes and those of other marginalised groups. Finally, the researcher identifies the steps that need to be taken within Parliamentary structures and processes to achieve a truly gender-sensitive budget which is capable of identifying the different gender needs of both its female and male citizens and directing the nation's wealth towards their fulfilment. These reforms include: increasing the number of women in Parliament and its committees and improving their skills in leadership and public presentation; improving the understanding and education of all MPs, male and female, in gender studies, its place in the wider framework of human rights and its precise role in the budget making process (for the benefit of their electorate, this should be done in a spirit of mutual support and co-operation); enforcing gender budget guidelines throughout all Ministries, especially the Ministry of Finance; increasing the gender-promoting capacity of the Ministry of Gender; and establishing a national sex and gender-disaggregated database from which to build an accurate citizens' profile for national budget planning, formulation and evaluation purposes.

Dedication

To my father, Christopher Mesikano

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank NORAD for sponsoring my scholarship to do studies in an area which I am passionate about.

My gratitude is also extended to my supervisor, Dr Amy Tsanga, for giving me guidance throughout my research. You never run out of words, are a source of encouragement and will continue to intrigue me.

My sincere gratitude goes to Professor Stewart and the rest of the staff at the Women's Law Centre for the support throughout the programme. I would like to give special thanks to Cecile Mariri for being such a reliable and helpful librarian.

I would also like to thank Dr Naomi Ngwira for providing endless literature which was very useful for my write-up and Mr Henry Chingaibe for assisting me in locating my key respondents in Parliament.

Thanks to my sisters and sister-friends for relying on me religiously for some feminist motivation.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Definition of terms.....	ix
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Research problem.....	1
1.2 Objectives and justification of research.....	2
1.3 Representation and participation of women in Parliament.....	3
1.4 Political party composition in Parliament.....	4
1.5 Research assumptions.....	6
1.6 Conclusion.....	8
CHAPTER TWO.....	10
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Gender in the national budget.....	10
2.2.1 <i>The budget meeting the needs of women</i>	11
2.2.2 <i>The budget meeting Malawi's gender commitments and attaining social equality</i>	14
2.2.2.1 Principles of national policy.....	15
2.2.2.2 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.....	15
2.2.2.3 The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.....	15
2.2.2.4 The United Nations Millenium Development Goals.....	16
2.2.2.5 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.....	17
2.2.2.6 The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, 1997.....	17
2.3 Policy review.....	19
2.3.1 <i>Gender Budgeting Guidelines</i>	19
2.3.2 <i>Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP)</i>	20
2.3.3 <i>Ministry Of Finance Budget Documents</i>	20
2.3.4 <i>National Gender Programme 2004-2009</i>	21
2.4 Gender analysis reports.....	22
2.5 Conclusion.....	22

CHAPTER THREE	24
3.0 METHODOLOGY	24
3.1 Introduction to theoretical perspectives.....	24
3.2 Theoretical approaches	24
3.2.1 <i>Women in development approach (WID)</i>	24
3.2.2 <i>Women and development approach (WAD)</i>	26
3.2.3 <i>Gender and development approach (GAD)</i>	27
3.2.4 <i>Women’s Law Approach (WLA)</i>	28
3.3 Research design	29
3.3.1 <i>Research methods</i>	29
3.3.1.1 Desk study of documentary and archival data	29
3.3.1.2 In-depth interviews with key respondents	31
3.3.1.3 Observations	32
3.3.1.4 Questionnaire	33
3.3.1.5 Group discussions	33
3.4 Conclusion.....	34
CHAPTER 4	36
4.0 THE MALAWI BUDGET MAKING PROCESS	36
4.1 Introduction	36
4.2 Role of the Ministry of Finance.....	37
4.2.1 <i>Analysis of the Ministry of Finance: Possibilities of gender budgeting through gender-targeted expenditures</i>	39
4.2.2 <i>Role of Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services</i>	40
4.3 Parliamentary role in the budget process.....	44
4.3.1 <i>Parliament as an institution</i>	44
4.3.2 <i>Budget speech by President: Delivering on our promises</i>	45
4.3.3 <i>Budget speech by the Ministry of Finance</i>	45
4.3.4 <i>Passing of Appropriation Bill</i>	46
4.3.5 <i>Civil society’s role</i>	47
4.3.6 <i>Development partners’ role</i>	47
4.3.7 <i>Political parties’ role in the budget process</i>	48
4.4 Conclusion.....	49
CHAPTER FIVE	50

5.0	PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE BUDGET PROCESS	50
5.1	Introduction	50
5.2	Research questions answered or challenged?	50
5.3	Findings and analysis.....	51
5.3.1	<i>Female Parliamentarians participate less during budget sessions than their male counterparts</i>	<i>51</i>
5.3.2	<i>Participation by both sexes is gender neutral.....</i>	<i>52</i>
5.3.3	<i>The budget is perpetuating gender inequality through its failure to address women’s concerns</i>	<i>53</i>
5.4	Emerging themes	54
5.4.1	<i>Representation of women in strategic Parliamentary Committees – A case of women spreading themselves too thinly</i>	<i>54</i>
5.4.2	<i>Women are more democratic leaders – Gendered difference in leadership styles between men and women.....</i>	<i>56</i>
5.4.3	<i>Non-participatory budget process.....</i>	<i>57</i>
5.4.4	<i>Drowning out their voices.....</i>	<i>59</i>
5.4.5	<i>Lack of gender mainstreaming in Parliament.....</i>	<i>60</i>
5.4.6	<i>Lack of gender mainstreaming in Ministry of Finance and government ministries.....</i>	<i>62</i>
5.4.7	<i>The alienation of the Ministry Of Gender</i>	<i>63</i>
5.4.8	<i>Budget literacy and analysis</i>	<i>63</i>
5.4.9	<i>Capacity building: Learning ‘to walk the talk’</i>	<i>64</i>
5.5	Conclusion.....	65
	CHAPTER SIX.....	67
6.0	RECOMMENDATIONS	67
6.1	Introduction	67
6.2	Legal interventions	68
6.2.1	<i>Legitimising the gender debate at the highest national level.....</i>	<i>68</i>
6.2.2	<i>Parliamentary reform.....</i>	<i>68</i>
6.3	Policy interventions	69
6.4	Other recommendations.....	69
6.4.1	<i>Lobbying.....</i>	<i>69</i>
6.4.2	<i>Empowerment of women</i>	<i>70</i>
6.4.3	<i>Building capacity</i>	<i>70</i>

6.4.4	<i>Budget literacy programmes</i>	70
6.4.5	<i>Preparation of sex-disaggregated data</i>	70
6.5	Monitoring and evaluation	71
	Bibliography	73
	Annexure I: Part of the 1996 Budget Speech by the South African Minister of Finance, Mr C.F. Liebenberg, on 13 March 1996	76
	Annexure II: Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet Women’s Budget Statement 2001 Overview	77

Definition of terms

Budget	A plan to raise revenue and how to spend it. It is also a financial statement prepared and approved prior to a defined period of time containing the policies to be pursued during that period to achieve defined objectives. ¹
Budgeting	This is a process of allocating limited resources to competing needs.
Gender-insensitive	Describe actions that do not consider their gendered implications.
Gender	This describes the social relations between men and women. It, therefore, refers not to men or women, but the relationship between them and the way this is socially construed. ²
Gender budgeting	These are systematic steps that are taken during budgeting processes to ensure that the needs of women, men and other special interest groups are taken into consideration during resource allocation and expenditure. ³
GDP (Gross Domestic Product)	This is the total value of goods and services produced in a country during a calendar year. It is used to measure economic growth.
Women's budget	A budget that addresses the sex-specific and gender-specific needs of women.

¹ Government Budget Formulation and Implementation, The Processes and Challenges. Society of Accountants Malawi. 2004.

² Moser, C (1993). Gender, Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training. Routledge, London and New York.

³ Gender Budgeting Guidelines, Ministry of Gender, Malawi Government.

Equity

Fairness, according to need.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research problem

The performance of women in political and decision-making positions is important for a country's sustainable development. Generally, for most of the world's countries, including Malawi, the most important political, but male-dominated, institution is Parliament. Out of the total membership of Malawi's Parliament of 193, only 26 Members of Parliament (MPs) are women, representing 13,61% of all MPs. Since women make up 52% of the country's population, their level of representation in Parliament is unacceptably low. The poor Parliamentary representation of Malawi's women closely reflects that of national Parliaments around the world⁴ and is the most obvious indicator of gender inequality. The world average percentage of women in Parliament is 16.4%, and in the Sub-Saharan region it is 16.6%.⁵ Besides the important right to representation, it limits the potential to address the needs of women at a national level. The world and regional figures reflect that *de facto* equality has not been realised not only in Malawi, but also in the region and in the world.

It became apparent to me that women are not utilised as agents of change for the benefit of the country in general or for the benefit of women in particular. The national budget sessions in Parliament are regarded as one of the most strategic legislative processes. However, the exclusion of women, through limited representation, gives rise to marginalisation of the needs of women, which are different from the needs of men. This broad assumption at the beginning of the research was based on appreciating the face value of the national budget, which planned to raise revenue of close to 117 billion kwacha, but only had a targeted gender expenditure of an allocation towards the day-to-day running of the Ministry of Gender which was less than one billion kwacha (K898, 746,953).⁶ Several indications through reports had shown that this amount was actually decreasing every year and that gender was actually off the agenda!

⁴ According to Kabeer (2000), the percentage of women in national Parliaments around the world is extremely low, averaging 13.8 percent in 2000.

⁵ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

⁶ Hansard, 15 July, 2005.

1.2 Objectives and justification of research

The Government of Malawi is comprised of three organs, namely, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. This separation of powers is essential in ensuring the independence and monitoring of one organ by the others. Ideally, the legislative organ has the primary role of enacting laws that govern the country. The executive has the administrative role of running government ministries and is driven by heads of Cabinet, otherwise referred to as ministers. The judiciary implements and interprets the laws, which are enacted by the legislature underpinned by the country's Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land.

Parliament is the decision-making structure and it has no legitimacy if its decisions are not representative of both men and women equally. The demand for equal representation of women in Parliament is supported by various justifications which are outlined by Sadie (2005) and require serious consideration.

Firstly, the democratic justice argument champions the involvement of women in political and decision-making structures as a fundamental human right and an important part of the democratic process. Principles of democracy are grounded on the principle of equal rights for all. Therefore, when government is controlled men, it raises the question about whose interest is paramount. It is imperative in a democratic dispensation for equal representation between men and women; after all, women constitute the majority of the population.

The second argument necessitates the presence of women as a condition for women's interests to be taken into account. This is simple because if men are in the majority, their voices are the loudest. But if women are involved in Parliament in larger numbers, their voices are also heard and their interests taken into account.

The third utility argument for women's increased participation is that it makes more sense to utilise women. It is a social loss for women's potential, skills and expertise to be laid to waste. In other words it seems logical to use women as equal agents in political and decision-making positions.

In view of the fact that these three arguments provide such a compelling justification for increasing women's representation in Parliament, one is forced to wonder why the whole

process is taking place at such a snail's pace, especially when one considers the fact that their continued under-representation is perpetuating the *de facto* inequality and neglect of women's needs at a national scale.

1.3 Representation and participation of women in Parliament

This margin between women and men representatives in Parliament calls into question whether the gendered aspects of the legislative process are adequately addressed. Parliament provides an adequate reflection on the power relations in society and it is clear that women do not share political power. With women having only 13.61% of power in Parliament, it is an indicator of under-representation of women in conventional forms of political participation. Economic marginalization of women is reflected in the lack of women's participation in the budget-making process even at the highest level of governance such as the Parliament. The representation of women in the National Assembly and their participation in the budget process both inside and outside Parliament raises concerns. Involvement of women in the budget process is imperative in a democracy because women's needs will continue to be marginalized if they do not understand issues of economic policy and articulate their budgets as a form of petitioning for their own economic and social rights.

Commenting on the quality of debate in the National Assembly, the Clerk of Parliament hit the nail on the head when stating:

‘I think the debates have a varied nature and many factors have contributed to this. In my opinion, this has to a large extent depended on the levels of understanding as well as interests in issues under consideration. I have also noticed that members have in some cases towed party lines in their contributions. It is my hope that in future MPs will deliberate issues on merit, bearing in mind their roles and responsibilities to their constituents and the nation at large.’⁷

The marginalisation of women both as agents and recipients of change provoked interest in this research area. It is an expectation of both ordinary women and the organisations which represent their interests that women elected to Parliament will be the driving force of their cause. It is a legitimate expectation and thus a major objective of the research was to analyse the nature and extent of participation by female Parliamentarians during budget sessions and whether they champion the cause of women.

⁷ Matilda Katopola, Clerk of Parliament, 2006-current.

An important aspect of the research was the outcome of the 2006 national budget which is a valid indicator to monitor and evaluate how the gender neutral participation of both women and men results in a national institution that fails to address the needs of people in general and the needs of women in particular.

The strategic presence of women in Parliament is a sign of women's empowerment, because the National Assembly is the highest structure of governance in a country. Having women in Parliament is a right to representation and central to civil and political rights. According to Kabeer (2000), gender equality implies fifty percent representation by women and such entitlement in the civil and political sphere of human rights raises an expectation that women in Parliament will bring attention in the National Assembly to their plight. Women in Parliament are, therefore, a vital part of the mechanism to ensure that women at the grassroots' level have a greater voice and participate one way or another in the manner in which government funds are spent for the benefit of everyone in the country. Economists at government and policy level need to listen to women's voices in economic thinking and modelling. This is more preferable than a non-participatory economic model which only looks at women as beneficiaries and not the driving force behind development.

The budget is the most important tool for the allocation of resources to support social and economic policy pronouncements, programmes and priorities that government has committed it to. Inherent in a budget is the allocation of resources between groups of people. It is important for gender issues to receive consideration in this distribution of resources for the budget to be efficient and equitable. Accordingly, the concept of gender budgeting upholds these principles of equity and efficiency through reprioritizing revenue and expenditure policies at national level so as to take more account of the needs and interests of poor women and implementation of relevant policies and programmes. On a higher scale of political willingness, gender budgeting also reflects on whether gender commitments made by government are supported by appropriate financial resources to implement them.

1.4 Political party composition in Parliament

Political ideologies affect participation in Parliament. The Clerk of Parliament intimated as much when he commented:

‘The National Assembly consists of individual human beings with different ideologies and beliefs who also belong to different political parties representing different interests.’⁸

In Malawi *de facto* decisions are made outside Parliament at official party meetings. Effectively, Parliamentary debates and process only function to ratify decisions already made. Political structures in themselves are exclusively male and a woman heads no political party. The under-representation of women in Parliament is a perpetuation of under-representation within political parties.

The composition of the political parties in Parliament is as follows:⁹

1. The Malawi Congress Party has 56 members of which 4 are women (5 percent).
2. The United Democratic Front has 49 members of which 11 are women (28 percent).
3. The Republican Party has 16 members of which 2 are women (12 percent).
4. The Alliance for Democracy has 6 members of which 1 is a woman (16 percent).
5. Independent members won 39 seats of which 5 were won by women.
6. Petra has one Parliamentary seat that is held by a woman (100 percent).
7. The Peoples Progressive Movement has 6 seats none of which was won by a woman won.
8. MCODE won 3 seats 1 of which is held by a woman.
9. Before the NDA disbanded it won 8 seats of which 2 were held by women.

