Improving the Political Prospects of Women in Malawi by Promoting Gender Equality

*A minor field study in Mpasa Community in Malawi 2013*
Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the gender equality in Mpasa Community in Malawi by measuring the access to work, education, health, and political empowerment as measurements. An investigation of how the pre-colonial social structure, based on matriarchy, will determine to what extent the cultural factors affects gender equality. This thesis is based on observations made possible through a minor field study scholarship financed by SIDA in 2013. Previous research and theories are used as framework for the thesis. The Malawian Parliament, consisting of mainly men, passing a gender equality bill hoping to empower women and increase female political representation is evidence of willingness to improve the current living situation of women and girls.

It turns out the degree of gender equality is high for such an underdeveloped country as Malawi and the cultural factors do have a big impact on the political development. Inequality does occur in the field of political participation investigated at chief level in the district and matriarchy seems to be the underlying social structure that sets the norms and rules.

Key words: Malawi, gender equality, matriarchy, political empowerment
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1. Introduction

Gender equality is emphasized by its inclusion as one of the eight MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and is first and foremost a human right.1 The UN refers to gender equality as the equal rights, responsibility and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Women’s and men’s rights, responsibility and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.2 Gender equality is an issue worldwide but where women are specially targeted is in underdeveloped countries where human development and gender inequality are usually correlated.3 Women are in many parts of the world discriminated due to religious and cultural factors and in Africa a woman’s ability to make an informed decision without any form of discrimination is in many cases not a given right.4 Nearly all of today’s African countries have at some point been a colony under French, British, Portuguese, Boer, German or Leopold of Belgian rule5 and most countries are flawed democracies or hybrid regimes.6 There has been some significant democratic improvement in many African nations and young democracies capture the opportunity to enhance gender equality. In January 2006 Liberia became the first African country to ever have a female president when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in as president. In April 2012 Joyce Banda became the first female president in Malawi. Banda explains good political and economic governance guarantees fairness, equality and freedom. She agrees gender equality use the full potential of both men and women and enhances the capacity for women to participate in matters affecting them.7

Malawi was a British colony and became an independent state in 1964. During the colonial time blacks were discriminated and black women were struggling with social, economic and political oppression. The social structure before the colonial time had been of matrilineal character, but the colonization changed the social structure and matriarchy was replaced with European patriarchy.8 Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was the first president of the Republic of Malawi and the constitution established a one-party state and suppressed opposition movement and in 1971 he made himself president for life. During this political period there were negligibly few women in politics. The first multi-party election was held in 1994 and

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1 (Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015)
2 (UN Women)
3 (Gender Inequality Index (GII))
4 (Advancing Gender Equality)
5 (The Story of Africa)
6 (A Glass Half-Full, 2012)
7 (Joyce Banda touts her charity work in the U.S: Launches JBFI Africa Initiative)
8 (Kaarhus, 2013, s. 2)
since that point the female political representation has increased.\textsuperscript{9} In May 2014 the gender ratio decline and only 30 women now have seats in the parliament and Dr. Joyce Banda did not win the election.\textsuperscript{10} Despite this setback, men and women outside central politics are still eager to make Malawi more equal and treat each other with mutual respect. Aaron Blake, a reporter for \textit{The Washington Post} claims that people in rural areas tend to be more conservative than people in bigger cities.\textsuperscript{11} But the movement to become an independent state and overthrow Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda all came originally from outside central politics. Gender equality evolved in the central politics but how gender equality is practiced at the local level and rural area is yet to find out. When Joyce Banda became the president of Malawi she was greeted with positive attitude and support from nations around the world and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said because of another female president, the potential for more women leadership at the highest level is now made even stronger.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{1.1. Purpose}

Gender equality does not mean that women and men become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, need and priorities of both men and women are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. This equality is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of sustainable people-centered development.\textsuperscript{13} In June 2014, just two decades of democracy Malawi swore in their first female head of state while more developed countries (the US and Sweden) has never had a woman as head of state. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the degree of gender equality and how traces of matriarchy affect the female political representation in Mpasa community in Malawi.

\textsuperscript{9} (Malawi: Women’s representation in the National Assembly)
\textsuperscript{10} (Dionne & Dulani, 2014)
\textsuperscript{11} (Blake, 2014)
\textsuperscript{12} (Liberian leader Sirleaf gives advice to Malawi's Banda, 2012)
\textsuperscript{13} (UN Women)
1.2. Specified Question

By achieving gender equality all activities toward human development can improve such as policy development, implementation of projects and programs, and legislation.\(^\text{14}\) To achieve the purpose of the thesis and field study, two questions will be asked and answered. Since equality is the core of this thesis there are four factors determining the degree of gender equality: the access to 1) work, 2) education, 3) health, and 4) political empowerment. Work refers to the women’s availability to work and if wage is independent of gender. Education refers to the same rights and availability to education between men and women. Health refers to life expectancy, and ratio of women to men within society.\(^\text{15}\) Political empowerment refers to the access to exercise political power without gender based discrimination. Meaningful input from women and their life experience gives a different awareness of the community’s needs, concern and interest than from men’s perspective.\(^\text{16}\)

The specified questions for this paper are:

1. *How balanced is Mpsa Community in terms of gender equality based on the four determined factors?*

2. *Are the traces from the pre-colonial social structure and matriarchy an underlying norm that affects the progress of gender equality?*

Answering these two questions can help understand the current political situation in southern rural Malawi and through this use the benefits of the cultural backbone of the region to improve female political representation and empowerment.

\(^{14}\) (Gender Mainstreaming)

\(^{15}\) (Sweeping change narrows gender gap, 2014)

\(^{16}\) (Forum, 2005, s. 4)
2. Method & Material

To answer the research question for this thesis certain choices regarding the method had to be made, which will be presented in this chapter. The investigation to see the balance of gender equality in Malawi based on work, health, education and political power was made through a case study method through field work in Malawi in October and November 2013. The project was financed through an minor field study scholarship from SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) provided through the institution of Political Science at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden.

2.1. Research Design

Gender equality is crucial for a country’s democratic process and human development. The design is analytical and descriptive, and the theories explaining the case will make it a theory consuming design. Empirical research of the social structure and the balance of gender equality made observations the best design for answering the research questions. The focus was on whether men and women live as equals in the rural area or if the rural area practices more traditional social norms. General conversation about the daily life situations took place to confirm the thoughts and theories about what had been observed.

The theory used for investigating the gender equality in Mpasa is based on the WEF’s (World Economic Forum) four factors determining the degree of equality. The pursuit to achieve equality within these factors would mean a country is using its full potential to enhance democracy and political conditions. Theories to investigate the traces of matrilineal society are the work of many researchers claiming that matriarchy has and still exists in southern and central Malawi. These regions are traditionally based on matrilineal rules and practice.

2.2. Choice of Study Object

To improve a country’s economic development the increase of women’s economic participation is an important first step. While gender equality is an issue of human rights and social justice it can also contribute to achievements of social and economic activities.

