

# THE RESPONSE NEWSLETTER



**FOR EQUALITY**  
*Towards a Gender Just Africa*



## ABOUT FOR EQUALITY

For Equality (FE) is a Pan-African women's rights organization working to accelerate progress toward attaining gender equality. The organization's vision is toward a gender-equal and just Africa. Every day, women and girls around the world face violence and discrimination. Sexual exploitation, violence, harmful cultural practices, and systemic inequalities violate their human rights and prevent them from reaching their potential. For equality sees these gender inequalities as threats to the actualization of empowering girls and women and seeks to strengthen the individual and collective agency of pan-African women to dismantle systems of oppression and attain gender equality.

Under Social and Gender Justice, For Equality advocates for access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, including accountability for SRHR Financing, access to safe abortion, and ending sexual violence against women and girls; through policy review and advisement, awareness raising, movement building, and campaigning.

Under Economic Justice and Rights, For Equality advocates for feminist alternatives in response to the impact of neoliberal macroeconomic policies, decent work, and debt justice through knowledge production, coalition collaboration, and movement building.

For Equality's, approach focuses on convening and connecting, knowledge production, dissemination and campaigning, movement building, and capacity strengthening.

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# FOR EQUALITY HOSTS FEMINIST MACROECONOMICS BOOTCAMPS



Have you ever wondered why women are called to care and nurture? Under what obligation women serve in the normalcy of looking after an ill family member or being the primary parent for children in the home. Think about why the domestic worker at home is paid a minimum wage, yet oftentimes, women and girls have to do the same work for free in the absence of the worker?

Feminist Macroeconomics is the field that analyzes macroeconomic policies and seeks to achieve a comprehensive economic framework that recognizes and includes unpaid care and domestic work as meaningful contributors to economic growth. Women and girls are the primary agents of domestic work and unpaid care work hence they are mostly affected by the effects of government's fiscal policies that only focus on paid activities to account for economic growth.

For Equality under the Economic justice and rights thematic area hosted Bootcamps in the three main regions of Malawi to facilitate and train young women led organizations on Feminist Macroeconomics. The Bootcamps aimed to capacitate young women in their diversities with the technical knowledge to unpack macroeconomics and link its tenets to the existing challenges, primarily those women are subject to. This knowledge is to be used to inform programming for advocacy efforts against oppressive economic systems that burden young women and girls as well as interlope with gender justice issues and cause inequality.

A total of thirty young women-led organizations across the country were successfully trained on the concepts of the origins and evolution of feminism, public debt, Neoliberalism, Public-Private partnerships, public debt and austerity

in order to facilitate the increase of economic justice knowledge amongst young Malawian activists.

The content shared reflected upon the problem of privatization and the failure of the market economy in Malawi. From the interactive discussions and desk research, it was noted that a majority of Malawians are living in adverse poverty and cannot afford the private services our government continuously endorses. The overall effect of privatization on the majority is a compromised quality of life as public service delivery significantly becomes poor.

Linda Phiri, a young woman from the organization “girl power for change” upon reflecting on the content, shared that more young women need to be informed on macroeconomic knowledge as it is often perceived as a technical issue.

Young activists are not conversant with where economics and socio-political life intersect and need further training to penetrate the economic justice space and actively participate. The young women further shared on the need for active political participation to be able to voice out and advocate for issues that affect them in meaningful spaces.

Upon completion of the Bootcamps, organizations made the commitments on the pursuit of economic justice through diverse advocacy efforts.



# THE PEOPLE'S ALTERNATIVES CAMPAIGN



For Equality, as a member of Feminist Macroeconomics Association of Malawi participated in the people's alternatives global campaign that was hosted across Africa as a prelude to the IMF and WorldBank meetings that were held in Marrakesh, Morocco in October 2023. This campaign was centered around exposing the failure of IMF and World Bank policies in Africa. For Equality together with action aid, participated in the people's assemblies, a collection and documentation of lived experiences of Malawians facing challenges to access basic needs and rights through public services. The Health and Education sectors were singled out to represent the damage that policies made by international financial institutions have done to many lives.

## The State of Health Service Delivery in Malawi: Kapiri Community Hospital

One thousand eight hundred and eighty two women, men and children wait on one individual to receive medical assistance. Crisis does not begin to describe the severity of the situation at Kapiri Community Hospital in Mchinji, with a catchment area amounting to a population of 64,000 depending on only 34 medical staff members.

According to the World Health Organization the required doctor to patient ratio is 1:1000, and the nurse-patient is 25:10,000, however the recommended ratio is 83:10,000 in response to the fast growing populations (Nandili 2019). Kapiri community hospital only has 24 nurses and 10 clinicians. Jane Khongo, the lead nurse explained that it has been three years since the government announced the ban

on civil service recruitment; coupled with the sharp rise in population, the state of health service delivery at Kapiri hospital has declined.

