



SALO Malawi Brief

A Tale of Cautious Optimism

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Background

SALO has worked with civil society and human rights defenders in Malawi during the period of the re-run of the presidential election of May 2019. SALO has more recently engaged several of the civil society leaders and human rights defenders for critical analysis and discussion on the post-electoral environment in Malawi, particularly focusing on the new government and the position of the country concerning its regional and international standing. This report reflects on the participant's views and news reports centering on the post-electoral environment in the country and provides a critical reflection on decisions taken by the incumbent administration.

The interviewees included **Beatrice Mateyo**, founder and executive director for the Coalition for the Empowerment of Women and Girls (CEWAG), and member of the Human Rights Defenders' Coalition (HDRC) Malawi; **Billy Mayaya**, Chairperson for the Central Region of the HRDC; **Habiba Osman**, Executive Secretary of the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC); and **Tadala Peggy Chinkwezule**, President of the Malawi Women Lawyers Association (WLA).

Several themes will be discussed in this report, including noting the historic achievement Malawi has attained, especially amid a regression in democratic gains by regional neighbours like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania. Further, there have been several gains made by the new administration such as its anti-corruption offensive. However, the human rights defenders expressed disappointment around the incumbent government's alleged inaction on addressing gender inequality. This analysis keeps in mind that the incumbent government has only been in office for six months and time will tell whether this will change. Furthermore, the discussion and paper both focus on the disunity and fragmentation within the Tonse Alliance, Malawi's regional and international diplomacy thus far, and the way forward for Malawi.

Malawi's achievement

The re-run of the election saw a landslide victory for Lazarus Chakwera. The leader of the opposition Malawi Congress Party (MCP) that received 59% of the vote and heads the nine-party coalition alliance, the Tonse Alliance.¹ This election outcome inspired hope in Malawi and the region and, according to the Mail & Guardian, provided a "global lesson in democracy".² Malawi was able to hold a re-run of the election in a context of COVID-19, with limited external observers, and ensure that Malawians could accept the results. Further, the electoral commission stated that the elections were generally free and fair.³ The election results were accepted by civil society in Malawi and were approved by the Human Rights Defenders Coalition, a prominent human rights organisation.⁴ This was reiterated by Beatrice Mateyo:

"The first positive that for me I see, is that at least we are able to say that the government was legitimately elected by the people and no foul play was suspected."

The civil society representatives indicated that they were proud of their country. Habiba Osman explained:

¹ BBC News. 2020. Lazarus Chakwera was sworn in as Malawi President after the historic win. 28 June.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53210473>

² Moffat, C. 2020. *Mail&Guardian*. Malawi elections provide a global lesson in democracy. 23 November. URL: <https://mg.co.za/thoughtleader/2020-11-23-malawi-elections-provide-a-global-lesson-in-democracy/>

³ Al Jazeera News. 2020. Malawi Presidential election: Lazarus Chakwera declared Winner. 28 June.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/malawi-presidential-election-lazarus-chakwera-declared-winner200625141737274.html>

⁴ Pensulo, C. 2020. Maai has become an example - President Chakwera's Big Promise. All Africa. 24 August.

<https://allafrica.com/stories/202008250003.html>

“I am really proud of our country, especially the human rights defenders... for really carrying the day but also I think restoring the legitimacy of...human rights, but also just creating an enabling space for people to come and express themselves. Almost every day now we are getting to see people demonstrate on various issues... People are also starting to hold duty bearers to account.”

Importantly, even within a context of electoral defeat, a further achievement was that Chakwera’s predecessor, Peter Mutharika, stepped down and embarked on a peaceful transition of power.⁵ This is a historic achievement within a context of democracy at risk of backsliding globally amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Most of the participants in the interview felt a sense of careful optimism. While there was a sense of euphoria as the newly elected government brought in a feeling of hopefulness and there have been indications that the dynamics have changed from the previous administration, they remain hesitant about whether this means all the problems that Malawi faced before the election will be resolved by the new administration. Billy Mayaya asserted that he is experiencing:

“a mismatch of mixed feelings, one of euphoria and one of an anti-climax, so to speak. Euphoria in that I think the government that was voted in brought in a period of hopefulness and that things would change. But on the low side is that nothing has really changed... All the campaign promises made have been watered down by announcements of the government. But I think still we are hopeful that this government has only been in place for six months, so they have not yet shown their true colours. But there is still a long way to go in terms of fulfilling most of the campaign promises that they made.”

