

## **Women Empowerment**

**How do Faith- Based Projects Empower Women  
In Malawi? The Case of Economic Empowerment  
of Women (EEW) Project In Kalolo Area, Nkhoma  
Synod C.C.A.P Church.**

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***ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN***

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**SUPERVISOR: ANNETTE LEIS-PETERS**

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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is entirely done by me through my personal efforts in research which I conducted between the months of July and August, 2014. It is a result of reflection and evaluation of this field work unless where otherwise acknowledged. No part of this paper has been submitted elsewhere for such an examination.

Agnes Mwatitha Banda.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my aunt, Mrs. Maina Mithi (nee Mndala Banda) for her love, care and support morally, spiritually, socially and financially. May the good Lord bless her abundantly and give her long life.

**Also,**

Dedicated to my grandfather, Mr. Blackmore Mndala Banda, for his dedication towards girl child education. May his soul rest in peace.

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the role of the Economic Empowerment of Women (EEW) project and the Church of Central African Presbyterian (C.C.A.P) of the Nkhoma Synod, in the empowering of women in Kalolo area, Lilongwe district, in the central region of Malawi. This entailed an exploration of the situation of the women in Kalolo area on the one hand, and then studied how empowerment is understood by the people involved in the EEW project on the other hand. In order to get the required information, I interviewed representatives of three groups: the women, the church representatives and the EEW representatives. The material of these interviews was supported by participant observation and some documents from the church and the EEW projects. The study will employ gender theories and empowerment theory to analyse the data.



## **LIST of ABBREVIATIONS**

C.C.A.P	Central Church of African Presbyterian
NEEP	National Economic Empowerment Policy (Malawi)
EEW	Economic Empowerment of Women ( a project run by Nkhoma Synod Church)
NSO	National Statistics Office (Malawi)
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
NAF	National HIV/AIDS Action Framework (Malawi)
NAC	National Aids Commission (Malawi)
DRCM	Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
MGDs	Millennium Development Goals
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
DCA	Danish Church Aid
CSP	Church and Society Program
CSO	Civil Society Organization
TOT	Trainer of Trainers
CBO	Community Based Educators
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
TDC	Teacher Development Centre
ADC	Area Development Committee
VCT	Voluntary Testing and Counselling
WCC	World Council of Churches
OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet (Malawi)

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The aim of this study was to investigate what the EEW project and Nkhoma Synod Church is doing to empower women in Kalolo area. Hence, the main question is; how are faith-based projects empowering women in Malawi? The case of the EEW project in Kalolo area, run by Nkhoma Synod Church, in the central region of Malawi. In order to answer this question, the first step was to explore the situation of women in this area on the one hand, and then I investigated the role of the EEW project and Nkhoma Synod Church on the other hand. The understanding of the term empowerment was also studied.

### **1.0 Contextual Background**

The background information will provide a base for the understanding of the situation of women in Malawi. From the cross cutting situation in Malawi, the reader will then be able to understand the situation of the women in Kalolo area and what the church and EEW is doing in this area to empower the women.

### **1.1 Geography**

Malawi is a landlocked country south of the equator in sub-Saharan Africa (National Statistics Office (NSO) 2003). It is bordered to the north and northeast by the United Republic of Tanzania; to the east; south and southeast by the People's Republic of Mozambique; and to the west and northwest by the Republic of Zambia.

The country is divided into three regions; north, central and southern regions. There are twenty-eight districts in the country administered by District Commissioners (ibid). There are six districts in the northern region, nine in the central region and thirteen districts in the southern region. Administratively, the districts are subdivided into Traditional Authorities that are presided over by chiefs. Lilongwe district has eighteen traditional authorities and Kalolo area is one of them. These traditional authorities are comprised of villages, which are the smallest administrative units presided over by village headmen.

Figure 1 shows the map of Malawi showing the study area;

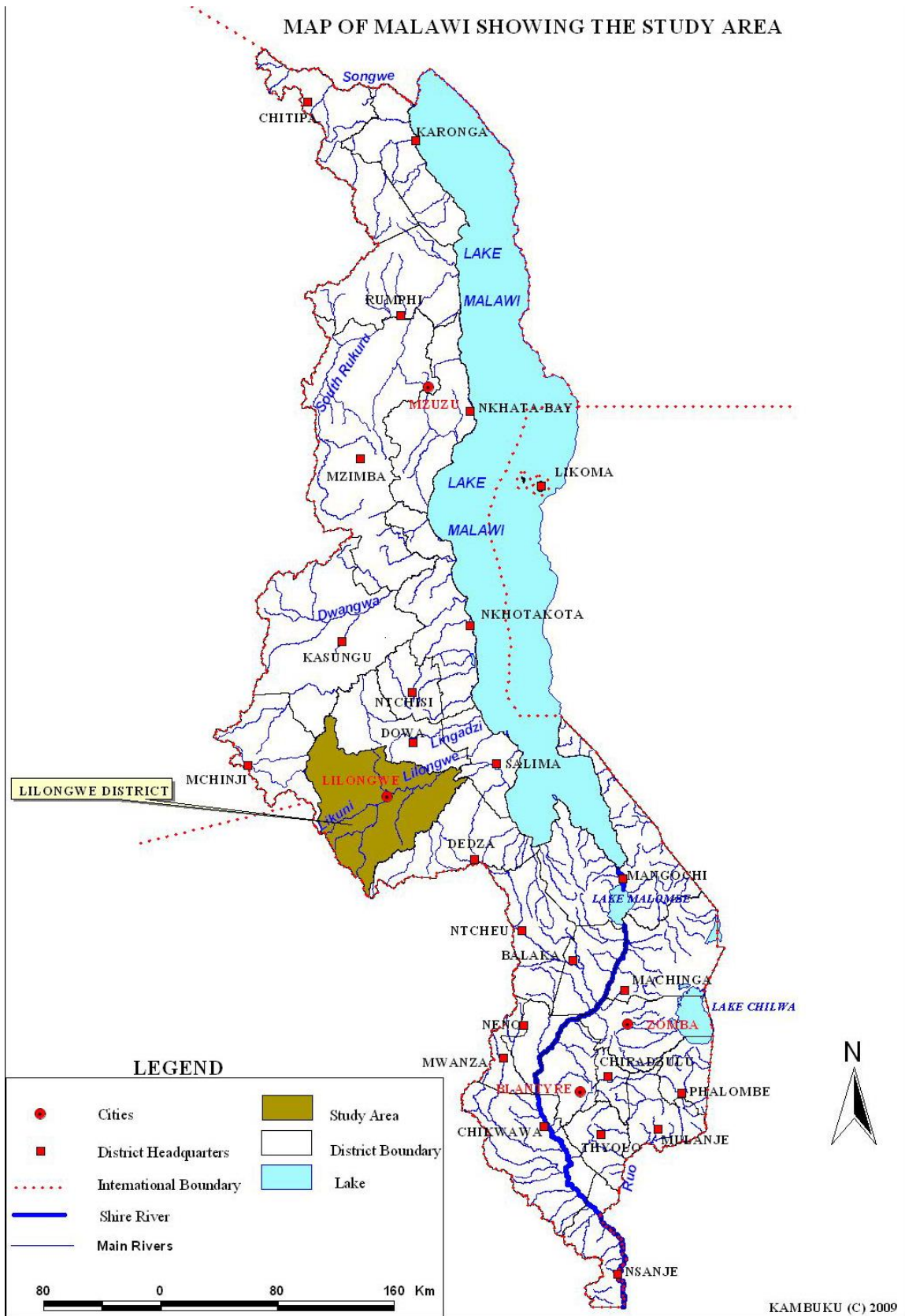


Figure 1 showing Lilongwe district

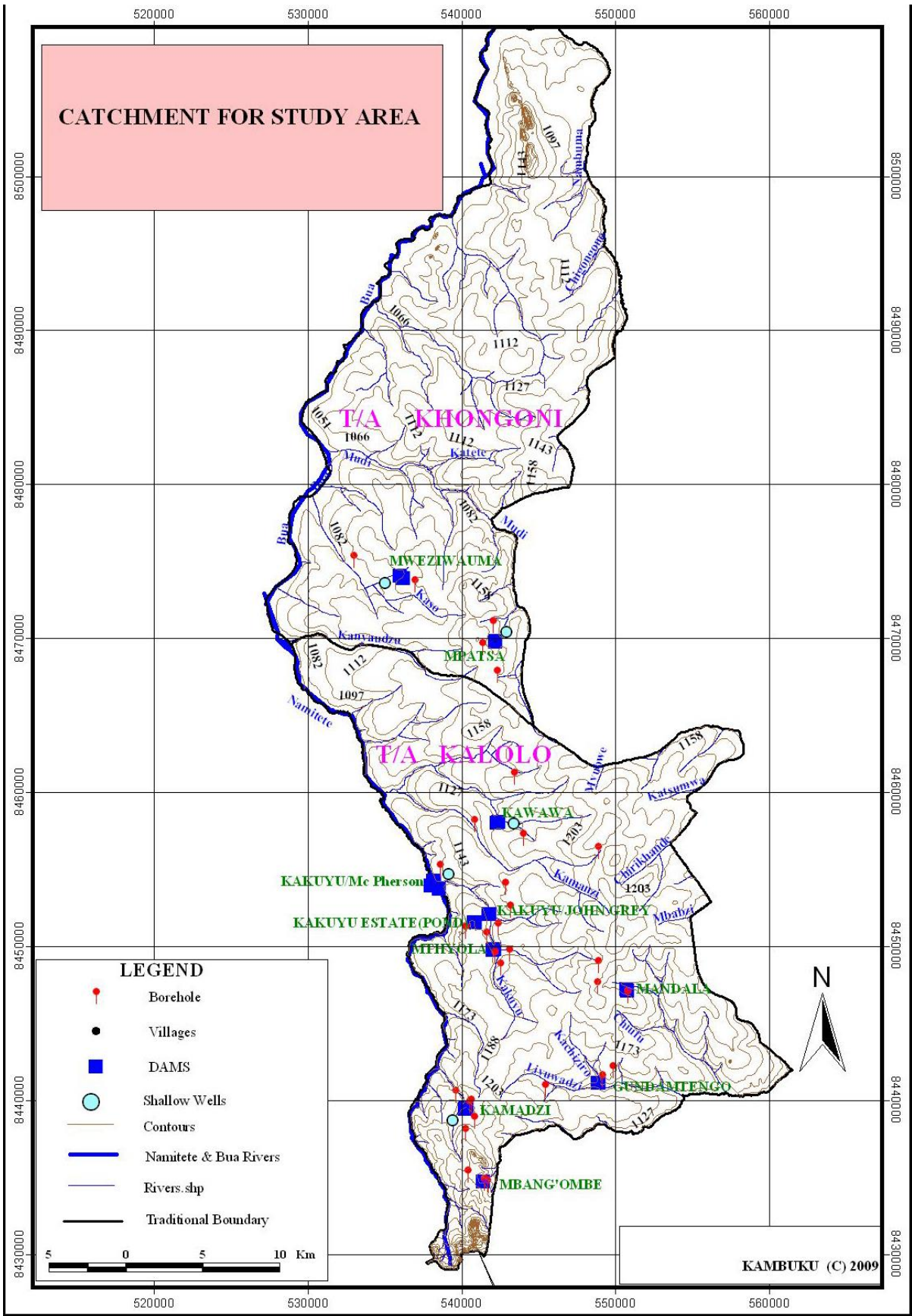


Figure 2 showing Kalolo area.

## **1.2 Population**

Malawi's population is growing rapidly. In just over 40 years it has increased from 4 million people in 1966 to 13.1 million in 2008 (NSO 2012). Given the high number of births per woman (currently 5.7) the population will continue to grow. The estimated population in 2012 was 15.4 million people making it one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. It is estimated that by July, 2015, the population will be 16, 307,000. This is far much densely populated as compared to its neighbouring countries, Zambia and Zimbabwe which are estimated at 15,474,000 and 13,503,000 respectively. The majority of the population (80%) live in rural areas. They mainly depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood. The population growth is high and the annual average stands at 2.8%. The average life expectancy is 54 years.

The educational attainment and fertility are closely related. Women with higher levels of education tend to have fewer children. Women with no education have an average of more than three times as many children as women who continue with their education beyond secondary school. Early marriage persists in Malawi. Many young women are married by the age 18 (ibid).

It should be noted that due to rapid population growth, there is pressure on the limited resources Malawi has. Malawi faces various challenges, including lack of resources. This makes it dependent on international development assistance. Political, economic and environmental adversities combine to make Malawi struggling with many aspects of basic needs such as health, education and food security. This being the case, it is the women who suffer most as they are culturally charged with the responsibility of looking after the entire family in terms of food and general well-being of the family members.

## **1.3 Poverty in the rural areas of Malawi**

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world. ([www.ruralpovertyportal.org/](http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/) 15 January, 2015) Progress towards reaching the millennium development goals of eradicating extreme poverty has been so limited. According to the United Nations Development Programmes' human development report 2009, about 74% of the population still lives below income poverty line of US\$1.25 a day and 90% below US\$2.00 a day. The proportion of poor and ultra-poor is highest in the rural areas of the Southern and Northern parts of the country. Kalolo area is in the central region of Malawi. These percentages are much higher if

compared to other African countries like Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is estimated that in Zambia, 68.51% live below US\$1.25 per day and 82.55 live below US\$2.00 per day while in Zimbabwe the percentages are 72.3 and 68 respectively.

Access to assets, services and economic opportunities is profoundly unequal across the population. Larger households are more likely to be poor, particularly those with many children. Similarly, access to education, which is a major driver of relative wealth, is highly inequitable as well. There is also limited access to markets and services which is another constraint. Poor rural people tend to live in remote areas with few roads and means of transport. This limits the people's access to economic opportunities. It is also a problem to have financial services, which is very restricted for small holder farmers, most of which are women. It is only about 12% of households who have access to credit. The result is that the poor households adopt hard strategies such as withdrawing children from school, especially girls.

Livestock ownership is very low. Productivity of the livestock is affected by low productivity of the cropping sector; as cropping extends into grazing areas, the number of ruminant livestock has been decreasing. The result is that meat consumption and protein intake is very low. This contributes to poor nutrition among children.

#### **1.4 Education**

Education is a key determinant of the lifestyle and societal status an individual enjoys. Studies have shown that educational attainment is strongly associated with health-related behaviours and attitudes (NSO, 2010). Almost 30% of poor children do not even start primary school, which is free in Malawi. Secondary and higher education is highly confined to non-poor households, mainly due to the required tuition fees.

In Malawi, more females than males have never attended school (19% compared with 11%). The proportion that has never attended school is also higher for females than males across all age groups, except for those under 14. There might be a slight difference in the attainment of primary education between males and females. However, more men than women have attended or completed secondary education (17% men as compared to 11% women). There are some differences between rural and urban in educational attainment. In the rural areas, about 21% of the women have no education at all as compared to 9% in the urban area. The trend is the same for men (ibid).

It is this lack of education of most of the women that render them more vulnerable. The ability to read is crucial for exploring social and economic opportunities during a person's lifetime. For a person to get messages from programme planners, s/he must be able to read. However, there are also marked disparities between men and women in the literacy level in Malawi. About 80% of men age 45-49 are literate compared to 45% of women in the same age group. How can one effectively participate in development activities without knowledge to read or write? The big number of illiterate women negatively affects not only women, but also the nation at large.

### **1.5 HIV/AIDS in Malawi**

The first case of AIDS in Malawi was identified in 1985. The joint United Nation programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in its 2010 global report stated that there were 920, 000 adults and children living with HIV/AIDS in 2009 (UNAIDS, 2010). In July 2001, the National Aids Commission was established and replaced the National Aids Control Programme (NSO, 2010). The National HIV and AIDS policy was launched in 2003 in Malawi (OPC, 2003). This policy was developed through consultative process that involved civil society organizations, the public and private sectors, the media and persons living with HIV/AIDS (NSO, 2010). The National Aids policy now provides guiding principles for all programmes and interventions in Malawi.

It should be noted that HIV/AIDS prevalence is high among the women in Malawi. About 11% of adults age 15-49 are infected with HIV. Among the women age 15-49, the HIV prevalence rate is 13%, while among men age 15-49 the prevalence rate is only 8%. It has been noted that HIV prevalence increases with age both women and men. The prevalence rate is highest among women age 35-39, which is 24%. For the men, the prevalence increases from 1% among age 15-19 to 21% among age 40-44 (ibid).

HIV/AIDS is a great challenge to the women because they are the ones who provide care for the infected people, also when they are infected themselves. This means that the women are double affected by HIV/AIDS than the men.

### **1.6 The context of Nkhoma Synod**

The overview history of Nkhoma Synod will shed light on how the Synod was involved in development activities right from the beginning in sectors such as education, health, agriculture and how it clashed with the British protectorate in defending its members. It will

also provide a base to understand how the Synod handled women, for example, in areas of education and how this background is related to women situation today in Kalolo area.

The Central Church of African Presbyterian is located in three administrative regions, Livingstonia in the northern region, Nkhoma in the central region and Blantyre in the southern region of Malawi. The focus of this thesis is Nkhoma Synod, in the central region of Malawi. Its origins go back to 1889 when the Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries (DRCM) started work in the central region of Malawi (Brown, 2005).

During the first five years, Nkhoma Synod opened more as schools. It was Mr. AVD Westhuizen, who laid the foundation of the mission's agricultural teaching and Miss Martha Murray who started the first girl's boarding school in 1895.

Nkhoma station church was opened in 1896 in Lilongwe district. Among the first group of Malawian converts in 1897 was Mai Sarah Nabanda<sup>1</sup> who became the first woman in the Nkhoma Synod to work at Nkhoma Hospital. The girl's nurse's home at Nkhoma mission was named after her as a sign of appreciation for her contribution. Mai Nabanda officially opened the girl's nurse's home on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1961 (ibid).

The Dutch Reformed Church Mission sought to combat the problems of Malawians, brought about by the hut tax, by introducing a fourfold programme of education, agriculture, industries and the formation of Christian families (Phiri 2007, p. 51). The primary aim of the schools was to teach people to read the Bible in Chichewa. The main disadvantage was that the education was only up to primary level.

The education of girls in the DRCM was worse than that of boys in that, apart from knowing reading the Bible, only a few lucky girls went to mission's girls hostels. In order for one to qualify to be admitted at the hostels, one had to be at least 12 years old and should have permission of one's parents. Therefore, even if a girl wanted to be educated but had parents against it, had no chance of going to school. The interesting thing to note here is that boys were not expected to get permission from their parents or guardians (ibid).

The constitution of the hostels stipulated that the aim of the girls' boarding school was to lead the girls to Jesus as saviour and; to build up a good Christian character by inspiring the girls with principles of obedience, order and helpfulness. This was to be achieved by educating the

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<sup>1</sup> She was one of the first Malawian converts of the DRCM. She was also the first Malawian woman to work with Nkhoma Hospital.



girls in all kinds of domestic manual work like washing, ironing, sewing, pottery, soap making etc (Phiri, 2007). In a nut shell, the education given to girls was in preparation for home management.

### **1.7 What was the position of a woman in the traditional Chewa matrilineal society?**

A brief overview of the status and situation of women in the traditional Chewa will provide a basis of cultural understanding how a woman is seen culturally according to the beliefs and customs of the Chewa. Although culture is dynamic, it will still shed light on the attitude and beliefs the Chewa people hold towards women even today and how the women are affected either negatively or positively. This will then closely be linked to the situation of women in Kalolo area which is dominantly a Chewa area.

During the period of the Chewa of the Banda clan, (900-1480) women had total control of the places of worship called rain shrines<sup>2</sup> as mediums (Phiri 2007, p. 23). The same women had political leadership. Two great territorial rain shrines developed, one in the southern region of Malawi based on a man called M'bona and the other one in the central region based on a god called Chisumphu. The shrine in the central region was headed by a succession of women known as 'Mangadzi' or 'Makewana.' The DRCM missionaries preached against these women saying that they were demons and that they would burn in fire (Melanie, (1991). Among the Chewa, a woman could divorce her husband. One of the reasons permitting a divorce was if the husband was beating the woman for no apparent reason. On the other hand, the man could divorce a wife among other reasons if she was unfaithful.