The Malawi government has no hospital in the Kapiri area and made a service-level agreement with the Kapiri mission hospital. This package consists of Sexual Reproductive Health services including; maternal and neonatal health, HIV/AIDS services and treatment of STDs. However, Kapiri being a mission hospital managed by Roman Catholic sisters, does not offer any family planning services as it goes against their faith principles.

Khongo expressed further disappointment with the LOCUM fund, an overtime payment scheme, indicating that the returns do not match the workload, amounting to only \$2.76 cents per day shift and \$4.59 per night shift. Despite government efforts to support free provision for some services and medication, it is always insufficient and propositions for a larger budget for Kapiri community hospital have proven futile. The government insists on their self-reliance as a private institution, yet they can only charge MWK 700 (0.60 \$) for adults and MWK 400 (0.34\$) because the local community members cannot afford any more than that.

“Last year, some licenses were held on the basis of negligence in the labor ward,” complained Khongo “One nurse handles 15 deliveries per day, and unfortunately, a baby was lost on one of the nurses’ shifts. She got sued

for negligence yet she had no choice as she was attending to another delivery. The lead nurse asked policy makers to lift the recruitment ban and cancel debt as the recipients of its implications are the people in the grassroots. She further mentioned that women and girls bear the burden of care work in hospitals and this stunts their personal development. Khongo identified Mama Agnes, one of the guardians at Kapiri who shared her experience.

Mama Agness had been in the hospital with her pregnant daughter for two weeks. She had left two other children at home including her standard 6 daughter who was responsible for all housework in her absence. The family solely depends on farming hence the father was out, doing piece works in people’s fields. Mama Agness further shared that the family does not make enough to meet daily needs, she sometimes goes hungry as Kapiri hospital is unable to provide food to both guardians and patients. She called on the government to improve funding for hospitals.

### **Too Far! A Health Access Crisis**

Dzindevu community clinic in Dedza was no different from Kapiri. Located over 100 kilometers away from the district town, Dzindevu’s team of 26 Health workers, serves a population of up to 39,087 people. The clinic solely depends on the government and looks to the district hospital for assistance. Their main challenge is poor infrastructure at the facility. There is no overnight room hence they are forced



to send patients that should be under observation home or to the district hospital, nor is there a waiting room for guardians. Children are treated outside and in the 'consultation room,' a small building donated by well-wishers which also serves as the conference room, treatment room, and storage. In quite a horrific spin, George Garton, the lead Health Surveillance Assistant revealed that there are no toilets for patients at the clinic and they are forced to use the surrounding bushes.

The infrastructure problem manifests mostly during the rainy season, whereby it becomes nearly impossible to attend to all the sick children the hospital receives in a day. In January 2023, the country underwent a cholera crisis and the Dzindevvu clinic was overwhelmed. Unfortunately, the road to the district town is in a very poor state and as is expected, worsens during the rainy season. "We have to call the district hospital for an ambulance and one isn't always available, the people of this community can simply not afford to ferry themselves to the hospital and even if they manage to do so, it has dire effects on their daily life as the cost of living has wildly escalated," complained Kitty Njazi, the lead nurse. The clinic also rarely has any oxygen and during the covid-19 crisis, lives that may have been saved with the provision of resources, were lost.

Nurse Njazi further explained that it is impossible to take leave, because there is no one to cover your shift and as medical practitioners, they cannot just let people die. Unfortunately working long hours with no breaks affects their delivery. With the assistance of a single midwife, Njazi has to attend to over 200 pregnant women per month. Dzindevvu offers free services including family planning, under five clinic, Sexual Reproductive health and HIV/Aids counseling but usually have a medication shortage and have to refer people to the district hospital or private pharmacies for prescribed drugs.

Jeremiah Mbite, the lead doctor shared that attempts to improve the clinic's funding have been made and the team has countless times informed the district hospital on these challenges, however, every year they are told they will be given feedback and it never comes. The team is unaware of how much the budget for their clinic is, nor do they know what informs the governments' funds allocation to their different services.



“Debt is not benefitting anyone,” concluded Mr. Garton. “Life has become too expensive and whatever debt is meant for is not enough to keep us going. We need independent leaders on our economic front because the policies of International financial institutions are only hurting us.” Nurse Njazi added to call for a cancellation of debt, highlighting that the country’s resources are already spread too thin.

Finally, Mbite shared a story of a young boy, who was diagnosed with a mild case of pneumonia in January 2023. The clinic had no oxygen and quickly arranged for his referral to the district hospital. The district hospital called back to say they had no fuel in their ambulances and people had to mobilize themselves to ensure that this child had gone to the hospital, despite the heavily damaged road in the rain. He died on the way.

### **The State of Education Service Delivery in Malawi: Katondo Community Primary School**

Regina Josiah is the only female teacher at Katondo community primary school in Mchinji district, central Malawi. Together with 9 other staff members, Regina and her colleagues are responsible for the primary foundational education of 1,124 learners. “The student teacher ratio poses danger to the quality of education the learners may receive,” shared Regina, “there is a special attention that the girls need, as it is common for girls from this area to drop out of school.”