Campaign promises delivered

While noting the opinions of the interviewed human rights activists, the new administration has made progress with regards to implementing some of its campaign promises. Others have not yet been delivered, however, as mentioned by Billy Mayaya, it is too early to tell whether the government will commit to implementing its promises. President Chakwera faces a significant challenge to undo the problems created by the previous administration. This includes endemic levels of corruption, increasing frustration over high levels of unemployment, a stagnant economy worsening poverty, and the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

When running for office, Chakwera campaigned on a platform to transform Malawi into a middle-income country: he premised his campaign on five core foundations, namely, servant leadership, uniting Malawians, prospering together, the rule of law and judicial independence, and putting an end to corruption.⁷ Practically, Chakwera and his party have promised to create “one million jobs,” commercialise the country’s agriculture industry, and restore constitutionalism in the country.⁸

President Chakwera’s administration appears to be making good on some of its promises - particularly in terms of tackling corruption. His administration has embarked on several investigations, has made high profile arrests and has charged

⁵ Moffat, C. 2020. *Mail&Guardian*. Malawi elections provide a global lesson in democracy. 23 November. URL: <https://mg.co.za/thoughtleader/2020-11-23-malawi-elections-provide-a-global-lesson-in-democracy/>

⁶ Matonga, G. 2020. *Mail&Guardian*. Malawi’s new president is off to a good start. 13 October. URL: <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-10-13-malawis-new-president-is-off-to-a-good-start/>

⁷ New African. 2020. *Lazarus Chakwera: Doing God’s work in another capacity*. 13 August. URL: <https://newafricanmagazine.com/23801/>

⁸ Matonga, G. 2020. Malawi’s New President is off to a good start. 13 October. *Mail & Guardian*. <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-10-13-malawis-new-president-is-off-to-a-good-start/>.

alleged offenders of maladministration, including former legislators, directors and office bearers from state-owned enterprises from the Peter Mutharika administration.⁹ Moreover, his administration has embarked on a reform process targeted at limiting the president's powers and giving greater independence to the Anti-Corruption Bureau.¹⁰ Notably, as stated by Boniface Dulani, a political scientist at the University of Malawi, in the Mail&Guardian,

“Chakwera is in effect running the most transparent and accountable leadership Malawi has seen: the president has also gazetted into law the Access to Information Act, which mandates civil servants to release public information to citizens upon request; and introduced weekly press briefings at the presidential palace.”¹¹

In some areas, Chakwera has struggled to fulfil campaign promises; notably, when promising that he would create one million jobs, his administration has since backtracked by claiming the government could only employ 200, 000 people.¹² Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous SALO Malawi Brief¹³ Chakwera’s administration has faced backlash in the makeup of his first cabinet over appointing several people with family ties; he has since stated that it is a provisionally appointed cabinet which is set to be reviewed five months after their appointment.¹⁴ The opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of Peter Mutharika has accused Chakwera’s anti-corruption campaign as politically motivated and targeting its members and supporters. Many of the corruption charges still have to be independently verified.¹⁵

Malawi’s gender inequality problem

Importantly, Chakwera’s cabinet also faced criticism over the low numbers of women appointed to boards for the various state-owned enterprises, angering women’s rights activists. There is a worrying trend with regards to women in leadership. The Tonse Alliance was lobbied by women’s rights activists and organisations at different levels before the election and are still being engaged by these actors. As a result, the government signed the Women’s Manifesto. This Manifesto is a political tool to engage in advocacy to keep duty bearers accountable to the demands of women. The Manifesto speaks with one voice as the women of Malawi.¹⁶ The government further committed to applying what is described in the Gender Equality Act of Malawi as the ‘forty-sixty rule’¹⁷. According to the act, all public service appointments require a 60-40 representation of either men or women.¹⁸ Thus, by law, 40% of appointments should be women, while the rest should be men, or vice versa.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Face of Malawi, 2020. *Chakwera Says Civil Service Can Only Employ 200, 000 People, A Nightmare for 1 Million Jobs?* 06 October. URL: <https://www.faceofmalawi.com/2020/10/06/chakwera-says-civil-service-can-only-employ-200-000-people-a-nightmare-for-1-million-jobs/>