The interesting thing to note is that beating could lead to divorce only when it was done for no apparent reason. This means that a husband had a mandate to beat a wife if he felt there were enough reasons to do so. Another interesting thing to note is that unfaithfulness on the part of the woman led to divorce but not on the part of a man. This means that culturally a man was permitted to have extra-marital affairs. (Phiri, 2007).

In some African cultures, a widow underwent through dehumanizing rituals such as sleeping alone with the dead body the whole night to prove innocence of the death of the husband. On the other hand, the Chewa widow was protected by the fact that she was surrounded by her kin who supported her emotionally and economically. This assisted her to bear the loss of her

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<sup>2</sup> Rain shrines were places where the Chewa people worshipped a god called Chisumphu. The worship revolved around rain, hence the name rain shrine. At this place the Chewa could offer their sacrifices to ask for rain from Chisumphu if there was a drought or a calamity like an outbreak of diseases like small pox.

husband. However, the ritual of burning the house she shared with the deceased husband meant that she no longer had accommodation (ibid)

Respect was a virtue which was emphasised when girls underwent initiation ceremonies, especially respect for men. A woman was not supposed to talk to a man while standing or looking in his eyes. She was also not supposed to argue with a man. Doing so was interpreted as being rude and disrespectful. A woman had to kneel down to the elders, especially men (Phiri, 2007).

A quick glance at this overview, it could be concluded that women in the Chewa culture were highly respected. However, a closer look at it would reveal that there were disparities which existed between the men and the women. What was going on at initiation ceremonies was for the benefit of the men. Throughout, the girls were drilled to believe that life means making a man happy. The girls were taught how to make themselves desirable to their husbands, and how to respect men privately as well as publicly. On the other hand, the men were not told to make wives happy in the nyau<sup>3</sup> (ibid).

### **1.8 Women's participation in decision making**

The ability of women to make decisions that affect their personal circumstances is essential for their empowerment. It also serves as an important factor in the national development. The women are considered to make decisions if they make decisions alone or jointly with their husbands or someone else (NSO, 2010). National Statistics Office research found out that 40% of the married women have decisions made for them by their husbands, mainly for the women's health care. On the other hand, 69% of the women have their husbands mainly make decisions for major house hold purchasing. On the daily household needs, 46% of the women have their husbands make the decisions and 32% of the married women have their husbands make decisions for them on visits to their family or relatives (ibid). This shows that mostly women do not participate in decision –making right from the household level.

### **1.9 The first summary situation of the women in Malawi and Kalolo area**

In Malawi, women constitute 52% of the population, yet they lag behind in almost all spheres of life. Girls drop out of school to assist in domestic chores and later fail to secure formal employment. This makes it hard for the women to have access and control over resources. They also lag behind in participation in development activities at individual, household,

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<sup>3</sup> Nyau is the secret society of the Chewa people where boys are initiated into adulthood. It is accompanied by masked dancers who perform at celebrations, funerals and during initiation ceremonies. In the past, all Chewa boys were supposed to undergo through this process.

community and society levels. Although the Malawi government has been making calls for women to actively participate in and benefit from government programmes at decision making positions both publicly and privately, very little progress has been made.

From birth, boys and girls are treated differently in Malawi though nowadays there is a slight improvement. The belief that a man is superior as compared to a woman is still dominant in the people's mind. Therefore, with limited resources, parents would prefer sending a boy to school and train them to be courageous as boys will be bread winners of their homes. On the other hand, it is believed that a girl will get married and be supported by her husband. For this reason, girls are trained to take care of the homes and how to please men. Such beliefs are internalised by both girls and boys. Marriage is, therefore, looked at as a prestige.

The central region of Malawi is mostly occupied by the Chewa tribe, which is culturally matrilineal (descent being traced through the mother). Women are seen as custodians of tradition (Gilman & Henderson 2004, p.23); children are looked at as wealth. Therefore, girls are forced into early marriages for the propagation of a man's name '*mwini mbumba*'<sup>4</sup>. It is believed that if these girls are educated, the social fabric will be disrupted which in the end will lead to loss of culture and identity. It is the responsibility of this uncle or brother to make all important decisions in the family. Hence, though the Chewa tribe is matrilineal, it is still male dominated. The women face oppression because they have to do all the work in household, and they have to be silent.

Since the girls marry at a very tender age, such households are usually very poor. The women then are trapped in a circle of poverty which is passed on from one generation to the next. This, then, aggravates the spread of HIV/AIDS because due to poverty, women are forced into extra-marital affairs in search of material and financial support. It should be noted that 60% of 960,000 adults living with HIV/AIDS in Malawi are women (NSO, 2004). The women provide care to those suffering from HIV/AIDS and as a result fail to engage in meaningful development activities. In addition, some of them do contract the HIV virus due to lack of sanitary equipment like gloves. Culturally, the use of gloves in the villages is negatively perceived as lack of real love for the patient and stigmatization. HIV/AIDS has contributed to the increase of widows in the area and female headed households. Thus, women are pushed to the margins of the society resulting in retarded development. These

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<sup>4</sup> Mwini mbumba is a brother or an uncle of a woman. He has the responsibility to look after his sister's children. He has the responsibility to make all the decisions in his sister's marriage. He is the one who receives the dowry.

problems prompted me to explore the role of Nkhoma Synod and EEW project in empowering women in Kalolo area, in Lilongwe district, Malawi.

### **1.10 A brief overview of the EEW project**

The EEW project was launched in 2012. The project is targeting about 402 women. It is being implemented in three Synods of the C.C.A.P namely: Blantyre in the south, Nkhoma in the centre and Livingstonia in the north. Nkhoma Synod is implementing the project in Malenga area, Ntchisi district and Kalolo area, Lilongwe district. The focus of this study is Kalolo area.

The main goal of the project is to contribute to the progressive attainment of inclusive, accountable and responsive governance in Malawi. It also aims at enhancing legal and policy frameworks for furthering poor/vulnerable women's financial inclusion and socio-economic empowerment. The project aims to achieve this goal through the attainment of responsive service delivery. The project is for three years (2012-2015). During the time of research (2014), the project was in its second year.

### **1.11 The scope of the study**

The key question for this study is; How are faith based projects empowering women in Malawi? The case of the EEW project, in Kalolo area, Nkhoma Synod Church. From this question, the main aim of the research is to investigate how Nkhoma Synod Church and the EEW project are empowering women in Kalolo area. This aim is supported by three questions;

- What is the situation of women in Kalolo area?
- What is the role of Nkhoma Synod Church and EEW project in empowering the women in Kalolo area?
- How is the term empowerment understood in the EEW project?

The specific objectives are;

- To explore the situation of women in Kalolo area.
- To investigate how Nkhoma Synod Church and EEW project is empowering women in Kalolo area.
- To find out how empowerment is understood in the EEW project.

### **1.12 Motivation, relevance and significance of the study**

I am interested in being a voice for other women. Being a woman raised up in a Malawian village, once married and a mother of four girls, I have ever strived and attained positions of power. This study is relevant because it will encourage other women to take an initiative for the improvement of their own lives. The women need to come forward and do something about their lives. There is power in unity, so when the women cooperate and work together, more can be achieved unlike when each of them was working individually. Thus, the circles of poverty can be broken if the women team up and work together.

### **1.13 Position of the researcher**

As a researcher, my role was firstly to formulate the research questions. I was also the one conducting and guiding the interviews. I also did some observation. In addition, I am a Malawian woman who was raised up in a Malawian village. As such, I could understand the problems these women were going through. I am the author of this research. This study therefore, is the product of my interaction with the respondents.

### **1.14 Design of the study**

This paper has got five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research questions, aim and objectives. The contextual background is also given in this chapter. On the other hand, chapter 2 contains the theoretical frame work and why I chose to use gender and empowerment theories. The research methods are covered in chapter 3 with a description of techniques, procedures and reasons for using particular techniques. It is chapter 4 that presents the findings of the study. The analysis and interpretation of the findings are covered in chapter 5 in relation to the theories. Thereafter, I will present conclusions, recommendations, references and finally appendices.

## **Chapter 2, Conceptual and theoretical framework**

In order to answer the research questions, I will use gender theories and empowerment theories. Gender theories will help us to explain the situation of the women in Kalolo area. It is also useful in this study to identify the conditions under which change for the women can occur. The empowerment theories are useful to make us analyse what kind of empowerment the EEW project and the church is providing to the women.

### **2.1 Gender**

Gender is defined by patterns of learnt behaviour considered appropriate either for women alone or men alone (Lobber 1994, p. 101). Gender is constantly created and recreated through human interactions. Every society classifies people as ‘boy’ and ‘girl’, ‘men’ and ‘women’, constructs similarities and differences among them, and then assigns them different roles and responsibilities. Thus gender like culture is a human production that depends on everyone constantly doing gender. Gender theory will be used in this study because it will assist in shedding more light to the fact that men and women have different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs (ibid).

It is important to distinguish between sex and gender in order to emphasise that gender is cultural rather than biological (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2008). Sex denotes females and males depending on biological features such as chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and physical features. It describes the biological differences between men and women, which are universal and determined by birth (Zachariassen 2012, p. 89). On the other hand, gender is complicated and difficult to define as it is not the same in different contexts. It also varies within the same society. It is socially constructed. Therefore, what might be gender issues in Malawi may not mean the same thing in Norway.

Gender theory does not define gender as an individualized role that is learnt in childhood and relatively stable thereafter, but as a system of inequality that is created and recreated in daily experience (Potuchek 1992, p.549). It examines the social construction of gender categories through system of boundaries that delineate male and female, masculine and feminine (Gerson and Peiss, 1995). Gender theory emphasises the continuing construction and reconstruction of gender (Potechek 1992, p.553). Thus, gender theory pays more attributes to adult experiences and circumstances. There are different types of gender theories such as gender differences theory, gender inequality theory, gender oppression theory and structural oppression theory just to mention a few. This study will only employ three gender theories;

gender differences theory, gender inequality theory and gender oppression theory to analyse the situation of the women in Kalolo area and the contribution of the EEW project

### **2.1.1 Gender differences theory**

According to Judith Lobber, a social construction feminist, with some ideas of postmodernism and queer theories gender is a social institution. As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives (Lobber 1994, p.101). Gender provides human societies with predictable division of labour, a designated allocation of scarce goods and assigned responsibilities for men and women. The societal values and their systematic transmission to new members legitimate leadership. Gender is also a process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. As part of the stratification system that ranks these statuses unequally, gender is a major building block in the social structures built on these unequal statuses. In social interaction throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways and thus simultaneously constructing and maintaining the gender order (ibid). As part of a stratification system, gender ranks men above women of the same race and class (Lobber 1994, p. 102). The devalued genders have less power, prestige and economic rewards than the valued genders. This separation reinforces gendered differences, identity and ways of thinking and behaving (Cosser, 1986).

Mpyana Fulgence Nyengere (2004), a native of Democratic Republic of Congo, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counselling at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, defines the term gender as cultural categories that shape human experiences on the basis of the physiological marks of sex. Thus gender denotes men and women depending on social roles, behaviour or identity (Mari, 2012). These roles and behaviours are socially constructed, appropriated by a given society. Gender refers to these roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in families, societies and cultures (Zachariassen 2012, p. 89). The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, abilities and likely behaviour of both women and men that is; femininity and masculinity. These gender roles and expectations are socially constructed and learnt.

The social construction of gender begins with the assignment of the genital look at birth (Flore, 2012). After a child is classified as boy or girl, parents become part of this process as they start dressing them with colours that identify their gender, for example, pink for girls and blue for boys. As the children grow up, they start learning how they are supposed to act. Therefore, an individual is not born a woman/man, but rather becomes a woman/man through

a process of socialisation (Mari, 2012). Masculinity and femininity are thus thought to be products of nurture or how individuals are brought up. It is the social forces that either have a causal role in bringing gendered individuals into existence or shape the way people are qua men or women. However, gender norms are problematic in that gender behaviour conveniently fits with the reinforcements of women's subordination so that the women are socialised into subordinate roles. The women learn to be passive, ignorant, submissive and emotional helpmates for men. Since these roles are learnt, more equal societies can be created by 'unlearning' the social roles.

The gender differences perspective examines how women's location in and experience of social situations differ from men's. Cultural feminists look to the different values associated with womanhood and femininity as a reason why men and women experience the social world differently ([www.sociology.about.com/od/](http://www.sociology.about.com/od/) accessed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, 2015). It is believed that the different roles assigned to women and men within institutions better explain gender differences, including the sexual division of labour in the household. Gender differentiation focuses on how women have been marginalized and defined as 'other' in patriarchal societies. Women are then seen as objects and are denied opportunities for self realisation. Most of the values and expectations for women's behaviour have been articulated in relation to men rather than independently (Lengermann & Wallace, 1985). Social structures such as avenues of access to resources, keep women in segregated and subordinate roles (Lobber, 1994). In many vital respects women are segregated from the world of men. The women's delegated work and traditional responsibilities frequently confine them to the domestic sphere (Benard, 1981).

Anne-Marie Mpundu has also noted that this is a big issue in Congolese context. She has introduced the phrase 'the woman with six hands' to describe the reality of women's excessive work based on the unequal distribution of work between women and men in the Congolese families. Mpundu wonders how with such busy schedules at the end of the day a woman can have energy and time for her own education and growth. She asks whether with such schedules and tasks a woman can have time to read, listen to the radio or watch TV. The answer she gives is that these are believed to be activities for men. The women find it difficult to engage even in leisure time for their own enjoyment, growth and self-fulfilment. Mpundu further argues that the women put their families before themselves and, in the process lose themselves in the family.



Gender differences theory is relevant to this study as it will shed light on how Kalolo society has assigned different responsibilities to men and women. Also, the theory will help us to see the differences between men and women responsibilities in this area as regards to who does what in the home, community and society at large. Further, gender differences theory is crucial for analysing how the women and men in Kalolo area have internalised these differences as prescribed by the society and how the women are affected by these differences.

### **2.1.2 Gender inequality theory**

Gender inequality theories recognize that women's location in and experience of, social situations are not only different, but unequal ([www.sociology.about.com/od/](http://www.sociology.about.com/od/), accessed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, 2015). The argument put forward by feminists is that women have the same capacity as men for moral reasoning and agency. It is the patriarchy, particularly the sexist patterning of the division of labour that has historically denied women the opportunity to express and practice reasoning. The women have been isolated to the private sphere of the household making them having no voice in the public sphere. However, even when the women enter into the public sphere, they are still expected to manage the private sphere and take care of the household duties and rearing children. The liberal feminists point out that marriage is a sight of gender inequality. The women do not mostly benefit from being married as men do. Indeed, married women have higher levels of stress than unmarried women and unmarried men (ibid). According to liberal feminists, the division of labour in both public and private spheres need to be altered in order for the women to achieve equality. This can be done through women empowerment. Ruth Besha, in her research conducted in Tanzania in the early 1990s concluded that unequal gender relations still exist in African societies. She writes that there is still resistance to women's efforts to transform these unbalanced patterns of relating and dealing with people across gender lines exemplified by unequal distribution of work in families. Besha, (1996) observes that economic and social factors are the challenges that hinder real progress in women's efforts to bring about change.

On the other hand, gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realising their full rights and for contributing to, and benefitting from economic, social, cultural and political development (Zacharissen 2012, p. 90). Gender equality is therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of women and men, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being partners in their home, their community and their society. For example, in the Malawian context, engaging in economic activities is stereotyped as a male domain and because it is believed that the man is the bread winner for

the family. If a woman engages in business, she is labelled as a prostitute, because women are stereotyped to be economic dependants. If the women can be allowed to engage in business, then both men and women will be economically sound. Therefore, there will be gender equality since there will be an equal presentation of men and women in the market place. Similarly, gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women. Hence, equity is the means and equality is the result.

I chose to use gender inequality theory in this study because it is crucial for us to see what inequalities are there between men and women in Kalolo area and Malawi as a whole socially, economically, culturally, politically, religiously as well as in areas of education. Thus, gender inequality theory will help us to analyse the representation of men and women in different spheres of life including decision making positions. This will in turn give a clue on how Malawi has been affected either positively or negatively due to gender inequality. Gender equality would be beneficial to Malawi as a country because talents of both men and women would be used thereby maximising human capacity.

### **2.1.3 Gender oppression theory**

Gender oppression theories go further than gender inequality theory and gender differences theory. They argue that women are not only different and unequal to men, but that they are actively oppressed, subordinated and even abused by men (Lobber, 1994). Power is the key variable in the two main theories of gender oppression. Psychoanalytical feminism and radical feminism attempt to explain power relations between men and women. They feel that conscious' calculation cannot fully explain the production and reproduction of patriarchy. On the other hand, radical feminists argue that being a woman is good, but that this is not acknowledged in patriarchal societies where women are oppressed (ibid). Riphenburg makes a similar observation in the Zimbabwean context. She observes that there are cultural preferences for male pre-eminence in the family in the Zimbabwean society. She points out that the male has ultimate decision-making power. He controls all forms of property including his wife, who in some groups is regarded as the man's property. Riphenburg notes that the male-dominated structures are desired and this justifies the male domination of family relations. This means that families which are headed by females are viewed as lacking and an abomination. Riphenburg notes that this value is held despite the fact that female headed families and single parents are on the rise in Zimbabwe. The problem is that the society views a female-headed family as a result of divorce or unmarried status as a social failure, labelling such women as deviants and outcasts in the society.

In these paragraphs, I have presented gender theories. Gender analysis explores these differences so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the different needs of both men and women. It also facilitates the strategic use of distinct knowledge and skills possessed by men and women.

Gender oppression theory is relevant to this study to help us understand what power relations exist between men and women in Kalolo area. It will further shed more light on how women are affected by these power relations. The other importance is that gender theories will shed light on how gender differences, inequalities and oppression can be negotiated within individual relations to permit the possibility of change towards equality (Coltrane & Shih 2010, p. 797). I will use gender inequality theory, gender differences and gender oppression to explain the situation of women in Kalolo area. In the paragraphs that follow, I will present empowerment. This is due to the fact that empowerment theory will let us understand what sort of empowerment the church and the EEW project is offering to the women. It will also help us analyse whether the women feel that they are being empowered and how empowerment is understood in the EEW project.

### **2.2.1 Empowerment**

Empowerment is about people, both women and men taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance (Zachariassen, 2012). Zachariassen argues that no one can empower another, but that institutions can only facilitate and support processes that nurture self-empowerment of individuals or groups. It is a multidimensional concept basing on both at individual and group level. Gutierrez et. al (2000) defines empowerment as a process of increasing personal, interpersonal or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their own life situation.

Personal power can be described as experiencing oneself as an effective and capable person. On the other hand, interpersonal power involves the ability to influence others with social power that is derived from one's social status or role, interpersonal skills or credibility. Some of these powers are based on factors such as race or class, whereas other bases of power can be developed by attainment of social skills or new social positions (French and Raven, 1968). I will structure this section into two main parts; namely, empowerment from a sociological understanding and secondly, empowerment from a theological understanding which can also be considered to be diaconal empowerment. I will mainly use the sociological perspective to

explain the role of the EEW project and the diaconal empowerment will be used to explain the role of the church in the EEW project.

### **2.2.2 Empowerment from a sociological perspective**

In this study, I will mainly use Joanna Rowlands (1997), a community and peace activist and then a feminist in the late 1970s. She examines the various meanings given to the concept of empowerment. She further examines ways in which power can be expressed, in personal relationships and in wider social interactions. Rowlands understands empowerment as participation and individual's ability to maximise their opportunities available to them without constraints. Another researcher who uses empowerment is Wyndow et.al. In her PhD thesis, she conducted a research in 2013, in gender equality and democracy. Wyndow has a background in community sector at Curtin University. She investigated the role of women in democratic development over the last 30 years in 180 countries. Wyndow bases empowerment on the Beijing Declaration. She argues that women's rights are human rights. This renders women with an inherent dignity. Similarly, for the women, the term empowerment has different meaning in different countries. As such, what may mean empowerment in Malawi may not have the same meaning in other countries. Empowerment may also vary between women within the same country depending upon their class, education or urban/rural orientation (Kumari (ed) 1999, p.42).