Out of 8 classes, only 2 classes at Katondo primary school have desks, the rest of the learners in lower classes have to sit on the floor. Years 1 to 4 are heavily overcrowded

and the stationery and learning books are not enough to accommodate all the learners. Furthermore, there are no resources to cater for students living with disabilities, nor are there special needs teachers trained for the assignment hence they face exclusionism. Poor civic education structures also result in bullying of special needs students and this affects their mental health and performance. Teachers are underpaid and spend time looking for alternative ways of earning money to sustain income and this primarily causes under preparedness in lesson planning. Consequently, this yields poor results, with very few students getting selected to secondary schools.

Josiah highlighted the plight of girls and young women; every 5 in 10 girls drop out of school, indicating a 50% dropout rate. Girls have a lower pass rate in comparison to boys at Katondo Primary school. Josiah attributes this to the extra responsibility that girls bear after school in their different households, while boys have more time for recreation or to study further, girls are stuck at home carrying out house chores. Child marriages usually occur upon dropping out of school and unfortunately, some die young from maternal health complications. Appealing to parents is mostly unsuccessful as there are no female role models in the community, most who have completed both secondary and tertiary education end up back in the community, unemployed and struggling hence parents and guardians perceive education as a useless investment.

## The State of Education Service Delivery in Malawi



Government services ought to be of very good quality as they serve the greater population of Malawians. Primary schools currently access the School Improvement Grant (SIG) fund regularly to build and maintain school blocks, buy learning materials and help vulnerable groups. Josiah asked for this fund to be increased in order to cover more costs, pay up for warranted promotions and build female teachers accommodation. She further called for the government to look for alternative ways to service debt other than wage bill capping, additionally the government must stop borrowing completely as it seems the interest for acquiring the debt is not necessarily rooted in helping Malawians.

A trip to Kasumbu Community Day Secondary School revealed that secondary schools are equally choking from the tight grip of austerity. "Teachers are being absolutely side-lined and the education sector has very poor services, 30 years of service with no promotion, I would not allow my child to study education," hailed the head teacher. The institution was founded 11 years ago in 2013 and has a total

of 316 students with 146 girls and 170 boys. Kasumbu CDSS has a team of 12 individuals, all men, working as teachers, however there are only 4 qualified teachers who respectively hold diplomas and degrees in education studies while the other 8 only completed secondary school level.

One tends to wonder why this is the case when statistics show that over 90% of trained teachers in Malawi are unemployed. As a result of the wage bill capping measure imposed by international financial institutions in acquiring debt, the government cannot employ any more

**2 of 8**  
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teachers despite the impending need for the services. Consequently, the local government recruits these MSCE level students to work as teachers under the district commissioners youth volunteer programs. The headteacher, though appreciative of the initiative, expressed his frustration by pointing it out as a temporary solution because in the end, the quality of education delivered by underqualified teachers is inadequate and yields poor performance. The Headteacher and the Deputy Head teacher proposed that the IFI's must restructure their rules and that the government must have a say in negotiating debt conditionality.

### Further Studies For the Few

University students equally bear the consequences of the system of privatization. Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural resources records a population of about 9,224 students with a high gender imbalance of 6,331 male students and 2,839 female students (Kaunda, 2021). Restructuring and privatization brought about significant changes in the university; only about 15% of the population is accommodated on campus and the rest have to fend for themselves and find accommodation amongst private owners. Similarly, the university no longer provides food for students and outside tuition and rental fees, students must find their own means of feeding to sustain themselves. This situation is a current reflection of all government universities in Malawi.

Tiwonge Kanyenda, a 3rd year Agriculture extension student spoke on the challenges that accompany off-campus accommodation, especially food and distance; "I am usually late for several classes every

week, It is not only time consuming to walk from off campus, but to also make your own meals before class, have time to study and rest making it nearly impossible to be on time." Tiwonge further expressed that sometimes the weather conditions are extreme and unfavorable to be walking, when asked why she simply does not opt to buy meals to save time, she explained how the prices of meals have spiraled just in the past year following the devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha, hence it is neither sustainable nor affordable to buy meals on campus. Furthermore, campus cafes have been privatized and the quality of the food is subpar to match the 'student prices' that the majority cannot afford anyway.

Campus accommodation allocation barely solves any problems as things are just as tough on campus," shared Grace Simfungwe, another 3rd year Agriculture Extension student. Simfungwe, just like Kanyenda is a daughter to farmers and began by explaining how much the average Malawian farmer is struggling as a result of poor climate change and inflation. "The elite can easily access the best campus accommodation, with well-maintained expensive hostels, as well as have a choice of food," the rest are forced to bring bags of rice and flour, pots and mini charcoal stoves to campus to cook their own food, despite cooking on campus being illegal. This can be both time consuming and dangerous health-wise as attempts to cook in hiding results in a closed room filled with carbon monoxide from the burning charcoal.