¹³ 9 November, available here: <https://www.salo.org.za/post-election-environment-in-malawi/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nyasa Times, 2020. *CSOs differ on DPP persecution claims: Malawi Watch questions police, YAS backs crackdown.* 06 July. URL: <https://www.nyasatimes.com/csos-differ-on-dpp-persecution-claims-malawi-watch-question-police-yas-backs-crackdown/>

¹⁶ Malawi Women’s Manifesto. 2019. <https://womeninleadership.hivos.org/assets/2019/04/MALAWI-WOMENS-MANIFESTO-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ The Gender Equality Act of Malawi, 2013. <https://womenlawyersmalawi.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/gender-equality-act.pdf>

¹⁸ Masina, L. 2020. Malawi Women Protest Gender Imbalance in Public Service Appointments. VOA.

<https://www.voanews.com/africa/malawi-women-protest-gender-imbalance-public-service-appointments>

Chakwera's recent appointment of members in 54 boards of public institutions, where only 20% of the board are women, is concerning.¹⁹ Tadala Peggy Chinkwezule:

"They [the government] clearly understood and acknowledged that the representation was not efficient or according to the Gender Equality Act, but they argued that the Gender Equality Act is not necessarily providing for appointments in boards, it says public service."

Thus, the government used this loophole in the law as an excuse. Following this, the government had to backtrack on its appointments on various boards, which had already been made public. They had to remove some board members and replace them with women. They also had to add in women in other boards. Concerning the ministerial positions, most women were made Deputy Ministers instead of Ministers. In Chakwera's 31-member cabinet, only four women were given full ministerial positions.²⁰ On the other hand, it is encouraging that the judges appointed at the Higher Court ensured that there were 50-50 appointments of men and women, which has also been done in several other institutions.²¹

Beatrice Mateyo asserted:

"There is a bit of a relaxed attitude as if the women are not there, which is worrying in terms of building trust and good governance."

While there may be some improvements in the representation of women in government positions, the country and government remain relatively patriarchal. Women are less likely than men to buy or rent land, and women have unequal access to land and economic resources.²² Furthermore, the country still has high rates of child marriage, high school dropout rates among girls, low levels of women's political representation,²³ and it remains questionable whether this engagement of women in the political space is treated as a 'quota' versus meaningful representation and with adequate power to enact change.

A 'Marriage of Convenience?'

Translating the Tonse Alliance from an electoral bloc into a political bloc from diverse ideological positions have proven challenging in the first six months of office. While the grouping has not yet disintegrated, the platform of political parties that came together during the re-run of the elections has since shown signs of disunity. Most notably, several incidents of violence took place leading up to the 10 November by-elections, especially in the Northern region's Karonga Central constituency.²⁴ The violence took place between supporters of Chakwera's Malawi Congress Party (MCP), and his Vice President Saulos Chilima's United Transformation Movement (UTM). These parties are the main bloc forming the Tonse Alliance. Although the incidents do not yet appear to reflect tensions at a national level, it is possible that the next election

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mkandawire, M. 2020. *Malawi24*. Chakwera appoints four new Supreme Court Judges, 12 High court Judges. 26 October. URL: <https://malawi24.com/2020/10/26/chakwera-appoints-four-new-supreme-court-judges-12-high-court-judges/>

²² The Program on Governance and Local Development. 2017. The Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in Malawi: Selected Findings on Gender. Series 2017: 2. URL: <https://gld.gu.se/media/1219/malawigenderreport-full-final.pdf>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Simeon-Phiri, J. 2020. *Malawi24*. Waves of threats and intimidation rock Karonga Central ahead of by-election. 09 November. URL: <https://malawi24.com/2020/11/09/waves-of-threats-and-intimidation-rock-karonga-central-ahead-of-by-election/>; Simeon-Phiri, J. 2020. *Malawi 24*. MCP's Mkaka condemns political violence in Karonga Central. 02 November. URL: <https://malawi24.com/2020/11/02/mcps-mkaka-condemns-political-violence-in-karonga-central/>

will showcase division and competition. In this way, it seems the alliance was, in Chinkwezule's words, a "*marriage of convenience*," preceding and during the election, but is unable to remain steadfast in the post-election environment.