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17 (Women’s Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap, 2014)
18 (Forum, 2005, s. 3)
19 (Nations, 2012, s. 10)
Addressing gender equality is essential for formulating effective national strategies for increasing economic productivity and growth, reducing poverty and achieving sustainable resource management\(^{20}\). Failing to invest in women’s education can lower the GNP (gross national product).

Blacks in Malawi and especially women were during the colonial times neglected, discriminated and oppressed. Even after colonialism and independence women were still not equal to men in society and there were few women involved in central politics. After the first multi-party election in 1994 women’s inclusion in central politics increased and ever since that election the participation has increased until the recent election in 2014.\(^{21}\) With a woman as head of state the male dominated social structure changed and political means to empower women were introduced. Malawi has come far in the development of gender equality in regards to its poverty level and in some instances further than other more developed nations.

Liberia was the first country in Africa to ever have an elected female president. A comparative case study between the two countries would have been possible due to the political similarities but the lack of time and resources did not make the study a feasible option. \(^{22}\)

### 2.3. Delimitation

To make sure that the field study would not be too extensive, there had to be limitations with the project. I chose to study the social relations between men and women in the rural area in Malawi because of the access to the mundane life of Malawians. Due to the underdevelopment in Malawi it was difficult to find and contact authorities and therefore I chose to restrict myself to Phalombe District where Mpasa is located. Focusing on one specific village and its people gave a clear perspective of how men and women function together and make it more possible to discover the inequalities rather than being in a big city where people always are in motion. Observations of the villagers took place every day and other observers helped me keep an objective view on the study.

\(^{20}\) (Nations, 2012). s.6  
\(^{21}\) (Malawi Profile, 2015)  
\(^{22}\) (Liberia)
2.4. Operationalization

The first specified question was observed by attending and visiting spheres and institutions where inequalities within of work, health, education and political empowerment may occur. Visiting men and women working out in the field made it possible to observe any potential inequalities and conclude whether work is helping enhancing women’s political engagement or not. Living with families and children at the MCC (Mpasa Children’s Center) made it possible to detect if males and females receive the same medical attentions regardless of gender. Education was observed when visiting the local primary school and see if there was a majority of boys or girls and also guardians’ opinion on education. Meeting the local chiefs created an opportunity to see a majority of either boys or girls and conclude why that was the case. The second specified question was. Are the traces from the pre-colonial social structure and matriarchy an underlying norm that affects the progress of gender equality? When living with the same villagers for a longer time period it becomes clear what the social norms are and by determining those norms it is possible to conclude if they are benefitting men or women and their political prospects.

2.5. The Field Study

Not many organizations are working in Malawi but in August 2013 EMFI (Embrace Malawi Foundation International) opened an orphanage for double orphans in Phalombe district and is a Swedish nonprofit organization. Together with Denise Jonsson (founder of EMFI) and Alex Muigai (responsible for the MFS preparation course) it was possible to form a design for how the study would best be executed. Alex Muigai suggested I go native. He explained: When arriving to a foreign country with different culture, language and traditions it can be an advantage to gain access to this environment during the field study.23 Adopting the social rules and behavior of Malawi made me transfer from being a foreigner to becoming a native. This resulted in information travelling faster directly to me instead of first landing at an intermediary.

Denise Jonsson was a guide throughout the operation and showed me where I would best access information. The source of material was originally to interview the villagers but because of them only speaking Chichewa (native language in Malawi) and very little and poor

23 (Muigai, 2013)
English the interviews had to be replaced with another primary source of information. Canada Byson worked as the interpreter between me and the respondents. When introducing the concept of an interview to villagers in Malawi were uncomfortable with the situation and was unable to provide me with answers. We tried organizing group interviews which did not generate any more information and made every respondent even more uncomfortable. Words such as gender equality, political participation and other political science related terms were an obstacle due to the lack of education. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) wrote a report in 2008 regarding illiteracy in Malawi and only 58 per cent of the population older than 15 years old was literate. 24 When using less difficult words it was still challenging for villagers to understand.

The awareness of interviews becoming a problem did occur and the substitute came to be observations. In Mpasa the norms and social rules are clear and patterns are easily discovered. Observations were more feasible because it provided an objective view of the social structure. Using observations, key-people, and other observers, conclusions from experiences were drawn every day. Using other observers made it possible to confirm theories that surfaced during the entire study. The key-people Canada Byson, Ellen Mose and Enock Kwakwala helped explain social and cultural norms and rules.

Observations took place every day and some were more active and conscious than other. Denise informed me about a project providing labor for 15 unemployed women in a corn field which came to be an opportunity to investigate gender equality in the labor force. While living with Canada Byson’s family and, at the orphanage, the investigation of access and distribution of health was made. Observations at Mwanazanga Primary School provided the opportunity to determine the ratio of girls and boys enrolled in school. Meeting chiefs and attending social and cultural events made it possible to investigate the political participation and to detect what gender dominated this institution.

2.6. Material and observations

There are basically three possible ways to collect material in social science; 1) asking people, 2) observe people, 3) observing physical trails and results of human activities. 25 I chose to use observations as the primary source of collecting material. Observations mean the interactions

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24 (UNESCO, 2008)
25 (Esaiasson & Gilljam, 2007, s. 99)
of the daily life and conformation of specific situations, physical, social and cultural. Many factors are to be considered when making observations; what type of observation, degree of participation, geographical area, qualitative or quantitative etcetera. The method for this thesis is direct observations which means the investigator is in place and makes observations with own eyes.\(^{26}\) This makes observations particularly suitable when studying processes or structures. For this case qualitative observations are used. Qualitative observation defined by Metodpraktikan is: *the occurrence and description of the phenomena is the most central.*\(^{27}\) It is known to be an advantage if there are other observers present. It forces every observer to sharpen the arguments for their interpretations and it increases the validity.\(^{28}\) The observations were both activity- and location based concentrating on different types of activities and social events. The field study will be in one specific geographical *room*\(^{29}\) but because it is an activity based observation it will also move the observation to where the activities are.\(^{30}\) The degree of participation varied throughout the entire field study. Spontaneous and unplanned conversations took place because it decreases the controlling role of interviews.\(^{31}\)

The chiefs, staff at MCC and school, boys and girls from Mpasa and adjacent villages were participants in observations and conversations. The chiefs are involved in everything concerning their own village and are therefore excellent informants regarding local political representation. Teachers at Mwanazanga Primary School provided information about enrolled children. The staff at MCC provided information about the village and social structure and shared their own experience regarding gender equality in social spheres. The Staff at MCC providing information was Enock Kwakwala, Thomas Wedson and Ellen Mose. Canada Byson works for EMFI and provided information about the chiefs and general social situation. Volunteers, Denise Jonsson, Christina Beverin and Alexandra Ahlgren all acted as observers and contributed in collecting information.