Secondly, students are unable to fully utilize and equally access learning materials. For instance, considering the distance between campus and Tiwonge's off-campus accommodation, she is forced to leave campus early even before she has finished studying. Studying till late on campus poses potential danger ranging from theft to physical and sexual assault, especially towards female students. Additionally, almost all books in the library are outdated and rarely serve as reference material, affecting the quality of education for those who cannot afford to privately source books at LUANAR.

Following this, there are several sexual reproductive health implications that occur. For instance, sex for grades is not a myth at LUANAR, female students fall prey to sexual perpetrators in academic or administrative power to have better grades, access campus accommodation, and tuition and upkeep loans as well as pocket money to sustain their needs. Equally, there is also an increase in intergenerational gap relations between female students and older men who can afford to pay for their needs, commonly known as 'Ma Blessor.' The young women expressed their concern for this growing trend and feared for the potential spread of Sexually Transmitted infections including HIV/Aids.

Simfungwe was able to secure a tuition fees loan from the National Council for Higher Education, but however still struggles with sourcing upkeep fees for food and other needs. Kanyenda on the other hand is being financed by a private loan institution, and is required to pay back upon completion of her studies. She however fears that the current unemployment crisis may worsen, having detrimental effects on her pay back plan.

"The main problem with our government today is corruption," said Simfungwe, "Debt is misused and simply shared amongst the politicians," added kanyenda, yet it is the local people who suffer the consequences through poor public service delivery. They further shared that privatization is not good, especially for our economy as people charge for profit, unmindful of quality of product or service or effective delivery. The young women also mentioned that conditionality on debt is quite unrealistic as far as development is concerned, because dictating where the money goes instead of hearing where it is needed from the recipients, is unhelpful. They believe that the IFI's have other interests beyond aid hence it is better to simply cancel debt.

In partnership with FEAM, FE presented these women's challenges, alternatives and demands during the People's Alternatives Global Tribunal, a key aspect of the People's Alternatives, in Morocco during the IMF and World Bank Annual Meetings. The People's Alternatives Global Tribunal consisted of representatives from 5 countries from the global south, Malawi included, where discussions centered around how budget cuts to public sectors such as health and education have exacerbated inequalities in Malawi. A verdict was given by the audience stating that the IMF and the World Bank have failed the people due to their neoliberal economic models which are detrimental to the well being of women and girls.

## #SHOW US THE MONEY: Strengthening Social Accountability for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Financing in Malawi

In recent years, Malawi has witnessed significant progress in the arena of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Notable strides include heightened awareness and uptake of modern contraception, leading to a decline in maternal mortality rates. However, amidst this progress, Malawi continues to grapple with persistently high rates of maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancies, child marriages, and soaring HIV infections among young women and girls.

Despite the government's efforts to develop specific SRHR policies and increase funding, various obstacles hinder the effective provision and implementation of these crucial services. These challenges include increasing rates of sexual violence, unsafe abortion as well as discriminatory and stigmatizing attitudes towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) Community, People living with HIV/AIDS; a lack of youth-friendly services where they are faced with judgmental attitudes from service providers when accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services, such as modern contraception, HIV/AIDS counseling, post-abortion care and accurate information on their sexual health; inadequate staffing, inconvenient operating hours, long travel distances, low availability of educational information, and an incomplete range of SRH commodities (PSA Alliance, 2021). The youth, who make up 80% of Malawi's



population, have limited knowledge, capacity and resources to engage in active transformative action towards the prevention of HIV.

The insufficiency of funding remains a key impediment to implementing policies and action plans dedicated to advancing SRHR in the country such as the Malawi Implementation Plan (MIP) which recognizes the investment in SRHR as key to development. While the government's commitment has increased over the years, financial support still falls short of the ideal amount required to meet the SRHR needs in Malawi. This inadequacy in funding necessitates intervention from development partners and civil society to bridge the investment gap for SRHR.

Recognizing the urgent need to address these challenges, For Equality, in collaboration with the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), is implementing the "Social Accountability for SRHR

Financing Project in Malawi." This project aims to bolster transparency and accountability in SRHR financing, focusing specifically on the impact of inadequate investment in HIV programming on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent girls and young women.

The objectives of the project revolve around fortifying accountability and transparency efforts among stakeholders. Key outcomes from these initiatives include comprehensive mapping of stakeholders involved in SRHR financing, insightful dialogues with adolescent girls and young women, and the facilitation of a platform for policy dialogue between relevant stakeholders and key government ministries.

Personal stories from the adolescent girls and young women revealed the urgency to equip them with knowledge on their rights and decision-making structures. For instance, through #SheTalks, FE identified the impact of deeply rooted social norms and misconceptions around contraception on HIV/AIDS prevention such as the disapproval of contraceptive methods by male sexual partners, yet women are the ones subjected to bearing pregnancy and childbirth.