However, Habiba Osman noted the positive relationship between Vice President Saulos Chilima and President Chakwera as a public sign of unity. Although they are from different parties, their rhetoric and even their body language towards each other are positive. This gives Osman the impression that they want to work at promoting unity and instilling a culture of hard work within the public sector. Unfortunately, Osman noted that it is often the people around them that sow division and disputes arise because of inter-party sensitivities and politics.

On a positive note, currently, the judiciary is strong and cannot be influenced by political actors. The 50 per cent +1 majority electoral system will likely ensure that the elections are free and that those who wish to win have to work hard to achieve political victory. This provides a strong platform for parties to improve if they wish to win elections in the coming years.

Regional and international diplomacy

Since President Lazarus Chakwera's inauguration, he has met with several regional countries to establish and strengthen diplomatic ties. These meetings, according to Tadala Peggy Chinkwezule, did not yield significant progress with regard to pushing a regional democratic agenda: "*There seems to be first setting a rapport with other regions and countries and not really pushing a specific agenda. So it seems we are in the waiting stage.*" During this phase, Malawian citizens may be more forgiving about a lack of clear objective and focus, but it will be expected that the Malawian government should put pressure on the region to comply with human rights law. The countries which have been visited by President Chakwera since his election victory include Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa.

In President Lazarus Chakwera's 22 September visit to Zambia, the first country he visited since taking office, President Chakwera took the opportunity to first establish good relations with its regional neighbour.²⁵ President Chakwera's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eisenhower Mkaka, established the purpose of the visit by stating that President Chakwera and his Zambian counterpart, President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, would have private talks. In these, they will discuss an energy deal, which the Zambian government has approved, trade, transport, migration and immigration issues.²⁶

Additionally, President Chakwera visited Zimbabwe in September where he urged Malawians living in Zimbabwe to abide by their host country's laws. He further paid tribute to Zimbabwe for allowing Malawians returning from South Africa due to the COVID-19 pandemic to pass through the country. He also expressed his wish for Malawi and Zimbabwe to broaden their economic ties at a dinner hosted by the first family of Zimbabwe.²⁷ No indications have been made that President Chakwera spoke to Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa about the reports of human rights violations in Zimbabwe.²⁸

In October, President Chakwera met with Tanzanian President, John Magafuli, where they discussed bilateral trade. A statement by Tanzanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and East Africa Cooperation, Professor Palamagamba Kabudi, claimed

²⁵ Malawi President arrives in Zambia.2020. Lusaka Times. 22 September. <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/09/22/malawi-president-arrives-in-zambia/>

²⁶ Andsen-Mana. T. 2020. Malawi to firmly connect with neighbouring countries - Mkaka. 23 September. Club of Mozambique. <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/malawi-to-firmly-connect-with-neighbouring-countries-mkaka-172253/>

²⁷ Dondo, L. 2020. President Chakwera meets Malawians resident in Zimbabwe. September. ZBC News.

<https://www.zbcnews.co.zw/president-chakwera-meets-malawians-resident-in-zimbabwe/>

²⁸ Amnesty International. 2019. Zimbabwe 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/zimbabwe/report-zimbabwe/>.

that the visit was a way of strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.²⁹ The Magafuli administration has portrayed a willingness to work with President Chakwera's administration. During President Chakwera's visit to Tanzania on 07 October, he asserted that the country serves as a strategic trade partner and that the two countries have "a lot in common."³⁰ However, neither Tanzania nor Malawi has indicated whether they would speak about the unresolved boundary dispute of Lake Nyasa (as it is known in Tanzania), or Lake Malawi (as it is known to Malawians). This dispute has been an issue for bilateral relations since 1967. Malawi argues that its economy, culture and national identity is linked to the lake while Tanzania contends that fishermen who live along the shoreline have ancestral burial grounds in areas that are now under the lake.³¹ In contrast to the Malawian electoral story, Tanzanian authorities have increased repression of opposition parties, non-governmental organisations, and the media in the lead up to the general elections held in October 2020. The two main opposition parties have since demanded fresh elections, denouncing the 31 October elections as fraudulent.³²