Each day a sphere or institution was chosen where gender equality was observed. One was spent with Canada Byson’s wife to see what her day looks like and what sort of responsibilities she has and how she and Canada work together. On what tasks do they work together and where is there a clear separation of power? Observing the chiefs was made

\(^{26}\)(Esaiasson & Gilljam, 2007, s.343)  
\(^{27}\)Ibid. 352  
\(^{28}\)Ibid. s. 355  
\(^{29}\)(Pripp & Öhlander, 2011, s. 117)  
\(^{30}\)Ibid. s.120  
\(^{31}\)Ibid. s.124
through inviting 12 chiefs to a meeting at MCC. By doing this a hierarchy and the ratio of men and women was discovered.

2.7. Validity & Reliability

Using previous research and theories when answering the question gives the thesis a good validity. There is conformity between the theories and material and the study fulfills its purpose. To keep the analysis of the empirical material as objective as possible other observers were engaged in the study, as written above, to keep the argument as objective as possible.

3. Previous research & theory

Previous research about gender equality in Malawi has almost exclusively been focused on Joyce Banda becoming the first female head of state, and the improvements benefitting Malawians. Previous research mainly consists of other political fields, especially concerning Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Bakili Mulizi, Bingu wa Mutharika and the current president Peter Mutharika. Hence, this study object is valuable due to the current lack of information. Malawi has suffered from more severe problems than gender inequality. This has resulted in gender equality being a secondary issue in politics rather than primary issue such as natural disasters, poverty, political corruption, and HIV epidemics.\(^{32}\) Despite these issues Malawi has still managed to narrow the equality gap between men and women in social institutions as well as in politics.

3.1. Equality and Equality – same but different

Equality refers to the state where people are equal in terms of opportunities, rights and status.\(^{33}\) A thesis about equality could for instance be about equality between blacks and whites. Another kind of equality which is gender equality refers to the act of treating men and women equally. Cambridge dictionary notes that gender equality does not mean women and men are the same but have equal value and should be granted equal treatment.\(^{34}\) This essay is focused on gender equality and refers to the equal rights, responsibility and opportunities of

\(^{32}\) (Malawi Profile, 2014)  
\(^{33}\) (Oxford Dictionaries)  
\(^{34}\) (Cambridge Dictionary Online)
women and men and girls and boys. Women’s and men’s rights, responsibility and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.\(^{35}\)

### 3.2. Measuring Gender Equality

The four factors in the first specified question are *work, health, education* and *political empowerment*. The UN\(^{36}\) and WEF agree these four factors determine the degree of gender equality and ability to measure the gap. *Work* is measured as economic participation by using four aspects: female labor force participation over male value, wage equality for similar work between men and women, and female professionals and senior officials. *Education* is measured by attainment, through two aspects: female literacy over male value, female enrolment in primary-, secondary – and tertiary education. *Health* is measures through two aspects: sex ratio at birth, and female health life expectancy over male value. *Political empowerment* is measured through three aspects: females with seats in higher authorities over male value, females at chief level over male value and, number of years of female chiefs in the last 50 years, over male value.\(^{37}\)

### 3.3. Matrilineal society – myth or basic culture of Africa?

There are many different thoughts, theories and facts about matrilineal societies. *The Guardian* wrote an article in December 2010 with the headline “*Is China’s Mosuo tribe the world’s last matriarchy?*”\(^{38}\) Many articles claim matrilineal societies never existed and are only myths. Ifi Amaduine argues the contrary claiming matriarchy was historically basic to African societies and that European feminism was inventing single-parenthood and alternative affective relationship. Ifi continues explaining how these relationships do not need to be invented since Africa already has a history and legacy of women’s culture. Amaduine uses Cheikh Anta Dip’s theories explaining how matriarchy is the basis of the African cultural unity.\(^{39}\)

Other researchers have confirmed the theories about matrilineal societies taking place in Malawi. Mike Mathambo Mtika and Henry Victor Doctor spent two years writing an African sociology review about matriarchy, patriarchy and wealth flow variations in rural Malawi.

\(^{35}\) (UN Women)
\(^{36}\) (Using data to measure gender equality, 2014)
\(^{37}\) (Global Gender Gap Report 2014, 2014) s.13
\(^{38}\) (Shahesta, 2010)
\(^{39}\) (Amaduine, 1997, ss. 22-23)
They visited northern, central and southern Malawi and interviewed 1257 respondents (717 women and 540 men). From their empirically collected material they concluded that southern and central Malawi has traditionally been based on matrilineal rules and practice. Before the colonial time in the 19th century the main groups of people in southern and central Malawi was primarily organized through matrilineal principles and descent.40 The field study for that paper took place in southern Malawi. Mtika and Doctor concluded that the ethnic group in southern Malawi is Yao, which follow matrilineal practices.41 Under matriarchy the wife’s lineage is the integral part to the family rather than the father’s, but in decisions concerning wealth the focus transfers from the maternal to the paternal actor of the family.42

3.4. Social Institutions – the importance of measuring gender equality

Beside the four measurements on gender equality there is another factor playing a big role on the outcome: social institutions. OECD had in 2007 an International Expert’s Workshop on Measuring Gender Equality – Taking Stock and Looking Forward which brought together key stakeholders to exchange experiences with data related to gender. Some of the researchers responsible to the background information are Johannes P. Jütting, Christian Morrisson, Jeff Dayton-Johnson and Denis Drechsler who together wrote the paper: Measuring Gender InEquality: Introducing the Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base (GID).

In that paper it was stated that broader framework including social institutions adds to our understanding of the role of women in developing countries. They also point out how important it is not to ignore traditions, customs and explicit and implicit laws limiting the objective of policy actions implemented to improve women’s situations.43 GID collects information on social institutions that help determine the situation of women.44

*Family code, physical integrity, civil society, and ownership rights* are social institutions Jütte, Morrisson and Dayton-Johnson believe determine gender equality. The *family code* is formal and informal rules and traditions that in any way limit women’s economic situation. In some cultures many women and girls are married at a young age where the father is usually the decision maker. *Physical integrity* refers to the female genital mutilation legislation punishing acts of violence against women, domestic violence, sexual assault and rape, and sexual

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40 (Mtika & Doctor, 2002, s. 21)  
41 Ibid. s.2  
42 Ibid. s.3  
43 (Jütte, Morrisson, & Dayton-Johnson, 2006, s. 8)  
44 Ibid. s. 9
harassment. *Civil Liberties* refers to the percentage of female members in parliament, percentage of female ministers, women’s freedom to leave the house, and incorporated in the latter one is the requirement of women wearing a veil in public. *Ownership rights* includes women’s access to bank loans, their rights to acquire and own land, and their right to own property other than land. 45 These theories and assumptions are incorporated due to the social factors correlated to social norms and structures based on matriarchy in Malawi.

### 4. Result and analysis

The two specified questions regarding gender equality and researchers’ theories and findings on matrilineal society will each be presented individually. The four indicators determining the degree of gender equality will in turn be presented with subcategories. The material for this analysis involving observations, theories and other sources of information, physical as well as electronic, will make the base for this chapter.