For a long time, SRHR has been perceived as a women's issue with very little reference to the role of men in the process. However, Women's SRH directly affects men, as the primary sexual partners. The collective voices of adolescent girls and young women emphasized the importance of education and empowerment to address existing inequalities.

This project is not just about advocacy; it's about paving the way for an inclusive, informed, and empowered future for the young women and girls of Malawi. As we move forward, we continue our efforts to address the gaps in SRHR financing, working in collaboration with stakeholders and the government to ensure the comprehensive well-being and rights of every individual.



# SheTalks\_ShowUsTheMoney4Health



For Equality in partnership with ARASA hosted #SheTalks dialogues with the youth across the southern, central and northern regions of Malawi, particularly in Chiradzulu, Mzuzu and Lilongwe districts, to address the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls and young women in accessing healthcare, particularly in the context of HIV and SRH. The dialogues aimed to empower participants to share their experiences and recommendations, focusing on the impact of inadequate government funding on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and HIV issues.

In Chiradzulu, the discussions revealed a basic level of knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) among the participants, with men showing greater awareness. The primary source of SRHR information was identified as the youth networks convened by NGOs or interventions by NGOs.

It was further reported that the district hospital is too far hence it is not a preferred source of information. In Mzuzu, discussions highlighted the group's comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge, particularly in areas such as bodily autonomy, consent, intergenerational relationships, and intimate partner dynamics. Most participants shared that she acquired SRH knowledge through active engagement in the SRH space, attending training, conferences, and volunteering. Concerns were raised about limited access to youth-friendly health centers due to location and transportation costs, and negative experiences in hospitals or clinics. In Lilongwe on the other hand, the discussions indicated limited knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) among participants, despite articulate awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Knowledge sources primarily included affiliated

organizations, hospital programs, peers, youth spaces, and the media. ART experiences were generally challenging due to distance, queuing, and segregated clinics. Participants, particularly those identifying as Queer, faced judgmental attitudes, influencing their preference for NGO's.

The conversations however revealed that there is a need for more capacity on building knowledge around budget cycles

and how the youth can be more involved in advocating for improved budget allocations in sectors that affect their lives the most such as health. From the discussions of the youth, For Equality developed a position paper, citing existing challenges and recommendations for the government highlighting key issues for the youth that need to be addressed.





## NATIONAL YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY DIALOGUE ON SRHR & YFHS



To track progress and facilitate dialogue, For Equality, alongside the SRMNCAH+N Youth Platform partnered with Oxfam, Malawi SRHR Alliance, Manerela+, Center for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR), Her Liberty, Ladies in Tertiary Education (LAITE), UNESCO, Girls Activist Youth Organisation (GAYO) and SRHR Africa Trust (SAT) Malawi to host The National Youth-Led Accountability Dialogue on SRHR and Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS). The dialogue brought together diverse stakeholders to discuss critical issues in SRHR and explore solutions for marginalized and vulnerable youth.

The overarching theme was "Youth Empowerment in Health Advocacy: Amplifying Youth Voices and Driving Change towards better SRHR/YFHS financing and accountability in Malawi." The dialogue, presided over by the Minister of Health, aimed to provide a participatory platform for young people to present observations and recommendations on Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS) Programming.

It also sought to advocate for support from policymakers, donors, and development partners based on youth recommendations and to follow up on key recommendations from previous conferences.

The dialogue convened over 120 young people, with the largest group of attendees falling between the 24-30 age group. There were 71 youth-led and youth centered human rights organizations present, and participation was patronized by youth from the Central, Southern and Central regions of Malawi. Commencing her address, the Minister of Health Honourable Khumbidze Chiponda, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the National Youth Dialogue. Her observations highlighted the impressive unity and collective enthusiasm displayed by the youth, affirming that the nation's Vision 2030 and the Agenda 2063 are securely entrusted in their hands. Her speech mainly emphasized combating HIV/AIDS, stressing the government's commitment to ending new infections by 2030. She underscored the imperative of preventing

new infections among individuals without HIV, particularly among young girls facing heightened risks due to high incidences of sexual gender based violence in the country.

The Hon. Minister emphasized prioritizing Youth-Friendly Services, especially in rural areas where accessibility remains a challenge, cautioning against misinformation propagated via social media, contributing to depression among the youth. She urged non-governmental organizations to disseminate accurate information extensively, focusing on rural communities.

The event highlighted financial shortfalls in the SRHR and YFHS budgets, revealing a deficit impacting critical programs. The approved Ministry of Health budget faced a MK 70 billion deficit, compromising commodity procurement, specialist recruitment, and infrastructure development. The discussion underscored the urgent need for increased funding, specific budget lines for youth services, and robust monitoring mechanisms. Youth-led presentations offered insights into specific challenges faced by distinct groups.