While the above figures reveal that the representation of women in political parties varies, it has become apparent that the small number of women in each party seems to have a bearing on the fact that there still remains a lack of political party will to discuss gender issues in any real serious sense. Prominent female MP, Honourable Nancy Tembo, described this unfortunate state of affairs as follows:

‘If women’s issues coincide with the party’s agenda, it is a good combination, but if it varies then it is difficult.’

⁸ Matilda Katopola, Clerk of Parliament 2005 - current.

⁹ <http://www.sdn.org.mw/~Solomon/MEC/index.htm>.

Political party interests dominate economic governance. Some Members of Parliament resent the fact that political parties use some of their members as puppets and political decorations because they are elected on a party ticket. Most of the MPs who are able to and do talk freely are those who are independent. For example, one independent female MP said:

‘As women’s caucus political leaders split us up. I am independent, but I know my colleagues that’s what happens ... At party meetings they prepare about who should speak and what they should say, political affiliation affects how you behave in Parliament, what happens at the political caucus takes precedence over what happens at any other caucus.’¹⁰

With that in mind the research was based on the following five assumptions.

1.5 Research assumptions

1.5.1 Female Parliamentarians participate less during budget sessions than male Parliamentarians

This assumption was made in order to measure the levels of participation during the 2005-2006 budget sessions according to sex; in order to establish if women participate less than men and what kind of challenges, if any, they face in and outside Parliament, and how they affect their participation. Therefore, the major question was: *‘What are the sex-disaggregated levels of participation in Parliament during budget sessions?’* This assumption was, however, slightly challenged in that it became apparent during the course of the research that women did, in fact, participate during budget sessions and did so almost to the same extent as men. So focus now shifted to the substance of the submissions made by women as compared to that of those made by men. Surprisingly, men made most of the gender-specific contributions while women made gender-neutral statements.

1.5.2 Participation by both female and male Parliamentarians is gender neutral

This assumption was based on the quality of participation by both female and male Parliamentarians and whether it is gender neutral. Gender neutral in this sense means that men and women are treated as being identical, i.e., as having identical immediate and strategic needs. Gender neutrality is a result of the failure to differentiate between gender and sex specifications in society. Research questions centred on an assessment of verbatim recordings of the Hansards and the manner in which representatives in the National Assembly

¹⁰ Hon Getrude Mkandawire, MP.

articulate people's needs. The extent to which women Parliamentarians prepare for budget sessions in the form of briefings and meetings with lobby and interests groups became central in assessing the issues and the vigilance with which they are championed. The substance of capacity building and budget literacy programmes became fundamental to obtain a picture of the extent to which MPs understood and followed budget proceedings. This was based on the rationale that if people do not understand the budget and how it works, they will not be able to question the process in an informed and critical manner.

This assumption raised the possibility of general gender training programmes and, in particular, gender budgeting training for Members of Parliament. Beyond that I wanted to identify the problems that arise due to Parliament's failure to acknowledge the gendered differences that exist in society and which ultimately result in a gender-insensitive budget.

1.5.3 There is a lack of recognition by Parliament of how budgetary allocations affect men and women differently, resulting in the marginalisation of women as a social group

Questions for this assumption sought answers to the extent to which the government 'puts its money where its mouth is', so to speak. There was a pressing urge to identify levels of gender budgeting, if any, in the national budget, and, where it is lacking, whether there is any acknowledgement of responsibility for this failure by the powers that be. Another important aspect was the need for the presentation of sex-disaggregated data in policy documents, especially in the formulation of the national budget which would present an indicator of subsisting levels of comparison between men and women as to how they would benefit from any particular project. For example, when enforcing its policies, does government have the gendered needs of women in mind? How does government acknowledge women's needs? Does any of its programmes create gender equality or does it widen the gender gap?

1.5.4 The Ministry of Finance lacks gender sensitivity as evidenced by its gender-neutral budget statement

The research subject matter sought to seek concrete proof from the Ministry of Finance of what it understood to be the gender implications of the whole national budget. The Ministry's reliance on vital policy documents (such as the fiscal and monetary policies) which lack sex-disaggregated information, yet form the foundation of the national budget spoke volumes. The failure of the Ministry to consider sex-disaggregated data in the formulation of its own

policy makes it difficult for anyone to undertake a gendered analysis of the budget. This raised the question whether the Ministry acknowledges or even understands the meaning of gender inequality, because, on the face of it, there seemed to be no correlation between the differing needs of men, women, boys and girls on the ground and the budget that is meant to serve them.

1.5.5 Failure by female Parliamentarians to raise women's issues as national concerns during budget sessions means government's financial resources are not committed towards ending substantial gender inequality

This assumption problematised the estrangement of the budget, both in its formulation and execution, from its intended beneficiaries. I intended to identify the needs of women as a specific group and show how these seem divorced from the budgetary framework as a result of the marginalisation of women. The research aimed at outlining how women Parliamentarians are in touch with women and their problems, how these problems can best be addressed by women Parliamentarians who should be actively involved in the budget process but are not because they, the women MPs, are marginalized. Putting it simply, I intended to find out exactly what the budget really means for women.

1.6 Conclusion

The featuring of women in Parliament is a consequence of their position in their respective political parties and political culture continues to be defined by male norms. All political parties express their intention to integrate gender equality principles into their structures. They, however, just end up paying lip service to these commitments and women continue to fail to penetrate the real circles of power within their political parties. In reality, political parties are simply vehicles through which men protect their positions of power in Parliament and, as a consequence, that institution continues to be defined by men.

There are internal and external forces which affect budget preferences before the budget is handed over to Parliament. The promotion of beneficial social transformation must be reflected in the work Parliament, including the budget so that necessary adjustments may be made to it, especially in response to the pressing perennial needs of the poor. According to the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy, 63% of Malawians live in poverty and women are

disproportionately represented among the poor.¹¹ Therefore, urgent attention needs to be taken to make women Parliamentarians instruments of change in responding to the priorities of poor women. It is important to stress that in this research the concern with gender budgeting was twofold. Firstly, I was interested in its ability to meet the needs of women, and, secondly, with its ability to achieve social equality.

The low number of women in Parliament is a reflection of Malawi's patriarchal society, where power rests in the hands of a few men and, as a result, decisions are made which protect their interests. It is essential to have more women in Parliament with the aim of making it a more conducive place for both its female and male Members to exercise responsibly and professionally their different, though complementary, leadership styles so that they may bear the best fruit for their shared constituents.

¹¹ GoM. Draft Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Lilongwe. 2001.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The budget is the most important economic policy instrument of the government, reflecting its priorities and aspirations. The policy determines the action that government will take through the allocation of resources. The budget does not affect everyone more or less the same because its formulation is grounded on generalization of the needs of the average person. This neutral approach in the allocation of resources only serves to reinforce existing inequalities, which suppress the interest of women. Gender-sensitive budgeting is the allocation of resources within a budget with cognizance being given to society's gender relations and mainstreaming the budget according to its impact on men and women.¹² An important way of engendering the budget process is through taking into account the views and needs of women through the budget formulation process, especially through their participation at the level of Parliament. The presence of women and their active participation when budget decisions are made is central to good governance and a sound democracy.

Accordingly, this research was grounded on the literature appraisal of why it is essential to have a gender-sensitive budget and the crucial need for women to exercise a meaningful presence in Parliament to enable its realization.

2.2 Gender in the national budget

Two arguments have been championed for gender in Government budgets. Ngwira (1999) explains that gender is often used as an indicator of disadvantage and need. This disadvantage has to be addressed and acknowledged in the allocation of resources and the need has to be met for the budget to be efficient and for it not to be an instrument to perpetuate existing inequalities.

Secondly, governments always have limited resources and expenditure will almost always be targeted so that it reaches those who are most in need. Therefore, specific expenditures at

¹² Rhonda Sharp (1999), Women's Budget, in Budlender D. & Sharp R., How to do a gender sensitive budget. Commonwealth Secretariat.

times have to be made, targeted at ending gender inequality. It is important to stress that in this research the concern with gender budgeting was twofold, firstly, in meeting the individual woman's needs, and, secondly, as a strategy for attaining social equality as a fulfilment of regional and international human rights commitments. Unfortunately, mainstream economists are motivated by theories of economic growth and efficiency as a result of gender blindness and are not easily persuaded by the value of gender in the budget process.

2.2.1 The budget meeting the needs of women

Budlender (1999) accurately observes that Malawi's women are key economic agents because they are the main food producers in the agricultural and subsistence sectors. Budget policies have different but significant impacts on men and women and they may be a source of undermining gender equality efforts. The positive effect of any financial policy is reduced when its impact on different social groups is not closely considered. The Ministry of Finance in Malawi has displayed such serious forms of gender blindness both in the formulation and presentation of the budget that it may be safe to assume that it affects all aspects of any of the government's budget-related work. I, therefore, identified several indicators of how the budget was gender-insensitive in different sectors. Though this is not an exhaustive list of indicators in the 2005/6 national budgets, they do go some way in explaining how the budget marginalized women.

Budlender (1999) also explains the way in which the national budget is usually formulated ignores the differently socially-determined roles, responsibilities and capabilities of men and women. These differences are generally structured in such a way as to leave women in an unequal position, with less economic, social and political power. The fact of the matter is that the continued recycling of gender-insensitive budgeting perpetuates the limited political power that women have, especially in political and decision-making positions such as Members of Parliament.

The most obvious way of telling whether the budget will meet the needs of women is through the budget statement from the Ministry of Finance supported by that of the President. Although it may be viewed as an instrument to monitor and evaluate implementation of the budget, in most cases it is a political statement and publicity exploit to reflect on the ruling party's financial discipline.

One area in which the budget failed to appreciate the gender dynamics in the 2005/6 national budgets is in the agricultural sector, with the issue of food for work, or rather the road maintenance programme. The background to this is as follows. After being pressurized by development partners (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), the government came to the conclusion that provision of free fertilizers to the poor did not necessarily increase agricultural production but rather gave rise to an unhealthy counter-productive dependency syndrome. As a result, the government planned to start selling fertilizer at a highly subsidized price. Because even this highly subsidized price was too high for people in the rural areas who had no source of income, the government decided to introduce a road maintenance programme. This programme involves the construction and maintenance of roads throughout the country. At the end of the day, people are paid in the form of a coupon to buy fertilizer, a coupon for a bag of maize, or cash. This has come to be popularly known as *food for work*.

The gender dimensions of this programme reveal that it is creating employment for men while marginalizing women because it is based on an economic theory that ignores the 'care economy'. The care economy, as popularized by Elson (1997), is one in which women provide and produce goods and services in the home without receiving cash or any reward. The care economy produces family and community-oriented goods and services as part of caring for people. Both men and women work in this economy, but it is relatively intensive in its use of female labour which constitutes a free supply of human labour and maintains the social framework and the government is highly dependent on it. In Malawi, social dynamics have resulted in women taking care of the children, sanitation and looking after the old and the sick. Women are the subsistence farmers who produce and prepare food for the family, not food for sale. These activities consume much of a woman's daily working hours, compared to a man who will use these hours for paid work. As a result of this programme, women are restricted to a ghetto where they are not readily available to provide their labour for the food for work programme because of these social responsibilities. These responsibilities steal the time women would otherwise have to conduct income-generating activities. It is mostly men who are available to do such work and there is no guarantee that what they earn from this programme will be used to increase agricultural production. In practice, the tendency of men is to (ab)use the programme to acquire the cheap fertilizer and maize for resale in urban areas at a higher price. This reflects the marginalisation of women,

who, as a social group, are not ‘benefiting’ in the same way as men from this food for work programme. In other words, this programme is perpetuating the inequalities already suffered by women in terms of access and participation in social and economic development.

Another gender-insensitive feature of the 2005/6 national budget has been the reduction in the allocation to the Ministry of Gender Youth and Community Services. Much as the argument has been that most ministries had a reduction in their budgetary allocation, this particular ministry is categorized as a Protected Pro-Poor Expenditure (PPE) ministry. This means that the stakeholders of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy have agreed that its expenditures are protected from any cuts in the event of a shortfall of resources in the national budget.¹³ The overall budget grew by 32 percent, yet the budgetary allocation for this ministry was reduced by 92 percent. This greatly affects the ministry’s activities, as the national gender machinery, in its mission to facilitate socio-economic empowerment of women, men, girls and boys. The Gender Affairs Department actually shelved most of its activities because of the tight allocation approved by treasury.¹⁴

The indicators of gender insensitivity in the 2005/6 budget are not limited to the ones mentioned in this review. The purpose of the research is to sample the process and provide workable recommendations for future budget processes; hence, the research has been confined to the analysis mentioned. The final analysis is limited to the health sector. Malawi has the second highest maternal mortality rate which in 2004 sat at 1,800 per 100,000 live births.¹⁵ This is second to Sierra Leone which is a country ravaged by war, at a rate of 2,000 per 100,000 live births. Malawi has graduated to this rate, which in 1990 was at 620 per 100,000. Maternal mortality is a sex and gender-specific problem because it is a clear indication of the increasing number of women that are dying.

Much as it has been government policy to allocate more and more resources to the Ministry of Health, the source of the funding has been from outside the country. This clearly shows that it is not a government initiative but part of a donor-driven agenda, which increases the country’s vulnerability by making it subject to the strings that may come attached to donor funding. In its budget process, the government has been ambiguous about the issue of

¹³ MEJN. July 2005 National Budget Synopsis.

¹⁴ Government of Malawi. Ministry of Gender Community & Youth Services. Report on Activities. 2005.

¹⁵ UNDP Human Development Report 2004.

maternal mortality in that, despite its serious nature, it has not been declared a national problem. The national budget does not treat maternal mortality as an urgent matter and no specific policy has been formulated to address it.

As a final resort, a review must be made of Malawi's gender commitments both at domestic and international level. It is hoped that the country may be held to account by the international community.

2.2.2 The budget meeting Malawi's gender commitments and attaining social equality

International standards regarding political participation of women can influence the seriousness to which parties are willing to nominate women. Human rights in Malawi, especially those related to women, are not always complied with, thus ordinary Malawian women and the nation in general fails to benefit from the signing and ratification of international instruments by the government. A gender-sensitive budget is also about taking government's gender commitments and translating them into budgetary commitments.¹⁶ It is about taking government's commitments to gender equality in treaties, conventions and declarations and translating them into budgetary commitments.¹⁷ Malawians have not benefited much from the signing or ratification of international human rights or development instruments. This is attributed to the government's systematic failure to implement agreed international standards and recommendations.¹⁸ Consequently, it is necessary to analyse the country's gender commitments.

Gender equality is a human right and, according to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. In this case, the argument is not for women and men to be treated the same. On the contrary, it means that their opportunities and life chances should be equal, even if this means treating one social group more favourably than another. Gender inequality is a social construct, which is fuelled by social, cultural and economic factors. Therefore, these factors can be strategically changed to end gender inequality.

¹⁶ Budlender D & Sharp R, *How To Do A Gender Sensitive Budget*. Commonwealth Secretariat.

¹⁷ Civil Society Budget Training Manual, 2003, MEJN.

¹⁸ Malawi, Strategic Country Gender Assessment, World Bank, UNDP. May 2004.