The indicators, for the first specified question, determining the degree of gender equality all have a causal connection that all end up improving human development, democracy and political stability. Education about health can prevent young pregnancies and further spread of HIV/AIDS and these women are also more likely to work which in turn makes women more involved in society and more likely to participate politically. Joyce Banda brought forward a 5 pillar program with a purpose to generate income through agricultural businesses, increase access to education, health, and enhancing female leadership and rights. This strategy is used to highlight the importance of good governance, gender equality, and empowerment of women and girls. 46 Passing the Gender Equality Bill in Malawi Parliament in 2013 to strengthen women’s empowerment is evidence pointing at the success towards promoting gender equality in this poor and underdeveloped nation. 47 Changes, positive as negative, in one indicator can lead to changes in another. 48 Sheila Aikman and Elaine Unthalter investigate the parity and conclude that there are encouraging moves toward parity in many countries including Malawi. 49 All these four indicators are necessary for development and democracy in a country.

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45 (Jütte, Morrisson & Dayton-Johnson, 2006, s. 15)
46 (Joyce Banda touts her charity work in the U.S: Launches JBFI Africa Initiative)
47 (Malawi Parliament passes Gender Equality Bill: Women Empowerment)
48 (Kabeer, 2005, s. 16)
49 (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005, s. 2)
4.1. Work

This section aims to analyze the first specified question: How balanced is Mpasa Community in terms of gender equality based on the four determined factors? This part consists of 3 subcategories: female labor force participation, wage equality for similar work between men and women, female professionals and seniors officials.

4.1.1. Female labor force participation

One of the MDG’s is to increase women’s share of wage employment in the non-agricultural sector. Women are key contributors to economies for work at home, in the communities and at the workplace. By not using a country’s full potential of one half of the population the societies are not distributing their human resources accurately and therefore lose their competitive potential. Not only single national economies would benefit from greater labor participation of women but also the global economy would benefit substantially. On October 16th, 18th, 19th and 26th female villagers were observed exclusively. The observation engaging with the 15 women in the work sphere took place on October 18th. The majority of the labor force in Mpasa is women and the majority of the type of labor is agriculture. Women spend several hours every day on agriculture which is essential for survival of the family. In Mpasa the female labor force participation is somewhat restricted due to the poor economic situation and a very small percentage of the labor is non-agricultural. Work where physical strength is essential is building houses, working as stone breakers, among other and these tasks are few and that is why the male labor participation is lower than female. Women’s important contributions to family food, production, and water and firewood production add to women’s workload and are often obstacles to engaging politically or expanding economic activities.

Alex Muigai’s theory and advice about going native made it easier to access the social institutions and conclude the norms and social rules. The female labor force over male value is more than equal because women work with agriculture and in the home. When men and women share the workload the wage is equal. Today very few women are chiefs in Phalombe.

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50 (Kabeer, 2005, s. 13)  
51 (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995)  
52 (Forum, 2005, s. 1)  
53 (Devex, 2013)  
54 (Nations, Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview, 2012) s.6
district and the few times women act as authorities is when their husbands are unable to perform their task as chiefs.

The WEF’s statistics of labor force participation in Malawi show a score of 1.0 (0.0= inequality, 1.0= equal). The female/male ratio is 1.05 meaning there are more women working than men.\textsuperscript{55} Observations confirm these statistics as it revealed more women than men in the labor force. Men work much less than women and most of the time the women tell the men what to do.\textsuperscript{56} This factor can be the main reason why Malawi is developed in terms of gender equality even though the country is characterized as an extremely poor and underdeveloped country.

Moving towards gender equality is a process and investing in women’s capabilities and empowering them to practice their choice is valuable and the surest way to contribute to economic growth and development.\textsuperscript{57} Acting with a purpose to secure women’s rights is not only a concern of women but also about responsibility of the entire international community.\textsuperscript{58} Enhancing women’s confidence and independence can help women engage more in local political issues and encourage other young females to do the same. By doing this, gender equality will be mainstreamed in society and will in turn help the political development.

4.1.2. Wage equality

Eliminating gender inequality in occupation and pay could increase women’s income and contribute to national income.\textsuperscript{59} Unlike some developed countries Mpasa does not have wage depending on gender. Malawians in Mpasa believe the labor is the same whether a man or woman is performing it\textsuperscript{60} and partnership between men and women based on equality is important for a sustainable development.\textsuperscript{61} Employers in Mpasa consider all possible candidates and hire people based on competence, education, earlier experience, and seniority and not based on gender. What they do take in account when it comes to gender is heavy physical work and some of the reasons are the obvious anatomical differences. Surviving in these poor regions in Malawi makes it crucial to use all the forces and competence of the

\textsuperscript{55} (Bekhouse & Zahidi, 2014, s. 260)
\textsuperscript{56} (Wedson, 2013)
\textsuperscript{57} (Yadav, 2006, ss. 2-3)
\textsuperscript{58} (Nations, Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview, 2012, s. 6)
\textsuperscript{59} (Ibid. s.11)
\textsuperscript{60} (Mukumba, 2013)
\textsuperscript{61} (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995)
villagers’ one can find. Applying gender inequality in the labor force means they will lose more than they will gain. The chiefs in these villages are making efforts to ensure that every family has as much as they can have. Chiefs monitor that as many healthy and capable villagers make as many socio-economic contributions as they can for themselves and the village. No female villager will work for less than a man and this is why there is no wage inequality. The chiefs are aware that women are the majority of the labor force and violating their right to a proper payment would not generate a positive result. 62

According to WEF, Malawi scored a total of 0.76 where 1.0 is equal. Even though there are no numbers of the female/male ratio, the number 0.76 still states that there is an inequality between the wage of men and women where women is the losing gender. 63 It is necessary to build a society in which women and men share equally in the distribution of access to decent work and livelihoods which will in turn contribute to the fulfillment of economic rights of women and girls. 64

4.1.3. Female Professionals and Senior Officials

Malawians are considered seniors at the age of 35-40 and when someone reaches this age the children of the mother/father is responsible for providing for the parent or legal guardian. This is why Malawians prefer to give birth to as many children as possible. This risk of the child not surviving past the age of 5 is very high compared to other developed countries. The child mortality (under the age of 5) was in 2013 68 per cent. 65 Mothers and other female legal guardians of girls and women are teaching their oldest female child how to take care of her future family and how to manage agriculture. Unfortunately there are no female professionals within local politics at chief level and no senior officials at local political authorities in Mpasa. Including women in local politics could mean including the needs and interests of not only men but also women into political policies. 66 Improving women’s access to political opportunity could in the long term be a sustainable improvement for women rights and empowerment. 67 Gender based discrimination is a cause and consequence of deep-rooted disparity in societies and traditional attitudes can either undermine or enhance women’s

62 (Mose, Wage Equality in Mpasa, 2013)
63 (Bekhouse & Zahidi, 2014, s. 260)
64 (Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment)
65 (Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births))
66 (Benefits of Gender Equality Online Discussion Report, 2014) s.6
67 (Brown, Rao Gupte, & Pande, 2005)
It is proved that companies investing in women’s employment often find it benefitting their innovation and access to new markets and talents.\textsuperscript{69} and when gender equality increases poverty reduces.\textsuperscript{70}