One presentation focused on the utilization of female condoms among young female sex workers in Likuni, Lilongwe, revealing barriers such as payment, unfamiliarity, and difficulty understanding instructions. Another study assessed the utilization of family planning services among young people with disabilities in T/A Maganga, Salima District, outlining challenges related to knowledge gaps, stigma, and religious barriers. An innovative solution, YouthWyze, was introduced by SRHR Africa Trust (SAT) as a digital platform to improve SRHR for young people. It incorporates chat forums, health facility maps, feedback features, and opportunities for surveys, operating both online and offline. The platform was successfully piloted as a community-level monitoring tool in Lilongwe and Machinga.



The dialogue also addressed the impact of the debt crisis in Malawi on the realization of sexual and reproductive rights for adolescent girls and young women. Austerity measures were found to compromise funding for crucial health and social programs, negatively affecting SRHR services and information access. The dialogue emphasized the need for policy changes and international support to mitigate these impacts.

The assessment of the implementation of the 2017-2022 Malawi National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy revealed both successes and challenges. While progress was noted in areas such as HIV initiatives, youth-friendly health services, and education on sexuality, challenges persisted, including resource shortages, lack of training for healthcare workers, and difficulties reaching key populations.

Key takeaways from the dialogue included the recognition of financial shortfalls, the importance of youth engagement and empowerment, the need for targeted interventions, and innovative solutions such as YouthWyze. Youth stakeholders emphasized the importance of inclusive policies, financial support, and awareness

campaigns to address specific challenges. Recommendations from the dialogue highlighted the urgency of increased budget allocations for SRHR and YFHS, the creation of specific budget lines for youth services, and targeted awareness campaigns. Additionally, recommendations included inclusive policies, specialized training for service providers, and addressing accessibility barriers in rural areas.

The National Youth Dialogue on SRHR and YFHS in Malawi brought to light critical issues, financial shortfalls, and innovative solutions. It emphasized the need for collaborative efforts involving government, civil society, NGOs, and international support to enact immediate changes in policy, funding, and service delivery for the benefit of the youth in Malawi. The findings from the dialogues and subsequent position paper will likely contribute to policy advocacy and transformative action in HIV and SRH programming for AGYW in Malawi.





## SHE TALKS: FEMINISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY



For Equality under the Gender and social Justice thematic area, in November 2023 organized a one of its kind networking event, “#SheTalks: Feminism in the 21st century,” held under the theme “Reimagining Feminism, Self-care and Social reproduction.” The event was centered around exploring a multifaceted approach to feminism and its evolution, to have women of all diversities and capabilities share their experiences and build together towards a strong and multi-layered feminist movement in Malawi.

The event featured feminists and human rights activists of all ages, diversities and backgrounds from various organizations across the country. The blend of different experiences provided an environment rich with learning and elevated perspective for all participants. Guided by the three main topics as outlined in the theme, a Ted style discussion led by Ms Nyatuwe Phiri; Human Rights specialist, Ms Nunga Kamau; Psycho-socio counselor and Ms Mbumba Kapindula, an international electoral observer set the ball rolling with Nurturing Resilience: Balancing Feminism, Self-Care, and Social Reproduction in Human Rights Advocacy.

Share circles and multiple interactive workshops followed where participants shared their experiences of feminism. Diverse angles were explored including the intergenerational gap in channels of addressing systems of patriarchy, accountability mechanisms amongst women to navigate whether the ‘My sister’s keeper’ philosophy is valid and comprehensive inclusion of marginalized groups such as the LGBTQI community.

The event was graced by renowned Judge and Human Rights Activist honorable Zion Ntaba who emphasized that difference can be strength, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own,” she concluded. She further shared on the need for self-care as activism can be at times frustrating, a repetitive opposition against systems that are deep rooted in our society.

Beyond the academics, the #SheTalks\_Feminism in the 21st century brought a refreshing environment for participants, featuring outstanding performances from radio host, song writer and singer Ms Mbumba Nkhoma and her live band, art displays from young feminist painters as well as many games and challenges. Feedback from our participants displayed a mark of encouragement

and deeper understanding of diverse feminist work from the interactions at the event.

Key takeaways from the participants included that the #SheTalks experience was interactive, fun, informative, enlightening and very diverse. Participants also shared that it was unique and the networking went beyond the technical knowledge sharing but also fostered sisterhood and pathways for meaningful collaboration.





## HEAR HER STORY : 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM (INVEST TO PREVENT)

The power of a story lies in revealing that gender justice advocacy is less about statistics and policies, laws and systems but the lived experiences of women in their everyday lives. 2023 presented us with the theme “Invest to Prevent,” but what does investment look like for young women and adolescent girls?

For Equality was honored to project the voices of various young women who bravely shared their stories of encountering violence in all its different forms. Amongst the shared stories were experiences of intimate partner violence, harassment in the workplace, sexual violence, violence in public spaces, abuse of power in academic spaces and rape. The young women called for an end to the culture of silence and the need for young women to report gender based violence. However, narrations of these experiences reflected the weaknesses of our reporting systems both in the public and private sectors. It further exposed harmful social norms rooted in patriarchal culture that prevail in our society.