2.2.2.1 Principles of national policy

According to Section 13(a) the Malawian Constitution,¹⁹ principles of national policy oblige the government, among other things, to implement policies aimed at achieving gender equality such as national budgets, which are responsive to the gender-specific needs of the nation. They further place an obligation of power sharing with women who are members of the society. Full participation of women in political and decision-making positions is a constitutional right and the government should be held accountable for not providing an enabling environment in which this right is exercised to its fullest extent.

2.2.2.2 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

According to article 12 of the ICCPR, which Malawi has signed and ratified, the state is under an obligation to adopt legislative or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the covenant. This provision in pushing the gender-budgeting agenda calls for states to show political willingness in implementing human rights obligations by, for example, committing money targeted towards a realization of human rights. Human rights in international covenants should not remain a myth; rather, there should be a proactive conscience within the government to make the human realization of human rights a reality.

According to article 25 of the ICCPR, people have the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs or through freely chosen representatives. The marginalisation of women as representatives and beneficiaries of the budget formulation and implementation process is illegitimate. Therefore, attitudes need to change and need to become more accepting of women's potential role in the budget process.

2.2.2.3 The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

In 1990 Malawi ratified the CEDAW Convention. Under this convention the definition of discrimination against women is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women irrespective of their marital status on the basis of equality of men and

¹⁹ Section 13(a) provides that the state shall actively promote the welfare and development of the people of Malawi by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality... (i) through the full participation of women in all spheres of Malawian society.

women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Furthermore, article 4 of CEDAW calls for temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between men and women. The national budget has clear indicators of planned programmes that in effect limit and restrict the enjoyment of fundamental human rights by women. The planning and execution of activities that do not take into consideration the social dynamics, resulting in the marginalisation of women from financial activities is a direct violation of this convention. The failure of the state to make deliberate efforts which accelerate equalities through the national budget shows its non-compliance with the women's convention. Thus, women need to speak collectively and strongly to shape their own societies. Commitment of the state to its obligations in this convention should be reflected in its national budget in that targeted expenditures should be made to improve the lives of women and girls. The absence of such expenditures in the national budget has to be addressed through a demand for time-saving infrastructures, such as boreholes or water reservoirs, health centres and child care centres which lessen the burden on women in the care economy.

Economic and social rights in CEDAW can be achieved and depend directly on budgetary decisions. This can be done by translating policy and legal commitments to certain rights into budgetary allocations.

2.2.2.4 The United Nations Millenium Development Goals

In 2000 world leaders translated these goals into values which should guide development across the globe. Both developed and developing countries appreciated the urgent need to reduce poverty by half by the year 2015. Among the eight Millennium Goals, gender equality is the third on the list as an important development agenda, appreciating the limited place that gender has especially in economic policies.

An indicator of gender equality is the visibility and increased proportion of seats held by women in Parliament. In the presence of gender inequality, economic growth is stunted. This is because if issues which affect women and make them poor are not addressed, economic growth should not be expected. The Millennium Development Goals, however, make gender an explicit goal, with one of the indicators of progress being the increase in the percentage of women holding seats in national Parliaments. As far as Malawi is concerned, there seems to

be reluctance on the part of the state to recognise the need to increase budgetary allocations to key MDG areas, which currently falls below the international standards. While international standards require, for instance, that 26% of the Gross Domestic Product be allocated to MDG 2 (i.e., achieving universal Primary education), the Malawi government allocated only 14%.

In addition to other obligations, reducing maternal mortality from 155 per 100,000 live births by 2015 is a goal which the government should achieve by implementing an appropriate strategy. The government's failure to have a deliberate policy to address it will definitely lead to Malawi missing this goal. The importance of this goal is that it vindicates the end product of formulating a budget, which does not appreciate the gender dimensions of its allocations.

2.2.2.5 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

Malawi was among the first 15 countries to ratify this protocol and bring it into force. The obligation under article 2(c) is to integrate a gender perspective in government policy decisions, legislations, development plans, programmes and activities in all other spheres of life. Furthermore, according to article 9, women have a right to participate in political and decision-making processes as equal partners with men. This is a long overdue correction of women's exclusion from budget formulation.

The state also has an obligation to introduce a gender perspective in the national development planning procedures.²⁰ This extends to the provision of a sound database, with sex-disaggregated data, to enable a gender analysis at the planning stage, especially that of the budget. This obligation will assist in curbing gender blindness and avoid gender neutrality by the ministry responsible for co-ordinating the formulation of the budget. The absence of sex disaggregated data at the planning stages for services provided by ministries only serves to widen the gender gap and marginalizes women in the process.

2.2.2.6 The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, 1997

In the Southern African region women constitute a majority of the population, however when it comes to political and decision-making positions they are not represented in proportion to their numbers. In 1997, the Declaration on Gender and Development was adopted by Heads

²⁰ Article 19.

of State and Government in Blantyre, Malawi. This commitment is to the effect that equal representation of women and men in the decision-making processes of member states and SADC structures should be achieved with a minimum target of 30% representation of women by 2005.

The number of female members in the Malawi Parliament is low and stands at 13.61 percent. Although the number of female MPs is increasing, the rate at which they are doing so is too slow and, for that reason, it still falls below the 30% commitment of the SADC Declaration. It is apparent that so long as women remain in the minority in the House their influence in Parliamentary discussions will remain diminished. Despite Malawi's commitment to this target, it has not been reached.

The Malawi Women Parliamentary Caucus was set up in 1995 and is comprised of all female Members of Parliament. It is not a Parliamentary Committee, but merely a gathering of female MPs. In its Strategic Plan, one of the expected outputs of the Caucus's programme and continued existence is *increased budgets on areas that affect the lives of women*.²¹ However, it is important to depart from the misconception that some areas do not affect women. While some areas have more easily identifiable gender-related benefits than others, all areas affect women and men differently but are of equal importance. Consequently, gender budgeting provides an opportunity for gender issues to be introduced into the heart of government operations and financial management.

Among the key activities identified by women Parliamentarians in their strategic plan is capacity building and training in etiquette, public speaking, communication and debating skills. This is aimed at increasing the levels of individual confidence of MPs with the hope of enhancing participation. The principle of gender budgeting promotes active involvement and participation of women, men, and other marginalized groups through different intervention stages such as Parliament.

Parliament is strategically positioned to implement gender budgeting principles as a way of ending substantial gender inequality because it is an institution which has the potential to

²¹ Malawi Women Parliamentary Caucus - Changing the Face of Politics Women Making a Real Difference. Strategic Plan (Unpublished).

build political will and the gradual promotion of women's leadership role within the most prestigious political structure of government.

2.3 Policy review

2.3.1 *Gender Budgeting Guidelines*

The Ministry of Gender in co-ordination with the Ministry of Finance has formulated Gender Budgeting Guidelines. Although the Guidelines belong to the Ministry of Gender, there are calls for the Ministry of Finance to adopt them. The reason why my thesis insists that ownership should be with the Finance Ministry is because the Ministry of Gender is structurally weak and its functions are, unfortunately, lower on the rank of priorities, unlike the Ministry of Finance, which is at the helm of all government functions.

The Guidelines outline the budget process, and propose workable solutions on how the budget process can be engendered. However, the Guidelines fall short, in that they have not identified Members of Parliament as serious stakeholders in the budget process. Even the strategies of intervention do not acknowledge the essential role of involving Parliamentarians in the formulation of the budget.

The Guidelines are more centred on the role of ministry officials and are biased towards mainstreaming gender in the government, rather than economic governance as the starting point for a gender-sensitive budget. The difference is that the focus of attention is different, because if the guidelines were more concerned with economic governance and equitable distribution of resources, then they would be targeted for use by stakeholders who are more in touch with the problems of the nation including, but not limited to, Members of Parliament. This observation provides the answer to why the Ministry of Finance is not adopting these guidelines as their own because then it will seem as if they are usurping the Ministry of Gender's responsibilities of gender mainstreaming, it is because the Guidelines are more for the use of gender mainstreaming and not based on theories of economic growth, efficiency and governance.

2.3.2 Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP)

This is a policy document of Malawi's action plan to reduce the high levels of poverty in the country.²² All government's efforts to reduce poverty meet in this document. As such it is the centre of government's plans and priorities. This is the basis for the entire national budget and provides the roadmap that outlines goals and activities the budget must fund in order to reduce poverty.²³ This policy has outlined four key areas for poverty reduction. Although gender is not among the four, it is recognised as a cross-cutting issue that affects all efforts made towards poverty reduction. Anti-poverty work is understood from a human rights framework and the fact that the state is obligated to provide work and health care, corresponds with the rights of citizens demand these.

According to the strategy, 63% of Malawians live in poverty and women are disproportionately represented among the poor.²⁴ It is evident that this formulation process of this strategy paper was a participatory one, thus it is an engendered policy document.

The policy is quick in acknowledging that addressing the gender disparities will lead to the attainment of increased economic growth and sustainable human development. Thus the MPRSP has outlined one of its objectives as enhancement of women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes. The MPRSP says:

'Empowerment and participation of women in decision-making is vital for development. Let women take part in decisions that affect them.'

2.3.3 Ministry Of Finance Budget Documents

The government of Malawi budget consists of the following documents:

1. Budget document No 1: Delivering our Promises; Budget statement presented in the National Assembly. The Minister of Finance's speech introducing the budget to the National Assembly is the first budget document and is considered a formal statement of government policy. It has provided insight of government's priority areas and what government is committed to spending more finances on.
2. Budget Document No 2: Annual Economic Report 2005.

²² Malawi Economic Justice Network, 2004. A Simplified Version of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Paper.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ N.Ngwira *et al.* In, Engendering The MPRSP: Lessons from Failure. eds. Mulinge M. 2003.

3. Budget Document No 3: Financial Statement 2005/6 which is a summary of the votes.
4. Budget Document No 4: Draft estimates of expenditure on recurrent and capital accounts.

These documents in total comprise the Malawi budget, which Parliament deliberates over. The documents provide information on the how the exact amount in the government budget totalling K119, 498, 537, 425 which became Bill No.14 of 2005 Appropriation will be spent. The above documents show the exact allocation of the funds. However, more meaning behind the figures can only be known during the formulation process. The Ministry of Finance in Parliament makes the final motion, for the amount to be part of the consolidated account for purposes of ensuring government services continue.

2.3.4 National Gender Programme 2004-2009

Government launched this programme as a sign of commitment to pledge and promote gender equality and empowerment of women. The implementation of this programme falls within the mandate of the Ministry of Gender and the Parliamentary Committee on Social and Community Affairs which puts into effect government's priorities on gender equality. The programme has eight important objectives, including the objectives to strengthen gender mainstreaming in public and private sectors, to reduce poverty among women through economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of women's participation in politics and decision-making. The marriage between women in political and decision-making positions, and the attainment of gender equality is inseparable. Consequently, women in these positions are instrumental in changing the situation of women.

The policy provides a plan of action with clear identification of key players to carry through their objectives. Institutional arrangements have been defined and the role of the President is defined as that of upholding the Constitution which guarantees equality. As a consequence, in his State of the Nation address, the President is obliged to make a clear statement of how his government intends to uphold the Constitution. With the support of Cabinet, there should be an adoption of a gender dimension in the budget; to reflect on this political will to achieve gender equality in fact. The programme further obliges Parliament to be responsible for passing legislation that promotes gender equality, without perpetuating inequalities.

2.4 Gender analysis reports

All of the reports on gender analysis I came across during the research were by members of civil society. Malawi Economic Justice Network has championed budget analysis both in-depth and in general, at all budget sessions, yet they have been gender neutral in their approach. They have been quick to state that their services are demand-driven, therefore, a gendered analysis of the budget has not been undertaken by them because no one has raised the demand. Consequently they prepare gender neutral budget analysis.

There has been some independent gender analysis of the National budget by consultants such as the Report by Debbie Budlender and Naomi Ngwira in 1999, the Gender in the Malawi Government Report of 2000, commissioned by CIDA, and finally the Engendered Analysis of the 2002/3 National Budget by Jan De Waal, Stephen Mwale *et al.* under the auspices of CIDA. But these are insufficient because they are more in the form of post-mortem reports and have been presented way after the budget has been passed. They have not been made available whilst Parliament is deliberating over the budget with the aim of lobbying for a gender sensitive budget. Despite this, the report undertaken in 2000 stressed the objective of a gender analysis of the budget as being a way of helping more women participate so as to ensure that government resources are used to meet the needs of Malawians who need them. This was a major finding in that conclusively it justified my research, which seeks to call for greater participation of women Parliamentarians in the quest for a gender sensitive budget which meets the needs of women.

2.5 Conclusion

With obligations there are corresponding rights. Thus with the obligations that the government holds at national, regional and international level, there is need for custodians of these rights to hold their leaders accountable. Without embarking on field study, the information on paper reflects a different situation on the ground, with policy divorced from the lived realities of women. By assessing the budget and its effect on women and men, it is obvious that budgetary decisions affect men and women differently. In terms of gender commitments, the national budget is one way through which gender programmes can be placed on the national agenda.

The following chapters will outline the lived realities and actual role of women both as instruments and beneficiaries of change.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to theoretical perspectives

To validate the assumptions my sources of data were government departments, both female and male Parliamentarians, Hansards, print media, non-governmental organizations and ordinary women.

Within the context of my research topic, my methodological framework was best supported by the theoretical approach of Women in Development. The approach's firm grasp of the concept of women's actual and potential roles in development processes and the increased calls for social justice, improved education and employment opportunities, increased health and welfare services for women provided a solid foundation for the research. Broadly speaking, the research was based on five assumptions and much as the overall methodological framework was influenced by the Women in Development Approach, there were some assumptions for which the approach was inappropriate; consequently a different approach was adopted. As a result, my methodological framework was shaped by a fusion of the Women in Development Approach, the Women and Development Approach, the Gender and Development Approach and the Women's Law Approach, which assisted in supporting my assumptions. The following is an outline of each approach and how it was useful in the research process.

3.2 Theoretical approaches

3.2.1 *Women in development approach (WID)*

The Women in Development Approach targets women as an underutilized resource in the overall development process.²⁵ The core elements of this approach strengthen the research objective in its call for social justice, political equality and increased health and welfare services.

²⁵ Mainstreaming Gender in Debt and Development Resource Management. (2005), Commonwealth Secretariat.

Therefore, grounded on the research, this approach, *firstly*, supported the assumption about the direct role of women Parliamentarians in the budget process. In order for the national budget to take into account gendered needs, there is a need to recognize the contribution of women Parliamentarians in the budget process and formulation within Parliament as well as women as active contributors to the economy. This methodology is pertinent in order to appreciate women's potential in budget formulation, which results in a budget that is effective in addressing the needs of women. In addition, the Women in Development approach values equity in its attempt to meet women's needs. Thus, the principle of gender budgeting and the Women in Development approach share common ground in upholding equitable distribution and eliminating gender inequalities.

This approach was beneficial in the research assumption which problematised the representation and participation of women in Parliament budget processes. It also assisted in identifying data to substantiate the following assumptions of the research:

- That female Parliamentarians participate less during budget sessions than male Parliamentarians (Assumption 1).
- That participation by both female and male Parliamentarians is gender neutral (Assumption 2).
- That failure by female Parliamentarians to raise women's issues as national concerns during budget sessions means government's financial resources are not committed to ending substantial gender inequality (Assumption 5).