Therefore, the definition and strategies employed for the empowerment of women differ according to the situation in which women within each locality find themselves in. More specifically, women empowerment will differ according to developmental needs of each country. The other factor for the difference will be how favourable the climate for change happens to be. It is for this reason that I have used empowerment theories from different parts of the world. However, the hope and expectation for empowerment is the removal of differences, disparities and inequalities between men and women. Thus, women empowerment is expected to bring about equality for women so that they can participate in all spheres of life, whether it is economical, social, cultural, religious and personal (ibid).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for action set on an agenda for the empowerment of women, and reaffirmed women rights as human rights (Wyndow et.al. 2013, p.36). This document stresses that the empowerment of women and the equalization of men and women's rights are of critical concerns for the achievement of political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples (United Nations (UN), 1995). Thus, Wyndow et.al, (2013) has given commonalities in different definitions of women

empowerment, stressing the relationship between a woman's individual agency and the micro-social structures or institutions that enhance or restrict women's ability to exercise the agency. Therefore, empowerment can be understood as a process, where over time an individual's situation improves for the better (Rowlands, 1995).

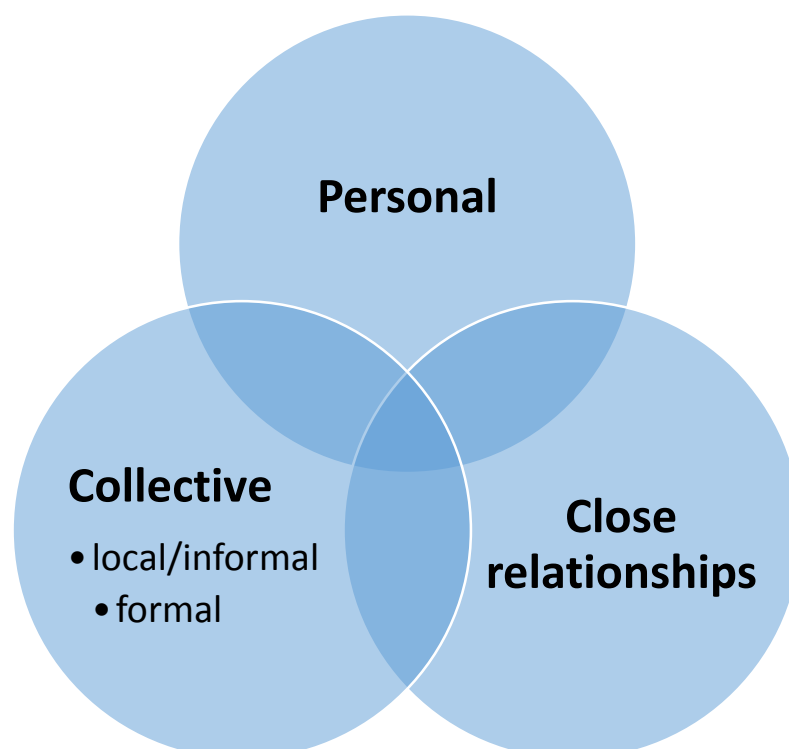
Since the UN Decade for women (1975-85) international strategies and conventions, such as the 'Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women' (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) have created a strong mandate to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment is an essential component of development and democracy (Wyndow et.al, 2013). The preamble from the Universal Declaration of Rights (1948) declares that democracy is based on the "freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems, and their full participation in all aspects of their lives." Therefore, if women are unable to express themselves, are poor and are unable to participate fully, it means women's ability to shape their own lives and that of society is limited (Wyndow et.al, 2013).

Empowerment is the key to meaningful development (Rowlands, 1997). Empowerment can be understood differently. In order to investigate how Nkhoma Synod Church and the EEW project are empowering women in Kalolo area, Rowland's definition will be used. In order to understand the word empowerment, there is need to understand its root word, 'power'. Power can be defined as ability of an individual or a group to get another person or group to do something. Power can be exercised at different levels such as the household, village, community or national. Sometimes power can be expressed in extreme form of violence or other forms of interactions, for example extra resources. The following are different forms of power;

- Power over: this is controlling power, which may be responded to with compliance, resistance or manipulation
- Power to: this is generative or productive power, which creates new possibilities and actions without domination.
- Power with: this is a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles a problem together.
- Power from within: this is the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self acceptance and self respect which extends in turn to respect others as equals. (Rowlands 1997, p. 13).

What is empowerment then? From the definition of ‘power over’ empowerment means bringing in people who are outside the decision making process to the centre. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision making in the economic sphere as well. Individuals are empowered when they maximise their opportunities available to them without constraints. Within the generative ‘power to’ and ‘power with’ empowerment is concerned with the process by which people become aware of their own interests and how these interests relate to the interests of others, so that they both participate from a position of greater strength in decision making and actually influence such decisions ( Rowlands 1997, p.14). From a feminist perspective ‘power over’ entails the understanding of the dynamics of oppression and the internalised oppression. Empowerment is more than just participation in decision making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. The feminist understanding also includes ‘power to’ and ‘power from within’. This involves giving scope to the full range of human abilities and potential.

On the other hand, society ascribes particular sets of abilities to social categories of people (ibid). Empowerment must involve undoing social construction, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act. Rowlands (1997) has come up with three dimensions of empowerment as personal, close relationships and collective. See the figure below; adopted from Rowlands 1997, page 14.



From this picture, empowerment operates within three dimensions; namely, personal, relational and collective. At a personal level, an individual develops a sense of self confidence and resists effects of internalised oppression. On the other hand, at the relational dimension, individuals develop the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relationship as they interact with other people. Empowerment also takes place collectively whereby people work together in order to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have done alone. This model is relevant to Malawi and to this study in particular. It will give a clue on what form of empowerment is taking place at an individual level, relational and collectively as the women are working in groups. This is important because it will assist in what type of strategy should be employed in order to achieve the required results. In the following paragraphs, empowerment will be examined from the theological point of view.

### **2.2.3 Empowerment from a theological (diaconal) perspective**

Theologically, empowerment refers to the biblical understanding of creation. Every human being is created in the image of God, with capabilities and abilities, independent of their apparent social situation (Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 2009, p.45). Thus, all human beings are God's own image, whether male or female (Genesis 1- 2). Human Rights claim that all members of the human family have an inherent dignity that cannot be segregated from humankind. Women's inclusion in church and society is rooted in this theology of creation and the sacraments such as the Holy Communion (Kessel 2014, p. 50). Both men and women are baptised into the body of Christ and invited to share the Holy Communion. God bestows gifts to both genders by the Holy Spirit for service in church and society. God empowers people to act in the world and makes them responsible for the creation. Diaconal empowerment seeks to initiate processes which in development language are called the building of human capacities (Kessel 2014, p. 49). It refers to making people aware of their God-given and inherited, abilities and talents given to them to be expressed in ordinary life and in the church. Such empowerment aims to build self-awareness and human capacities so that they are able to be agents of transformation. It should be born in mind that transformation and empowerment are not successive processes in that the one causes the other, but rather are interrelated processes (LWF 2009, p.9).

According to ecumenical diakonia, diaconal work implies to experience processes of shift of power on various levels, spiritually and between people. The primary model for the transfer of power is God who empowers the people (Kessel 2014, p.49). Power is passed on to enable action. When God appointed Moses to address Pharaoh in Egypt and bring out the enslaved

Israelites, Moses negotiated with God (Exodus 3-4). Moses argued that he was incompetent and unable to accomplish the task because he was not eloquent and slow of speech. God then promised to help Moses and Aaron to speak and to empower them for the task (Exodus 4:15). When Jesus appointed the disciples to make disciples of all nations, it was followed by a promise of Jesus' presence (Matthew 28:20). Jesus promised that they would receive power by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). When the day of Pentecost came, God intervened in the life of the disciples and infused in them the Spirit. The apostles were enabled to speak in different languages and were empowered to preach the gospel to all nations (Acts 2). Empowerment is a shift of power from the divine to the humankind.

This is to enable the people to claim liberation, inclusion, space and voice contrary to exclusion, confinement and silence (Kessel 2014, p.49). Therefore, empowerment implies to share power. From a feminist perspective, Kessel says that power is about sharing but also about controlling. Kessel argues that since power penetrates life in various ways, there is need to look at empowerment from a feminist perspective. She says that empowerment is a transformative potential of power within, rooted in the self-understanding that can inspire women at the grassroots level to identify and challenge gender inequalities in the home and community. She emphasises that, from a feminist perspective, emphasis should be on the inclusion and mutual collective grassroots' participation and on the power to collaborate with others as a means to control resources, to determine agendas and to make decisions (Kessel 2014, p. 53).

In summary, from a theological perspective, diaconal empowerment means sharing of power from the divine source to humankind through the works of the Holy Spirit. It is also sharing power among human beings as God has shared it with them. From a sociological point of view, empowerment is bringing the people at the margins to the centre to enable them to participate in all spheres of life, economic, cultural, social, religious as well as personal. I will use empowerment from a sociological point of view to analyse the role of the EEW project in the empowerment of women in Kalolo area. The diaconal perspective will mainly be used to explain the role of the church in EEW project in the empowerment of women.



### **Chapter 3; Methodology**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how the church of Nkhoma Synod and EEW project is empowering women in Kalolo area, Lilongwe, Malawi. This entailed an investigation of the role of the church and the role of EEW on one hand. On the other hand, it involved an exploration of the situation of the women in the area. The specific research question was formulated in chapter 1 and it is here restated: How are faith based projects empowering women in Malawi? The Case of (EEW) project, in Kalolo area, Nkhoma Synod Church. The research question is supported by three questions;

- What is the situation of the women in Kalolo area?
- What is the role of Nkhoma Synod and EEW project in empowering women in Kalolo area?
- How is empowerment understood in EEW project?

This chapter presents the research design, data collection and data analysis procedures that could best address the research questions. The chapter will also include a discussion of the research methods, the selection process of participants and the materials which were used in the investigation. A summary of ethical considerations will conclude this chapter.

#### **3.1 Quantitative vs. qualitative**

The approach of this study is that of a qualitative research. It entails the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the people under study (Bryman 2012, p.399). The purpose of qualitative researchers is to gain insight into a topic. It provides depth and detailed information about a phenomenon by looking deeper than analysing ranks and counts as it is the case in a quantitative research. Qualitative method allows the researcher to record attitudes, feelings and behaviours. Due to the openness and unstructured or semi-structured interviews, interviewees are encouraged to expand their responses which can open up new topics not initially considered ([www.archive.learninghigher.ac.uk/](http://www.archive.learninghigher.ac.uk/) , 15 March, 2015). The research question of this study could not be answered by applying quantitative methods because it aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by obtaining information from the women, church representatives and EEW representatives. The study also required to understand attitudes and feelings of both men and women about the situation of women in the society. Therefore, quantitative method could not be applied to answer the research question of the study. Although it is difficult to quantify qualitative data and less easy to generalise, it can reveal valuable attitudes and perspectives that can hardly be accessed through quantitative approach (Bryman 2012, 400-408).

The explanatory character of qualitative research permits the gathering of new information through intensive interviews. Since field work is done without predetermined categories of analysis, qualitative research provides depth and detailed data. It provides an understanding of the patterns provided by the participants. This is in contrast to quantitative methods, which can statistically measure and evaluate a great number of people to a limited set of questions and standardized answer categories. A qualitative study can yet never reach the same breath due to reduced number of cases (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the question about which method to apply is not about whether the method is right or wrong, but rather where it takes you. Qualitative methods discover partially, and after this study, there will still be more to study (Kessel 2014, p.24).

### **3.2 A case study design**

A research design represents a structure that gives the execution of research method and analysis of the subsequent data (Bryman 2012, p.45). There are different types of research designs, longitudinal design, cross-sectional design, case study design and comparative design (Bryman 2012, pp50-75). This study is a qualitative case study design. A research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A case can either be a single school, a single community, a single organization or a single family. A case study is convenient for a theoretical analysis (Bryman 2012, p.71). This is done so that it can be measured how well the data supports the theoretical arguments that are generated and whether or not there is a demonstration of connections between different conceptual ideas that are developed out of data. Although the issue of generalization is difficult with a case study, much can be learnt from the detailed description given in the case (Stake, 2005). The description can create an image, a vivid portrait of excellent teaching. It can therefore, be argued that the general lies in the particular, and what we learn in a particular case can therefore, be transferred to similar situations (Erickson, 1981). Hence, it is the reader, not the researcher who determines what can apply to her/his context (Stake, 2005). As such, it is the readers who will determine what is applicable to their contexts from the particulars of Kalolo area.

### **Research paradigm**

Social sciences like the natural sciences have both a descriptive and prescriptive side. On the one hand, the field is about explanations, methods, empirical arguments, theories and hypotheses (Bryman 2012, pp. 20-26). This actually occurs in the social science literature. Hence, extensive knowledge of several social researches is required in order to formulate

analysis of the social sciences that corresponds appropriately to scientists' practice. For example, observation is one of the methods used in the natural sciences for gathering data, which is the same in the social sciences. In this case, social sciences are related to natural sciences. On the other hand, the field is epistemic. It is concerned with the idea that scientific theories are put forward as true or probable, and justified on empirical and theoretical.

Epistemology holds that the goal of social science is to provide interpretation of human conduct within the context of culturally specific meaningful arrangement. The interpreter should tease out the meanings underlying a particular complex behaviour (ibid). For example, only through observation or interviews I cannot tell why the women in Kalolo area are poor, unless I give an interpretation.

The model applied in this study is denominated as constructionism. It asserts that knowledge is socially constructed and may change depending on circumstances (Bryman 2012, p.33). As such, meaning is contingent on human practices and constructed in and out through human interaction. This implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction, but that they are in constant revision. This position challenges the positivist view that categories such as organizations and culture are pre-given and therefore confronts social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning (ibid). Hence, the situation of the women in Kalolo area is a result of social construction and it can be changed.

### **3.3 Sampling**

A sample is a segment of the population that is selected for investigation. It is a sub-set of a population. The method of selection may be based on a probability or non-probability approach (Bryman 2012, p.187). Therefore, the process of selecting a sample is what may be referred to as sampling. In the paragraphs that follow I will present my sample size, the type of my sample and the procedures which I undertook to come up with my sample.

Whereas quantitative research works with random probability sampling, there are no specific rules for the determination of sample sizes in qualitative research (Bryman 2012, p.416). The sample size rather depends on considerations of the researcher related to the purpose of the study, the usefulness and credibility of the selected cases and on availability of time and resources (Sayre, 2001). Qualitative research generally permits the inquiry of a few selected cases, but in great depth and with attention to detailed context (Bryman 2012, p. 401). The depth then of a qualitative study is enhanced. Thus, the number of people interviewed or observed in a qualitative study is limited.

In qualitative research sampling revolves around the notion of purposive sampling. It is a non-probability sampling (Bryman 2012, p. 418). The goal for the purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that have been posed. The main idea is that the research questions should give an indication of what units need to be sampled. The research questions are likely to provide guidelines as to what categories of people need to be the focus of attention. To answer the research question for this study, church representatives, EEW employees and women who are directly involved in the project were sampled.

The sampling of areas and then participants is a common strategy in qualitative research (Bryman 2012, p.417). In this study, it was important for me to study how the situation of women is constructed. Since my research question implied that the construction of women situation draws on cultural resources, it was important to explore the social setting of the area. There were two levels of sampling in this study; context case (Kalolo area) and then the participants (ibid). Nonetheless, the study had some limitations. Some of these limitations were as follows;

- Limited time
- Financial constraints
- Geographical restrictions
- Limited number of interviewers

### **3.4 Collecting the empirical data**

The time frame for the research was two months, between July and August, 2014, with no budgets available. The research was also geographically limited to Kalolo area, challenged by transportation as some of the places were very remote and difficult to reach. I had to hire bicycles to go distances of sometimes 15-20 kilometres.

The study sample consisted of church representatives, EEW employees and women. The age range was between 27-58 years old. These participants were chosen because they were directly involved in EEW project. Therefore, the participation in this study was based on the experience which the participants had, as regards, to EEW project. In total, I interviewed twelve people, seven women and five men. I conducted four individual interviews and four group interviews. Therefore, in total I conducted eight interviews.

### **3.4 Data collection techniques**

Data collection techniques are methods for collecting the necessary information from the field. The commonest methods for data collection in qualitative research are interviews, observation and review of documents (Bryman 2012, pp. 431-518). In my study, I mainly used interviews. However, these interviews were supported by participant observation and some documents from EEW projects. In the paragraphs that follow, I will present these techniques and how I conducted them.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

The interview is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (Bryman 2012, p.469). Interviews are explained as a way of bringing in the multiple views of people, and a method of maintaining and generating conversations on topics under study. The interviews therefore, are an instrument to nail deeper into the structures that border the spheres of issues (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). It is a method of seeing or rather a state for seeing everything. The flexibility of qualitative interviews makes them attractive. Although the process of interviewing, the transcription of interviews and the analysis of transcripts are time consuming, they can be more readily accommodated into researcher's personal lives (Bryman 2012, p.469).

There are three types of interviews, namely; structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. This study employed semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured form of interviews, a researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered. This is called an interview guide, (which I have attached in the appendix) but the interviewee has a great deal of freedom in how to reply. The questions may not exactly follow the way they are outlined on the guide. Questions which are not included on the guide may also be asked. Since the goal of this study is to understand the research topic from the perspective of the people under study, it was necessary to employ the semi-structured interviews.

#### **3.4.2 Observation**

Qualitative research is conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a 'field' or life situation (Bryman 2012, p.431). These situations are reflective of everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations. The researchers' role is to gain a holistic overview of the context under study. Observation as a method may imply watching behaviour, listen to what is said in conversation between others and field workers, and asking questions. Due to the fact that organizations to be observed are either open or closed, observation is categorized into overt and covert observation. A covert observer does not

disclose that s/he is a researcher. This has got the advantage of easing the problem of negotiation for access to organizations or to explain why s/he wants to intrude into peoples' lives and make them objects. However, it is not always that a researcher is purely a covert or overt observer (Bryman 2012, p.435) as s/he may sometimes display characteristics of both. This is what I did, I gained permission from the church representative to attend the training session, but the women did not know that I was a researcher.

Observation as a method has got an advantage in that it provides direct access to the social phenomena under study. Instead of relying on some kind of self-report, such as asking people what they would do in a certain situation, the researcher actually sees and records the behaviour in the situation. For example, when the Trainer of Trainers (TOT) arrived, it was easy to see how the women welcomed him rather than asking what they would do in such a situation. Another advantage of observation is that it can be done differently thereby yielding diverse types of data. Further, observation provides a permanent record of events or behaviour since all observation entails some form of recording. Such recordings allow further analysis of subsequent comparisons across time or location to be carried out. Observation also has an advantage of complementarily with other methods through a process of triangulation (Bryman 2012, p.392). On the other hand, observation is time consuming and in some cases the researcher may be biased. This is because the researcher may record not actually what happens but what s/he wants to see or merely thought is seen. Nonetheless, since my interest was in the interactions and behaviour, observation was the best method to complement the data of the interviews with.

### **3.4.3 Documents**

Documents offer a source of data which are both quick to collect and contain rich materials ([www.essourceresearch.org/](http://www.essourceresearch.org/), 20 March, 2015). Documents influence how we see the world, the people in it and the people's actions. Documents are the instances of what participants are actually doing, without being dependent on being asked by researchers. Also, the texts are usually accessible and not always dependent on ethical constraints. Since documents can quickly be gathered, they encourage the researcher to begin early analysis. Bryman, (2012) categorises documents into two main types; personal documents such as diaries and letters on one hand, and official documents such as annual reports, mission statements, press releases and advertisements. In this study, official documents were used such as the EEW 2012 report, the EEW framework and some scripts used by the TOTs when carrying out the training sessions.