Poor and under resourced reporting systems delay and hinder access to justice which then perpetuates gender inequality

which in turn stagnates development. 50.7% of Malawians live in poverty (World Bank News 2022) hence a big chunk of the population turn to public services for needs. In this context, Malawi police victim support units would be the go-to platform for survivors of gender based violence. Nevertheless, the inspector general of the Malawi Police Service Merlyn Yolamu stated that “Victim Support Units need proper service centers which are child-friendly, gender-sensitive and victim-centered (2022).” The current infrastructure is not entirely accommodative or efficient for reporting as it lacks a conducive environment and well trained personnel to deliver a 360 approach assistance including counseling and foster home placement if need be. Investment in access to justice would facilitate more reporting and reinforce existing protection laws as well as apprehend perpetrators.

The stories of these young women exposed a fraction of the injustice that women face in their daily lives. In fighting against inequality, we call for all women to unite and speak up against gender based violence.

## WRITERS SPOTLIGHT

Mayamiko Lwanda is a 21 one-year-old a fourth year student pursuing Bachelor of Arts in Humanities; majoring in Drama at the University of Malawi. She is passionate about gender justice and equality through the lens of theater, film and radio drama. As part of her work, Maya has been a SAFE Campaign volunteer, under For Equality, from 2022 till present. She also works for Brother2Brother as a peer educator to raise awareness of young women and men sexual health, gender justice and equality in Universities and as well as secondary schools. Maya aspires to be a film maker who collaborates with and empowers the blind and deaf communities in the cinematic journey towards true inclusivity. She hopes to see a positive change in the world by working with fellow women filmmakers to attain equality in the film industry.



### MAN'S WORLD By Mayamiko Lwanda

Isn't it ironic how in movies, they portray university as the best 4 years of your life. The time when you get to explore, discover and truly know who, why and what you want to be after you leave the institution. University is the time where you meet your future life partners, workmates, bosses and lifelong friends; or so they say. What they fail to portray to us is; life is not always sunshine and rainbows as we see in movies, rather, it is thunderstorm after thunderstorm accompanied by random sunny days. And those random sunny days, oh aren't they sweet?

There's a certain song that says; "Bad things happen to the people you love and you'll find yourself praying up to the Heaven above. But honestly I never had much sympathy for those bad things, I always saw them coming for me." I never paid much attention to the lyrics until my very first sexual harassment encounter in the first few weeks of my first year in university on campus. You would think that the perpetrators would have a bit of shame before doing such atrocious acts in broad daylight, but no. In fact, other bystanders were in support and would cheer on as the men called me derogatory names, grabbed me in ways I was not comfortable with and tried to speak to me by getting into my personal space just because I wore a short dress on a sunny afternoon. At that very moment, as I looked around me,

I realized that I only have myself to protect me. That day left me scarier than I could imagine. I had no one to talk to because I had not yet made friends. It bothered me deeply as to why men act so entitled to a woman's body as if it is theirs to own. What angered me the most is that, why didn't anyone stand up for me to help me out, especially a man, a man that is most suitable to handle the situation being that men tend to listen to other men. It got me to wonder why is it that in a world that is meant to be for the both genders, men still manage to oppress women and call it "A man's world" and yet, they still come to us women and demand help? Why is it that men always have the upper hand and women don't? Why is it that in a country that is 50.65% women, women still manage to get oppressed by the lesser percentage of men?

This seriously had me to ponder on why the institution never really seems to progress in issues regarding the safety of women in their facility. Why does the administration not seem to care enough for women's safety? Why does it throw the blame on the victims, and just punish the perpetrators with a slap on the wrist? The institution does not give enough emphasis on how wrong it is to take advantage of young girls, be it at parties, walking alone at night, in broad daylight, in their rooms or anywhere else. Men will and always stick to the same mindset even when rules and laws are put in place even when they are means of implementation. As long as the male population is not intensely educated of the evils of acts of violence whether physically,

emotionally or mentally; they will continue to do so because to them, it is normal.

I've come to a realization that in this university as well any other university, we all come from different backgrounds. Our upbringing shapes who we are but the influence around us can also impact and change our way of thinking. If intense workshops are done by men for men to help each other grow and understand the importance of each gender in a society, the institution could potentially produce men who would respect women and treat them correctly as they should and deserve. The only way to win this fight is by educating men who must be willing to teach other men moral principles on how to treat a woman properly. Naturally, men will undermine the words of a woman because they see us as inferior to them. On the other hand, men will most likely pay close attention to the words of a fellow man because they see them as equal. In order to win this fight for equality, we need to not only reach out to the women, but reach out to the men, more especially men, work with them hand in hand because they could be our secret weapon for our victory.