A widespread reality is that women and their policy interests have been marginalized as a result of men's monopolization of political and decision-making structures and men's voices predominate in these structures.²⁶ Thus, gender inequalities exist not only to the disadvantage of women in decision-making structures, but they trickle down to and prejudice women on the ground.

The Women in Development Approach was important in the research in that it acknowledged the subordination of women in development and government processes. Of major importance throughout the research is women's potential role in Parliament and government structures

²⁶ Sadie. Y., Women in Political and Decision Making in the SADC Region. AGENDA, 65. 2005.

and what can be done to increase participation and representation by women for women and men.

Secondly, this approach was pertinent in the call for increased health and welfare services. The sex and gender specific problem of maternal mortality, which was a clear indicator of gender insensitivity in the national budget, was sustained by this approach. Research questions raised by the following research assumption:

- That failure by female Parliamentarians to raise women's issues as national concerns during budget sessions means government's financial resources are not committed towards ending substantial gender inequality (Assumption 5)

enabled the identification of a national problem, which affected women but did not receive the urgent attention it required.

3.2.2 Women and development approach (WAD)

The outstanding principles of this approach are the economic dependency of women and the conceptualization of work, which does not include what women undertake in the care economy. Gender-blind economic theories are a manifestation of the sex segregation of labour, which restricts women from engaging in paid work due to social responsibilities. These economic theories become the basis of budget formulation, which plans and executes programmes, which further marginalize women, because of this failure to acknowledge the 'invisible work' that women do.

The Women and Development Approach also influenced my research on assumptions about women being forced to be overly dependent on men and men being controllers of resources. The budget being controlled by men and their deciding how to spend the money at a national level denied women their practical needs, such as health care and agricultural inputs. As a result, the budget is used as an instrument to buttress the interests of men, without taking into consideration the social dynamics that disadvantage women. The basis of this theory is confirmed by empirical findings that economic theories which neglect gender relations are instrumental in perpetuating inequalities.

Understanding the strategic needs of women (in particular, their right and access to decision-making in the budget process) were best achieved by appreciating the existing social structures which subordinate women. This approach assisted in an appreciation of the existing power structures and how women are marginalized in power-sharing structures.

3.2.3 Gender and development approach (GAD)

The Gender and Development Approach seeks to integrate women's needs into the wider picture, calling for different life courses of men and women to be considered at an early stage and emphasising the need to monitor the different impact of policies and programmes on women and men, girls and boys. Gender refers to the socially defined roles of men and women. The status of both sexes has to be considered.²⁷ This approach aims to meet not only women's practical needs, such as water, food, and shelter, but also their strategic needs such as land rights, reproductive rights and access to decision-making processes.

I found working with this approach very rewarding because it looks at the needs of both men and women in society. It lent support to the assumption 'women MPs represent both men and women, therefore, they are not inclined to defend only women's interests.' This approach also gave direction to the assertion that a gender-sensitive budget does not benefit women only, but rather *both* men and women in that it attends to the gender-specific needs of each group. This was important to me because it legitimises the gender debate which crucially brings men on board. The GAD approach was confidently endorsed in the field when one key respondent within the Ministry of Finance stated:

'...Gender should be introduced as a development concept, to us and not this issue of feminism, because we become less receptive to it. However, if it is a development concept, we also start visualising about the fruits of embracing the gendered specifications because we can see poverty alleviation and economic growth ...'²⁸

This approach places more emphasis is placed on gender-mainstreaming and puts women on the agenda to challenge socio-economic and political systems. It involves the shared participation of both men and women in making decisions and sharing benefits. This approach is more focused on the results and the benefits of appreciating women's

²⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat (1995) Plan of Action on Gender and Development. A Commonwealth Vision, Women's and Youth Affairs Division, London.

²⁸ Mr Chancy Simwaka, Deputy Director, Budgeting, Ministry of Finance.

contribution and needs. It is pertinent in that it emphasises gender mainstreaming as a vital component towards achieving a gender-sensitive budget. It champions and celebrates the fact that gender will be appreciated from all different perspectives and ministries and this is more likely to result in sustainable changes and lasting results.

It was very interesting and informative applying the WID, WAD and GAD approaches because of the complementary manner in which they worked together in that the theoretical basis of each approach informed the others and thereby averted the danger of treating women as a homogeneous group. In order to secure accurate data in addressing women's needs a bottom-up approach is required and, for this reason, I turned to the Women's Law Approach.

3.2.4 Women's Law Approach (WLA)

This approach was inspiring because it provided guidance in capturing women's lived realities and using them as a starting point to fly the flag for the gender debate. The fundamental premise of this woman-centred legal discipline is the taking of women's lived realities as a starting point for the analysis of women in law and society. This approach problematizes the law and society's undervaluation of women and their contribution. In this case, the by-product of the budget process is Appropriation Legislation, which is the legal authority granted by the legislature to the executive to spend public funds. It is for all intents and purposes a law and throughout the research its main purpose was to analyse the relationship between women and this law (i.e., the budget).

The appreciation of the widening gap between those who formulate and implement the budget and those who are actually affected by it justified the need for a more participatory budget formulation process. Dealing with this issue of participation using the women's law approach would enable the recognition of the biological and social differences between the needs of men and women and why these should be encompassed in the legal budgetary framework.

The WLA was also best suited when considering the challenges faced by women Parliamentarians because it seeks to find solutions to problems at a personal or individual level. This approach was useful in shaping research questions drafted in answer to assumptions aimed at identifying the needs of women and how these needs are related to the national budget.

The Women's Law Approach also reinforced the equity argument, equitable power-sharing within political arenas and the equitable sharing of resources within the national budget. In addition, unlike other theories, this approach, which so comprehensively embraces the relationship between men and women, constantly reminded me of the centrality of women and their life situations in the research journey. Finally, this approach identified women's needs and explained their marginalisation. This, in turn, shed light on the gross undervaluing of the activities that women do and the need for a change in the legal, economic and political culture.

3.3 Research design

The research design was shaped by the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was obtained from interviews and Parliamentary reports and Hansards which form the substance of Parliamentary debates. Quantitative data took the form of statistics, levels of participation and comparisons between budgetary allocations. Fortunately, in some cases the same data was both qualitative and quantitative but when it came to analysis, and being guided by the research questions, the data analysis enhanced classification of the information.

3.3.1 Research methods

3.3.1.1 Desk study of documentary and archival data

In order to obtain information about the budget and even the Parliamentary sessions it seemed imperative that my starting point would be to analyse, firstly, the national budget and then the Hansards, which recorded the deliberations by Parliament over the budget. Obtaining the President's budget statement and the Minister of Finance's budget statement did not prove as challenging as obtaining other supporting budget and policy documents. In order to have fruitful discussions with most of my respondents it proved very strategic for me to have prior knowledge of their specific role in the budget process this financial year, and even to highlight their specific contribution in the budget process and how it was pertinent to my area of study. I engaged in the task of embarking on library research especially at the respondent's work place and library, searching for any documents, policy or otherwise they had prepared towards the budget. Therefore, I used that as the starting point of the discussion.

Desk study on international human rights instruments provided insight into the standards and international norms. However, these international norms seemed far from the minds of those formulating or even those commenting on the budget. None of the respondents interviewed seemed to call for gender budgeting as a human right, but rather on the principle of fairness, poverty reduction and social justice. The aspect of human rights and the national budget seemed distant from everyone's mind that, as a researcher, there were instances when it also slipped my mind. Even though the state has a responsibility of giving meaning to rights in budgetary allocations, this was not the case. The customary practice seems to be that the budget process should simply ensure that the government should go insolvent. The idea of connecting the national budget to the individual needs of the country's citizens based on their gendered needs remains a fiction.

There is a general lack of preparation of statistical data for budget purposes. The admission by the Ministry of Finance that:

‘The National Statistics office does not generate data for specific needs, but for general purpose’²⁹

shows that sex-disaggregated statistics are not considered in budget formulation.

The print media's reporting on budget sessions proved important in that it provided members of the public with information on what Parliament was discussing at each sitting. These reports would then be supported by comments from reputable economists, bankers and political party leaders in which they expressed their views of the budget. It seemed imperative to assess whose views the media portrays as important since this swayed the public opinion about the budget. It was interesting to note that of all 25 sessions of Parliament held, no newspaper carried articles about the interests of women, nor was any comment sought from women rights activists or gender economists. Most likely this is because they are not consulted. The media's expectation is that it is the responsibility of members of civil society to follow budget sessions and comment on areas of concern to them. None of the economists seemed to be concerned about the lack of undertaking on the part of the President or the Minister of Finance to commit any funds towards ending gender inequalities in society. Simply put, all the commentaries were gender neutral.

²⁹ Mr Chancy Simwaka, Deputy Budget Director, Ministry of Finance.

3.3.1.2 In-depth interviews with key respondents

These were the most important throughout the research process because they allowed for more discussion, especially since most of the respondents did not understand what gender budgeting was; yet, they upheld the principle of the equitable distribution of resources. This was also very necessary in drawing a line between the different levels of understanding of budget issues by both male and female Members of Parliament.

In stressing the importance of women in development and as agents of change, in-depth interviews are vital in providing information about the potential that women have, the challenges they face, the fears they have and for them to assist in coming up with workable solutions to assist them in their respective positions. This method provides more accuracy, especially when coming up with recommendations, to the extent that research from a Woman in Development theoretical base does not hold water unless this method of data collection is employed.

I conducted in-depth interviews with both female and male Members of Parliament, including the second Deputy Speaker and members of strategic Parliamentary Committees. The Research Department within Parliament proved a valid asset in locating honourable Members of Parliament, who, at the beginning of the research, were all over the country in their respective constituencies. Parliament, as an institution, prepares a directory of Members of Parliament, listing the Parliamentary Committees to which they belong and their contact details. The Parliament also has on hand a directory of all female Members of Parliament and their contact details. Most interview appointments were arranged telephonically but most of the interviewees either cancelled or failed to turn up for the interview. With a limited list of 27 female MPs, it was a challenge to get interviews with most of them. Over a four month period I managed to secure 9 interviews with them. Basically, this was due to the fact that a substantial number of female MPs reside in their constituencies which are often far from the urban areas. As a result, if and when they did manage to visit the capital city, they were too busy to grant interviews. Interviews with male MPs were less challenging to obtain because, with a base of 166 male members, there were almost always other male MPs available to be interviewed if the particular member I intended to interview was not. This experience goes to show that with an inequitable representation of women and men in such structures, the disparity between their numbers limits or narrows the researcher's source of data and creates

challenges, especially with research such as this in which I was trying to identify and define the unique challenges faced by female MPs. At the end of the day, I was forced, as a result of the unavailability of female Parliamentarians, to start focusing on male MPs and their views. Throughout the research process, however, I remembered the importance of interviewing female Parliamentarians.

In order to get a view about gender issues at Cabinet level and heads of ministries, in-depth interviews were held with two Cabinet Ministers who also happened to be Members of Parliament. This was part and parcel of interviewing officials from government departments. However, locating them was not difficult because the President selects Cabinet Ministers from MPs, so their details were contained in the directories. Furthermore, it was important in highlighting how ministers tend to abdicate their roles as MPs for the better positions of Administrators.

Interviews were also conducted with 8 key respondents from government ministries, 4 journalists, 3 economists who pioneered budget literacy programmes, 2 key informants from Malawi Economic Justice Network which conducted gender budgeting literacy and 1 informant from a non-governmental organisation which promotes dialogue between MPs and their constituents. Newspaper articles ran biased reports on which economists and non-governmental organisations to interview and what they had said during the entire budget process. The Members of Parliament themselves also highlighted who had provided them with training and what kind of material they had received.

3.3.1.3 Observations

I made personal observations whenever respondents were unavailable for individual interviews. They proved useful in capturing the behaviour of MPs during debates and discussion both inside and outside Parliament and between male and female Parliamentarians. Because of the advantage that Parliament was sitting at one point during the time of my research, I managed to sit through one of its sessions. It proved important in that there was display of public speaking and articulation of issues at hand. The level in which they had grasped the issues they were discussing became very useful. Furthermore, conducting my personal observations provided ample time for me to write my notes accurately and provided a springboard for me to ask follow-up questions during the individual interviews.

3.3.1.4 Questionnaire

These were provided to 26 female MPs but only 2 returned them signed and one was anonymous. Initially, this method was not in my research design, but because of the political and volatile nature of Parliament, when I asked them for an interview most of the members of Parliament wanted to have a questionnaire so that they could get some idea of what kind of questions they would be asked. This is because most MPs have reached Parliament on a party ticket and they wanted to be certain that they would not have to answer questions that challenged or embarrassed their party. In one instance, an MP cancelled an interview because he was not certain whether his party leader would approve of the interview. Therefore, it was necessary to send out a questionnaire to give a brief description about the nature of the interview. The questionnaire clarified the agenda for the interview and brought certainty to the mind of the interviewee who might have had a lot of unanswered questions before the interview began.

From the researcher's point of view, the only advantage with this method of data collection is that during the interview it makes it easier just to dive straight into the research topic. This is especially rewarding if the interviewee, having had advance notice of the questions, has already prepared for the interview. Where advanced notice is not given the risk is that the interviewee says that they were not aware they would be asked such questions, so they are not prepared to answer them. While the questionnaire is good in that it prepares the respondent for the interview, it may, unfortunately, also prove to be misleading because some respondents use them to tell you what you want to hear and not really the truth. This risk also applies to assessing the extent to which a respondent grasps or understands a topic (e.g., gender issues). A respondent's answers during an interview may mislead one into thinking that the respondent actually understands gender issues, when they have just 'copied and pasted' what they remembered from some workshop they once attended.

3.3.1.5 Group discussions

The first group discussion I had with 10 ordinary women in a rural constituency was very interesting in that it provided an ideal atmosphere in which the women could relax, reflect on and talk about their lived realities. I noticed that group discussions are best held in a community setting which have a *laissez-faire* atmosphere in which women feel free just to exchange information about their experiences. I was hoping to obtain an understanding of the needs of the community from a woman's perspective and then hone in on the needs of

women on an individual basis. Since I was also asking questions about the budget, which most ordinary women did not relate to, a group discussion seemed the most appropriate forum to explain the meaning of the budget process, to allow everyone to discuss it freely in relation to their community and then to relate it to their individual needs. In other words, this approach eventually enabled individuals to feel sufficiently confident to contribute what they thought the budget should mean to them and how it should be translated to them individually.

Ordinary women on the ground proved to be willing respondents, who would provide me with very useful data and even go as far as identifying new potential areas of research. Discussions with ordinary women provided great inspiration for the research and were a breath of fresh air in stark contrast to my visits to Parliament to attend interviews which respondents often cancelled.

The second group discussion was held with 35 male and female MPs, who were in their first term of office. This was during one of their training sessions in which I basically asked them to highlight problems they have with the budget process both inside and outside Parliament. Even though this was an informal setting, the atmosphere soon became highly charged as the MPs started attacking each other's parties. There was a clear division along political lines with some of the Members threatening to walk out of the discussion. Little respect was given to anyone talking at any point in time and some started seeing the research visit as a waste of their spare time, which they could use for their own personal business. However, this provided me with an opportunity to identify those who had made contributions of sufficient interest to the research which I realised needed further exploration in follow-up in-depth interviews. Therefore, group discussions are a way of sifting respondents in order to select those who have a researcher's area of interest at heart, and identifying them as key respondents to the research.