### 4.2. Education

This part consists of two subcategories: female literacy over male value and female enrollment in primary-, secondary – and tertiary education. The investigation took place at Mwanazanga Primary School on October 28\textsuperscript{th} where it was possible to determine whether legal guardians prefer to send boys or girls to school. Education contributes to knowledge about health and the prevention of early pregnancy and HIV/AIDS.\textsuperscript{71} Education, employment and political participation are essential for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. One of the MDG’s is to close the gender gap in education at all levels.\textsuperscript{72} Joyce Banda Foundation International sends 1,300 students to tertiary education and 3,500 to secondary school every year.\textsuperscript{73} Banda says she knows a girl’s economic future and prospects will change if there is access to education and health. When staying in school girls more commonly marry later, have fewer children, and contribute to the economic development of communities and the nation.\textsuperscript{74}

#### 4.2.1. Literacy

Literacy is a big issue throughout Malawi and the population between the age of 15 to 24 approximately 70 per cent of males are literate while only a little more than 50 per cent of females are literate.\textsuperscript{75} The groups of people who suffer the most from illiteracy are poor females according to UNESCO’s 2008 report on Malawi. The poor conditions of Mpasa bring the education level down for all people regardless of gender. Men tend to know more English and can be explained with men travelling further from their village every day and meet people where they have to use the English language.\textsuperscript{76} The ratio of girls and boys was equal and both gender were treated the same way and have the same access to education. Because of this

\textsuperscript{68} (Gender Equality in Education)  
\textsuperscript{69} (Devex Editor, 2013)  
\textsuperscript{70} (Our Fields of Work: Gender Equality, 2014)  
\textsuperscript{71} (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005, s. 2)  
\textsuperscript{72} (Kabeer, 2005, s. 13)  
\textsuperscript{73} (Joyce Banda touts her charity work in the U.S: Launches JBFI Africa Initiative)  
\textsuperscript{74} (Haviland, 2012)  
\textsuperscript{75} (Bekhouse & Zahidi, 2014, s. 260)  
\textsuperscript{76} (Jonsson, Education: Mwanazanga School, 2013)
village being so poor it is difficult for families to send more than one child to school and the first born is usually the one to go to school. Sometimes the parents cannot afford any of their children to go to school and use them as labor force to survive.\textsuperscript{77}

Access to health and the prevention of early and unwilling pregnancy explains why boys and men have a higher percentage of literacy. This explains why boys and men have a higher percentage of tertiary education than women. Healthy, educated and empowered women have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons.\textsuperscript{78} The majority of girls do not continue other education after secondary school. Marriage and giving birth at the age of 15 is very common.\textsuperscript{79} The economic situation and access to education prevent young girls to pursuing a degree in higher education. Higher economic development would result in easier access to food for Malawians which enhances the quality of health and lowers the mortality rate. This in turn can keep the family healthier and thereby enabling parents to send their children to school for education.

Observing a family with good economic conditions and experiencing their quality of life while simultaneously exploring the conditions of the poorer villagers made it possible to conclude the importance of the economic and educational factors and how these can help a family rise from poverty. At Mwanazanga Primary school one particular female teacher has more power than the headmaster himself because she is married to the principal at Mpasa Secondary School.\textsuperscript{80} This woman is empowered because of her education level and economic stability and is higher in the hierarchy in this institution than some men.

4.2.2. Enrollment

In primary and secondary school the ratio of females and males is equal but after secondary education and in tertiary education male ratio increases while the female ratio decreases. A high percentage of women enrolled in school become mothers and are therefore home working and raising their children and do not attend tertiary education.\textsuperscript{81} One of the explanations to why it is a higher percentage of girls in primary and secondary school is the child labor force. In Mpasa, the parents consider girls to be more suitable to attend school than boys, while boys are seen as a resource of labor. Due to families being so poor, they can

\textsuperscript{77} (Jonsson, Education: Mwanazanga School, 2013)  
\textsuperscript{78} (The State of the World's Children, 2007) s.vii  
\textsuperscript{79} (Jonsson, Education, 2014)  
\textsuperscript{80} (Jonsson, Education: Mwanazanga School, 2013)  
\textsuperscript{81} (Mose, Education, 2013)
sometimes not enroll all their children in school and when the parents have to decide whether to send a girl or a boy to school the parents most commonly choose to send the girl.\footnote{Jonsson, Education, 201412}

Inequality between men and women has been identified as one of the causes for blocking development over the last two years in the world. Inequality within education is, among other, what causes the blocking for development.\footnote{Galvankova, 2013} Mother’s educational level can often increase the chances of a child being enrolled in school. Extra incomes to mothers have shown to have a positive impact on health and education than the father having an extra income.\footnote{Nations, Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview, 2012, s. 11} It is stated that primary education result in positive health outcomes such as reduced fertility and child mortality and post-primary education contributed to broader employment of women. Further education such as post-secondary education has proved to enable women to reject gender-based norms. Post-secondary education has a positive effect on health conditions where it seems to be associated with high age of marriage, low fertility and mortality, good maternal care and reduced vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. \footnote{Brown, Rao Gupte, & Pande, 2005}

4.3. Health

This part consists of two subcategories: sex ratio at birth and female life expectancy over male value. This factor was investigated through observations at MCC and domestic homes where both parents in a family suffered from illness at the same time. Their two youngest children were also ill at the same time and they were both treated equally. Both children were brought to a clinic and made sure they were properly treated.

The right of women and girls to have control and power over their own bodies is a controversial issue, which involves access to contraceptives, the right to knowledge about the body and what rights you have.\footnote{Our Fields of Work: Gender Equality , 2014} USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) states that in some parts of the world, a mother is more likely to die in childbirth than she is to finish secondary school.\footnote{Maternal and Child Health, 2014} USAID reported that enabling young women to avoid early pregnancy allows them to attend school longer and women will therefore be able to join the workforce as
the fertility falls.\textsuperscript{88} To decrease the spread of HIV/AIDS a network of 850,000 youths, introduced by Joyce Banda Foundation International, are taught about life skills and health.\textsuperscript{89}

\subsection*{4.3.1. Sex ratio at birth}

All around the world, more boys are born than girls and the ratio is 107 boys on 100 girls. In some countries, like China and India, abortion is based on the babies’ sex which is the main reason why the ratio of boys is higher than girls in some countries.\textsuperscript{90} In poor regions such as Mpasa in Malawi, young girls do not have the economic resources to abort a child. Sometimes it is impossible due to the bad health resources. In Mpasa it is not possible to control if a boy or girl is born and the desire is not higher for either sex of the child. Malawi as a country scored 0.94 on the indicator \textit{Sex ratio at birth} in the WEF gender report, which is very close to equality. There is no other social scientific reason and factor to why there is a slight inequality in Malawi. It is a worldwide phenomenon which is not affected by the people but by biological factors.\textsuperscript{91}