### **3. 4. Content analysis**

This study employed a content analysis. Content analysis seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories. Patton, (2002), says that the idea of content analysis focuses on three aspects;

- Confirm what is already known
- Identifying misconceptions
- Discovering important things that have not yet been illuminated

Content analysis is a qualitative data reduction and categorisation based on core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). It serves to identify the most important units. One of the most important instruments of content or thematic analysis is coding (Patton, 2002). The data is seen as an instrument by which analysis can access the context of what has been said or written. The core meanings found throughout such context are called patterns/theme. The researcher codes text in these themes. Essentially, what is being sought is a categorization of the phenomenon of interest. Content analysis is a number of procedures aimed at the production of an analytical meta-text in which the actual analysed data is presented in a transformed way (ibid).

This is a process of breaking down and reducing the text into manageable units of analysis. The researcher reads the whole text over and over again. In the course of reading, the researcher needs to identify key words to form meaning units, which can later be classified into categories. Coding can either be done manually or using a computer (Bryman 2012, pp 296-299). In this study, coding was done manually since the data was not so huge. The data was structured and categorized into four main themes; and then it was coded into smaller units of meaning that could be related to the structure.

Content analysis has got an advantage in that it is a transparent research method. The coding procedures and the sampling procedures can be clearly set out so that follow up studies are feasible (Bryman 2012, p. 304). Content analysis is also unobtrusive method since it entails participants in the study having to take the researcher into account. Although it is sometimes almost impossible to devise coding manuals that do not entail some interpretation, a researcher can draw on his/her everyday knowledge as participants in a common culture in order to code material that he/she is confronted with (ibid)

### **3.6. Ethical consideration**

In order to conduct this research, I obtained an approval from Church and Society, Nkhoma Synod. Full explanation of the study was given to the subjects regarding some demands of the study and how the study might benefit them. This was done in order to get an informed consent and thoughtful decision regarding the subject's participation in the study. Verbal consent was obtained from all the subjects. Letters were used instead of names to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The tapes which were used for recording were accessible only to me as the researcher and safely locked up in a cupboard.



## **Chapter 4, presentation of findings**

In this chapter, I will present my empirical findings which were collected through interviews, participant observation and review of some documents. In section 4.1, I will present the hierarchical structure of the EEW project and the roles played at each hierarchy. This is important to enable us see how women are represented in positions of decision making in the EEW project. Section 4.2 contains examples from the project which I got through participant observation and review of some documents. I have structured the empirical data from the interviews into 4 themes; namely, the situation of the women in Kalolo area, the understanding of the concept of empowerment in the EEW project, the role of the EEW project and the role of the church. Following the group of people who were interviewed, each theme will be further divided into three sections; the voice of the women, the voice of the church and the voice of the EEW employees. I will conclude the chapter with a short summary.

### **4.1 The EEW project**

In order to understand the findings, I first briefly give a short description of the project. The EEW project was launched in October, 2012 (EEW report, 2012). The Danish Church Aid (DCA) with its partners Church and Society Programme (CSP), of the C.C.A.P Synod of Nkhoma, Livingstonia and Blantyre started implementing the project through inclusive and accountable governance in Malawi. Nkhoma Synod is implementing the project in Malenga area in Ntchisi district and Kalolo area, in Lilongwe district. My case study is Kalolo area. The project is for three years, from 2012-2015. During the time of research, the project was in its second year. This was important because by then, all the interviewees had an experience of the EEW project. After the DCA together with its partners conducted a thorough gender analysis, it found out that;

- Women are excluded from all spheres of life.
- There are higher levels of illiteracy among women than men
- There are high levels of poverty among women
- Women have weak linkages and access to markets
- Women are not economically empowered
- There are high levels of gender based human right violation
- There is a lack of specific development programmes that target groups like women.

The purpose of the project is to ensure that the poor women are being informed and organized so that they attain economic and social empowerment. It also aims at effective women participation in local decision making processes and structures. Another aim of the project is that partner Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the organized women groups should be able to influence policies, strategies and allocations on gender equality and economic empowerment of women at local and national levels (EEW report, 2012).

According to one of the church representatives, the project is targeting 402 women. The chain of command starts with two EEW representatives, followed by the programme director, who is a representative of church and society, Nkhoma Synod, then two supervisors, after that, comes the TOTs. The TOTs are responsible for training the Community Basic Educators (CBOs) who in turn go in the fields to train the women. 93 men have been incorporated in the women groups to work together with the women. The task of these men is to act as a bridge between men and women in the promotion of women's rights. These men have been called the 'male champions.' The table below shows this hierarchical structure of the EEW project and the representation of men and women;

<b>position</b>	<b>Representation of men</b>	<b>Representation of women</b>	<b>Role of the position</b>
EEW representatives	2	-	Donor of the project
Programme director	1	-	administrator of the project
Programme supervisors	1	1	Supervising the TOTs in the field
Trainer of Trainers (TOTs)	2	-	Conducting trainings for the CBOs
Community Based Educators	6	12	Reaching out to the women at the grassroots
Male champions	93	-	Incorporated in the women's groups to encourage the women

Targeted women	-	402	Mobilized into groups to engage in various economic activities.
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This structure reveals that the representation of men and women in decision making positions in the EEW project is unequal. There is a big gap between men and women. Only one woman was in a decision making position, the supervisor and the 12 CBOs.

#### **4.2 Examples from the project work**

In the following paragraph, I will give some examples from the project in order to have an overview of how the project is working with empowering the women in Kalolo area. The content of the lessons is as follows;

According to the TOT's scripts, dated 4 June, 2013, the women are taught various lessons. Some of these lessons are as follows;

##### ***Gender***

It was documented in the scripts that gender means equality between men and women as regards to job opportunities or equal distribution of work in the household.

##### ***Human rights***

According to the scripts, women have the right to assume different positions in society like being members of parliament, councillor or even presidency. It was emphasised that the women must take part because it is their right to participate in such positions.

##### ***Development***

The women are taught on how development activities are run. The aim is that there should be transparency and accountability when running such activities. The people must know exactly what is going on.

##### ***Decentralisation***

It was defined as people on the ground having a say on what development they want in their area. The government or Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) should not impose development on the people, but rather, it should listen to what the people in the area want.

### ***Micro-finance activities***

The women are taught business skills and encouraged to rear animals like pigs and goats. They are also taught on saving, borrowing and lending money.

### ***Observation of a teaching lesson.***

I also had a chance of attending to one of the sessions as a participant observer on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, 2014. The meeting took place at the Teacher Development Centre (TDC), at Chileka. This description is given so that the reader may have an overview of the context under study. Since observation entails watching behaviour, listening to what people say in conversation, hence there is need to give a detailed account of what was happening on this day. The day was cloudy with mild wind blowing. Women in their rappers and head gears were arriving at the place from all directions. The dust on their feet indicated that some of them had come from a distance on foot. There were also some men, but the women seemed to be more than the men. I sat on a veranda facing the opposite direction where there was a church building. Some of the women were greeting me and then went on to join the others who were sitting on the ground. On the other hand, the men were standing under a tree. I could hear the women chatting and laughing, sometimes shaking hands in the course of laughter. May be they were discussing about their businesses, I wondered.

At around 2.00 pm, a man arrived on a motor bike. He was tall, plump with a brown skin. All the women stood up. Their faces were gleaming with joy moving towards his direction. “*takulandirani,*” the women said to the man. Meaning (you are welcome) “*Zikomo*” meaning (thank you) the man responded with a wide smile on his face. The men too moved closer. “*Ndiye poti tachedwa kale, tiyeni tilowe tiyambepo phunziro la lero,*” the man said. Meaning (since we are already late, let’s go inside and begin our today’s lesson). He was the trainer of trainers. The lesson started at 2.15 pm.

The lesson was on human rights. According to the TOT human rights were understood as freedom of an individual to do what he/she wants. He gave examples of freedom to do business, freedom to be educated. His emphasis was that all human beings have human rights for the fact that they were born human, including women:

Every human being has got human rights for the fact of being born human. Human rights entail freedom for all humanity, including women. (I, 1, 30th of June, 2014).

The emphasis was that even women have human rights. This may be to the fact that men feel they are superior and that they have the rights and that the women have no rights because they are under the control of men. The observation is that some of the internalised oppression by both men and women is due to the fact that both men and women lack knowledge on human rights. Teaching them about these rights will enable women to stand up for their rights. On the other hand, men will respect women's rights if they have knowledge of these rights.

### **4.3 Findings from the interviews**

The main source of my empirical data was from interviews. In the paragraphs that follow I present the findings theme by theme. For each theme, there shall be the voice of the women, the voice of the church and the voice of EEW employees. In total, I interviewed twelve people, three church representative, two EEW representatives and seven women. Therefore, my material consists of the voice of these three categories of interviewees. I have structured my findings in four themes according to my research questions; the situation of the women, the understanding of the concept of empowerment, the role of EEW project and the role of the church.

#### **4.3.1 The situation of women in Kalolo area**

In order to investigate how the church and the EEW project are empowering women, I first of all wanted to find out what the situation of women is like in this area. Hence, I first present the situation of women in accordance to the research findings starting with the voice of the women themselves.

##### **4.3.1.1 The voice of the women**

The women took up different challenges which they face as women in their everyday life such as poverty, gender based violence, denied access to resources, not taking part in decision making, property grabbing and overworking. HIV/AIDS was also mentioned as a challenge. I will first present what they say on poverty, then gender based violence, unequal distribution of household work, HIV/AIDS, widowhood, exclusion from decision making positions and I will finish with lack of education.

##### **Poverty**

The study found out that the situation of the women in Kalolo area is characterised by many challenges. One common theme which was commonly mentioned by women when I asked them about their situation was poverty. According to the interviewees, poverty takes many

forms like lack of education, lack of resources such as food, accessibility to health facilities. Lack of education is due to school dropout and early marriages.

One of the interviewees commented in this way;

I went to school up to form two, but I could not continue due to poverty. I have both parents alive, but they are extremely poor. They failed to provide for me even a tablet of soap. I had no option, but to drop out of school and get married at that early age (G 5, 13 July, 2014).

The statement reveals that poverty is a contributing factor to the disparities between men and women. Marriage seems to be the only option and a solution to the women coming from poor families.

The research also found out that poverty is also on the increase due to the fact that some husbands refuse their wives to be employed even if the women have the necessary qualifications.

I am educated up to form four. I did not go further with my education because of poverty. In 2002, I had an opportunity to be employed as health surveillance. Unfortunately, it was my husband who received the invitation letter. He did not even tell me. He tore the letter and threw it away (G6, 13 July, 2014).

Here, the observation is that as much as marriage seems to be a solution to the challenges, women find themselves in a web of problems which they cannot easily bail themselves out.

According to the women, they face a lot of challenges because they live in the remotest parts of the country. They are challenged economically because they do not have formal employment. The only source of income is farming. The women report that after selling the crops, the men do not involve the women on how to spend the money. This causes the women to face challenges on how to feed the children. The women feel that this is oppression.

We solely depend on men. Unfortunately, after selling the crops, the men do not involve us on how to spend the money. They do not even think about the family needs. The woman suffers because she is the one who stays in the home to look after the children. (G5, 13 July, 2014).

What can be observed in this statement is that the women feel that most of the men shy away from their responsibilities as breadwinners of the homes as endorsed by the society. The men refuse to give assistance to the wives both financially and materially. To summarise it all, the women feel that poverty is a big challenge for them. They attributed this poverty to the fact that they are not employed. Their dependence is solely on the men.

## **Gender based violence and oppression**

Another finding on the situation of women was that the women experience gender based violence. The women understood violence in different ways ranging from wife battering, being denied an opportunity to participate in decision making both at household level and village level, lack of care for the family by the men as manifested in failure to provide for basic resources such as food, marital rape, and denial for the women to ask for conjugal rights from the husband. The women feel that this is the case because most of the women have very little or no education at all.

There is gender based violence especially concerning money. In order to go and do piece work, a woman has to ask for permission from the husband who sometimes refuses the request. It is the same thing if a woman wants to do business; the men refuse (G6, 13 July, 2014).

The above statement reveals that the women feel that the men are selfish. They refuse to give financial or material support to the family and at the same time refuse the women to engage in economic activities.

Another interviewee commented like this;

Gender based violence does exist in the homes, for example there is wife battering. There is also marital rape, men force us into conjugal duties, yet as a woman I do not have the right to ask for sex from my husband. The men do not even care if they leave the home with food for children or not (I, 3, 8 July, 2014).

In short, from this statement it can be deduced that the women are forced to total submission to the men even if the decisions the men make are to their disadvantage. The women know that they are oppressed but they fail to break through since they solely depend on men as wives.

## **Unequal household distribution**

According to the interviewees, the women are challenged in the homes in that they have to do almost all house hold work. They have to take care of the children, prepare food for the entire household, clean the home, clean the kitchen utensils, wash the clothes for everybody in the house and they also go to the fields to work. The women have no time to rest.

We go to the fields together with my husband, but when we come back, my husband rests. I continue working, give my husband water to bath, wash the children and do all the household chores alone while my husband is having a rest. I do work till sunset. I (I, 3, 8 July, 2014).

The statement reveals that women have no time to rest or associate with other women. So, even if they can be given a chance to do business, where will they get the time to do that?

### **HIV/AIDS pandemic**

The situation of the women is also affected by the big challenge of HIV/AIDS. The women put the blame on the men that they contribute to the spread of the virus. This, according to the women is because when the men have money, they go and enjoy with other women. They get drunk and indulge themselves in extra-marital affairs, but without preventive measures or having time to have an HIV/AIDS test. The women say that when the men contract the virus, they in turn infect their wives at home.

The men contribute to the spread of the disease. A woman might be faithful, but it is these men who indulge in extra marital affairs when they have money and then they pass it on to the wife at home. (G5, 13 July, 2014).

This statement reveals that the women are caught up in a situation which is difficult to come out. Even if they know that the men are promiscuous, there is nothing they can do since their only hope is marriage.

Nonetheless, some women are also involved in extra marital affairs in exchange for financial or material support. This contributes further to the spread of the disease. This is what one of the women observed;

Due to lack of resources in the homes, women are sometimes forced to have affairs outside the matrimonial home in search of assistance and resources. (G2, 8 July, 2014).

In conclusion, the women are caught up in a dilemma, they have to be faithful as wives, but they are also forced to have sex with other men due to poverty in search of material and financial support. This places a heavy burden on the women both as wives and as mothers.

### **Widowhood and property grabbing**

The interviewees' reported that the practice of property grabbing from the widows still persists in the area. According to the women, the deceased relatives do this because to them, it is a man who works and provide for the family resources. They feel that the woman contributes nothing. As such, when the man dies, the relatives feel that they are taking what belongs to them. Sometimes the relatives may claim that they will take care of the children of the deceased, but once they get the property, they don't think about the children:

In their thinking, they are taking what belongs to them. They feel they are obliged because the property is the sweat of one of their number (G6, 13 July, 2014).



This statement reveals that when the relatives of a deceased husband grab property, it is the children who suffer most. The widow is helpless and fails to defend herself.

Another woman had this comment:

The relatives of a man grab property from the widow with the thinking that it is a man who works and provide for the family resources. They feel that a woman contributes nothing in the home (G5, 13 July, 2014).

From these statements, the conclusion is that the attitude people have in the Malawian society is that a woman contributes nothing in the home, yet as we have already seen above it is the woman who does almost everything in the home. But when the husband dies, in most cases everything is taken away from the widow.

### **Exclusion from decision making positions**

The women unanimously reported that they do not take part in any decision making, be it at family level or at village level. They said that men expect the women to follow whatever the man says. According to one interviewee, the woman is a spectator in the home as per cultural norms. This, she said is because people think that the woman's reasoning is very low as compared to that of the man. She said that this may be one cause of their oppression:

We take decisions from men, but the men do not take decisions from us. The men feel that our reasoning is very low. Yet had it been that we were working together, there would be development in the homes (G6, 13 July, 2014).

The statement shows that the women feel isolated in the homes. The women think that the society sees women as having low reasoning capacity. The exclusion from decision making diminishes the skills and abilities that are invested in the women. It is a waste of valuable resources which would otherwise benefit the whole society.

### **Lack of education**

When expressing how the women are oppressed in the area, one interviewee reported that the people have the attitude that a woman is always below a man. She pointed out that this perception is the contributing factor for the many challenges that women face. She however, said that this is due to the fact that most of the women in this area are not educated:

Most of us here have little or no education at all. The men take advantage of this situation to oppress the women (I3, 8 July, 2014).

The interviews show that most the women not educated in this area as compared to the men. This gap put women at a subordinate position as was observed by the woman above.

In summary, the women confirmed that they are faced with so many challenges in their everyday life ranging from poverty; Gender based violence and oppression, heavy workloads, HIV/AIDS, widowhood and exclusion from decision making just to mention a few. The women said that many of these challenges are due to the fact that most of the women in this area have no formal education. The women see the key in the bad situation of women as lack of education. Therefore, had it been that women were educated, the story would be different.

#### **4.3.1.2 The Voice of the Church on the Situation Women in Kalolo Area**

Since the project is a church based project, it is necessary to hear from the church what it says about the situation of the women in Kalolo area. This then will enable us to understand what the church is doing to empower the women.

##### **Poverty**

According to one of the church representatives, the women were chosen because they are vulnerable. He reported that 90% of the women are poor. The church representative noted that the women have a lot of responsibilities, like looking after the children and the homes when their husbands are away, yet they lack finances to support the children for school fees, medication and food. He explained that some women even fail to serve God because of poverty.

Here the observation is that the church is aware of the responsibilities the women have, but also conclude that poverty challenges the women to serve God effectively.

##### **Widowhood**

One of the church representatives reported that many men from this area go to town in search of jobs, leaving the women alone. He also reported that when these men are in town, they engage themselves in immorality. The consequence is that they contract HIV/AIDS and die from the disease. As such, there are many widows in the area:

Some of these women are widows; yet they don't have support from anywhere. Some of these widows also look after orphans. (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

Both the church and the women acknowledged that there are widows in the area. The women attributed the practice of property grabbing to culture which ascribes to a woman a position of an economic dependant. On the other hand, the church attributed this practice to laziness, saying it is a lazy person who would want to grab property from a widow.

### **Oppression and male domination**

One of the church representatives also reported that the women are oppressed by the men. He said that in Kalolo area, the women are seen as if they are useless. According to him, it is the woman who looks after the children and the visitors even in the absence of the husband. He further said that it is unfortunate that when a woman engages in business, people think that she is a prostitute.

The women were chosen because they are vulnerable and oppressed. If a woman overworks, it will cost her health and even life (I, 2, 3 July, 2014).

The observation is that it is the women who do most of the work in the household. As such, they have a heavier workload as compared to the men.

Another church representative agreed that indeed there is oppression of women in the homes. He cited lack of communication and tolerance between the husband and wife as a cause of gender based violence. He gave an example that the couples deny each other conjugal rights as a form of punishment. He said that such behaviour pushes the partners out to go and sleep with other women or men. This, he said contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS:

The way in which men and women live in the homes is a source of violence. Men and women work together in the fields, but when the crops are sold, women are left out of the deal (G1, 8 July, 2014).

In a nut shell, while the women blamed the men for the spread of HIV/AIDS, the church representative shifted the blame back to the women for denying their husbands sex. The husbands in turn go to search for sexual satisfaction.

### **Lack of education**

Just as the women reported that most of them are not educated, the church agreed with the women. One of the church representatives said that very few women in the area went beyond primary education and that others had no formal education at all. He said that this is a big challenge for the women:

The biggest challenge is that women are left behind in terms of education (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

Both the women and the church attributed lack of education as a contributing factor to the bad situation of women. Since they have no education, they cannot be employed or access skills necessary for economic activities.