3.4 Conclusion

During on-going research there is a need to adopt flexibility in theoretical perspectives, especially when assumptions are challenged. However, I adopted the Women in Development Approach as a theoretical base, which ran throughout the research and did ample justice to the theme of the research by giving the data collection process meaning and direction.

It is also interesting to learn how, during the research process, theories seem to overlap and yet also complement each other. Most refreshing of all is that by appreciating their similarities and differences, their strengths and weaknesses, one constantly discovers new insights into women-centred research.

CHAPTER 4

4.0 THE MALAWI BUDGET MAKING PROCESS

4.1 Introduction

A clear understanding of the budget process was a major finding for the research and it was central, at the very outset, to obtaining an understanding of the role of Parliament in general and women in particular. At the heart of the research was *an analysis of the role of women Parliamentarians during budget sessions*. It was unsuitable to analyse their role in isolation, but rather to appreciate it in the context of the whole budget process in order to understand where they are coming from and where they are going. An analysis of their role and an appreciation of the bigger picture also enabled a comparison between their surrounding circumstances and the surroundings of other key players.

This chapter intends to present the findings of the budget making process using as the source of data budget documents and in-depth interviews with the key players in the budget process. The next chapter focuses more on the role of female Parliamentarians and what challenges their participation in the budget process.

After reviewing the literature on the budget process, it seemed important to capture what the players in the budget process understood their role to be. Especially prior to examining the role of female Parliamentarians in the budget making process, I needed to have a clear understanding of their mandate within the budgetary framework in relation to the role of other actors. This approach would give me the necessary background or foundation upon which to formulate well-informed recommendations.

The findings presented in this chapter answered research questions for the following assumptions. That:

- There is a lack of recognition by Parliament of how budgetary allocations affect men and women differently, resulting in the marginalisation of women as a social group (Assumption 3).

- The Ministry of Finance lacks gender sensitivity, evidenced by its gender-neutral budget statement (Assumption 4).

Under the assumption 3, it seemed relevant to capture what Parliamentarians understand their role to be in the budget process and how they execute their duties within that process. In addition, central to the research was the question of how Parliamentarians understood the actual budget when it is passed on to them and whether they appreciated the different needs of men and women. The findings in this chapter aim at clearly defining the role of each key player and reflect on the absence of appreciation of gender dynamics by each player, which consequently results in a gender-insensitive budget. Essentially, this chapter clearly attempts to outline how each stage of the budget process has continuously contributed to social injustice through their role in the budget process.

In relation to assumption 4, this chapter intends to outline the central and co-ordinating role that the Ministry of Finance plays in formulating the budget. Having an understanding of the role played by this Ministry has addressed questions of how its gender-neutral approach in formulating the budget is the beginning of the pattern of making gender invisible in the budget through the adoption of gender-blind economic theories. The questions that informed the research in this chapter were whether the Ministry understood the gender implications of the whole national budget, and whether the Ministry acknowledged the existence of gender inequality.

4.2 Role of the Ministry of Finance

In formulating the budget, the starting point in Malawi is usually policy documents, which clarify the country's development policies and priority areas. A decision is then made by the Ministry of Finance on how the budget should address these interest areas with the usual limited amount of resources. The government uses the budget to influence the direction and pattern of investments, trade, consumption, economic growth and empowerment. National budgets have far-reaching implications for the economy³⁰ because policy influences the lived realities of people. Currently these policies documents are:

1. The Fiscal Policy.

³⁰ Civil Society Budget Training Manual, 2003, MEJN.

2. The Monetary Policy.
3. The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy.
4. The Public Sector Investment Programme.
5. The Malawi Economic Growth Strategy.
6. Decentralization Policy.

The process itself includes several key actors. Essentially, public actors are the executive, civil society and development partners, sometimes referred to as donors. The political nature of the budget process cannot be underestimated and it has been described as theatre ‘masking the real distribution and spending of resources’.³¹ All the key actors in the process behave to ensure that their interests are protected. Hence, there is a need to outline the part played by each actor in the budget process drama.

The Ministry of Finance has overall responsibility for co-ordinating the formulation of the budget. The Medium Term Expenditure Framework Process guides the budget process in Malawi. This process calls for ministries to define their aims, objectives, outputs and activities and what is within their strategic mandate. Following that, the Ministry should allocate available resources accordingly and prioritise expenditure in line with government’s policies outlined earlier.

Ideally, policy is meant to provide a framework and shape the budget. However, there is often a lack of political will to implement suggested changes.

Budget formulation starts with the development of the macro-economic framework. At this stage the Ministry of Finance receives plans from the Reserve Bank of Malawi, the Economic Planning Department and the National Statistics Office. Surveys are undertaken to obtain a picture of the situation nationwide and sources of growth are identified, with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

At this stage, ministries start preparing their budgets through the outlined framework and, after submitting these to the central Ministry, they now reconcile the proposals they have

³¹ The Budget as Theatre – The Formal and Informal Institutional Makings of the Budget Process in Malawi. Report.

received with the macro-economic frame developed. It is here when reality forces ministerial allocations to be reduced based on the available resources.

After consolidation of the budget, it is then submitted to Parliament as a draft for deliberation. The budget can be approved without amendments or it can be rejected pending amendments. However, this is done on a rolling basis and adjustments are made as they deliberate.

Finally, after Parliament has agreed, an Appropriation Bill is passed, which is the final budget the President assents to and it is passed into law. As far as the Ministry of Finance is concerned, when the budget is submitted to Parliament:

‘We have no power over it, it is in the hands of the legislature.’³²

Adjustments can be made to the budget, but there are some conditions, which will be explained later. One of them is the identification of the new source of funds.

4.2.1 Analysis of the Ministry of Finance: Possibilities of gender budgeting through gender-targeted expenditures

As custodians of the budget formulation process, the Ministry of Finance is aware of the gender commitments the government has. However, the point of entry for introducing the issue should not be after the figures have already been factored into the process, but rather at the planning stage. Budgeting is about putting figures to the process of using resources to meet the country’s needs, but budget formulation is the stage at which the nation’s needs, e.g., its gendered needs, ought to be identified and an assessment made of appropriate interventions. Each ministry is viewed having it within their mandate to include gender inequality in its budget and this should be incorporated at the planning stage. According to the Ministry of Finance, gender is a cross-cutting issue, which should be mainstreamed into other ministries, but since it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender they should push that agenda.

³² Mr Chancy Simwaka, Ministry of Finance.

The problem of insufficient data has contributed to a gender-neutral approach in budgeting, because planners are not aware of gender disparities and do not have the figures before them which show that gender as an important variable.

It is apparent that once the issue of gender is introduced, the baton is passed to the national gender machinery. Realistically speaking, since gender is a cross-cutting issue, the Ministry of Finance itself should be gender-sensitive. Although the Ministry has acknowledged gender inequality, this has been limited to assistance in the formulation of the Gender Budgeting Guidelines, which now hang in abeyance because of lack of ownership. The Ministry of finance refuses to own them and insist that they belong to the Ministry of Gender. However, how can the Ministry of Gender enforce financial guidelines?

While the Ministry of Finance has admitted that it has failed to acknowledge gender in the budget statement, it has blamed the Ministry of Gender for failing to provide benchmarks for them. Despite this, it is at least encouraging that there is potential for achieving a gender sensitive budget and that with adequate gender mainstreaming each ministry's core activities may be designed on concepts aimed at addressing gender equality. However, the question still remains: *'Which ministry should promote this agenda?'*

4.2.2 Role of Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services

The findings in this part of the chapter inform on one of the several traditions in which the budget can be gender insensitive, through the reduction of budgetary allocations to the national gender machinery. In identifying the research problem, this observation from looking at the face value of the national budget, made me conclude that indeed it was a fact that the 2005/6 national budget was gender insensitive. However, I still needed empirical evidence to substantiate generally the rest of the assumptions and, in particular, that gender insensitivity was a result of a gender-neutral Ministry of Finance and that it directly affected the needs of women.

The mandate of the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services is, among other things, to ensure that no discrimination occurs against women, men, boys and girls in their access to resources and other social amenities on the basis of their gender. Delivery of services is through the Ministry's three technical departments, namely, the Departments of Gender Affairs, Community and Development and Social Welfare. The strategic objectives

of the Ministry are clear and, in terms of budget preparation, they are subject to the same procedures outlined by the Ministry of Finance.

The Gender Ministry has been a victim of poor budget performance. Although it is responsible for co-ordinating gender mainstreaming activities in all the other arms of government, this has been almost impossible to do because of the small budget it receives. The approved budget for the Ministry has been declining since the 2002-3 financial year, regardless of the fact that it is a protected pro-poor expenditure (PPE) which improves the quality of lives of the most vulnerable people. The Ministry had a proposed budget of K350 000 million and was only approved K106 million.

The Ministry has categorically stated that the lack of government support compromises its implementation of project activities to the extent that, in some cases, projects do not perform as expected.³³ Most of the activities of the Gender Affairs Department were shelved this year because it only received a fraction (i.e., K4,7 million) of its proposed K27 million budget. Among the activities not implemented due to poor funding and major challenges has been the lack of gender mainstreaming skills and limited appreciation of gender as an economic planning and budgeting tool at all levels.³⁴

The Ministry has formulated the Gender in Public Budgeting Guidelines and Checklists.³⁵ It is clear that even the formulation of these gender-budgeting guidelines were a separate donor-funded project bankrolled by Canadian International Development Agency. It states that the purpose of the guidelines is to provide budgetary actors such as planners and budget coordinators with instruments for engendering budgets. This is to ensure that equitable and sustainable development is achieved in Malawi as stipulated in major policy documents, such as the Vision 2020, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS) and the National Gender Policy. Now that all is said and done, it begs the question: *'Who is responsible for enforcing these guidelines?'*

Various reports have been presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Social and Community Affairs, outlining the challenges the Ministry is facing in its gender

³³ Report on the Ministry's activities, plans and programmes 2005/6 presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Social and Community Affairs, Ministry of Gender.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services.

mainstreaming efforts, but the response from Ministry of Finance (Treasury) has shown that their reports via Parliament have not been considered. As the budgeting officer in the Ministry stated:

‘Parliamentarians do not take our reports any further, sometimes it seems they do not want to be bothered because it makes no difference, since the absolute say is with Treasury. Treasury prefers consolidating the needs of gender through other ministries, but gender mainstreaming has not advanced to that stage yet and you do not see the money being used for the intended gender-specific intentions.’

She continued:

‘The Parliamentary Committee we work with actually has more men than women.’³⁶

The above findings reinforce my objective to show that the non-vigilance of Parliament is a contributing factor to a gender-insensitive budget and that female Parliamentarians also taking a back seat and failing to champion the gender debate, it has a direct negative impact on the outcome of the budget. In the above case, we see that the national gender machinery actually relies heavily on lobbying the Social and Community Affairs Parliamentary Committee in the hope that they can promote their interest at Parliamentary and Cabinet level. But the lack of vigilance by the members of this committee to advocate for the Gender Ministry has resulted in no urgent action being taken to address the Ministry’s budgetary concerns.

It is evident that the Ministry of Finance is ambiguous in its approach towards gender issues. On one hand, they stress the importance of the Ministry of Gender being responsible for mainstreaming gender in other ministries. However, when the Ministry of Gender seeks adequate funds to accomplish this mandate through their development and capacity building activities, one of the reasons given for reducing their budgetary allocation is that that gender is a cross-cutting issue. Therefore, the budgetary allocation for gender-related activities shall be built into each respective ministry’s budgetary allocation, resultantly each ministry will take care of its own gender concerns. This is not practical because if a government ministry has not directly acknowledged gender as a concern in its planning stages, even if funds are

³⁶ Victoria Geresomo, Deputy Director for Planning, Ministry of Gender.

allocated, they will not be used for the intended purpose. Since after the entire ministry may not have the capacity or knowledge of gender issues.

On the other hand preparing reports and presenting them to Parliament is not fruitful. This may be because most of the members being briefed do not understand gender principles. This is vindicated by what the 2nd Deputy speaker of Parliament said:

‘Since I was elected in 2004, I have started understanding gender principles now (December 2005) that gender refers to the social relations between both men and women.’³⁷

Therefore, lobbying on the one hand requires the audience to have a high level of understanding of the issues at hand, in order for them to adopt the ideas as their own and champion them in Parliament. Both men and women have failed to do this in Parliament.

Dr Mary Shawa, a former Deputy Director in the Ministry, agreed that the whole concept of gender is misconceived that even non-governmental organisations have contributed to this misunderstanding of gender through their civic education programmes. There has been no standardising of how the whole concept of gender should be understood by the general public. With NGOs obtaining funding on their own and executing training courses without involving the Ministry of Gender. The Ministry of Gender, has not been at the centre of co-ordinating gender-related activities outside government, unless they are consulted by the NGOs. The need for systematic capacity building within and outside government has been overlooked and the Ministry of Gender cannot spearhead this disorder. One important observation made by Dr Shawa was that:

‘Even the economist themselves, they cannot claim to do gender budgeting, because they lack the capacity to make gender analysis, which can be made by gender experts.’

Because of this reason that is how I understood why Dr Naomi Ngwira had stated that ‘people like me (economists, who are also gender experts) are rare.’

³⁷ Hon Chingola, MP.

Similarly , a gender expert cannot claim to make an analysis of the budget alone, because they need economists to unpack it, and so the story goes on. Therefore, the relationship between the Ministry of Gender and Finance cannot be divorced, if Malawi is to implement any gender-budgeting principles.

4.3 Parliamentary role in the budget process

Parliament has supervision over the budget after it leaves the hands of the executive. In this case, it entirely depends on what Members of Parliament consider their legislative function to be.

4.3.1 Parliament as an institution

Ordinary people in Malawi play an important role in the democratic process, through their chosen representatives, who are Members of Parliament. Parliament is a public body consisting of members elected or appointed to represent the interests of the people of the country.³⁸ Parliament gives the government legitimacy by representing the needs of the people. The budget is the most important tool for the allocation of resources to support social and economic policy pronouncements, programmes and priorities that government has committed itself to.

The role of Parliamentary Committees in this instance will be to analyse the budget with their interest areas in mind. However, due to underfunding and the lack of technical experts to assist only a few of these committees do in fact manage to meet to discuss the budget at all. In embracing the participatory approach in formulating the budget, the Ministry of Finance includes the Budget and Finance Committee in its consultations. But these have been viewed by some as more of briefings than consultations. This is because the committee or the stakeholders are introduced to the budgetary framework, with little input from them in the discussions. Some have also criticised that a 400-paged document is reduced to two pages. After consolidation of the budget, the Minister of Finance and the President present the budget to Parliament for deliberation. This is a very important and highly publicised stage because this is when the budget is passed into law.

³⁸ Women in Parliament . Women in politics and decision making in the 20th century. A United Nations Study. 1992.

4.3.2 Budget speech by President: Delivering on our promises

On Friday 10 June 2005, the President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr Bingu Wamutharika, opened the budget session with his speech 'Delivering on our promises'. Of major importance was the promotion of economic growth through agriculture and improved services through the maintenance of infrastructure. In terms of investing in human development, the health and education sectors received more attention.