Also in October, President Chakwera visited Mozambique to conduct bilateral talks with Mozambican President, Fillipe Nyusi. The purpose of this visit was to strengthen solidarity. President Chakwera appreciated the Cahora Basa hydropower dam and a step-up transformer station from which Malawi could potentially connect electricity under the Malawi-Mozambique interconnection project.³³ This visit took place while Mozambique was experiencing a security crisis in its Northern territories, however, no mention was made of this in the talking points that Malawi undertook during this visit.³⁴

However, President Chakwera did speak about the region's peace and security situation on his visit to South Africa. President Chakwera met with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in November where they discussed regional security and recognised the "need for collaborative efforts in addressing threats to peace and security such as terrorism, extremism and insurgencies."³⁵ The two-day visit sought to strengthen cooperation on trade and investment, agriculture, defence, culture, tourism, gender and health between the countries. Both Presidents said they were continuing with regional efforts to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recovery. President Ramaphosa stressed the importance of economic cooperation through the African Continental Free Trade Area.³⁶ However, this state visit became mired in controversy as a result of a high-profile legal case involving both countries. TV pastor Shepherd Bushiri and his wife Mary, charged with theft, fraud and money-laundering in South Africa, skipped bail and fled to Malawi at the same time that the state visit was taking place. While the Bushiri situation is unlikely to significantly impact South

²⁹ Tairo, A. 2020. Tanzania: Malawi President Chakwera Visits Tanzania to Boost Bilateral Ties . 7 October. The East African. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202010070845.html>

³⁰ Malawian President Chakwera Meets Tanzanian Counterpart Magufuli, Silent on Lake Dispute. 2020. Statecraft. 6 October. <https://www.statecraft.co.in/article/malawian-president-chakwera-meets-tanzanian-counterpart-magufuli-silent-on-lake-dispute>

³¹ Ibid.

³² BBC. 2020. Tanzania elections: Main opposition parties demand fresh vote. 31 October. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54759865>

³³ Malawi: Chakwera visits Mozambique, meets Nyusi in Songo. 2020. Club of Mozambique. 6 October. <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/malawi-chakwera-visits-mozambique-meets-nyusi-in-songo-173047/>

³⁴ Nkuonera. M. 2020. Malawi: Chakwera Says Mozambique Visit Fruitful. 6 October. All Africa <https://allafrica.com/stories/202010070116.html>

³⁵ SA, Malawi committed to strengthening cooperation - Ramaphosa. 2020. 14 November. IOL. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/sa-malawi-committed-to-strengthening-cooperation-ramaphosa-07579d2a-81b3-54eb-b8f9-f9d57549780f>

³⁶ Ibid.

Africa and Malawi's good bilateral relations, this situation is still ongoing and could complicate their relationship in the future.³⁷

President Chakwera has also been involved in multilateral diplomacy at a regional and international level. The member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have elected President Chakwera as the next Chairperson of SADC. He will follow Mozambican President, Filip Nyusi and will take up this role in August 2021. At the SADC Summit held virtually on 17 August 2020, Chakwera expressed his desire to deepen regional integration:

“For us as Malawians, we feel this undeniable bond whenever we travel beyond our borders, which is why I have never accepted that Malawi is land-locked, but rather land-linked, for we are inextricably linked to our SADC brothers on all sides, and I can assure you that we would not have it any other way.”

President Chakwera further expressed that this election is a symbol of the level of confidence expressed by the regional bloc in the new leadership of Malawi.³⁸ Here he would have a greater platform to establish and pursue a human rights-centric focus.

Furthermore, on 13 October 2020, Malawi was elected by the United Nations General Assembly to take a seat as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council from 2021 - 2023. The Malawi Ministry of Foreign Affairs conveyed that Malawi gained a majority of 180 votes out of 190 in the election. According to the Ministry,

“This is a demonstration of the confidence by UN Member States in the Republic of Malawi towards promotion and consolidation of human rights in the country and her contribution at a global level.”³⁹

This will put pressure on the Malawian government to be a leader in the region and to act as a role model on the issue of human rights as there is automatically some pressure to “clean up your own house,” expressed by Habiba Osman.