#### **4.3.1.3 The voice of EEW employees on the situation of women in Kalolo area.**

After presenting the voice of the church and the women on the situation of the women, it is important to also listen to the voice of the EEW employees who are running the project. This will shed light on what type of empowerment the project is offering to the women.

##### **Poverty**

Both the church and the EEW representatives reported that women are vulnerable and poor. According to one of the EEW representative, women are trapped in a web of poverty. He said that this is because of the economic structures that exist in Malawi. He cited the local village setting in which men refuse their wives to do business. He also reported that in Malawi, the laws also prohibit the women from doing business because banks require a guarantor for one to be given a loan. This, he said is a prohibition to a village woman:

Some men do not allow their wives to be involved in business activities. The law also prohibit women from doing business; a village woman cannot get a loan because the banks do not accept (G7, 17 July, 2014).

Just like the women and the church, the EEW employees agree that the life of the women is characterized by poverty. While the church and the women attribute lack of education as the major factor for the women's situation, the EEW employees attribute it to prohibitive laws and culture.

##### **Culture as a barrier to women progression**

Another challenge that one of the EEW representative identified on the situation of women was to do with culture. He said that culture negatively affects the women, especially on the women's status quo. He said that men do not believe that a woman can be away from them without engaging in prostitution:

Men think that if a woman is away from home, she is engaging in prostitution. They feel that if a woman has money, then she will be more than a husband. (G8, 17 July, 2014).

From this statement, the EEW employees feel that it is the culture which is oppressive to the women. They attribute the submissive role of women to cultural settings like the family.

##### **Women exclusion**

In the 2012 EEW report, women exclusion was cited as one reason why this project came into being. It was reported that Malawian women suffer exclusion socially, economically and politically. According to the report, women exclusion undermines their dignity, capabilities and talents. The report further said that exclusion renders women as not fully human:

The EEW project was conceived because we realise that women are excluded economically, socially and politically. (2012 EEW report).

This statement concludes that women are excluded in society in all spheres of life. They do not have access to resources such as money and market, hence, they fall prey to poverty and gender based violence.

The word prostitute is a tool used for women exclusion in economic activities, so that the women should believe that to be an accepted member in the society, they need to be passive and be dependent on the men.

Just like the women, both the church and the EEW employees acknowledge that the life of the women in the area is characterised by many challenges. They cited examples of poverty, male domination, cultural barriers and HIV/AIDS just to mention a few. The women put the blame on men for the spread of HIV/AIDS. On the other hand, one of the church representatives shifted the blame to the women for denying their husbands sex as a form of punishment. The EEW representatives had a different perspective. They mainly attributed the bad situation of women to cultural structures, values and norms that oppress women.

#### **4.4.0 How is empowerment understood in the EEW project?**

The concept of empowerment was understood in different terms in the EEW project from the women, the church and EEW representatives. However, all understanding was directed to the self reliance of women and participation.

#### **4.4.1 The voice of the women**

In the following paragraphs, I will present what the women think about empowerment. This is important because the women are the target group for EEW project. The women understood empowerment in various terms ranging from accessibility and control over resources, participation, acquisition of skill and belonging to different groups just to mention but a few. I will begin by presenting empowerment as access and control over resources.

#### **Empowerment as ability to access resources**

Most of the women understood empowerment as having the capacity to access different resources such as food, money, health services, and domesticated animals for self support. According to the women, lack of resources becomes a challenge in taking care of the children. So, the women said that if the resources are available, that is empowerment to them.

I sell sweet beer. Through this business, I manage to buy fertilizer and harvest enough food to feed my children. I am also able to provide for school fees and soap for my children. My husband does nothing (I, 4, 8 July, 2014).

Since the women are mostly charged with the responsibility of looking after the children and family, their priority is to find food for the children. If they are able to do so, they feel that they are empowerment.

Another woman had this to say;

Since I joined EEW, I started selling flitters. I also started banking through the village saving loan. I am now able to fetch food for my children (G4, 13 July, 2014).

This statement reveals that women are focussed, if they are empowered, they are development minded for their homes unlike men whom the women say that they shy away from their responsibilities as bread winners.

The women also reported that lack of health facilities is a big problem. According to one of the interviewees, it is the women who are hit hard especially with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. She however, reported that through EEW, the people are now able to receive counselling, which she said is empowering to both the affected and infected persons:

. The good news is that we now have an opportunity to go for HIV/AIDS test where counselling is also provided (I, 3, 8 July, 2014).

It can be observed that lack of health facilities makes the situation of HIV/AIDS worse; the women are victims for such circumstances. However, the women feel empowered because they can now access Voluntary Testing and Counselling services where they are trained on how to care for the HIV/AIDS patients; they are also trained on how the disease is spread and how it can be prevented. Through VCT, the people can also have access to condoms free of charge.

Hence, access to resources is a sign of empowerment because it minimises the stress of lack of resources on the women. Since the women are the ones who look after the families and children, having access to resources enables them to execute this task better and regain their confidence as people who are able to manage the tasks that they are responsible for.

### **Empowerment as ability to demand for rights**

The women reported that through EEW, they now know their rights. According to one of the interviewees, the women were able to engage hospital authorities for the provision of transport. According to the women, lack of transportation was also costing lives, especially pregnant women when they were due to deliver at night.

We had transport problems to access our nearest hospital, especially at night. After EEW taught us about our rights, we were able to engage the hospital authorities. We are happy that the bicycle has been granted. (G4, 13 July, 2014).

Since the women now know their rights, they are active and know exactly what to do to improve their situation.

According to the women, they are now able to participate in business and development activities through the groups into which they have been mobilized. One of the interviewees reported that after the training, they also reach out to other women in the surrounding villages. She said this is empowerment:

We assist each other to reach out to the villages so that we move forward with development. In the groups that we have formed, women are doing business (G6, 13 July, 2014).

The women feel that by belonging to different groups, they are empowered to learn from other women and gain new skills for the betterment of their lives.

. This is what another woman said:

Through development lessons (kalondolondo) women have been enlightened that they have the right to participate in development activities, whether in the family, home community or even at national level (G2, 8 July, 2014).

The enlightenment that the women have received from EEW has enabled them to follow up what is going on in their area, especially development activities. The women feel that this is empowerment because they are now able to take duty bearers to task as regards to their rights such as clean water and health services.

### **Empowerment as acquisition of skills**

Most of the women pointed out that the skills which they have acquired have empowered them. According to one interviewee, it is important that a woman be trained in different spheres of life. She however, reported that most women shy away from adult literacy classes:

Women need to be trained in different categories of life. If a woman is educated, it becomes easy to grab new skills. She can then freely participate in development work. Development is retarded because most of the women are not educated (G6, 13 July, 2014).

Concurring with this statement, another woman said:

We appreciate for the skills that we are being equipped with. People feel that the skills are not important but money. But I say it is rather the skills that are important for business management. It is a

good thing to join these groups because one learns a lot. Our families have changed for the better because of the skills imparted to us (I, 4, 8 July, 2014).

According to the women, one can gain these skills by belonging to different groups. This is a sign of empowerment. According to one of the women, one learns more from friends when she belongs to a group. She said that if a woman does not belong to any group, she is lagging behind:

A woman has to join different groups to acquire different skills from friends. I now belong to different groups. I am able to do outreach to other women, to me, that is great (I, 4, 8 July, 2014)

In agreement to this statement, another woman said:

I now associate in groups with other women. I have learnt a lot. I have an opportunity to borrow money from these groups. Things have improved in my family (G5, 13 July, 2014).

The women emphasised association into groups as empowerment which was not mentioned by the church. The women believe that by belonging to these groups, they can learn and share skills with other women. They have provided them a space to go out to the public sphere. The women feel that this is empowerment.

The women reported that culturally, men and women are separated. The women said that they are not supposed to work with men as this would be interpreted as seduction. According to one interviewee, EEW has enabled women to work together with men:

EEW has enabled men and women to work together. We have worked together for two years now. Our husbands also understand there is no suspicion of infidelity. We know the limits of our interactions. We mix up, but at the same time we respect each other (G6, 13 July, 2014).

Another woman also had this to say;

EEW has trained us to work together. This is important. Malawi will benefit a lot if men and women work together. Both of them will be fetching resources for the family. This will make budgeting easier (G2, 8 July, 2014).

The women feel empowered to work together with the men. The project has broken the cultural wall that separates men and women. According to the Malawian context, this is empowerment, for the women to gather courage and mix up with men. The women think that to be empowered means to have access and control over resources, to belong to a group, to participate in various activities be it economical or social, to acquire skills and be able to demand for their rights. The women feel that the project has empowered them.



#### **4.4.2 The voice of the church**

The project being church based, there is a need to hear from the church what it feels empowerment means to the women in Kalolo area. In the following section therefore, I will present the views of the church on empowerment.

##### **Empowerment as ability to access resources**

The church echoed the same voice as the women. Empowerment was also understood as access to resources. While the women emphasised on access and control over resources like food, the church emphasised on generation of finances. This is what one of the church representatives said:

Women lack power to generate finances. Once they are empowered, they will be able to serve God through the same funds they have generated. (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

Here, the observation is that the church understood empowerment as ability, freedom and active participation.

The church understood empowerment as gaining confidence and taking up decision making positions in society. On the other hand, none of the women mentioned taking of positions in society. This is what one of the church representatives said:

Women are being empowered in a number of areas, to take up positions in society, to be confident because the women are part and parcel of the society. (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

Due to the cultural setting, women have no confidence to take up positions. They feel leadership is for men. Therefore, the church feels that once the women gain confidence, they can be able to take up different positions in the communities where they live. If one gains confidence, he/she is empowered.

##### **Empowerment as ability to work together with the men**

In addition, the church understood empowerment as ability for men and women to work together. The women themselves mentioned this as well. This is important if the gap between men and women is to be closed. Here is what one of the church representatives said;

The culture of today and yesterday is different. Today people are able to talk and work together though they are of different sex (I, 1, 2 July, 2014)

According to one of the church representatives, by gathering courage to work with men, the women can then actively participate in development work at family level, community and the society at large.

The church representative further said that, a woman's participation is very crucial for the development of the country. He said that women overwork in the homes and this might lead to failure for the woman to participate in development activities. He said that EEW seeks to increase women's participation in development activities:

We are teaching about mutual respect between men and women and the disadvantages of gender based violence if a woman is trained in development activities, even if the husband dies, she will be able to support the children. EEW is aiming at increasing women's participation (I, 2, 3 July, 2014).

The observation is that women are overloaded, but in a private sphere. They lack time to participate in what is going on in their community. They are always exhausted with household chores. Working together with men brings in mutual respect and may be the men can come to understand that a woman is also a human being who needs resting as well.

### **Empowerment as self-reliance**

One of the church representatives also pointed out that to empower women means to enable them to be self-reliant. He explained that women become vulnerable because they are not self-reliant:

When a woman has money, she can provide for the children for soap or school equipment like writing materials. There are some women who are widows. EEW is there to support them to stand on their own economically so that they can support themselves (I, 2, 3 July, 2014)

The conclusion is that the church representative attributed women's bad situation to the fact that many of them depend on men economically. Therefore, according to one of the church representatives, the solution is to empower women economically so that they can be economically independent.

### **Empowerment from a biblical perspective**

The church representative also pointed out that God empowered the Israelites by teaching them His word basing on Deuteronomy 6:4-15. He explained that through God's word, the Israelites were empowered economically, spiritually and militarily. The church representative further explained that even Jesus empowered his disciples by teaching them God's skills. He based this on Luke 10:1-24. He also cited an example of the Samaritan woman at the well John chapter 4. From these examples the church representative said:

Empowerment is a free action, yet propelled by the power of the Holy Spirit (I, 1, 2 July, 2014)

Here, empowerment is understood as an action of God through the Holy Spirit who empowered even a woman (the Samaritan woman). The woman came out of the private sphere and went to the public testifying what she had seen and heard from Jesus. The church's view was that empowerment comes from God. It is God who gives people the power for action.

#### **4.4.3 The voice the EEW representatives**

In this section, I will present the views of the EEW employees. This will help us to see whether the EEW employees had a similar view with the women and the church on what empowerment is.

Unlike the church and the women, the emphasis of the EEW employees was that empowerment is ability to engage government as duty bearers for delivery of quality services. This is what one of the EEW representatives said:

The project is centrally on empowering women so that they should be able to engage government for better services. This is to make sure that the people on the ground are empowered and are able to demand for services from government (G8, 17 July, 2014).

Once the women are able to engage the government, it means they no longer suffer in silence. They have been empowered to speak out in order to express their concerns. The EEW representatives also understood freedom of expression as empowerment.

According to the EEW representative, women cannot culturally speak in public and voice out their concerns. He pointed out that culture silences the women. He however, said that through EEW, women have been enabled to speak in public, even in the presence of traditional<sup>5</sup> leaders:

Women are now able to speak publicly which in our culture would be a taboo. (G8, 17 July, 2014).

For a woman to speak in the presence of a traditional leader in the Malawian setting is a great break through. It shows that little by little things are changing for the better. This is indeed a sign of empowerment. The courage they have gained to speak in the presence of traditional leaders means that the women can be given a space for participation in the community. Therefore, just like the church and the women, the EEW representative also understood

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<sup>5</sup> Traditional leaders are most respected people in the Malawian social setting. Previously, if a traditional leader is passing by, a woman had not to meet him face to face; she was supposed to kneel down at a distance and clap hands till the traditional leader passes by.

empowerment as participation in development activities by taking up different positions. This is what one of the EEW representative said:

Traditionally, it was all about men being involved in development activities without necessarily the women coming forward. This time, development committees and structures, especially in leadership positions we have women (G8, 17 July, 2014).

The active participation will enable the women to generate finances which will then enable them to access resources. This will make the women be self-reliant. If the women are self-reliant, they will be less vulnerable to poverty and gender based violence. Just like the church, the EEW representatives also understood empowerment as ability to support oneself economically, socially and politically. This is the comment that was made by one of the EEW representative:

We wanted to influence both in terms of policies and legislation. We also wanted to influence at community level whereby we wanted to make sure that the women are empowered socially and economically (G8, 17 July, 2014).

Policies and legislations are important to provide a framework and direction through which women empowerment can be implemented. If there are no gender policies, there is no favourable environment for gender issues.

In the preceding section, I have presented what the EEW representatives think empowerment is and what type of empowerment the EEW project is offering to the women. The emphasis of the EEW representatives was that empowerment is ability to engage government as duty bearers. According to the EEW representatives, this would enable the government to be accountable and inclusive. On the other hand, the church's emphasis was empowerment is a divine action, performed by the Holy Spirit. The women emphasised that empowerment was access and control over resources and participation in all spheres of life. In short, all the interviewees agreed that the project had managed to empower the women.

#### **4.5.0 The role of EEW project in Kalolo area**

The case study of this paper is the EEW project. Therefore, it is important to explore what the project is doing for the women. In the paragraphs that follow, I will present what the women think the project has done for them in line with empowerment.

##### **4.5.1 The voice of the women**

The women being the targeted group necessitates their voice to be heard on what they think the project is doing to them.

### **The project as an advocacy**

Most of the women acknowledged the fact that they were enlightened through this project. According to one interviewee, culturally, the women did not know that they too, had the right to participate in development activities in their area. They felt that it was only men who were supposed to do that:

I have been enlightened on human rights. Most of the women were shying away from development activities in the village. This is because such activities were believed to be the male's domain. The women did not know about their rights that they could also participate. They were just too afraid to go against the cultural norms and traditions. (I, 4, 8 July, 2014).

This shows that the women are now able to claim for their rights and they can be able to stand up for these rights.

Another interviewee also commented:

We had problems with our dentist at the health centre. He was demanding bribes. But EEW project has taught us that our health centre is a public institution, as such we do not need to pay anything. (G4, 13 July, 2014).

The observation is that the project has enabled the women to know their rights and they are now able to engage duty bearers for their rights. The women feel that the project has been a voice for them. They also feel that the project has enabled them to raise their voice and claim for their rights.

### **EEW as an instrument for empowerment**

The women further explained that the project has empowered them. According to the women, they are now able to demand for services from duty bearers. The women cited an example of the work for food programme. According to one of the interviewees, the payment was too little and it was not been given on time. She said that they called for the district authority and presented these concerns. The project has also enabled widows without financial muscle to build their existence. The picture below shows a house of one of the widows in the area. Her husband died in 2001, and the relatives of her husband grabbed everything from her, including beddings. She was survived by 6 children and she struggled to feed the children and send them to. But, with the advent of the EEW project, she has managed to send the children to school. One of them is now a teacher. She has also managed to buy 17 iron sheets to roof her house.



This is what she said;

I was one of the most vulnerable women in this village after the death of my husband. It was my mother who gave me a blanket. But since I joined EEW, I sell flitters and my situation has completely changed. By December, 2014, my house will be iron roofed (G4, 13 July, 2014).

The observation is that the women feel that they have been empowered because they are now standing up for economic activities which could not be the case before when the women would suffer in silence. The women have become agents for their own empowerment instead of waiting for men to do things for them.

### **The project as an instrument of transformation**

Another role cited by the women was that the project had acted as a transformational agent. The women reported that culturally, when village head men were presiding over cases, there would be no women to monitor if justice was carried out, especially against women. The women further explained that the women were at a disadvantage. But with the advent of EEW, the women said that things had changed;

We make sure we witness all cases so that women are not victimised (G3, 13 July, 2014).

From this statement it can be seen that the women are no longer silent and offer blind submission. They have been transformed and enabled to question the local structures and issues of justice which are oppressive to them as women.

### **The project as an agent for capacity building**

The women reported that micro-finance banking was not a new phenomenon in Kalolo area. The women said that they have been doing borrowing and lending money in groups for years, but they were not achieving anything. The women said that what they were lacking were skills and competencies. According to the women, EEW project has equipped them with skills and competencies which have enabled them to actively participate in economic activities;

EEW has taught us that we need not share the whole sum. We should also be lending the money to the people within the group for easy collection of the money. So, we now only share the interests. (G3, 13 July, 2014)

Though the women were doing micro-finance banking before EEW project was launched, the women had no necessary skills and competences for carrying out these activities.

This is what one of the interviewees said:

EEW does not give us money. What we are given are skills which to me are important. It is the skills which we have been given that have really helped to change our lives in this area. The skills direct and guide us; it is the skills we have received that have really empowered us to support ourselves as women (G6, 13 July, 2014)

The women feel that the skills are more important and empowering than being given money without skills, to them they feel this would not work. Most of the people according to the women would simply misuse the money. The women have also gained skills for rearing domesticated animals like pigs, goats and cattle. They sell the cattle to increase income in the homes, use the animal waste as manure in their fields thereby increasing crop output and reduce the costs of buying fertilizer. In addition, they can slaughter the animals for food so that they have access to animal protein. The picture below shows a woman feeding her pig;



In summary, the women feel that the project has equipped them with the necessary skills for business management, rearing of domesticated animals and social skills. The women said these skills have empowered them and enabled them to transform their situation for the better.

#### **4.5.2 The voice of the church**

In the following section, I will present what the church representatives said about the project.

##### **The project as an instrument of empowerment**

The church representatives were in agreement with the women that the role of EEW is to empower the women economically. According to the church representatives this was to be achieved through the acquisition of necessary skills for doing business. This is what one of the church representatives said:

The project seeks to assist the women to be powerful regardless that other women have no husbands. The women have got responsibilities in the homes; therefore, they have to be empowered (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

The church representatives see the need to equip the women with the skills necessary for economic activities so that they can be able to successfully engage in these activities.



### **EEW as an instrument for capacity building**

One of the church representatives was in agreement with the women that the project does not give out money to the women. He said that what EEW does is to train the women and equip them with economic skills. The women are also taught how to run micro-finance banks effectively:

The funds are not distributed, but they are used for training on how to generate money and how to keep money, lend and borrow money. It is the women themselves who contribute the money in their groups and lend it to each other with an interest. (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

Just like the women, the emphasis of church representatives is on skill acquisition as empowering rather than handouts.