Imagine living in a world where I don't need to always walk with a taser, pepper spray, or even a knife just because I was walking alone at night from the library to my dormitory. Imagine a world where I don't freeze up when I see a group of men on the path I am supposed to pass in fear of being called offensive names or even sexually assaulted. Imagine a world where I don't



have to live in constant fear simply by just being born female. This is achievable if more men understood what it actually means to be a woman in a “man’s world”. If they could understand that, then they could also come to realize that perhaps, it doesn’t have to be a “man’s world”, perhaps, it could just simply be; a world.



Ulala Kondowe is a women’s rights activist with 10 years’ experience in program planning and implementation, resource mobilization, feminist leadership development, strategic advocacy and policy analysis within the Gender Justice and Economic Justice thematic areas. Having attended the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) School of Feminist Economics, she has vast knowledge and expertise in feminist macroeconomics and feminist economic models and policies. As an alumna of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) and the Obama Foundation Leaders Africa Program, Ulala possesses exceptional leadership expertise and displays excellent communication, facilitation and inter-personal skills. Ulala has a Bachelor’s Degree in Education and is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Project Management.

## MALAWI AT 44% DEVALUATION; A Feminist Perspective

In November 2023, Malawi celebrated an Extended Credit Facility (ECF) of \$178 million secured from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to boost its foreign exchange reserves after having adhered to the austerity measures required for the loan. However, what majority of Malawians weren't adequately cognizant of was the repercussions that would follow which would negatively affect the quality of life of most. The ECF celebrations were short lived and instantly marred by the shocking news people woke up to of the devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha by 44% despite having devalued it by 25% 18 months ago.

Social media was awash in the days that followed with complaints ranging from increased transport costs due to the fuel hike, to the significant rise in prices of food items. Malawians continued to feel the pinch as schools announced their exorbitant increments in school fees come January and as prices of farming inputs soared likewise. However, most discourse wasn't centered around the repayment of this loan inclusive of interest, which will reduce government's spending on public services

as prioritization in this year's budget and those to come, ought to be debt repayment. Most households are currently grappling with the increase in the cost of living, which significantly stifles people's efforts in making ends meet considering most households haven't had any recent changes to their income. A continued upward trajectory in the prices of commodities in the months to come will result in the reduction of people's purchasing power hence further lowering their standards of living and quality of life.

Festivity celebrations were further marred by parents' fear of how high school fees increments would go come January despite the majority not having registered any changes to their income yet. Those in tertiary education weren't only worried about school fees but also additional costs in accommodation, food and transportation which have increased as well. Upward adjustments in access to education have detrimental and disproportionate effects on women and girls as societal norms and cultural beliefs influence most parents to prioritize education for the boy child

at the girls' expenses.

This will lead to an increase in the number of girls dropping out of school hence perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty. Unfortunately, the quality of education stays the same in our public schools, mostly characterized by dilapidated classrooms, overcrowding, limited resources and a high teacher:pupil ratio of 1:102 in primary schools and 1:62 in secondary schools. With 24 percent of the 2023/2024 Malawi's national budget allocated to debt financing, the education sector among others, is left poorly funded leaving the government unable to employ more teachers due to the wage bill capping.

Cuts in government spending on social services such as health, has left hospitals in shambles with inadequate medical staff and shortages of medicines, for let alone basic ailments. A failing health care system creates a gap in service delivery which is automatically filled by women due to existing cultural and social - economic norms. Lack of quality health care significantly increases the burden of unpaid care work on women as they are primarily considered as caregivers. This means more waiting time in hospitals, poor sleeping conditions with the majority of the caregivers sleeping on the floor, and no medication despite that usually being the primary purpose of a hospital visit. Unfortunately, private hospitals with all their comforts aren't a feasible option for most due to exorbitant fees attached.

As we are currently in the farming season, people are scrambling to access farm inputs in a timely manner despite the exorbitant increase in the prices such as seed and fertilizer. However, most of their efforts will prove futile due to challenges in purchasing fertilizer which is currently being sold at roughly MK75,000 per 50kg bag. With severe hunger already suffocating several parts of the country due to the effects of cyclone Freddy, and a massive increase in the price of maize, most families will struggle to make it to the next harvesting season. With a score of 21.1 in the 2023 Global Hunger Index, Malawi has a level of hunger that is serious having ranked 88th out of 125 countries with sufficient data to calculate scores from. Agriculture is an important sector for Malawi's economy, and women contribute between 60 and 80 percent of the agricultural labor force. Gender differences in agricultural practices, coupled with the increased cost of inputs will leave a majority of households with decreased yield, subsequently leading to dire hunger.

Despite the government having developed mechanisms to cushion the impacts of devaluation, the majority of Malawians will still endure the adverse effects of the country's current economic landscape. As a country we still have a long way to go in ensuring the measures put in place are inclusive of the unique challenges attributed to women and girls and incorporate a larger number of individuals to reflect the actual need on the ground.

**FOR EQUALITY**  
*Towards a Gender Just Africa*



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