Further, focusing on the international sphere there, have been some concerns regarding Malawi's relationship with Israel. The Malawian government has announced plans to open a full embassy to Israel in the city of Jerusalem.⁴⁰ Malawi plans to open its embassy in 2021, which would make it the first African country in decades to open an embassy in Jerusalem.⁴¹ Billy Mayaya felt that the decision to open an embassy in Jerusalem is a naïve approach to conduct Malawi's international relations as it weakens the moral position of Malawi. He noted that Chakwera's background in the church may be influencing his positions on his relationship with Israel and may continue to play a role in the future since President Chakwera is a pastor and has a background in charismatic evangelicalism.⁴²

³⁷ Fabricius, P. 2020. Pretoria's relations with new Malawian President Chakwera get off on wrong foot. 16 November. The Daily Maverick. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-11-16-pretorias-relations-with-new-malawian-president-chakwera-get-off-on-wrong-foot/>

³⁸ Chamdimba, P. 2020. Southern Africa: Chakwera to Lead SADC From 2021 - Malawi to Hosts Heads of State Summit. 18 August. All Africa. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202008180811.html>

³⁹ Mkandawire, M. 2020. Malawi wins seat on UN Human Rights Council. 14 October. *Malawi24*. URL: [https://malawi24.com/2020/10/14/malawi-wins-seat-on-un-human-rights-council/#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20\(UN\)%20General,of%203%20years%20beginning%202021.&text=The%20UN%20General%20Assembly%20elections,for%20the%20term%202021%2D2023](https://malawi24.com/2020/10/14/malawi-wins-seat-on-un-human-rights-council/#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20(UN)%20General,of%203%20years%20beginning%202021.&text=The%20UN%20General%20Assembly%20elections,for%20the%20term%202021%2D2023)

⁴⁰ Emi, I. 2020. Malawi Makes Bold Move with its Embassy in Jerusalem. Venture Africa. URL: <http://venturesafrica.com/south-sudan-secures-52-3-million-imf-first-ever-loan/>

⁴¹ Butty, J. 2020. VOA News. Malawi Plans Embassy in Jerusalem. 05 November. URL: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/malawi-plans-embassy-jerusalem>

⁴² Matonga, G. 2020. Malawi's New President is off to a good start. 13 October. Mail & Guardian. <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-10-13-malawis-new-president-is-off-to-a-good-start/>

From the examples mentioned above, it is telling that the Malawian administration is still developing its foreign policy agenda and appears to not be causing any immediate regional upsets, although it remains to be seen what the country's regional and international priorities will be as it takes up the SADC chair in 2021 and how its seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council from 2021 - 2023 will impact its position toward regional partners.

The way forward

The sentiment expressed by Beatrice Mateyo that, *"there is nothing for us without us"* is an important factor for a successful democracy. The attitude that Malawians need to be at the forefront of what is happening in their country should be fostered. Internally, Malawi needs to continue encouraging the culture of civic engagement and active citizenship which has landed the country this historic victory. The challenges affecting the country remain, however; thus far, although the women's movement has spoken out about gender-based violence and sexual harassment, the difficulty now is for this sentiment to trickle down to broader society and for citizens to continuously engage on these issues.

Malawi is given the platform of being the Chairperson of SADC and is seen as a role model for the region. Civil society should capitalise on this momentum and push this agenda in other countries. This should be a joint process where institutions and civil society groups converge to have a more assertive voice on what it wishes Malawi to achieve locally and regionally. Civil society has the responsibility to document the best practice Malawi has shown during the election period. This can be used to inspire the same democratic spirit in other countries in the region. Further, this should also act as a means to keep the Malawian government accountable in pursuing the advancement of democracy and human rights in Malawi and the broader region. Thus far, Malawi has not engaged its regional counterparts on these issues, and it remains to be seen what path Malawi will take on this.

However, the existence of gaps in Malawi's quest for democracy is noteworthy. The violence seen during the by-elections, the fragmentation of the Tonse Alliance, and the lack of urgency placed on following the Gender Equality Act, for example, raise questions about the future of the Chakwera administration. Time will tell whether these shortcomings will be addressed sufficiently, despite an encouraging start in a number of other areas.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Brief do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance.

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