### **EEW as an instrument of transformation**

The church representatives also acknowledged that EEW has acted as an agent of transformation and change. This is especially the negative attitude which men have towards women.

The men have now realised the importance of their wives to participate in the project. It is the men now who are encouraging their wives to go for the meetings (I, 2, 3 July, 2014).

In summary, according to the church, the project has given the women space to be active in their families and community as well. The men are now slowly changing their negative attitude towards women, as regards to women participation in economic activities. The church also feels that the project has been an instrument for change, transformation and capacity building. By enabling the women to participate in economic activities, the church has managed to empower the women.

#### **4.5.3 The voice of EEW employees.**

In this section, I will present what the EEW employees as those who are running the project say about the EEW project.

### **EEW as an instrument of empowerment**

According to one of the EEW representatives, EEW is aiming at the people on the ground. He said that they are seeking to empower the people for active participation in their communities. The EEW representative stressed that the focus is specifically on women. He reported that as DCA, they were interested in enabling the women to engage government as duty bearers for better services:

We are interested that people on the ground are in participation, especially women. Our strategy is on active citizenship. The government should be able to respond to the issues that are raised by the people on the ground (G8, 17 July, 2014).

The EEW employee emphasised on empowerment of the grass-roots so that they can be enabled to participate in development activities at household and community level.

### **EEW as an instrument for change**

EEW has also actively been involved in the enactment of gender bills in order to create favourable environment for women empowerment. According to the EEW representatives, if there is no enabling environment for the women, the intervention cannot make any meaningful difference:

The bill has been long overdue, but with our engagement, partners and other stakeholders progress has been made. It is no longer a bill, it is now an act. (G8, 17 July, 2014).

Laws and policies can contribute negatively or positively to any change or transformation. The EEW employees feel that if laws concerning women issues are enacted, then there will be a favourable environment for the empowerment of women and enable change and transformation. They feel that the laws can make a great difference either for or against the EEW project to effect change in the lives of the women.

### **EEW as a means for active participation**

The EEW representatives reported that they do not give the women money. He said that what they had done was to mobilise the women into groups. It is through these groups that the women are then engaged in economic activities:

We do not give out money to these groups for purposes of sustainability. We have engaged the women in economic activities like village saving loans to enable women to engage in economic activities to generate money for themselves. (G8, 17 July, 2014).

Belonging to different groups take women out of their confinement to the public sphere. The women are then able to actively participate in economic activities and share information with other women.

### **EEW as an advocacy**

One of the EEW representatives said that the project is a voice for the women in a male dominated society. He explained that the project aimed at changing the attitude that the society has towards the women:

The project is an advocacy, to break structures that trap and condemn women to poverty. Such structures must be broken through advocating and enactment of laws and fight for attitude change. If a woman is involved in business, it doesn't mean that she has become a prostitute. Moving up and down in the course of business doesn't mean that the women are looking for men (G7, 17 July, 2014).

The EEW employees attribute the women situation due to social structures like the family that trap the women to poverty. The EEW therefore, feel that the project has to speak for the women because it is these social structures that silence the women.

### **EEW as an instrument for capacity building**

The EEW representatives were in agreement with the women that EEW is being involved in capacity building. The EEW representatives reported that in order to empower the women, capacity building was required. He said that it was necessary that the women understood governance issues. He further explained that to achieve this, the consortium too had to be empowered:

We have to empower the women so that they should understand governance issues. So, we have intervened in terms of empowering the consortium members so that they have capacity to facilitate the project (G8, 17 July, 2014).

For the project to be effective, those implementing the project need also to be empowered. Empowerment is at different levels. Beyond training, capacity building provides resources to individuals and communities to actively participate. Therefore, capacity building is related to empowerment.

### **EEW as a bridge**

The EEW representative reported that the Malawian culture is male dominated. He explained that culturally, the men and women are supposed to work separately. According to the EEW representative, EEW has tried to bridge this gap by introducing male champions in the project so that they should work together with the women:

We have engaged males in the project to make sure that they are also involved in the project. The men have been involved to empower the women (G8, 17 July, 2014).

For meaningful change to take place men and women have to work together as partners. If the project only involved the women it would seem that men were not part of the community. For this reason, though the target of the project is the women, the men have also been incorporated.

The EEW employees echoed a similar voice with that of the church and the women. They viewed the project as a means of empowerment, bridge, advocacy and an instrument for change.

#### **4.6.1 The role of the church in the EEW project**

The EEW project is church based. Therefore, in order for the research question to be answered, it is important to investigate what role the church is playing in this project. This will also shed light as to whether the church is using the project as a means for mission or that it is just fulfilling its diaconal work. I will present this following the voices of the people who were interviewed, namely; women, church representatives and EEW employees. I will begin with the voice of the women.

#### **4.6.2 The women's voice**

It is important to hear from the women what they think the church is doing in this project. The voice of the women may better reveal if the church is empowering them or if it is using the project as a means of evangelisation. In the paragraphs that follow, I will present what the women say about the church.

#### **The church as an instrument of fellowship**

The women reported that their groups are comprised of people from different backgrounds such as ethnicity, religion, beliefs, political and even levels of education. They said under normal circumstances, it is difficult for such a group to function properly because of these differences. The women further reported that, under normal circumstances, different tribes in the area like the Chewas, Yaos and the Tumbukas do not comfortably work together. The women said that through church and society, Nkhoma Synod this has been possible. They said church had united them to live and work together in harmony:

Our group comprises of people from different denominations like Catholics or other faith. We have people in our group who do not even belong to any church or religion. We are working together; the church has enhanced unity among people of different faith (G2, 8 July, 2014)

This statement sheds light on the fact that under normal circumstances, people of different background find it difficult to cooperate. The women feel that it is the church which has united them to be able to work together.

### **The church as an instrument to improve people's lives**

When asked if she had any intentions to join Nkhoma Synod church seeing what the church is doing, one interviewee said that the church's intention was not evangelism, but to improve the lives of the people, especially the women:

Nkhoma Synod has welcomed all women. The bottom line was that you should be a woman. We are living in harmony; prayers given at our meetings are general, not from a specific denomination (G3, 13 July, 2014).

The women feel that the church is determined to uplift their lives in the area. They feel that the church is not using the project to evangelise them so that they should join Nkhoma Synod church.

### **The church as a go between**

The women further reported that the church has enabled men and women to work together. According to one of the women, through gender lessons, the men have come to understand that men and women must assist each other in providing for the families. She said that at first the men feared that the gender lessons meant that women would grab power from them. She said that this is no longer the case. Men now agree to work together with women:

Men and women have now started working together because of what Nkhoma Synod has done. The men now understand that gender means men and women assisting each other in providing for the resources (G6, 13 July, 2014)

The statement reveals that, culturally, Malawians have a negative attitude towards gender equality. The men were afraid that if women are taught about gender, they would become powerful and it would be difficult to subdue them.

In summary, all the women agreed that the church had united them despite whatever barriers like political parties or ethnic groups. The women feel that by enabling them to cooperate with men, there will be mutual understanding between men and women. It will then be possible for men to see women as co-workers and therefore, accord them the respect they require as human beings. In short, the church has acted like a bridge between men and women, but also between people with different background.

### **4.6.3 The voice of the church**

In the paragraphs that follow, I will present what the church representatives say about the role of the church in EEW project. This will help us to see what type of empowerment women are being given by the church.

### **The church as a servant**

One of the church representatives said that priesthood and women empowerment are two different things. He said that all what the church was doing was charity work. According to him, the church realises that it has a responsibility to empower the women to take a stand on their own economically. He said that the church was putting theology into action, trying to translate the message which it preaches into action:

As a church, what we are doing is not being off target. When women are empowered, they are the same people who give to God whatever they have generated (I, 1, 2 July, 2014)

The church representatives feel that what the church is doing in the EEW project is charity work (diakonia), so that what the church preaches on the pulpit is being put into practice.

### **The church as an instrument for fellowship**

One of the church representatives said that the church welcomed all women regardless of their faith. He emphasised that the project cannot be a tool for evangelisation. Women with different background were taken on board.

The church welcomes women from other faith and denominations like Catholics, Muslims and even those who do not belong to any faith are taken on board. The church is empowering all women in Kalolo area (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

In sum, the church representatives state that the church's responsibility is not only to be confined to its members, but to all the people, even those who do not belong to any religion.

### **The church as a witness to God's kingdom**

I asked one of the church representatives if there is any connection between what the church was doing and the kingdom of God. In response, he said that by empowering the women to economically support themselves, the church is teaching about love. He said that God's kingdom is about love:

The church is supporting all women so that they can be able to support themselves because they are God's creation. If one lacks resources, she can be tempted to sin (I, 2, 3 July, 2014).

From this statement, it can be deduced that the church is seen as a witness of God's kingdom. The church feels that by empowering the women it is establishing God's kingdom.

### **The church as a pastoral care ministry**

One other role that one of the church representatives mentioned was that the church was providing pastoral care to the people. He reported that when the project had just been launched, many men refused their wives to participate. He said that one marriage was at a

point of breaking up because the woman was engaging in business. He said that as a church, they had to intervene. He reported that the family is now living happily.

The lives of many women in this area have improved for the better. They are now able to pay school fees for their children. We acted as a go-between and advocate to the family (I, 2, 3 July, 2014).

According to the church representative, by providing advice to families, the church is like a shepherd taking care of the sheep. If one sheep goes astray, the church brings it back to the right track.

### **The church as a bridge**

One of the church representatives said that women are not only vulnerable and poor, but that the women also lag behind in all spheres of life. He said that economically or in terms of education the women lag behind as compared to the men. He said that the women are deprived of all opportunities in society. According to the church representative, the church is aiming at bridging the gap between men and women:

We are bridging the gap between men and women. Male champions have been trained to be part and parcel of the project to assist and encourage the women so that they improve economically (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

By incorporating men in the women groups, the church feels that the gap which is there between men and women can be covered. The church feels that through these men, the project is not feminine, but that men and women are partners.

### **The church as an instrument of empowerment**

Another role of the church that one of the church representatives cited was that of being an instrument for empowering people. One of the church representatives said that some women fail to serve God because of poverty. He emphasised that if these women are empowered, they will be able to serve God through the same funds that they generate. He further said that through empowerment, the women become free to serve God as well as the society because they become economically sound. The church representative referred to the biblical example of Dorcas (Acts9:32-43) who was economically empowered and she was able to serve the church and the society:

God created everything before a human being. Therefore, a human being is supposed to have all resources, everything for his/her life. This is a basis to empower each, especially women (I, 1, 2 July, 2014).

As a church, Nkhoma Synod feels that it is doing what is commanded in the Bible. The church feels that the women can better serve God and the church if they are economically empowered. The church feels that God provided the resources to human beings so that they can have a good life. Thus, biblically, empowerment is a divine action. The power is from God to humanity.

### **The church as an instrument for transformation and reconciliation**

One of the church representatives explained that initially most of the men did not want their wives to participate. The church representative said that the argument which the men were putting forward was that the women would be engaging in prostitution, hiding behind business. He however said that with the training that was being provided, the men are now aware that it does not mean that if a woman engages in business she would be doing prostitution. He further explained that the same men who were refusing their wives are now in the fore front reminding the wives about the dates for the meetings.

The men have now seen the benefits of engaging their wives in economic activities. There is now at least mutual respect between men and women (I, 2, 3 July, 2014).

The church representatives feel that the church has enabled the men to have a change of attitude towards women who are engaged in economic activities.

### **The church as an advocacy**

When he was explaining about the practice of property grabbing in the area, one of the church representatives said that the root cause of this practice is laziness. He pointed out that God commanded every human being to eat his/her own sweat. He said that for this reason, every family works with their own children and they have to enjoy the fruits of their sweat. He said that as a church, Nkhoma Synod is strongly teaching against laziness. He further explained that it is a lazy person who would wish to grab property from the widow.

Here, the church representatives attribute laziness as a source for people to be grabbing property from widows. Therefore, the church feels that it has the mandate to teach the people to work hard as a biblical commandment.

The church representatives feel that the church has the mandate to do charity work (diakonia). As a servant, the church says it is entrusted with the responsibility to call all people to fellowship as it witnesses to God's kingdom. It is like a shepherd, offering pastoral care to the people at the same time bridging the gaps among them. The church takes on board



all the people, men and women, people within and without the church, people of different political parties and beliefs. Thus, it creates an inclusive community which is empowering.

#### **4.6.4 The voice of EEW representatives**

In the following paragraphs, I will present what the EEW employees say is the role of the church in this project.

One of the EEW representatives said that the Malawian society is male dominated. He explained that a gender analysis which was conducted revealed that there are issues affecting both men and women in Kalolo area. He said that in such a circumstance, use of already existing structures is necessary. He explained that since about 80% of the people in this area are members of religious structures, the church provided a good entry point for bringing in awareness. He said that religious leaders like other structures such as chiefs and Area Development Committee (ADC) act as watchdogs to protect women from abuse:

Churches are already established structures, therefore, easy to use when implementing a project (G7, 17 July, 2014).

This statement reveals that many people belong to religious institutions. Therefore, to be effective, working with the church will be ideal. The people also take what the church says as true and that it is from God. According to the EEW representative, the other reason for working with the church is because the church also deals with issues of vulnerability. The EEW employees felt that since the church is always in contact with people at the grassroots, is easy to reach these people by working with the church.

In summary, the EEW employees see the church as a partner in dealing with issues of vulnerability. This enables the project to reach out to many grassroots at the same time. In this project, the church has acted as a path to reach the women at the grassroots easily.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the empirical material. These findings are primarily based on the analysis of the interview transcripts. They are also supported by documents and observation. The material shows that the situation of the women is characterised by poverty, gender based violence, unequal distribution of household work, HIV/AIDS, widowhood and lack of education. The women are also excluded from any decision making position. Commenting on their situation, the women stressed that poverty and HIV/AIDS are the major challenges. They attributed these challenges to the fact that men do dominate in all spheres of life in the homes. The women reported that, HIV/AIDS has spread so fast because the men go

for other women whenever they have got money. The women also said that the women who are in polygamous families (especially first wives) are neglected together with their children. In order to find for the resources to feed the children, these women sometimes are forced to engage in extra marital relationships which results in the contraction of the disease.

While the church representatives concurred with the women that they are poor and vulnerable, they did not acknowledge polygamy as a problem and challenge for the women. One of the church representatives reported that HIV/AIDS has spread because the women deny their husbands conjugal rights as a means of punishment to force the man to conform to their opinions. He further reported that in most of the marriages there is no communication between the wife and the husband with regards to sexual matters. The consequence is that the men go out for other women in places like pubs in search of sexual satisfaction. On the other hand, the EEW employees stressed that women exclusion from all spheres of life is a great challenge. One of the EEW employees reported that the cultural setting of the Malawian society like the family trap and condemn women to poverty. He further explained that the laws of Malawi are also oppressive to poor village Malawian women. He said that the laws are not conducive for women progression. He cited an example that banks require someone to have a guarantor in order to be given a loan. He wondered where a village woman can get such a requirement.

Concerning the role of the church in the EEW project, the women unanimously voiced that the church had acted as a unifying instrument. The women said that under normal circumstances, different tribes in the area like the Chewas (who are dominant in the area), the Yaos and the Tumbukas do not comfortably work together. Again, Muslims, Christians, those who believe in African Traditional Religions and others who do not belong to any other religion are never free to mix up. Another dividing factor is politics. The people belonging to different political parties find it hard to work together. Nonetheless, the church has managed to break all these dividing walls. The people have been enabled to work together. The women said that this was important because they had learnt a lot from each other.

On the other hand, the church felt that its role was to take care of all God's creation. According to the church representatives, the women have great responsibilities in the home, community and society at large. He cited examples that the women take care of children, pay school fees and pay for medication costs. The church representatives further reported that some of these women are widows and some look after orphans as well, yet they do not have

support from anywhere. Therefore, according to the church representatives, the church was mandated to do charity work (diakonia) in order to support these women. He added that the project cannot be a means for mission; all were welcome because they are God's own creation.

The EEW employees stressed that the church was a pathfinder. According to one of the EEW employees, since 80% of the Malawian population belong to one form of religious institutions, the grassroots can easily be reached if the church is used as a partner. He said that the people on the ground have trust in religious institutions. Therefore, using such institutions like the church structures, it is easy to implement the project. He further said that such institutions act as watchdogs. He said that the women are protected from whatever abuse that would have happened as a result of the women's participation in the project.

As regards to the role of the EEW project, both the women and the church were in agreement that the project was an instrument of empowerment. The women reported that the EEW project had enabled them to demand for their rights and engage duty bearers for better services like clean water and health. In addition, the women said that the project had empowered them economically through the different economic activities in which they are engaged. Some of the widows who were helpless had been enabled to establish themselves and take care of their children.

In a similar vein, the church representatives emphasised that the project had empowered the women economically. One of the church representatives said that some of the women were failing to serve God because of poverty. He however said that the project had enabled women to generate funds which they also used to serve God and freely participate in church activities as well as the society.

On the other hand, the EEW employees' emphasis was on advocacy. According to one of the EEW employees, the project was a voice for the women in a male dominated society. He explained that the project aimed at changing the attitude that the society had towards women. He further said that the structures that trap and condemn women to poverty needed to be broken through advocating and enactment of laws and fight for attitude change. He gave an example that if a woman is involved in economic activities it does not mean that she has become a prostitute or looking for men.

The interviewees in the study also had different emphasis on what empowerment is. On the one hand, they all agreed that empowerment means participation and acquisition of skills.

However, for the women, the emphasis was that empowerment means the ability to access and control over resources and to belong to a group. The women reported that various skills which they had acquired from their groups enabled them to have access to resources like fertilizer, domesticated animals and maize (which is the main staple food in Malawi). On the other hand, the church representatives emphasised that empowerment is a divine action through the Holy Spirit. He cited biblical examples that God empowered the Israelites by teaching them His word which empowered them spiritually, economically and militarily. The church representative further said that Jesus empowered his disciples by teaching them God's skills. For the EEW employees, empowerment mainly referred to the ability for the grassroots to be mobilised and be enabled to engage the government as duty bearers for better services. Therefore, their emphasis was that empowerment is ability to express oneself.

These findings will further be discussed in chapter 5 using gender theories and empowerment theories. The concept of empowerment has been looked at from both the secular (sociological) and theological (diaconal) perspectives.

## **Chapter 5, discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how EEW project and Nkhoma Synod is empowering women in Kalolo area. To achieve this purpose, I first of all explored the situation of women in Kalolo area on one hand and tried to find out how the people involved in the EEW project understand empowerment on the other hand. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with twelve people. These interviews were supported by participant observation and some documents like scripts and reports. This chapter reviews, analyses and discusses the findings using gender theory and empowerment theory in light of relevant literature.

The main question for this research is; How are faith based projects empowering women in Malawi? The case of EEW project, in Kalolo area, Lilongwe district, Malawi. This question was supported by three questions;

- What is the situation of the women in Kalolo area?
- What is the role of Nkhoma Synod Church and the EEW project in empowering women in this area?
- How is empowerment understood in this project?

These research questions were answered by the themes that emerged from the interviews and were reported in chapter 4.

### **5.1 The situation of the women in Kalolo area.**

The interviewees revealed that the situation of the women in this area is characterised by gender differences, inequalities and oppression. There are unequal power relations in the families, community and society at large, with men having more power than women. In the paragraphs that follow, I will present these gender differences, inequalities and oppression between men and women and contrast them with gender differences, gender inequality and gender oppression theory.

#### **Do the women in Kalolo area face gender oppression?**

As I have already presented in chapter 2, gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female ([www.UNDP.org/](http://www.UNDP.org/) 26/03/2015). However, in most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources as well as decision making opportunities.

Most of the interviewees confirmed that there are unequal gender relations in the families and society. The women said that marriage functions to the advantage of men at the expense of the women. There is male domination with the man making all the decisions in the family.