Targeting poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth, targeted sectors were Agriculture, Energy, Tourism, Mining and Manufacturing. As for gender and social development, the President outlined his commitments through:

- (a) The appointment of women into powerful and decision-making positions.
- (b) Training of Parliamentary Committees in gender budgeting analysis.
- (c) Social transformation of women at grassroots level development programmes.

Commitment (a) and (b) have been partly upheld. However, it has not borne any fruits, because of other inadequacies of the training programmes. Commitment (c) still remains to be seen, because the Ministry of Gender, which is already working on a small budgetary allocation, executes these development programmes. Therefore, this raises the question, '*Where is the money to undertake these commitments going to come from?*' It is ironic, therefore, that government should claim to be delivering on their promises.

4.3.3 Budget speech by the Ministry of Finance

The Minister of Finance is required by law to present the budget speech to Parliament and it is only at this time when the budget documents are made available for the House to read. The speech is a summary document which sets the tone for the actual budget which contains the figures. At this point, no one can actively participate because all the information is being heard for the first time. Accompanying the speech are three documents, namely, the Appropriations Bill, the Finance Bill and an Annual Economic Report. Sometimes the budget documents arrive late and Members have a limited time within which to go through the documents. There is little opportune time for Members to seek an expert opinion of the budget. That is when members of civil society assist in simplifying it and identifying the areas of interest for the MPs.

The expectation at this stage is that Members of Parliament debate the policy proposals of the government. Further debate takes place on broad national concerns requiring urgent attention. In Parliament the figures do not really change because of the requirement of Section 57 of the Constitution³⁹ which provides that the Ministry of Finance has to agree to any change. However, it is not rare for some Parliamentarians to engage the Ministry of Finance well before the Minister has consolidated the budget; thus changes are made a long time before the budget comes to Parliament.

The strategic positioning of the Budget and Finance Committee is such that its Members are well placed and have more information about the budget than any other person. Ministries are usually encouraged to lobby MP's in their various committees to engage with the Ministry of Finance before the figures are included in the budget. At Parliamentary level, no initiative has been taken to have a gender sensitive budget during deliberations. Even though the time to discuss the budget is limited, part of the blame has been put on civil society organisations, which have not prepared a synopsis on a gender analysis of the budget. The visible initiatives have been for budget awareness but the participation has remained gender neutral.

4.3.4 Passing of Appropriation Bill

The legal nature of the budget is magnified through the passing of the Appropriations Bill. After all is said and done and all changes have been made to the proposed budget, the Minister of Finance presents the budget according to 'votes', and these are individual proposed budgets for individual ministries and departments. If any changes have been made, the Ministry of Finance makes the adjustments and the final budget is passed in terms of an Appropriation Bill, which is handed over to the President for signing into law.

Participation by female MPs usually takes place if there is a debate on social services and if specific votes, such as that for the Ministry of Gender, Health or Education, are dealt with in a plenary session. However, as will be highlighted later, most of these submissions are

³⁹ Section 57 of the Constitution provides: ... except upon recommendation of the ministry responsible for finance, signified in writing, the National Assembly shall not (a) proceed upon any bill or any amendment to a bill that in the opinion of the person presiding, makes provisions for any of the following purposes: (i) for the imposition of tax or the alteration of tax (ii) for the imposition of any charge upon the consolidated fund, or the alteration of any such charge; (iii) for the payment or withdrawal from the consolidated fund of any money's not charged thereon, or any increase in the amount of such payment, issue or withdrawal or (iv) for the composition or remission of any debt due to the government.

constituent specific and too general in that the MPs do not use them to attempt to address gender specific problems in their individual constituencies.

4.3.5 Civil society's role

Few representatives of civil society have engaged vigilantly in budget and economic governance. The most notable ones that do so are the Malawi Economic Justice Network and the Society of Accountants in Malawi (SOCAM). SOCAM is a professional urban based association whose members have budget literacy skills.

The interests of the poor are usually articulated by a vigilant civil society, which has a grassroots base and, in terms of economic governance issues, this area is left wanting in Malawi. Eventually poor people do not have a voice in economic issues except through their Members of Parliament, some of whom have their own economic agenda.

Acting Director of Malawi Economic Justice Network⁴⁰ highlighted the fact that budget analysis is demand-driven due to the limited number of days within which the budget has to be discussed and passed. As a result, if there is no demand for a gendered analysis of the budget either from Parliament or the general public, concentration is focused on other areas. This financial year a brochure was produced entitled 'Civil Society Submission on the 2005/2006 Budget'⁴¹ and the areas highlighted in the submissions were Agriculture, Education, Health, Water, Natural Resources, Security, Taxation and Privatisation. The analysis and recommendations were gender neutral, and gender was not identified as an issue which civil society should comment on. The submissions were solicited from various stakeholders including representatives of six Parliamentary Committees and civil society organisations.

4.3.6 Development partners' role

It is apparent that there is any ever increasing gap between the revenue that government generates and its expenditure. This gap is covered by borrowing finance both from within the country and outside it through grants. Huge debts are accumulated because more money is borrowed than is paid back. The dependency on domestic debts has continuously hiked interest rates and increased inflation with the poorest of the poor bearing the brunt. In the

⁴⁰ Mr Mavuto Bamusi.

⁴¹ MEJN. 2005. Montfort.

2005/6 budget K2,5 billion was committed to repaying domestic debt. International donors have played an essential role in contributing to the balance of payments with the aim of shedding domestic debt.

Malawi's development partners have been acknowledged, but not limited to the European Union, DFID, the United Kingdom and the governments of Norway and Sweden. Development partners influence policies and initiate changes to government systems by withholding aid. Thus when they set benchmarks or demand action, government is responsive.

4.3.7 Political parties' role in the budget process

In principle, all political parties should respect democracy, human rights and the Constitution. However, in practice, these principles are departed from. The political culture is accurately reflected during Parliamentary proceedings with Members showing a lack of respect for each other and their political parties. Malawi's government is peculiar and divided in that one party (the Malawi Congress Party) has a majority in Parliament while a different party is running the executive arm (At that time it was the United Democratic Front before the President abandoned it and started his own party with several MP's following him as well) which is the President and his Cabinet. As a result, while budget formulation is in the hands of the executive, the necessary passing of the budget by Parliament falls into the hands of the political party which has a working majority in Parliament. The official leader of the Opposition is given the first opportunity to respond after the Minister's speech to the government's proposals.

All political parties represented in Parliament hold pre-budget sessions in which the party's position is defined. Even if an individual has dissenting views, these are drowned out by the demands of the party, which, in most cases, would have supported the owner of the dissenting voice in his/her election campaign to be an MP.

Consequently, the party leader prepares a budget analysis in which he states those areas the party agrees with and those it does not support. A party with a working majority in Parliament has the potential to prevent the passing of the Appropriation Bill which means government will have no budget. As Members of Parliament they use this opportunity to

propose reductions of or increases in other items. After a majority of the MPs agree and offer support for the budget, it is approved.

4.4 Conclusion

It is clear that there are different players, actors and structures all of which have an important role to play in the budget process. As a result, different forces are at play and many things occur before the final document, the budget, is passed into legislation. Within all these different structures some level of gender awareness is required to have a positive effect on the outcome, the budget, which is sensitive to the needs of both women and men.

This chapter has located where female MPs fit into the budget process, although not specifically focusing on their role. The source of a gender-neutral approach towards the budget has been identified, as in the formulation process in all the respective key players contribution. The following chapter will further outline the findings on female Parliamentarians and analyse important aspects about their overall performance in the budget process.

A gender responsive budget cannot be achieved by women in Parliament alone. Therefore, the overall purpose of the research is not to overburden women with this responsibility. Gender-aware budgeting is, however, a social responsibility because of the strategic position of women in Parliament. Therefore, their potential to bring about change should not be underestimated. The following chapter aims to outline the actual role that women, in their minority play, their potential and their challenges. It is an attempt to listen to their drowned-out voices.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 PARTICPATION OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE BUDGET PROCESS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analyses the actual role that female Parliamentarians play in the budget process. The budget is the key tool in challenging the priorities of the executive for the welfare of the whole nation. However, the ability of Parliament generally and specifically the ability of female Parliamentarians to engage with the budget is limited to an individual member's competence and that of the political party they belong to. This conclusion applies to the whole Parliament in general and female MPs in particular. For most economists from government and civil society, they have the advantage of having a theoretical knowledge of the budget. However, when the document is left in the hands of the legislature, the same level of understanding of the budget is expected but not displayed.

The engagement of female MPs with the budget is through submissions made during plenary discussions and submissions made through committee deliberations. It is clear that membership of female MPs in the committees that directly deal with the budget, is not only low, but also insignificant. This chapter aims to isolate the role that female MPs play in their quest for a gender-sensitive budget and the challenges they face. An analysis is undertaken of the overall budget process in relation to women Parliamentarians and the reasoning behind the limited engagement with the budget at the personal, political and Parliamentary level is put under the microscope to outline what the emerging themes are.

Before undertaking the analysis, it is important to highlight the assumptions that informed this chapter.

5.2 Research questions answered or challenged?

First and foremost the findings in this chapter informed the overall research, but particularly the first assumption which I had. This assumption directly related to the comparison between levels of participation during budget sessions between male and female MPs and that female Parliamentarians participated less during budget sessions than their male counterparts. The

research questions that are substantiated by these findings, sought to capture from their own mouths (female Parliamentarians) what they understood to be their responsibility in the budget process, their assessment of the budget and whether they understood gender-budgeting principles and what encouraged or hindered their participation during budget sessions. It was my hope to discover the level of budget literacy among female Parliamentarians, which would be either a limitation or an advantage as they engage with the budget.

Secondly, the following findings answered the questions begged by the second assumption. The assumption I made was that the participation by both male and female Parliamentarians was gender neutral. My focus shifted from just mere participation to the level of understanding of gender issues and their integration in the budget. It was my hope to be guided on gender-budgeting initiatives which have been taken and whether in the begging Parliamentarians themselves are able to identify and acknowledge the gendered differences.

Finally, the following findings answer research questions of how the participation of female parliamentarians results in a budget which fails to attend to the needs of women.

5.3 Findings and analysis

5.3.1 Female Parliamentarians participate less during budget sessions than their male counterparts

The budget sessions I researched on were those in which the budget was discussed. The budget was discussed in 25 sessions, evidenced by the recordings in the Parliamentary Hansards. The National Assembly was opened by the President to discuss the budget on the 6 June 2005 and the budget was passed on the 22 July 2005. From a reading of all the volumes of the Hansards, it was evident that female Parliamentarians participated during budget sessions. At first, it seemed as though females participated less than their male Parliamentarians. But after going through the content, I highlighted the exact number of times that female MPs spoke and counted the exact number of times that male MPs spoke over the sessions.⁴² My major finding has been that out of the 17 sessions I analysed and calculated, female MPs spoke a total of 79 times, in comparison to 271 times spoken by male MPs and

⁴² The number of times a person spoke was recorded as follows. If an MP made a contribution and follow-up explanations or further contributions during an individual session, it was recorded as a single contribution.

the proportion is approximately 1:3. This means male participation during budget sessions is three times more than that of female members.

However, the conclusion that male Parliamentarians participate three times as much as female Parliamentarians is cosmetic and would only be true if their levels of representation were equal. Therefore, since their levels of representation are not equal, but rather 13.61 % as against 87 % (which is a ratio of 1:6), the actual research finding based on the empirical evidence is that female Parliamentarians actually participate more than male Parliamentarians during budget sessions. By comparing the ratio of 1:3 for women's participation against the ratio of 1:6 for their representation, it is clear that men participate less considering their numbers in Parliament. This finding justifies the argument for increasing female representation in Parliament, because their level of participation and engagement with not only the budget, but the whole parliamentary debate is even higher than that of their male colleagues.

This finding actually challenged the assumption I had that female Parliamentarians participate less, which may have been misguided by the invisibility of women in Parliament because of their small numbers. This may have also resulted from the expectation and overburdening of female MPs to work twice as hard as their male counterparts in order to earn the same recognition that they are doing their work. However, the facts and situation on the ground has now set the record straight, not only for budget sessions, but also for general Parliamentary performance.

5.3.2 Participation by both sexes is gender neutral

There is a significant level of misunderstanding of gender in Parliament. It became obvious in going through the submissions made in Parliament and follow-up interviews, that there was this generic treatment of people, especially the poor. In most of the submissions there was no distinction between the needs of women *vis-a-vis* the needs of men. It, therefore, reflected a failure to appreciate the gender dimensions in society. The Second Deputy Speaker Honourable Chingola admitted that he had only understood what gender meant two weeks prior to the interview and that all he thought was that men should be fighting women to enforce their equality.

Consequently, when asked whether the needs of men and women at a national scale are different or the same, most of the respondents said that they are the same. However, when asked for further explanation about how they are the same, most respondents explained that they are the same because men and women are equal. The findings to this assumption challenged to a greater extent the sameness debate and questioned the level at which the Constitutional equality principle is understood not only by Parliament, but also by society as a whole. The inconsistencies between the gender activist theory and the human rights theory helped me to realise the need for both human rights and gender rights training but the need also to distinguish between them by clearly identifying their similarities and differences without detracting from the value of each theory. This assumption was confirmed during in-depth interviews with most Parliamentarians. What human rights activists had failed to do is go a step further to explain that while both women and men are indeed of equal importance, they are not the same. They each have gendered and sexual differences, which need to be addressed with the same amount of seriousness. These gendered and sexual differences perpetuate inequalities if they are not addressed.

Gender neutrality in Parliament is also explained by the finding that women's rights activists have been concentrating on increasing the number of women in Parliament. In other words, it has been more about the quantity of women in Parliament and not the mainstreaming of gender principles in Parliamentary debates. Consequently, women parliamentarians are not well equipped to articulate and champion gender issues in Parliamentary debates. Mainstreaming gender in Parliament has not focused on creating space in Parliamentary debate for bringing attention to the needs of women, but rather on having more women in Parliament.

Due to the political nature of Parliament, deliberations, especially those taking place during budget sessions, are gender neutral, because the needs of women are not made central at party level either. So, they are not expected to be part of the broader Parliamentary debates.

5.3.3 The budget is perpetuating gender inequality through its failure to address women's concerns

Parliaments are reluctant to utilise their amendment powers in relation to the budget. The ability of Parliament to engage from a gender dimension with the budget is weak. Scrutinising the budget with a gender lens and pushing for suitable amendments along gender

lines where necessary has not yet been realised in Malawi. The need for capacity building to enable independent opinions and gender analysis about the budget is an urgent need. Consequently, calling for awareness that a gendered understanding by the legislature of the budget and its consequences is crucial for democracy.

A gender analysis of budgets can help more women participate in order to ensure that government resources are used to meet the needs of Malawians who need them most.

On the ground, it is evident that female MPs have a more cordial relationship with their constituents. When invited to compare between their previous male MPs and their current female MPs,⁴³ people have applauded the work done by female MPs who are more in touch with the problems of their people. However, the problem now arises as to how to bring these local problems to the attention of the nation in Parliament. Parliament and its male members have expressed ignorance of the sex-specific needs of women because they claim that female MPs do not bring these problems to light. When questioned, some male MPs even posed the question that if their own daughters do not tell them what they need, then how are they, as fathers, supposed to know about their needs or find ways of addressing them?