\subsection*{4.3.2. Life expectancy}

The life expectancy is equally low where two thirds of the Malawi population is under 15 years old and the life expectancy is 54 years.\textsuperscript{92} Women perform the less physically demanding labor as explained in the section discussing work and labor participation. Because of men treating their women well it is understandable why women may live longer than men, even if it is for only a few years. When a child or wife becomes ill it is the father’s or closest male relative’s responsibility to take the child to the nearest hospital or clinic for professional help. Because of the drought season during the field study and the lack of vaccines for the children at MCC, deceases and sicknesses were inevitable. Both boys and girls were sick during the field study but they were all treated equally. The man in the domestic home has the responsibility to make sure every member of the family is healthy and the man also respects the woman in the household. If both parents are ill the father or man in the home makes sure the mother is being treated first before the man seeks help for his own health illness.\textsuperscript{93} In Mpasa it is a given to take care of a wife, sister, or other female relative. A husband makes

\textsuperscript{88} (Promoting Gender Equality Through Health, 2014)
\textsuperscript{89} (Haviland, 2012)
\textsuperscript{90} (Wolchover, 2011)
\textsuperscript{91} (Ibid.)
\textsuperscript{92} (Kaminyighe, 2013)
\textsuperscript{93} (Canada, Health care, 2013)
sure his family members are doing well and prioritizes them over himself. Because of the high percentage of people living with HIV/AIDS there are several times a month when a family with this disease has to visit a doctor for treatment. Medication for this disease is expensive it is very common if one of the parents, especially the mother, has HIV/Aids that the children will be born with it too.

Women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and by decreasing this vulnerability it would help the development of the country and deepening this human rights would help mobilizing women. Through men’s treatment of women and the respect to make sure all females in a family are healthy, it helps decrease the economic and social consequences for girls as well as for boys. Low life expectancy is connected to human development where longer life expectancy and proper health conditions improves the economic future and the GNP. This strengthens the nation politically as well as socio-economically.

4.4. Political empowerment

The last and final part is political empowerment and will consist of three subcategories. This indicator is measured through three aspects: females with seats in higher political authorities over male value, females at chief level authorities over male value and, and number of years of female chiefs of state in the last 50 years, over male value. The chiefs in Phalombe district were the main source for determining the access for women to participate politically. Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as the ability to make decisions and defines disempowerment as being denied a choice.

4.4.1. Women in higher political authorities

One of the MDG’s is to increase the proportion of seats held by women in a national parliament. Taking up waged work would be regarded as evidence of progress in women’s empowerment according to the MDG. Work is far more likely to be empowering if it contributes to women’s sense of independence instead of just working for the case of survival, Naila Kabeer said. Seeking input from men as well as women is necessary to identify the

94 (Kwakwala, Health Care, 2013)
95 (Sen, Östlin, & George, 2007, s. 1)
96 (Ibid. s.10)
97 (Kabeer, 2005, s. 14)
98 (Ibid. 2.13)
99 (Kabeer, 2005, s. 15)
uses and priorities of resources in a nation. This leads to the most equitable distribution of access and costs.\textsuperscript{100} The project to empower women and make them economically independent by providing 15 of them with work is an example of women’s empowerment. UNFPA (The United Nations Populations Fund) expresses the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment as a precondition for advancing development and reducing poverty: empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities and improve prospects for the next generation.\textsuperscript{101} The minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, Anita Kalinde, explained the positive outcomes of the passing of the gender equality bill. The bill would allow women to be heard and their views are more likely to be incorporated in matters affecting them. She was especially pleased when the male legislators cared for the welfare of their wives, mothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{102}

In October 2013 the T.A (traditional authority) was a woman, and being T.A is one of the highest local political positions. A variation of men and women was expected among the chiefs but that was not the case. It seems as if women either occupy a few local political positions or no position at all. When women have an opportunity to become chief or a higher authority it is common men do not acknowledge them. Chief Mukumba became T.A in late 2013 and passed away in July 2014 and his wife was the successor. Five months later she is still not recognized as T.A by the other male authorities and chiefs. She has male representatives attending meetings in her place. This is a case where inequality becomes visible in Mpasa. Men and women live in symbiosis most of the remaining time but when the focus is shifted to higher political positions women are neglected to participate and are inferior men the majority of the times. On October 29th clear evidence of this conclusion was during an observation of cultural traditions, and the chiefs who could not attend had sent their wives as representatives. These women were not allowed to sit on benches like the rest of the male chiefs but had to sit on the floor. This is to enhance and highlight the social hierarchy. By violating gender equality women will continue to be denied the say in decisions affecting their lives and this is a worldwide phenomenon. Empowering and including female participation in the decision-making process is essential for human rights, not only for women

\textsuperscript{100} (Nations, Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview, 2012) s. 15
\textsuperscript{101} (Gender Equality)
\textsuperscript{102} (Malawi Parliament passes Gender Equality Bill: Women Empowerment)
but for all. 103 Essential for the empowerment of women is the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. 104

4.4.2. Women at chief level

Mpasa Village is part of Group Chiminya and Group Chiminya consists of four additional villages, a total of five villages. These five villages are Chiminya, Muthumpwa, Mwanapwa, Mmwenye, and Nankhala. Group Village Headman is Chief Chiminya which is who the village is named after.105 On October 6th 12 chiefs from local villages attended a meeting at MCC which made it possible to do a headcount which concluded that only three women attended the meeting out of 12 chiefs. These women were representatives for their husbands who could not attend this meeting.

Naila Kabeer argues that chiefs of tribes can limit the choices and have decision-making authorities. In Mpasa this statement is partially inaccurate because the chiefs are meant as means to empower all villagers to the biggest extent possible. Clear cases of disempowerment of women are when women’s primary form of access to resources is a family member. When this occurs her capacity to make strategic choices is likely to be limited.106 In Mpasa the women are free to move and make important life decision on their own, some restriction is on women’s economic empowerment where men administer the economics of the household. In the section concerning previous research it is stated that most commonly men have the economic power in matrilineal societies.