All the women unanimously agreed that women lack capital to start a business so that they can bail themselves out of poverty. The men take advantage of the situation to oppress the women as their economic dependants. Such male domination is not only found in Malawi. Riphenberg, (1997), a Zimbabwean social scientist, also affirms that 'African Cultures' generally operate in the advantage of men who are socialized to dominate the family relations and structures. In her article, "Women's Status and Cultural Expression: Changing Gender relations and Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe" Riphenburg discusses gender dynamics in the Zimbabwean family by pointing out the existence of unequal gender relations and the impact on women's health, control of sexuality and cultural expression. She states that the traditional structure of the Zimbabwean family makes it difficult for women to obtain the authority and resources they need during times of economic strain. Male-headed families are the ideal family model in Zimbabwe.

The trend is similar to the Malawian context. There exists a state of unbalanced power relations which operates as male members of the family assume positions of privilege even among the matrilineal societies like the Chewa. The findings revealed that poverty is a contributing factor to the inequalities in education between men and women.

The interviewees also revealed that when these girls drop out of school at that early age, the only option available to them is marriage. One interviewee reported that she dropped out of school because of poverty, yet she had a yearning to go up to the university. Her dreams were shattered up. She is a second wife in a polygamous family though she has a Malawi School Certificate of Education which would warrant her to get some formal employment. Things have been tough for her as the husband have 6 children from the first wife and 4 children from her. This is not a disadvantage only to the woman, but to the society as a whole. The early marriage breeds early pregnancy and rapid population growth. How can one take care of 10 children yet he has no any formal employment or business? Besides, the men refuse the women to do business or formal employment so that they can help each other in fetching for the family resources

The end result is that the cycle repeats itself; these children too will jump into early marriages as a solution, making it difficult to break the poverty cycle. The women then suffer

most because they are the ones society says should take care of the children and family, but without resources. How does education help to reduce early marriages? One of the outcomes from educating girls is to delay marriage as women seek alternative pathways outside the home in the form of further education or employment (Wyndow et.al, 2013).

Gender oppression theory praises these women's traits of caring and nurturing (Lobber, 1994). It argues that even men can do it if they are trained. However, the women reported that the men do nothing in the homes, as regards to child care

Through the unequal power relations in the family, women are exploited as wives and mothers. The research findings showed that lives in the homes is conditioned by harassment, domination and tyranny from the men. The women are victimised and exploited. The expectation of marriage and motherhood in a patriarchal society goes hand in hand with male domination in the homes. Kalolo area being dominantly occupied by the Chewa is a matrilineal society, but that does not mean that it is a matriarchal society. The women are still under the men either the husband; father, brother, uncle or son. As such, it is still a patriarchal society.

The fact that society and culture have endorsed that the man is the head and that male-headed families are an ideal model, power imbalances have been created with a man having more power than a woman, who is given a position of submission (Kessel 2014, p.71). In the Malawian context, it is even endorsed in wedding songs, "wamkulu ndani m'mbanja? Wamkulu m'mwamuna" that is to say, "Who is the head in the family? It is the man who is a head." Gender oppression theory argues that it is difficult to eradicate patriarchy but it can be resisted by creating space for women only. Can there be a time when men and women cease to interact? According to the women in the study, the men are still important, there is need that men and women work together.

The need for the incorporation of men in the EEW project was also noted by the EEW employees. Though the project is targeting on the women, men have been incorporated in the groups which have been mobilised. These men are termed 'male champions.' The EEW employees reported that the idea for male incorporation in the project is to make sure that the men will be able to understand the rights of the women, thereby help in the promotion of women's rights. In so doing, developmental activities will be tackled as a front of both men and women.

It can therefore be argued that creation of women space only cannot be a solution to combat patriarchy. The aim is not to turn the inequality upside down with women coming to the top and men down, but rather, drawing those at the periphery to the centre so that they become equal partners with the men.

According to the EEW 2012 report, women do not take part in decision making whether in the family, community or society at large. The man makes all the decisions in the family, even the decisions affecting the woman's own life. The women in the study said that the men do not understand the women. They reported that as women, they take decisions from men, yet the men do not take decisions from the women. The women said that men feel that the reasoning of the women is very low. According to the women, if the men and women were making decisions together the living conditions in the homes would greatly improve for the better. The women said that the cultural belief that a woman's reasoning is low and that as a result a woman should be submissive contributes to the exclusion of women from decision making positions.

It can therefore, be argued that the women in Kalolo area face oppression from the men. Marriage as a social institution functions to the advantage of men. The Chewa being a matrilineal society, one would think that it favours women. Nonetheless, from the study findings, men still dominate, putting women at a submissive position. It is the men who make all the decisions in the family, community and society at large.

### **Are there gender inequalities in Kalolo area?**

Gender theory does not define gender as an individualized role that is learnt in childhood and relatively stable thereafter, but as a system of inequality that is created and recreated in daily experience (Potuchek 1992, p. 549) as was reported by the women in the study. If the women are able to take care of both the men and children in the family, how can they fail to make a decision for their lives? The issue at hand here is not that the women's reasoning is low, but it is an issue of power struggle. The men would like to safeguard their power so that they can still keep the women under their dominion.

This exclusion undermines the women's dignity, capabilities and talents. In such a situation, the women are rendered not fully human. Phiri, (2007) writing from a Malawian context argues that a human being is considered to be a person if s/he is involved in the discussion that goes around him/her, and that his/her capabilities are recognized and utilized for the good of the community. Did God not create both women and men in His own image and



likeness? (Genesis 1:26-27). How can women with low reasoning give birth and raise men who are reasonable?

Therefore, by excluding the women from decision making, the capabilities, skills and talents which the women have are wasted. On the other hand, if these talents were taken on board together with those of men, the society would benefit very much.

Gender theory does not assume the ‘naturalness’ of gender differences, rather it highlights the creation of differences through the active construction of gender boundaries in everyday interactions (Potuchek, 1992). This helps us to see that engaging in economic activities has been a critical boundary in distinguishing men and women in the Malawian context. It has played an important part in the construction of gender inequality. Men’s responsibility as breadwinners has provided a justification for discrimination against women in the market place but even in the homes. This has reinforced women’s position as economic dependants in the families. In addition, it is culturally believed that it is men who should be educated because they will take care of a family, while women will be taken care of by their husbands. As such, there is no need for them to be educated.

By being mobilized into groups, the women in the study are trying to negotiate the gender boundaries, so that economic activities should not be a tool for discrimination against them. If there can be higher levels of women’s control over income and property, there will be more freedom of movement for women and choices for marriage (Coltrane, 2010). It is a stride towards gender equality, which as presented in the theory chapter means men and women having equal conditions for realising their full rights economically, socially, cultural and politically. If women are given a chance to be educated and engage in economic activities, the society will benefit from the talents of both men and women. The end result is that there will be an improvement in the socio-economic development in families as well as society as a whole.

It can therefore be concluded that, the inequalities which exist in Kalolo area are socially constructed due to the belief that men are bread winners; on the other hand, women are economic dependants. This has justified the discrimination of women economically, in education circles, social and politically.

### **What gender differences exist in Kalolo area?**

The study found out that women have a heavier workload than men. The division of household work and care for children is exploitative of women’s services. Among the Chewa

of Malawi; there is a saying that “namwali amamva nkhwali.” This means that a woman is supposed to wake up very early than any other member of the family possibly at around 2 or 3 am at the first crawl of a cock. The women in the study reported that as women they work all day. Therefore, this state of affairs has a negative impact on the education of girls and women.

Besha, (1996) writing from a Tanzanian context argues that women are already overloaded, and have no time to get involved in new development projects. Much of their time is consumed while maintaining the domestic responsibility to work and take care of the household needs. Besha goes on to say that the social constraints which most women face are a bigger hindrance than the economic ones which are held and fostered by patriarchal traditions.

Apart from the heavy workload, the study also revealed that the situation of the women is characterised by the big challenge of HIV/AIDS pandemic. Phiri (2004) observes that HIV/AIDS is a gender issue. The women in the study attributed the spread of HIV/AIDS to the men. When they sell their crops, the men go for other women in pubs, drinking and engaging themselves in immoral behaviours.

On the other hand, one of the church representatives attributed the spread of HIV/AIDS to lack of communication between a wife and a husband. He reported that when there is a conflict between the wife and husband, denying the partner conjugal rights is used as a means of punishment. He said that it is the women who mostly do this in trying to force the man to succumb to their wishes. However, instead of surrendering, the man goes out to sleep with other women, especially from the pubs. In addition, most couples are not free to discuss sexual issues in their marriages. The end result is that men go out of the matrimonial home in search of sexual satisfaction.

According to one of the church representatives, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has contributed to the increase of the number of widows in the area. He said that 90% of such families are extremely poor because once the husband dies; the relatives of the deceased man come and grab everything from the widow. This is to the fact that according to gender theory, women are marginalized and defined as ‘other’ in patriarchal societies. Women are seen as objects and denied opportunities for self-realization (Lengermann & Wallace, 1985). Thus, most of the values and expectations for women’s behaviour have been articulated in relation to men rather than independently. This was also noted and confirmed by the women in the study.

The women observed that the perception the relatives of the deceased man are that all the property is solely the sweat of their relation

According to one of the church representatives, there is a gap between men and women in terms of education as well as economically. Since the women have no education, they lack skills for formal employment. Gender theory says that the women are isolated to the private sphere of the household making them having no voice in the public sphere ([www.sociology.about.com/od/](http://www.sociology.about.com/od/) accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2015). Thus, being uneducated renders the women powerless, hence become vulnerable to the men's oppression. The women themselves acknowledged that it is because of their low education that they are exposed to such oppression and therefore lack power to free them.

The issue of education disparities is not only an issue in Malawi, but also in other African countries as well. Despite some governments' effort to improve the girl child education, studies show that the gender gap is widening in terms of educational achievements of boys and opportunities for girls (Nyengere 2004, p.48). It was also observed in this study that of all the women who were interviewed, only one went up to form 4. The rest reported to have dropped far away in primary school and then went ahead to get married. How can this gap be closed then? The society, beginning with the family must unlearn the socially constructed roles which oppress women like the unequal distribution of labour in the family. The socialisation of women must be re-examined and challenged.

It can be concluded that, as per gender differences theory, the Kalolo society has organized itself based on gender. It has ranked men above women. The men have been assigned the responsibility of breadwinners, thus justified to be educated and engage in economic activities. On the other hand, the women have been assigned as economic dependants, thus not justified to be educated or engage in economic activities as this would be the responsibility of their husbands. However, the women have proved to be able, but that they were only lacking space to exercise their skills, talents and reasoning as is described by gender inequality theory. It is the cultural structures that hinder the women from displaying their talents, thereby, seeming to be incompetent. From a gender oppression theory, women are oppressed and abused in this area. The power relations that exist between men and women in this area are not balanced. The men have been accorded more power by the society, thus dominating in all the spheres of life. The women then find themselves under the

dominion of men. As such, the women's lives are characterised by struggles and challenges as they are seen as objects, which cannot make decisions for their own lives.

## **5.2 How is empowerment understood in the EEW project?**

The core theme for this study is empowerment. The research question was; how are faith based projects empowering women in Malawi? In order to find out if this question has been answered, there was a need to get views from the people who were involved in the project how they understood empowerment. In line with the research question, voices from the women, the church representatives and the EEW employees will be presented.

### **5.2.1 The voice of women**

The women being a targeted group necessitated their voice to be heard and analyse if the women feel that the project is empowering them.

#### **Empowerment as access and control over resources**

Empowerment is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their own life situations (Gutierrez et.al. 2000, p.83). The women in the study reported that they are now engaging in various economic activities such as selling flitters, sweet beer and dried fish just to mention a few. This is in line with the National Economic Empowerment Policy (NEEP) which defines economic empowerment as improving the livelihood of Malawians through increased access to economic factors of various facilities that enhance potential for engaging in businesses and other income generating activities. The women in the study reported that through the economic activities they are engaging in, some of them are now able to buy farm inputs such fertilizer thereby increasing crop output, others are now rearing domestic animals such as pigs and goats, which they can sell and pay school fees for their children, others have bought iron sheets to roof their houses.

In the Malawian culture it is mostly the men who have access and control over resources. For a woman to have access to these resources is indeed a sign of empowerment. The women have the surplus to sell and have an increase in their income for their families. The availability of food also reduces malnutrition in their children.

#### **Empowerment as access to health facilities.**

Personal power can be described as experiencing oneself as an effecting and capable person (Gutierrez et.al, 2000, p. 583). However, in the face of HIV/AIDS, women have been further disempowered due to stigmatization on those who are infected and affected by the disease. In

addition, shortage of human and financial resources available further hinders progress in the fight against the disease. Kalolo area is not an exception. The women in the study reported that living with HIV/AIDS is hard. They further reported that lack of health facilities is also a challenge. The women however, reported that EEW has facilitated that the people in the area have access for Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT).

How is VCT an empowerment? At VCT, the people are trained on how they can take care and support the people who are infected. Thus, all the cultural myths that enhance stigmatization are cleared off. Therefore, both the infected and affected regain their confidence as people who are able. The people can once more experience their effectiveness and capability to the families as well as community. Their access to condoms will enable the infected persons to fulfil their conjugal duties at the same time preventing the virus from further spreading.

The availability of VCT, gives hope to the people. They are enabled to regain their confidence that though they are infected with the virus, they can still contribute to the socio-economic development in their families and nation with their talents and capabilities. The people are then enabled to participate in various activities for the betterment of their families and the society at large.

### **Empowerment as ability to claim rights from duty bearers**

In chapter 2, I presented the Beijing Declaration and platform for action set on an agenda for the empowerment of women which reaffirms women's rights as human rights (Wyndow et.al 2013, p.36). Under the Malawian Constitution, (chapter 4, section 24), women are given the right to full and equal protection by the law. The women may not be discriminated against on the basis of gender or marital status. Why then are women still discriminated against yet there is this provision? One possible explanation is that the women are ignorant of their rights. On the other hand, through the training which the women have gone through, their eyes are now open. The women in the study cited examples in which they were able to mobilize themselves and confront the authorities to provide them with clean water and transport from the hospital.

It can therefore be argued that, when self-confidence and capacity building increase, it influences the ability to negotiate and work in corporation with others so that oppressive structures are identified and resisted (Rowlands 1997, p.127). Hence, empowerment is what happens as a result of having self-confidence. The women in Kalolo area have been enabled to claim for their rights and speak against cultural norms and structures which oppress them.

### **Empowerment as participation**

From Rowland's definition of 'power over' empowerment means bringing people at the margins to the centre (Rowlands 1997, p.13). Thus, the emphasis is that empowerment is participation in all spheres of life, be it political, economic, social or formal decision making. Are the women of Kalolo area participating in any of such activities? The women in the study reported that culturally, they were waiting for their men to provide for them and make decisions for them. They however, said that they have now realized that this was oppression. The empowerment activities in which they are engaged address their human dignity and reveal to each of them the inherent gifts and abilities. Thus, the women have been enabled to actively work towards their own transformation (WCC 2005, p.8). The women's groups have provided for discussions and opportunities for action. The women are working together for supporting each other, networking, analysis of situations and reflections.

By participating in various economic activities, women have been exposed to the public realm. The women are reaching out to other women; they are able to intervene in issues that affect their lives such as health and food programmes. In short, women have been given a voice.

### **Empowerment as acquisition of skills**

The ability to learn and develop task related skills is a necessary requirement in any task to be undertaken. The skills increase the level of self-confidence and one is better prepared for the task. Kessel, (2014) says that power is not primarily control over institutions and resources. She argues that it involves control over the mind. Kessel further says that the transformative potential of power is rooted from within in a self-understanding that can inspire the grassroots. The women in the study reported that the idea of village saving loans is not new. They have been doing it for years. Why then were they not successful as they are now? According to woman G6, the women lacked training and skills, hence the failure. The education and training which the women have received have enabled the women to gain competencies and analytical skills which are essential for participation (Nordstokke, 2011). It has also provided a wide range of opportunities for self-actualization that has enabled them to act as agents of their own transformation.

It can therefore be concluded that skills are empowering than handouts. As the English proverb goes; *'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.'*

### **Empowerment as associating and belonging to groups.**

Most of the women in the study pointed out that they have been empowered by associating with other women and belonging to different groups. How do such groups empower women? In chapter 2, I referred to Rowlands' three dimension of power operation. Therefore, the groups into which women have been mobilized have provided space for their participation. The women are now able to see the reality of their situation from their own perspective (Nordstokke 2011, p.99). The space which has been provided is not only physical for the community, but also space for their life stories. This means defending their right to speak for themselves and protest against male domination and marginalization. Hence, the groups which the women have formed reveal the power from within to stand up, pursue a common goal and implement change (Kessel 2014, p.188). Thus, to have a sense of belonging is in line with the African world view which values communal life and relatedness.

### **Empowerment as ability to work together with the men**

The women in the study reported that they have been empowered to work with men. How can working together with men be empowerment yet it is the same men who dominate and oppress women? While gender oppression theory advocate for creation of women space only as a solution to male domination, to the contrary, the African world view is of balance, connectedness, reciprocity and compromise (Kessel 2014, quoting Nnaemeka 2005a, p.3). Thus, in the African world view, men are regarded as collaborators in problem solving and social change. The women in the study confirmed that they have been trained to work together with men. This is what Rowlands, (1997) refers to as the relational dimension of power. As the women are engaging in economic activities, they are also interacting with men, thereby, negotiating to narrow the gap between men and women.

The fact that the Malawian culture separates men and women, for a woman to work with men is a sign of empowerment. It will also enable an attitude change in the people's minds that if a woman works with a man she will seduce the man. The people will realise that men and women can work together without any seduction.

In summary, the women understood empowerment in various ways such as control and access over resources, acquisition of skills, participation and belonging to groups just to mention a few. The women feel that the project has in a way succeeded in empowering them though there are still some challenges.

### **5.2.2 Does the church have the same perception of empowerment as the women?**

In the previous section, I presented how the women perceive what empowerment is. In this section, I will present the voice of the church. In many aspects, the church echoed a similar voice with the women. The church representatives understood empowerment to mean access and control over resources, participation in development and decision making, ability to work together with men and self reliance. However, the church had a theological dimension of the understanding of empowerment. According to one of the church representatives, empowerment is a divine action. God transfers His power to human beings to enable action. Kessel, (2014) argues that empowerment is not a biblical term, but, from a theological perspective, it refers first to the fact that all human beings are created in the image of God. In Genesis chapter 2:20, Adam was given the mandate to name the animals. Thus, God empowers people to act in the world and be responsible for creation including responsibility for each other (Kessel 2014, p.49).

According to one of the church representatives, God created everything before a human being. He said that this is the basis for empowering each other. God meant that a human being should have access to resources for the sustainability of life. This is what Kessel, (2014) calls diaconal empowerment which makes people aware of their God given and inherited gifts and talents. It aims at building self-awareness and human capacities to enable the people to be agents of their own transformation (Kessel 2014, quoting Ferguson and Otega 2002, p.3). The church representative said that it is God who empowers people through the Holy Spirit. In the Exodus stories, Moses argued that he was incompetent and unable to accomplish the task because among other reasons he was not eloquent and slow in speech God however, promised to help Aaron and Moses and empower them for the mission (Chapters 3-4). In the book of Judges, Gideon also refused to carry out a mission against the Midianites saying his tribe of Manasseh was the weakest and that he was the least important member in his family. But God ensured him that he would help him (chapters 6, 7 and 8).

God shares His power with the church through the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus shared his power with those at the margins, tax collectors and women by welcoming them, Nkhoma Synod has followed this example. By training women and equipping them with various skills, the church is sharing power with women. The women have been enabled to stand up in realisation that they are also bearers of God's image. The women have been enabled to exercise their skills, potentials and abilities for their own benefits and for their families.



In conclusion, the church had both the secular and theological understanding of empowerment. According to the church representatives, the power is from God, through the action of the Holy Spirit to human kind. As such, human kind must also share the power among them.