And it is the very purpose of this research to address this question, since female MPs are more in touch with the problems of women on the ground. It is their responsibility to speak collectively on their behalf to bring attention to these needs and to make them national concerns. This will be the first crucial step in enabling a more equitable allocation of the nation's resources to address these needs. If this initiative is not taken gender inequalities will simply continue to exist.

5.4 Emerging themes

5.4.1 Representation of women in strategic Parliamentary Committees – A case of women spreading themselves too thinly

Parliament is comprised of 13 committees. Committees are groups of Parliamentarians assigned to examine matters more closely than could the whole Assembly. Committees allow the legislature to perform numerous important functions that otherwise might not be

⁴³ Thyolo North Constituency - Group Discussion.

conducted at all. These matters may include: detailed review of proposed legislation, oversight of executive branch activities, examination of and reporting on policy issues and special investigations.⁴⁴ The election of members to committees is a serious matter because it is a political assignment. A member of a committee is a representative of their party rather than anything else.

The duties and significance of committees cannot be underestimated because they are in a position to investigate legislation thoroughly and they have technical experts from government ministries at their disposal. Ideally, committees have the potential to increase efficiency and expertise in the legislative process, and, in fact, increase participation in issues of national importance.

Of special interest are the following Parliamentary Committees: Budget and Finance Committee, Health and Population Committee, Legal Affairs Committee, and the Social and Community Affairs Committee. The Budget and Finance Committee has 19 members and out of those, two are women. In the Health and Population Committee, which has 17 members there are three women. In the Social and Community Affairs, which has 18 members, five are women and in the Legal Affairs Committee, which has 16 members, only one is a woman.

The Budget and Finance Committee, which is usually consulted during and is pertinent to the budget process, enjoys access to certain privileged information, which is not available to other MPs. It is evident that with only two female members, the issue of the non-involvement of women in the budget process is once again raised. Even when the women do attend the committee meetings, they do not actively participate in them. A male member of the committee observed as much:

‘Normally as a committee we meet just to analyse the budget briefly. However female members do not attend these briefings and sadly gender issues do not feature in our discussions. One of them is usually busy elsewhere. Maybe if there were more female members in the committee they could act as whistle blowers for us to discuss gender issues.’⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labour. NDI, Legislative Research Series Paper #2.

⁴⁵ Hon. A.M. Mwechumu, a male MP and member of the Budget and Finance Committee.

It may be justifiably concluded that the low representation of women in Parliamentary Committees is a direct consequence of their equally low representation in the whole Assembly. No committee contains more than four women and it appears that they are simply randomly pepper-potted into committees as mere tokens rather than as potential valuable contributors of expertise and opinion. This affects their levels of participation in the respective committees, partly because they are still in the minority. This situation is exacerbated when female members fail to attend committee meetings for legitimate pressing reasons. Since some of these meetings make major decisions, it may happen that they are passed in the absence of any female member of society. This inadequate representation of women in Parliamentary Committees has also contributed to the problem of women being unable to speak with one voice on behalf of women in Parliament in order to make women's issues the legitimate concern of the nation.

5.4.2 Women are more democratic leaders – Gendered difference in leadership styles between men and women

The results of a survey undertaken of 25 constituencies⁴⁶ have proved that only a few Parliamentarians consult their constituents before going to Parliament. Out of 25, only 2 MPs conduct consultations. The majority of the constituents indicated that they did not know whether their MPs consult them or not, since some MPs' activities are concentrated in one area while other areas are ignored. Most constituents do not know what their MP is doing with regard to his job. There is no channel of communication between them. It is interesting to note, however, that their view about women MPs very different. In Thyolo North constituency, one of the research sites prior to the election, had a male MP and women expressed their views about having a female MP in these words:

‘Things have changed, because now as women, it is now our chance to have a voice, we meet and discuss how we can improve our community. Previously, with our male MP we had no chance to speak. But Amai Guga, she comes from the grassroots and identifies with some of problems as a woman and as a poor community. Even at Parliament we are confident that our problems are taken there. She is compassionate and has the heart of a woman, there is a lot of sacrifice and her house is accessible, it has no gate. Our former MP would just stay in hotels...he hardly communicated with us, we knew little of what was happening. This woman is very transparent.’

⁴⁶ An analysis report of a survey on project entitled ‘Promoting dialogue between MPs and their constituents’ by CCJP, June 2005-August 2005.

The distinctive leadership style of women is associated with a more participatory, democratic, sensitive, nurturing and caring approach.⁴⁷ Empirical evidence in Malawi has shown that women perform much better when it comes to their constituencies and that most constituencies express disappointment with their male MPs. Some of the complaints are that male MPs do not turn up after their election, while most of the female MPs interviewed either stayed in their constituencies or attended meetings there once a week. Civil society has expressed concern that this lack of dialogue between MPs and their constituencies⁴⁸ means that MPs are failing to attend to the needs of people at the grassroots level and are not presenting Parliament with an accurate picture of the state of affairs of their constituents. Therefore, there is ample evidence which supports a legitimate demand for an increase in the number of female MPs because women are more democratic and participatory in their representation and leadership of people. Female MPs also use their life experiences as a determining factor in how they work, meaning that it is true that women will represent women's interests in Parliament.

5.4.3 Non-participatory budget process

Central to enabling Parliament to undertake a gender analysis of the national budget is the presentation of gender-disaggregated data. Then what is needed is the political determination on the part of government to implement gender budgeting. Other identified ways which aim at achieving gender-sensitive budgets in which female MPs have a role have been suggested but not limited to:

‘Having more women on the technical staff of the committees of Parliament that deal with budgeting and finances; identifying and protecting gender targeted expenditures; doing engendered beneficiary assessments; reviewing the structure and presentation of the budget to include gender aware statements.’⁴⁹

The persistent call has been made to include more women in decision-making processes, especially those that include the allocation of financial resources in order for women's voices

⁴⁷ Gender, Women and Leadership. AGENDA. 2005.

⁴⁸ Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Blantyre Archdiocese. Report.2005.

⁴⁹ Ngwira, L Binauli and A Chiweza (2003). Engendering the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Debt Relief Initiatives and Poverty Alleviation. Africa Institute of South African Century.

to be heard when making these choices.⁵⁰ The budget process as it is ignores the lived realities of the poor, who are mostly women.

The formulation itself does not include consultations with MPs who have actually touched base with the problems of people in their constituencies. The formulation is entirely in the hands of the executive, with more attention given to what government officials from the district offices are saying, rather than to what the MPs are saying are the needs of the people. Honourable Juliana Guga expressed these sentiments:

‘As Parliamentarians, we only get to see the budget when it comes to us in Parliament, and we are expected to pass it. No one consults with me about the needs of my people, they prefer to listen to what the people in the District Assemblies are telling them. At this stage we are not seen as (being) important, yet we know the problems of the people at grass roots.’

Some female MPs felt their capacity as members of the National Assembly is directly undermined by non-involvement at the formulation stage of the budget making process:

‘As MPs we respond negatively if we are undermined and at the end of the day, the budget may not receive adequate support.’⁵¹

Non-involvement in the formulation of the budget stage has also contributed to the general Parliamentary tradition of MPs making constituent-specific submissions. Most MPs, both female and male, translate the budget into what it means specifically for their constituents and their unique needs. Hon Getrude Mkandawire highlighted this as follows:

‘A person is more comfortable and confident talking about what is happening in their individual constituency because that is what they know. I know the endless list of the services people in my constituency need, and wouldn’t know what is happening in the whole country. So everyone just speaks about what they have information about, which is what is happening in their homes.’

If MPs were more involved in the budget formulation process, they would be encouraged to obtain more information about national problems through consulting their constituents and would be more able and willing to defend their interests and needs in Parliament.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hon Getrude Mkandawire, MP.

5.4.4 Drowning out their voices

Actors in the budget making process seem estranged from the immediate beneficiaries of the budget who are the people in the constituencies. Decision-making processes both at the executive and legislative level are still male-dominated and most decisions are made by senior male officers. People participate in government processes through their chosen representatives. Thus, people expect to have a say in how money should be spent. They also expect not only to have their problems purportedly addressed through officers working in a government office, but they also necessarily expect them to champion their interests. But some male views on female participation on gender issues have been to the contrary:

‘I didn’t come to Parliament on a gender ticket, but for society as a whole... Thus, I will treat both men and women equally and provide for their needs which are the same.’⁵²

Because of the above misconception female representation has to be increased in order to enlighten other Members of the different needs of men and women, which require different attention. The adoption of these male perceptions in the formulation of the budget is inevitable, and, as a result, they end up drowning out women’s voices. Honourable Alice Mwale had a different view of women and men:

‘The needs of men and women are different, men’s needs are centred on luxury, whereas women’s needs are more family centred such as day care services, education, and food security... much as we want to debate women’s issues, our male colleagues say we should not take women’s issues into every debate.’

She further states that:

‘Men control Parliament because they are many in numbers, even with vocal women, the men will make (a) noise and it is difficult to be heard. They only have to be interested in what you are saying, to give you a chance to speak.’

This displays the literal drowning out of women’s voices. Another vocal Member of Parliament, Honourable Getrude Mkandawire says:

⁵² Hon R Msowoya, MP.

‘Sometimes when you are standing up to speak, men start commenting about the way you are dressed, your breast, things like that.’

Consequently, male domination in the budget process adversely affects the enjoyment of women’s rights. This is because the budget will now have a tendency to buttress the interests of men, even when the expressed purpose is equal allocation of resources for the nation. In effect this perpetuates inequalities. Thus, the marginalisation of women in formulation processes results in their marginalisation in reaping the fruits. Marginalisation is now at a lower level in the community, and at a higher level with the female MPs and male MPs have argued:

‘Women’s issues are brought to Parliament by women MPs themselves, how else should we know (about) these problems if they are not brought to us.’⁵³

The divide and rule factor also been a result of non-involvement. This is because women in Parliament fail to find common ground for making gender specific demands. More concentration is on their constituent-specific problems and political agendas, rather than national problems. Non-involvement promotes ignorance on issues of national importance and divides women with common problems. Common ground for making appeals in Parliament is strategic enough to justify, indeed, demand gender-targeted expenditures.

5.4.5 Lack of gender mainstreaming in Parliament

Gender mainstreaming is a process of integrating gender equality into an institution. It requires the recognition that gender inequality operates at all levels and needs to be addressed and mainstreamed. It requires empowering both men and women on gender dimensions, to understand the different implications of both men and women by policies and laws.

Mainstreaming gender is an ongoing process and cannot be done overnight or by a two-day workshop. It becomes everyone’s responsibility, rather a matter simply for the national gender machinery.

When MPs are elected to office they undergo a Parliamentary Training Programme, which contains a module concerning gender relations in society. This is usually a two-week programme co-ordinated by Parliament, but sponsored by development partners. Ideally, it is

⁵³ Hon Chingola, 2nd Deputy Speaker.

a beneficial programme, although some members do not attend for various reasons because they have, e.g., been appointed to Cabinet.

It is evident that some MPs understand gender as men fighting women, and others now mistake equality for sameness. Thus, when asking about gender budgeting the usual response was that men and women are the same and, therefore, they should be treated equally in the budget process. But this is a misunderstanding because men and women have sex and specific needs which should be acknowledged in budgeting. This misunderstanding about gender serves men and harms women because naturally the male perception will override that of women.

The low levels of representation of women in Parliament contribute to the marginalisation of women's needs in the national budget. It is clear from the budget process that it is a top-down approach. The formulation process does not use women's lived realities to inform the budget. Instead, the budgetary framework is formulated and executed in the isolated and rarefied atmosphere of Parliament which is alien to the ordinary women, rural or urban. Furthermore Parliament and its decisions are so heavily male-dominated that it has become an institution increasingly divorced and out of touch with its female constituents, whose needs they constantly fail to meet. In Thyolo North rural constituency, women view their problems to be the direct responsibility of their MP, Hon Juliana Guga. This is because they are not even aware that their problems could be a direct consequence of fiscal mismanagement by the government. When asked whether the women thought their problems had been addressed in the budget their answer was:

‘We have never thought about it. We just tell our MP our problems and she finds ways of assisting us, either with her personal resources or otherwise. Her house has no gate and we are welcome there any time. Our former MP was male and if we went there he would send us off because he is (*sic.*) sleeping.’⁵⁴

Other problems in the constituency were identified as the failure of government to provide a maternity clinic. As a result, the women had mobilised the community and built a clay house, which is now a clinic used by everyone in the community. This is because of the overwhelming demand for a clinic and years of waiting for the government to provide one. The problem had reached the extent of women delivering children in the forest on the way to

⁵⁴ Focus group discussion with women of Thyolo North constituency.

the nearest health centre, which was too far away. As for government action, the constituents have been told that a proposal was made to the government, but so far nothing has been done. This is just one of many examples of neglect of the pressing needs for women which remain unaddressed.

The budget shall remain inefficient and illegitimate, as long as women remain marginalised by it. Essentially, women could refuse to pass the budget in Parliament because its illegitimacy stems from the non-involvement of women and its failure year after year to holistically address the needs of women. The unresponsiveness of the budget to gender-based inequalities is a direct consequence of the lack of gender mainstreaming by the Ministry of Finance, the central ministry which holds the government's purse strings.

5.4.6 Lack of gender mainstreaming in Ministry of Finance and government ministries

The budget, through the budget statement, should display a range of practical measures to advance the status of women. Sex-disaggregated statistics reflecting public expenditure both on men and women enables verification on the extent to which commitments towards gender equality are being satisfied.

The Ministry of Finance is central in the formulation and implementation of fiscal policies. In-depth understanding and the highest level of gender mainstreaming within this ministry is imperative if a gender-sensitive government budget is to be achieved. However, this ministry views gender as being non-essential to its processes, but the responsibility of the National Gender Machinery. Therefore, the reality of the situation is that, as a result of this ministry's lack of gender sensitivity, women become victims of poor policy that exacerbates inequality. As outlined by Gita,⁵⁵ mainstreaming gender in finance ministries is challenged by:

- insufficient analytical clarifications on the changes brought about by globalisation and liberalisation of economies;
- lack of clear understanding of how gender is linked to the Ministry's role;
- insufficient knowledge and capacity among women's organizations to engage effectively in macroeconomic policy debate.

⁵⁵ Sen, G (1997), Mainstreaming gender into Commonwealth Government Ministries and related agencies responsible for finance.

Policies and plans need to be designed with an appreciation of the different ways in which they affect men and women. Failure to do so may seriously undermine any benefits that may flow from well-intended policies or plans.

The principle of equity is evident in a government budget which aims to redistribute wealth in order to reduce systematic disadvantage. For instance, this may take the form of increasing taxes for the rich and introducing subsidies on agricultural inputs for the poor. Gender inequality is a pressing social issue, which negatively affects the overall performance of government and imposes costs on society as a whole. Therefore, government should display some levels of financial commitment to addressing it.

It is appreciated that engendering the national budget can start by first engendering individual ministerial budgets. The importance of sex-disaggregated data cannot be overemphasised as it is considered to be one of the essential gender analysis tools in the task of budget formulation.

5.4.7 The alienation of the Ministry Of Gender

In the Strategic Country Gender Assessment Report the conclusion was reached that the Ministry of Gender and Community Services lacks capacity to effectively co-ordinate and implement women's rights.⁵⁶ This ministry cannot be expected to fight for women's rights on its own; rather, it should more of a body which co-ordinates government's efforts.