Researchers in the same region in Malawi concluded that the ratio of female chiefs in southern and central Malawi was higher than the northern territories. Divorced, single and independent women are considered to be more suitable for the task as chiefs. When female chiefs are appointed it is most commonly because of their independency, good behavior, and leadership qualities.107 Central and southern Malawi matrilineal characteristics in social structure make it easier for women to be chiefs than it is in northern Malawi where the social structure is more characterized by patriarchy. For the realization of lasting peace women are

103 (Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment )
104 (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995)
105 (Jonsson, Chief’s of Mmwenye Village, 2013)
106 (Kabeer, 2005, s. 15)
107 (Munthali, s. 5)
essential through their full participation in decision making, conflict prevention and all other peace initiatives.\textsuperscript{108}

Women at chief level are just as rare as women in higher authority (T.A or G.V.H). The theory about southern Malawi having a matrilineal social structure is in this particular region not always an accurate assumption. In Phalombe district it is more common that the chiefs are men, and women only act as representatives when the men are unavailable. It is a clear hierarchy, benefitting males, and inequality among the male and female chiefs.\textsuperscript{109} This is one of the few areas of labor besides physical demanding jobs where males are the dominating sex and can therefore explain why there is a clear majority of men. Women experience a different dimension of discrimination and poverty in relation to men. Inclusion of women in local as well as national politics can help implement policies benefitting both men and women.\textsuperscript{110}

Gender equality and political participation is essential in a country’s democratic development. Involving women in all aspects of politics makes societies more equal and fair which in turn strengthen democracy. Women in parliament position can also put gender equality and women’s concerns and issues on the political agenda,\textsuperscript{111} increasing the chances of implementing laws targeting municipalities and local governments. By doing this the local level will start building initiatives and means to carry out implemented rules.\textsuperscript{112}

4.4.3. Last five decades

Since Malawi broke loose from colonialism and became independent in 1964 there has been a significantly low number of female chiefs. Malawi had a relatively short period of being a British colony and therefore it is possible for Malawians to return to the social structure established before colonization. The last 5 decades have been a struggle of political corruption, dictatorship, economic crises and deficits. Natural disasters have made it harder for gender equality to improve and enter the political agenda. May 2012 was the first time when politics took a turn when Joyce Banda was sworn in as the first female president of southern Africa. After this, the struggle for gender equality began and was highlighted more

\textsuperscript{108} (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995)
\textsuperscript{109} (Jonsson, Chiefs of Phalombe District, 2014)
\textsuperscript{110} (Our Fields of Work: Gender Equality , 2014)
\textsuperscript{111} (Ballington, 2008, ss. 2-3)
\textsuperscript{112} (Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment )s.2
than ever before. Malawians need to challenge the stereotypes that keep women and girls disadvantages politically, socially and economically.

4.5. Matriarchy – a part of the culture and social structure

In this section the cultural features of Mpasa will be the base for this analysis to show how cultural and social norms affect the progress of gender equality and female political representation. General observations in the field study starting on October 5th and ending on November 3rd 2013, revealed women’s attitude towards alcohol consumption. Women do not approve of the men drinking and women do not drink themselves. The result was men hiding alcohol from women. Men did not want their wives to know what they were drinking and husbands were aware of the consequences of breaking this social rule. Suddenly there had been a shift in power and the women were charge. Enock Kwakwala explained, before he got married he used to drink now and then but since he got married he does not drink because his wife does not approve of it. On October 26th 2013 observations showed the continuous female power in the domestic homes where the women are the ones working. From the observations on October 6th 2013 men were sitting around the majority of the time, observing what the women were doing but did not work themselves.

Money is the one situation where the man in the household has the power. What is not to forget is that food is crucial in this village and nation. The women make the food, and if they are not happy with their husband they do not make food. In addition, men do not know how to make food. Hence, women have the power of playing the hunger card. If they are not happy they can make sure their husband is not happy which gives them leverage. The man in the house stays home with children when they are sick and solve family disputes.

On October 18th 2013 Denise decided which orphan she thought needed help the most and wanted to adopt this child to MCC. She gave the family an option: the family could choose to let their child live at MCC or EMFI would each month assist them with supplies such as corn and flour. Out of five families only one parent, the father, would rather keep his child and take the assistance. Canada Byson explained that the parent sees an opportunity to keep his son as

113 (Joyce Banda Touts Her Charity Work in the U.S: Launches JBFI Africa Initiative, 2014)
114 (The State of the World's Children, 2007)
115 (Canada, Social Norms, 2013)
116 (Kwakwala, Social Structure, 2013)
117 (Jonsson, Social rules, 2013)
a tool of labor and also receive monthly assistance.\textsuperscript{118} When the mother was asked if she wanted her son to live at MCC she said yes but that her husband has the final say and decides. Men oppress women which make them less independent and women lose their confidence which result in lack of any political participation. Continued oppression of these women will not help the development of Malawi.

Socio-cultural awareness has come to be a variable explaining women being subordinated men.\textsuperscript{119} Roland Inglehart, Pippa Norris and Christian Welzel investigated the cultural effect of gender equality. Culture, in their investigation, is explained as the entire historical heritage, including religious traditions, colonial ties, the experience of communism and its economic development.

Inglehart et al. argue how important cultural change is to gender equality and the democratic process. They claim cultural attitudes have long been suspected to function as a major barrier to women’s representation and it may have a direct influence on whether women are prepared to run as candidate for political offices.\textsuperscript{120} Scholars also discovered that preconception and cultural opinion about women in addition to poor economic means are holdbacks to women’s entry into politics.\textsuperscript{121} The passing of the gender equality bill generated positive responses not only from female political actors but male as well. Dr. George Chopanda leader of Democratic Progressive Party sees an opportunity for an equal platform for men and women and explains how women of Malawi have suffered long enough and therefore fully supports the bill. Jolly Kalelo, spokes person for Malawi Congress Party, believes the bill will empower women and make them more involved in the decision making in politics.\textsuperscript{122}

One of the social attitudes about political leaders is that large portions of societies believe men make better political leaders than women. But as younger generations replace the old generations this attitude rapidly changes and male and female leaders are considered equally suitable for the task of being a political leader. This statement suggests cultural norms have an even bigger impact than democratic institutions. In countries where people reject the idea of

\textsuperscript{118} (Canada, Adopting Children to MCC, 2013)
\textsuperscript{119} (Forum, 2005) s.1
\textsuperscript{120} (Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2004, s. 3)
\textsuperscript{121} (Ballington, 2008, s. 3)
\textsuperscript{122} (Malawi Parliament passes Gender Equality Bill: Women Empowerment)
men being better political leaders shows a relatively high proportion of women being elected to political positions. ¹²³

Several researchers and social scientists argue that economic and democratic development creates gender equality. This factor only explains thirty per cent of the variance and Inglehart et al. concluded that the result showed neither of them explaining any additional variance, but what did explain it was cultural heritage. This gave more explanation to the variance of women in politics than economic development and democratic institutions. ¹²⁴ What seems to be the main cause of women in politics is to what extent the public support the norms of gender equality and society’s cultural heritage have a strong impact on gender equality. ¹²⁵

Economic development and democratic institutions seem to only have little direct effect on changing the gender norms in a positive way but the result itself seems to be driven by cultural heritage. Whether or not democratization occurs, the female representation in politics seems to increase due to cultural factors. Inglehart et al. dropped the economic and democratic factors from the equation and the cultural variables by themselves explained 70 per cent of the variance of women in politics. Hence, democracy itself does not seem to cause it. The trends, both toward democracy and the shift toward gender equality, seem to reflect underlying cultural changes which transform societies. ¹²⁶

Jütte et al stated, the social institutions add more information about the social rules and norms than just referring to work, economic, education and political empowerment. By incorporating family code, physical integrity, civil society, and ownership rights it is possible to further evolve the analysis about gender equality. The family code referred to formal and informal rules and traditions that in any way limit women’s economic situation. In Mpasa men have more economic power than women because they administer economics in the household. Women’s access to political power remains a challenge as women still own a tiny part of the world’s financial assets. ¹²⁷ This is where gender equality and the matrilineal social structure declines and loses power. Physical integrity refers to the female genital mutilation legislation punishing acts of violence against women, domestic violence, sexual assault and rape, and sexual harassment. This factor is one of the dimensions where women have control. In Mpasa, as stated above, the health of the female family members is crucial and the man in the family

¹²³ (Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2004, ss. 5-6)
¹²⁴ (Ibid. s. 7)
¹²⁵ (Ibid. s. 8)
¹²⁶ (Ibid. s. 9)
¹²⁷ (Our Fields of Work: Gender Equality, 2014)
respects the female body. Where the cultural heritage plays a big role is in the matter concerning genital mutilation. Southern Malawi is liberal compared to northern territories where the social structure is more based on patriarchy. A woman in Mpasa decides what do to with her own body and there are few recent cases of genital mutilation. Men decide to voluntarily go through genital mutilation because the risk of being contaminated by HIV decreases. Male genital mutilation can therefore prevent the spread and contamination of the disease. The rules and laws about sexual assault and rape are strict in this area and if a man rape and sexually assault another woman the consequences could be severe. It is frowned upon and the man who would do this to a woman would be sent off from the village and possibly the whole district and would never be allowed to come back. Domestic violence is common in Malawi but not in this region where the field study took place.

Civil Liberties refers to the percentage of female members in higher authorities, percentage of female chiefs, women’s freedom to leave the house, and incorporated in the latter one is the requirement of women wearing a veil in public. The facts about females at higher authorities and at chief level have already been stated earlier in the analysis. All women in Mpasa have the freedom to leave the house and women do not wear veils. As written in the section above, southern Malawi is liberal compared to other regions of the country and religious rules such as wearing a veil is not of importance or prioritized.

Ownership rights includes women’s access to bank loans, their rights to acquire and own land, and their right to own property other than land. As explained in the theory chapter, matriarchy means that the economy and property rights are in line with the mother’s lineage. Mpasa deviate from this statement and theory. Men have the economic power in the household and the rights to own a property is assigned to the man of the house. Women have the access to bank loans but because of the men administrating economics women usually do not take the loans. Through observations in different social institutions presented in the empirical result chapter, it was possible to find the answers to the questions regarding gender equality and the traces of matriarchy. This shows how important it is not only to visit the political institutions but to also analyze the social ones.

128 (Mose, Health in Mpasa, 2013)
129 (Kwakwala, 2013)
5. Conclusion

The first specified question was; How balanced is Mpasa Community in terms of gender equality based on the four determined factors? It turns out access to work, was overall equal. Women have higher labor participation than men because of the agricultural labor force where and wage is not dependent on gender. Local political and higher authorities’ realization of using the full potential of all villagers has resulted in the awareness of the consequences of discriminating the majority of the labor force and has therefore decided to treat men and women as equals benefitting the entire community. Investing in women’s capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choice is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development. There is a lack of female professionals and senior officials among politics and women are restricted to teaching younger women about health, care, agriculture, and nutrition to be able to provide for their future families. Improving women’s access to political opportunity where men and women would share the equal right to distribution and access of politics would help improve the democratic development of the country.

The second indicator is education where literacy is higher among men than women. Primary and secondary school education is likely to result in positive health outcomes, higher age of marriage, low fertility and mortality rate, maternal care and reduced vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Broader employment of women increases the political participation and the likeliness of democratic institutions. Unfortunately many girls are unwillingly pregnant at the age of 15 and therefore have to end their education and raise a family while boys can continue their education. Enrollment in school is equal in primary school but after secondary school the majority is boys, for the same reason states above. Legal guardians prefer sending girls to school where they believe girls are more equipped and tend to focus throughout education. Increasing the number of educated female political representatives would not only improve and widen the perspectives of Malawi parliament but also affect the prospects of gender equality and political representation in the entire African continent.

The third indicator is health. Villagers in Mpasa have no preferences of gender of a child which is why the sex ratio at birth is close to equality. Women with good health have better access to earn a degree in higher education which generates increased political activity. Reducing the vulnerability to HIV/AIDS helps the national development. The reason for a slight inequality can be explained through biological factors and is not affected by the social or cultural factors. The life expectancy of women is a few years longer compared to men and
the reason for this is also explained through biological factors. Men take good care of their female family members and put them first when it comes to health care. The social rule is that men take care and respect their female family members. Proper health conditions help decrease the economic and social consequences that emerge in poor and underdeveloped countries and help deepen the respect of human rights. The humility of male and female members of the parliament agree women have suffered long enough and therefore passed the gender equality bill hoping to improve the current living situation of women in all aspects of life.

The fourth indicator is political empowerment and this is the factor where inequality is the highest. Women’s empowerment is vital for the realization of human rights and democratic development. Women in higher authorities such as T.A and G.V.H are almost exclusively men. The current T.A is a woman but the chiefs and G.V.H will not acknowledge her as T.A. Men make the active decision to highlight the hierarchy between male and female chiefs. Men oppress women in terms of power positions and when women are representatives for their husbands men also express the hierarchic difference. Malawi has only been independent for 50 years since they broke loose from Britain in 1964 and during those 5 decades Malawi has suffered from political corruption, dictatorship, natural disasters, and economic crises. Gender equality has not been on the political agenda until Joyce Banda was sworn in as president in 2012. Because of these severe conditions there have been a low number of female chiefs and authorities in Mpasa. It is stated that women who are independent and single stand a greater chance at being appointed as chiefs for a village. Women’s empowerment can contribute to health and productivity of whole families and communities and improve the prospect for the next generation. Empowerment through political participation is essential for human rights and for democratic development. Female representatives in local politics increase the probability to put female issues on the political agenda which increases the chances for laws, benefitting female, to be implemented.

The second specified question is: Are the traces from the pre-colonial social structure and matriarchy an underlying norm that affects the progress of gender equality? There are visible traces of a matrilineal social structure in Mpasa. In many social institutions one can conclude there is an underlying matriarchy setting the social rules and norms. Public support of gender results in a higher proportion of female political representation. When women do not approve of a certain issue it automatically applies to men and they obey these rules. Cultural factors have a great impact on gender equality and affect it more than democratic and economic
factors. Respecting the family code, physical integrity, civil society, and ownership rights will increase the degree of gender equality. The reason why Malawi is so developed in terms of gender equality is partially because of the matrilineal cultural factors. Negative cultural attitudes have been suspected to function as a major barrier to women’s representation and it can directly affect the local politics while public support of gender equality result in a higher proportion of female political representatives and empowerment.

Using the already established cultural and social benefits of women in Mpasu would help improve the equality even further and thereby increase female political representation. Central politics has already started building better political prospects for women and if it would spread to the bottom of society it would not only help Malawi as a single nation but Africa as an entire continent.
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