The unloading of all gender issues on to the shoulders of the Ministry of Gender has, not surprisingly, overwhelmed an already structurally weak and understaffed ministry. Continuing to hold the Gender Budgeting Guidelines in abeyance only reflects the failure by the Ministry of Finance to accept responsibility for enforcing gender principles.

5.4.8 Budget literacy and analysis

Gender budgeting is not clearly elaborated in budget literacy programmes. The most prominent undertakings towards budget literacy have been conducted by a civil society organisation called Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN). The strategic mandate of

⁵⁶ UNDP and World Bank Report. 2004.

MEJN has been to execute programmes towards budget participation and budget monitoring. The Acting Director of MEJN categorically stated that:

‘Since our inception in 2000 we have had a weakness of not concentrating on gender. In 2003 that is when we integrated gender as a component of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.’⁵⁷

Under their budget participation initiative, MPs have been trained on budget literacy in general, and an aspect of gender has just been introduced. Another interesting aspect raised by MEJN was the budget literacy programmes. They continue to be gender neutral because the general public has not yet raised the alarm and identified gender as an issue of economic governance. Thus, the view is that people still fail to acknowledge that gender budgeting is an economic governance issue and the whistle has to be blown on this first before someone can act to change this.

5.4.9 Capacity building: Learning ‘to walk the talk’

Abstract gender budgeting training has been characteristic of the little gender budgeting training that has been done for the benefit of female Parliamentarians. Development partners through CIDA and the Ministry of Gender contracted consultants from South Africa to train Parliamentarians in gender budgeting, and they have stated that they are yet to see them implement what they learnt. When the Parliamentarians themselves were asked about this training, these are some of the answers they gave:

‘Yes, we were trained once, but I haven’t implemented anything I learnt there, because we in Parliament have no total say.’⁵⁸

‘Honestly I don’t know what you are talking about.’⁵⁹

‘Yes, we were trained on gender budgeting, but we are still trying to exercise the principles.’⁶⁰

‘We had one training from facilitators from Cape Town, but the facilitators were speaking English which sounded like Afrikaans, it was difficult to

⁵⁷ Mr Mavuto Bamusi.

⁵⁸ Hon Angella Zachepa, MP.

⁵⁹ An anonymous female MP who refused to be interviewed.

⁶⁰ Hon Trifonia Dafter, MP, Chairperson of Committee of Social and Community Affairs.

understand...anyway the training was too abrupt. Honestly, I have done nothing with it.⁶¹

These are the views of the women who were trained. Though divergent, they share one common thread which is that they have not implemented what they were trained because they do not know how, or where to start. Through the in-depth interviews I observed that most female MPs have grasped gender budgeting principles, however, they are challenged in practising what they learnt.

It is clear that training should not be done as a one-off basis but rather as a constant on-going process allowing for opportunities for review and discussion among MPs themselves as well as technical experts. There is a need for nurturing a progressive relationship between gender budgeting experts and female MPs to buttress their arguments. Women in Parliament feel alone and insecure about initiating debates about principles about which they have little or no extensive knowledge. Another MP was of the view that:

‘To empower us, when the budget comes, technical experts should come and talk to us...so that we don’t look stupid. NGOs should prepare submissions for us to make, we can just read them in Parliament, it doesn’t matter, but we need to be pumped with information...However, during budget sessions we just get too many budget documents, with very little time to read them and it’s difficult to consult with very limited time...officially no one explains anything to us.’⁶²

There is an obvious reluctance and lack of confidence among women MPs to clearly articulate gender as an issue in the national budget and there is clearly a need for them to be walked through the process in the quest to achieve a gender-sensitive budget.

5.5 Conclusion

It is vital to attend to the challenges that women face in Parliament. The apparent limited capacity they have to understand and clearly contribute towards the budget process requires urgent attention. Women seem to be present in Parliament but they are not appropriately trained and supported in their positions. Though they are present in Parliament, when it comes to budgetary debates, women do not seem to share power with men, a stumbling block which makes the budget itself illegitimate and incapable of addressing gender inequalities.

⁶¹ Hon Juliana Guga, MP.

⁶² Hon Getrude Mkandawire, MP.

Women in Parliament have to be properly trained and supported. The unique attributes which women MPs have come to possess as a result of their lived experiences equip them to bring about the very change needed on the ground in their constituencies (and ultimately the nation) and these attributes must be emphasised as essential strengths or advantages of the characters of MPs, rather than be seen as a source of marginalisation and stereotyping. While the quest to achieve finally a gender-sensitive budget still has far to go, it will eventually influence government spending. The need for a gender-sensitive budget cannot be overemphasised because it highlights the extent of government's real commitment towards achieving gender equality.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The fight by women for equality is taking too long. As far back as 1990 the Secretary General of the United Nations stated in his report:

‘Although the nature of politics differs in various national contexts and cultures and while women themselves are not in many respects a homogenous group, one condition is common to all of them: they are not full participants in the public choices that affect their lives; they are grossly underrepresented in politics and the civil service, especially at the decision making levels...the conditions have to be created in which there will be a sufficient number of women in decision making positions, whether in politics or in the civil service, to make gender an unremarkable attribute and the selection of women for high positions inevitable and normal (E/CN.6/1990/2,para 7).’⁶³

The research has shown that the situation in Malawi falls way below the international norm, and as the gender debate has gained ground, mechanisms need to be put in place at national level to create space for women in the political process in larger numbers in order for them to make a positive difference. The argument by the Ministry of Finance has been that it has not been provided with an example of what an ideal gender-sensitive budget looks like. The initial part my recommendations will be the provision of two examples of gender-sensitive budget statement material. They are contained in Annexures I and II.

Annexure I (Part of the 1996 Budget Speech by the South African Minister of Finance, Mr C.F. Liebenberg, on 13 March 1996.) The budget statement is part and parcel of the budget. It provides a necessary starting point. In March 1996, the first South African Women's Budget was introduced to the public and it was an initiative from outside government. The official launch of the Women's Budget was held three days before the Budget Speech of March 1996. The budget and lobbying around it by women Parliamentarians clearly had an impact on the Budget Speech delivered days later by the then Minister of Finance who included three far-reaching commitments in respect of gender.

⁶³ Women in Politics and decision making in the late Twentieth Century. A UN Study. 1992.

Annexure II (Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet Women's Budget Statement 2001 Overview.) This example represents an advanced stage of gender budgeting. Australia was the first country to implement a women's budget in 1984. The Australia Women's Budget (1984-1996), which was a government-led initiative, brought about a significant increase in spending in areas of importance to women and has graduated to more detailed gendered approaches which filters down to all the different ministries.

There has to be a realisation that democracy has little meaning without giving complete effect to women's full participation in it. A combination of the following factors is imperative to improving the situation of women. Power-sharing has to be accepted as an essential application of the principles of true democracy.

6.2 Legal interventions

6.2.1 Legitimising the gender debate at the highest national level

This should be done by forcing change of Malawi's political culture and this should be implemented through the imposition of quotas, such as:

- Constitutionalise 50% representation of women in Parliament;
- Constitutionalise 50% representation of women in all political parties in the National Assembly;
- Constitutionalise 50% representation of women in Cabinet.

A combination of these would change political structures because it would increase the presence of women. Men would be forced to share power and this would create the necessary break of male monopoly in crucial decision-making areas.

6.2.2 Parliamentary reform

This should include:

- The legal recognition of the Women's Caucus as a Parliamentary Committee;

- The provision of technical experts for Parliamentary Committees and Members of Parliament to unpack the budget prior to Parliamentary deliberations;
- Increased numbers of women in Parliament.

6.3 Policy interventions

This can be achieved through:

- The adoption of gender-budgeting guidelines by the Ministry of Finance;
- The adoption of a National Gender Policy which should provide guidelines for use in the formulation and implementation of government budgets;
- The Ministry of Gender should present an ideal gender-sensitive budget to the Ministry of Finance;
- The implementation of guidelines at ministerial level;
- The mainstreaming of gender concerns into budgetary allocations through the inclusion of gender-specific activities in all ministerial activities;
- The engendering of treasury guidelines to enable ministerial budgets to undergo gender-scrutiny at the formulation stages and even before the number-crunching stage of the budgetary process;
- The generation of gender-sensitive budget statements which are clear and unambiguous in their emphasis on the importance of ending gender inequality;
- Encouraging ‘media balance’ in order to convince the electorate to vote for candidates who support their interests. The public, who are the electorate, need to be informed about the extent of the gender-insensitiveness of the current budget;
- Accessibility of budget documents and information;
- Improved access to budget information.

6.4 Other recommendations

6.4.1 Lobbying

There is a need to lobby against stereotyping which perpetuates the non-involvement of women. Partly because there are only a few women in Parliament, who are perceived as being powerless, it is evident that they are placed in more traditional positions, especially in

Parliamentary Committees that are service-centred. Integration of women in the budgetary and planning process formulation process is imperative. Policy directives should be made to bring women on board. Other recommended lobbying strategies are as follows:

- Vigilant gender-specific budget analysis.
- Departure from the secretive treatment of budget information.
- Transparency in the budget process.

6.4.2 Empowerment of women

This should include:

- The provision of simplified gender budget literacy programmes to enlighten women on how to link their needs to the government budget;
- Giving women improved access to budget information.

6.4.3 Building capacity

There is a need for special support for women in Parliament through:

- Continuous gender-budgeting training, with the application of principles and monitoring and evaluation of progress;
- Peer education, through interaction and training from MPs within the region.

6.4.4 Budget literacy programmes

Such programmes should include:

- Standardised and engendered budget literacy programmes.
- Budget literacy programmes to be co-ordinated by the Ministry of Finance, ensuring the inclusion of gender as a development concept.

6.4.5 Preparation of sex-disaggregated data

In the planning and formulation stages of the budget a meaningful information base is critical and it should be highly gender-sensitive because gender has proved itself an important variable upon which to disaggregate data.

6.5 Monitoring and evaluation

Although policy and legal interventions have occurred, the strategies are not being implemented and the situation has not changed for women in political and decision-making positions. It is imperative to reinforce these legal mechanisms, which support policies so that rights at international law can be enforced at the local level as well.

Evaluation of the situation of women clearly reflects a failure and lack of political will to share power with women. The interaction between men and women in the highest levels of government and within society has hardly changed and the traditional values which encourage gender stereotyping still exist.

Due to the appraisal of the current situation, changes are required through the recommendations outlined. The targeted group for change are both men and women in society, especially their perception of the role that women can play in fiscal policy formulation and implementation. Finances have to be committed towards projects whose objectives are to end gender inequality. This is preferable to the state simply making international commitments which it fails to uphold. Qualitative indicators for monitoring and evaluating the budget process would record the following changes:

1. Increased numbers of women in Parliament.
2. Increased participation by both men and women, which is appreciative of the gender specific needs of the people they represent.
3. The changing characteristics of political parties to reflect the visibility of women in political parties both inside and outside Parliament.
4. The adoption of a gender-sensitive budget with increased efficiency in government spending.
5. Leadership priorities identifying gender as a serious issue for consideration, both in the President's and Minister of Finance's Budget Statements.
6. Visible change in the democratic and political process with real participation from women and empowerment of women to be part of the budget process.
7. Change in policy trends.

8. The strategic needs of women identified and met through the translation of the budget into the allocation of resources to meet the needs and legal rights of the women whom the budget is meant to benefit.
9. The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development should play a central role in outlining gender as a normal function in monitoring and evaluating all ministerial activities and budget implementation.
10. Increased transparency and accountability.

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Annexure I: Part of the 1996 Budget Speech by the South African Minister of Finance, Mr C.F. Liebenberg, on 13 March 1996

‘Following the Beijing Women's Conference, South Africa undertook to play a more active role in the development and implementation of policies and programmes set out in the Beijing Platform of Action. Three areas of work have been identified:

1. The development of a statistical database, which will provide information on the impact of expenditures disaggregated by gender;
2. The implementation of targets and indicators of gender equality and equity in spending; and
3. The development of a performance review mechanism to evaluate progress and report to Parliament.’

Source: <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1996/m13speech.htm>

Annexure II: Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet Women's Budget Statement 2001 Overview

This Budget continues to build on the Government's sound economic policies and taxation reforms. This strong platform, together with social policies such as increased assistance to mothers and carers, offers women more opportunities, more choices and a greater ability to exercise those choices than ever before.

The number of women in our paid workforce has reached a record high, and women are closing the earnings gap with men. More young women are in education and training than ever before. In this Budget, initiatives focus on increasing access to education for all women. Specific initiatives range from areas where women are traditionally underrepresented - such as science and technology - through to measures focusing on nursing.

Women in community and volunteer activities, and those in paid work or undertaking study, have access to record levels of childcare and access to parenting and other family payments. Tax reforms have delivered significant income tax cuts for families and reforms to superannuation are helping more women to plan for a secure retirement. The \$1.7 billion Australians Working Together package now builds on the Government's commitment to strengthening Australia's social safety net, valued by all Australians as one of the key strengths of our society and, as such, is an important issue for women.

The Government is delivering on better health services for women. As well as the considerable foundations laid over the past few years, there are new measures that will improve women's access to services in both specific and general ways - including measures to increase the participation in the National Cervical Screening Programme to improve health services in rural and regional Australia, and to increase access to After Hours Emergency Care, as well as measures to assist older Australians and their health needs.

For Older Australians - the majority of whom are women - the Government has introduced a range of measures. These include a one off payment of \$25,000 in recognition of Japanese-held Prisoners of War and civilian detainees and their widows/ers, restoring pensions for war

widows/ers who remarried prior to 1984, expanding telephone and other concessions and a one-off payment to recipients of income support who are of Age Pension age.

The Government recognises that Australia's extensive cultural diversity requires specialised measures to meet the concerns of women from these backgrounds and has introduced a range of initiatives to promote a harmonious Australia.

Indigenous women are benefiting from measures to address family violence in a holistic manner, employment assistance and improved quality of, and accessibility to, legal services.

A key element of the Government's vision for women is to create a culture, an Australia, where women and children can live in environments that are free of violence. The Government is providing sound policies to build an Australia where women have support and choices in deciding the directions of their lives.

This Budget builds on the \$50 million Partnerships Against Domestic Violence programme with a new \$16.5 million national initiative to combat the alarming incidence of sexual assault in our communities.

Using a partnership approach between Commonwealth and State governments, service providers and communities, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence has shown practical and effective ways that we, as Australians, can act together to stop domestic violence. The national approach to combat sexual assault against women will also provide real results for Australian women.

There is also a package of measures in this Budget specifically designed to further promote and assist women to have their say in the development of Government policies and take on leadership roles in the community. Women's organisations will benefit from the establishment of a \$5.6 million Women's Development Programme that extends Government support for organisations representing the diversity of Australian women and will encourage community contribution to Government policy discussion and formulation. The measure - which will bring the total Office of the Status of Women funding for women's development to \$7.6 million over the next four years - will fund projects that are responsive to women's needs, again providing support for real and practical outcomes for Australian women.

The Government will provide \$2.4 million over four years for the Women's National Leadership Initiative - extending current activities to increase the number of women in leadership roles in community spheres. AUS\$5.5 million comprehensive information strategy will also make information about women and for women more accessible.

There is much for all Australian women in the 2001-02 Budget.

Source – <http://www.budget.gov.au/2001-02/minst/download/women.pdf>