### **5.2.3 What do the EEW employees say about empowerment?**

In this section, I will present the views of the EEW employees on the understanding of empowerment. The EEW employees had echoed similar voices with the church and the women. They understood empowerment as participation and self-reliance. However, the EEW employee's emphasis was on ability to engage government as duty bearers and freedom of expression. Thus, the EEW employees' understanding was right-based. Wyndow et.al, (2013) also understands women empowerment as human rights. According to the EEW project framework (2012), one of the aims of the project is to enhance legal and policy frameworks for the inclusion of the poor women in socio-economic activities. Thus, the project is not just a humble service focussing on human needs only. Dealing with legal and policy issues entails a fight for justice. Do faith based projects have the mandate to fight for justice and defend the poor?

Kessel, (2014), argues that since human rights are seen as a common understanding of law, it is a norm on which such projects can lean also; hence, a right-based approach can be justified as a norm and a mandate for church-based projects. Therefore, to be right-based implies following Jesus' vision for the poor and the marginalized (LWF 2007, p. 4). The EEW project aims at justice, to unmask the injustices which are embedded in the patriarchal structures and oppress women.

In conclusion, the EEW employees cited the attainment of human rights by women as empowerment. As such, their emphasis was on freedom of expression so that the people can hold government accountable as duty bearers. On the other hand, the church representatives emphasised empowerment from a theological point of view. According to one of the church representatives, empowerment is a divine action through the Holy Spirit. However, the women's emphasis was that empowerment is having access to and control over resources. The women also cited participation as a sign of empowerment. In overall, all the voices confirmed that the project had in a way succeeded in the empowerment of women. However, the interviewees had different perspectives on what is meant by empowerment.

Basing on what the interviewees reported, it can be concluded that the EEW project and the church is succeeding in the empowerment of women in Kalolo area. This is due to the fact that women have been mobilized in groups in which they are participating in various economic activities as well as reaching out to other women in the surrounding villages. The skills they have gained have further enabled women to claim for their rights and speak against cultural structures which they feel are oppressive to them as women. This is a sign that the women are being empowered.

### **5.3 What is the EEW project doing for the women in Kalolo area to empower them?**

The research question for this study focussed on the project. This necessitates an investigation on what EEW is doing in order to empower women in Kalolo area. One of the EEW employees reported that the project is a voice for the women in a male dominated society. Thus, being an advocate relates to resisting such structures and power of the mighty and their ideologies (LWF 2009, p.83). The EEW project has casted itself in a role as an instrument for equality and justice between men and women in Kalolo area, particularly economic and social justice. Hence, advocacy aims at empowerment of the marginalized. The base is the biblical understanding that every human being is created in the image of God, with capabilities and abilities independent of their status or gender (LWF 2009, p.45).

The Human Rights claim that all members of the human family have an inherent dignity that cannot be segregated from human kind (Kessel 2014, p.49). Therefore, all societal values which perpetuate injustice, suffering and oppression must be confronted (World Council of Churches (WCC) 2005, p.1). A similar observation is made by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995). She dreams of new women who will engage in the process of changing established oppressive norms and relational patterns. She dreams of women's individuality being affirmed and promoted. The EEW project is advocating for women by speaking for the women, advocating for the women's full humanity and dignity and the fullness of life given by Jesus Christ (John 10:10). One of the most effective strategies that EEW has adopted is the mobilization of women into groups for action. This then, has provided space for information sharing and speaking out for injustices (WCC 2005, p.2). Rowlands, (1997) also understand empowerment as participation and individual's ability to maximise their opportunities available to them

The women themselves confirmed that they have been enlightened through EEW. The women reported that before this project, most of the women did not know that they had the

right to participate in development activities in their community. As per gender theory, they were depending on social roles appropriated by society (Zachariassen 2012, p.89). As such, in respect to the cultural norms, the women were shying away from these activities. However, with the advent of the EEW project, women are now able to take part in such activities. The project has helped the women to unlearn the social norms that hindered them from participation.

The EEW project has also been instrumental in the empowerment of women in Kalolo area. As I defined empowerment in chapter 2, empowerment involves bringing people who are outside the centre so that they are enabled to participate in all spheres of life. The women reported that they had been enabled to intervene in various programmes that are taking place in their community. The church was in agreement with the women about empowerment. Using Rowland's definition, 'power over' entails the understanding of the dynamics of oppression and internalised oppression. According to the church representatives, economic empowerment could be achieved by equipping the women with various skills, competencies and techniques. The women in Kalolo area are now using these skills to analyse cultural norms and values which are oppressive to women. The women have challenged these cultural values and engage in economic activities which have enabled them to improve their lives.

In the same vein, the EEW employees concurred with the church and the women. One of them reported that the main focus of the project is on the people on the ground, especially the women. Thus, active participation is empowerment. Phiri, (2007) argues that to be a person, one's capabilities and talents must be recognized and used for the good of the community. In addition, one must be involved in the discussions that go on in the community. This is what Rowlands (1997) refers to as 'power to' and power from within'. Thus, the project has given the women the scope of their full range of their abilities and potential.

The women further reported that the project has transformed their lives as well as the community. Transformation is compatible with empowerment when it comes to conscious rising of individuals and groups to challenge social injustice (Kessel 2014, p.49). Through awareness campaign and equipping the women with skills, the project has built self-awareness and human capabilities thereby, enabling the women to be agents of their own transformation. The women reported that culturally, the village head man's court was solely a male's domain (see chapter 4, on transformation). Transformation is associated with God's continuous renewal of creation (ibid). It is a total reorientation of life with all its aspirations,

ideologies, structures and values (LWF 2004, p.32). The women in the study have now trespassed into the village head man's court and are able to challenge the social ideologies which oppress them as women. Thus, transformation also means building sustainable communities, where each and every person is enabled to engage in their own transformation (Kessel 2014, p.51).

The EEW employees agreed with the women. They acknowledged that EEW has been actively involved in the enactment of gender bills on gender equality. It is worth noting that, gender as part of stratification system ranks men and women unequally (Lobber 1994, p.101). Throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways. One way of unlearning these unequal social roles is through enactment of gender bills, so that a favourable environment for women empowerment can be created.

The church also acknowledged that the EEW project has acted as an agent of transformation and change as regards to the negative attitude society has towards women. Society ranks men and women unequally by providing predictable division of labour, designated allocation of scarce resources and responsibilities (ibid). In the Malawian context, economic activities have been used to discriminate against women. The society predicts that the man is a bread winner hence he is justified to engage in economic activities. On the other hand, the woman is predicted to be an economic dependant; hence she is not expected to engage in economic activities. The woman who engages in economic activities is labelled as a prostitute. In her book, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, Mercy Amba Oduyoye echoes a similar concern. Writing from a West African perspective, argues against assumptions that a woman can be fulfilled only by being attached to a man. By being involved in economic activities and various trainings the women in Kalolo area have gained skills and develop networks that can be translated to other types of grass roots movements. The men too have seen the benefits of involving their wives in such groups and activities.

Theoretically, gender equality entails that men and women have equal conditions for realising their full rights, contributing and benefitting from economic, social cultural and political development (Zachachariassen 2012, p.90). Hence, building capacities is critical for confronting injustices in communities that promote gender inequality. The first step is to raise awareness and create space for dialogue and tools for critical analysis (WCC 2005, p.10). The church was in agreement with the women that the project is equipping the women with skills so that they are enabled to effectively engage in economic activities. While society ascribes

particular set of abilities to social categories of people, empowerment must involve undoing such social constructions (Rowlands 1997). The people must be able to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act.

#### **5.4 What role is the church playing the EEW project?**

The church has many images in the New Testament (NT). One of these images is the church as a servant people (McGrath 2011, p.376). This image emphasises the continuity between the old and new covenants. God chose and called Israel to serve Him: in the same way, God chose and called the church for service. Thus, diakonia has a specific focus on the practices of the church in the context of the marginalized like women. It is faith in action motivated by Biblical readings and cries of those who suffer (Kessel 2014, p.39). As a norm, the church seeks to express the realisation of God's mission on earth. What is the mission of God on earth? The centre of Jesus' teaching was about the good news about the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). The manifesto of this kingdom is laid in Luke 4:18-20;

[...] he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed [...].

This verse outlines the nature of this kingdom. It is about empowerment and equality. Throughout His life on earth, Jesus was also accompanied by women (Luke 8:1-3). He accepted them as his disciples. Jesus could even visit women in their homes (Luke 10:38-42). He allowed the woman whom society had labelled as sinful to anoint his feet with oil (Luke 7:36-52). It is clear therefore, that in God's kingdom, which was established by Jesus, continued by the church and it is yet to come; the norm is about empowerment. By trying to empower the women in Kalolo area, the church is continuing in the establishment of the kingdom following the example of Jesus where all are equal regardless of sex or status.

The women reported that, the church had united them. They work together and share among themselves though they are from different background. Thus, the church is expressing communion and fellowship (McGrath 2011, p.389). It is also a biblical value of belonging and sharing (Kessel 2014, p.178). Communion implies mutual acceptance of each other and restlessness for one another's physical and spiritual well-being in all areas of life (LWF, 2009). Hence, the church is in obedience to God's call to a community, to share responsibilities and lives (Eurodiaconia 2010, p.12).

By being open to both women and men and people of different faith, the church is advocating for equality and participatory patterns of being together so that all who are

involved must benefit (LWF 2009, p.33). Being a community affirms and confesses that the communion itself is a gift from God. Through this gift the people acknowledge each other and share the gifts given to each individual. This is a proclamation of God's unconditional love in Jesus Christ, making equality and inclusiveness always an important expression of the church's nature.

The study found out that the main role of the church is to empower the women. According to one of the church representatives, as a church, Nkhoma Synod is doing charity work, putting theology into practice. It is translating the gospel into action. This is done through expression of love to the neighbour and creating an inclusive community. Thus, Nkhoma Synod is seeking to empower those on the margin of society, holistically and with complete care (Eurodiaconia 2010, p.13). Nkhoma Synod is not only helping people in vulnerable situations since such relationships of giver and receiver creates inequality. The church is enabling, empowering and facilitating the potential of the women. By enabling the women, the church is ensuring that the dignity of the women is freely and responsibly exercised (Haugen 2010, p. 208). Therefore, Nkhoma Synod is striving to build an inclusive society aiming at transformation, empowering and with the women in relation to the men and their environment.

One of the church representatives said that the role of the church is to take care of all God's creation. The church chose to work with the women because they are also God's creation. The understanding of the relationship between diaconal care and creation is to understand the holistic perspective of diaconal care (Eurodiaconia 2010, p.10). In Genesis 2:7, God takes the soil from the ground and creates a human being. It had no life until God breathed in His breath of life. Therefore, both man and woman carry God's breath and image in them. Thus, both sexes are equal and ought to treat each other fairly, with compassion and mercy. Therefore, taking care of creation includes caring for each other as God's stewards. The church is drawing the women from the periphery to the centre. The church is affirming that men and women are equal because both are God's own good creation.

In conclusion, it can be argued that, it is the task of the church to listen to the voices of the suffering and marginalised people (LWF 2009, p.83). It is also the task of the church to ensure that the gifts of all individuals are identified and put to use. The church must be inspired by the biblical witness of God's sensitivity to people in need like the women. In Exodus 3:7 God tells Moses that, "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in

Egypt [...]” Suffering may not only be poverty and marginalisation, but also cultural and society values, political regimes and lack of good environment to live in. By empowering the women through training and economic activities, the church is making the women visible in the public sphere just like men do. This is a confrontation of some oppressive cultural values against the women, like forbidding women to engage in economic activities in the Malawian context. Empowerment is enabling individuals to act and participate for the improvement of their own lives. It also involves sharing of power, from God to people and among people themselves. Jesus is a good example who shared his power, which was given to him by his father with the marginalised people like women.

## **Chapter 6, conclusions and recommendations**

In this chapter, I will evaluate whether the EEW project is empowering women basing on the empirical data that I presented in chapter 4 and the discussion on background of gender and empowerment theory. Then, I will give recommendations. The question is; is the EEW project empowering women in Kalolo area?

### **Conclusions**

Firstly, the fact that the EEW project targeted women is in itself motivating and encouraging to the women. It is an acknowledgement that women have talents, capabilities and gifts with which they can contribute to the socio-economic development at an individual level, family, community and society at large. The only problem is that the women lack space and resources to use these gifts due to cultural values and norms that put women in subordinate positions. It is also an acknowledgement that women just like men are God's creation and that they bear God's image. Hence, the EEW project's choice to work with women is a stride towards gender equality.

Thus, on the one hand, the project has managed to empower the women, not only economically, but socially as well. The groups into which the women have been mobilized have provided space for women participation. The women have been enabled to see the reality of their situation from their own perspective. In these groups, the women share their life stories and experiences. They also share skills and talents that each of them has. Therefore, by belonging to the groups, the women are achieving more than each of them could have managed alone. The groups provide a sense of belonging and solidarity. In their groups, the women are there for each other in times of happiness or sorrow. Therefore, the groups have broken down the barriers which might have been there, be it cultural, religious, political or ethnic.

Also, the training and awareness campaign which have been provided to the women have equipped them to gain competencies and analytical skills which are essential for participation and liberation from cultural norms and values that are oppressive to the women. Hence, the women have been provided with a wide range of opportunities for self-actualization that have enabled them to be agents of their own transformation as they strive for justice. These skills have also enabled the women to successfully engage in economic activities. Through these economic activities, most of the women in Kalolo area now have access and control over resources like food and domesticated animals. The women are also able to send their children



to school. In the same vein, widows who were completely helpless after suffering a double loss of their husband and property being grabbed by the relatives of their deceased husband, have managed to establish themselves and lead a normal life again.

Further, these trainings have enlightened the women of their human rights. Thus, the women have in some cases managed to claim for their rights such as clean water, transport and see to it that justice prevails in the village setting. The women have further been enabled to speak in public, in the presence of traditional leaders. Therefore, the women are no longer confined in the private sphere, they have been exposed to the public sphere, and they have become visible. They now participate in decision making in the community. From this perspective, it can be argued that the EEW project has managed to empower the women.

On the other hand, the project is exclusive. The idea for the women contributing for the village loans and savings is good for purposes of sustainability, commitment and a balanced relationship between the duty bearers and the right holders. However, what about those who cannot manage to contribute? What about those who are single or widows? Still more, others have husbands but they are helpless, the husbands refuse to give them money for the contributions? Is this contributing towards equality or inequality? Thus, the project has been a dividing line, between women who are within the groups and those without the groups. Even if the women can attain the skills from the trainings, it would be wasted because the women have no resources to put the skills into practice. Moreover, as per the women reports, the money should be lent to those within the groups only, which means that those without the groups are completely out. Therefore, it can be argued that the EEW project is not reaching to all the women in Kalolo area. Is this taking care of all God's creation as per the church representatives' statement?

Secondly, the incorporation of men in the women groups has both positive and negative consequences. While the aim behind is for the men to encourage and promote women's rights, the same men might be violating women's rights within the groups. Hence, instead of fighting against male domination, it might reproduce male domination. The men in the groups with their male superior mentality and background might be dominating in the group activities. This can be a barrier for the women's space to exercise leadership and decision making. The presence of men in the groups hinders the women from gaining confidence and high self-esteem. It fosters the mentality that on their own, the women can do nothing without

the men. Therefore, instead of empowering, the project from this perspective is disempowering.

Further, the representation of the women in the EEW hierarchical structure is not balanced. All the decision making positions were occupied by men except one. This is a demotivating factor to the women on the ground. The women in the power positions could be role models to the other women. It would instil in the women that they are also able and do away with self-stigmatization. The structure in the EEW project gives a message that power positions are for men because they have been labelled by society as efficient and skilled. On the other hand, the women have been labelled as inefficient and unskilled; hence they cannot be in power positions. Therefore, the EEW project is on the one hand empowering, but at the other hand disempowering. It is both inclusive and exclusive.

## **6.2 recommendations**

The following are some of the recommendations I have suggested for the project;

- The representation of women and men in the hierarchical structure of the project should be balanced
- There is need to train more trainers of trainers. The area is just too big for only two trainers.
- It would have been better to provide a small loan for those women who cannot manage to contribute as a starter park.
- Nkhoma Synod should also empower women within its church structures so that it does not seem contradicting itself when it speaks of women empowerment outside the church and no women empowerment within the church.
- With funds permitting, the Danish church Aid should fund more church organization for similar projects in order to uplift the lives of women.
- Policy makers should learn from this project to adopt the bottom-up approach to gender issues for sustainability.
- It would have been better if the project was given more time so that more would have been done on capacity building within the women.
- The church should take an initiative to advocate for girl child education against early marriages.

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#### **6.4 Appendices.**

Table showing interview participants

Date of Interview	Code	interviewee
2 July, 2014	I, 1	Church representative
3 July, 2014	I, 2	Church representative
8 July, 2014	I, 3	woman
8 July, 2014	I, 4	woman
8, July, 2014	G, 1	Church representative
8 July, 2014	G, 2	woman
13, July, 2014	G, 3	woman
13, July, 2014	G, 4	woman
13 July, 2014	G, 5	woman
13, July, 2014	G, 6	woman
17, July, 2014	G, 7	EEW employee
17, July, 2014	G, 8	EEW employee

#### **Note:**

- The letter I stand for individual interviews
- The letter G stands foe group interviews
- The numbers in front of the letters stand for the sequence in which the interviews were conducted according to the dates and time.



Women in the EEW project are involved in various economic activities. The women in the picture above sell maize.



- May you tell me more about your organization
- As an organization, I understand you are funding a project in conjunction with Nkhoma Synod. Why did you decide to target women?
- What are your policies when funding a project/
- According to the Malawian culture, a woman is supposed to be in the kitchen, and you are encouraging women to do business, how does this work with their marital issues?
- How are the funds distributed?
- Do you expect the women to pay back the money?
- How are the women organized?
- Do you work with churches only, or you also work with any other organization?

### **Church representatives' interview guide**

- May you tell more about yourself?
- I understand you have embarked on the EEW project in which you are empowering women; don't you think you are off target, and that you would be on the pulpit preaching?
- Do you think there is any connection between women empowerment and God's kingdom?
- Is there any Biblical support for participation in social and economic issues as a church?
- Why did you choose Kalolo area?
- Why did you choose to target women and not men?
- What criteria did you use the selection of the beneficiaries?
- Is the money a grant or the women are expected to pay back the money?
- How do you get the funding and how is the funding distributed?
- How are the women organized?
- Do you welcome women from other faith? If so, is the project a means for mission?
- I understand that Nkhoma Synod recommended women empowerment within the church, like women to be church elders and deacons, but this has not been implemented in most of the churches, why have you decided to do women empowerment outside the church instead of beginning within the church structures?

- Blantyre and Livingstonia have women pastors, church elders and deacons. Do you want the society to look at Nkhoma Synod as a good church towards women through this project? Or you want the women to be making money instead of being in the church?
- Culturally, a woman is supposed to be in the kitchen in the Malawian context, and here you are encouraging women to do business, how does this work with their marital issues?
- Have you ever had a case where a husband refused his wife to participate in this project?
- If yes, how did you handle the case?
- As a man, how do you feel working among the majority of women considering that our culture separates women and men?
- Due to climate change, the women are the ones who are affected most, as a church, what are you doing to address the situation?
- Apart from training the women in business skills, what else are you doing to empower the women?
- How are the men involved?

### **Interview guide for the women**

- May you tell me more about yourself?
- What problems do you as a woman encounter in your everyday life?
- What do you think are the causes of these problems?
- What are your responsibilities as a woman in the home, community or society at large?
- Why did you decide to join EEW project?
- What are the requirements for one to join the EEW project?
- How does the EEW project help you? Are you given money? If so, are you expected to pay back or it is a grant?
- According to the Malawian culture, a woman is supposed to be in the kitchen and wait for a man provide for her, don't you think that men are best suited to do business than women? By being involved in economic activities, are you not in conflict with the cultural norms?

- Now that you are involved in economic activities, do you still depend on your husband?
- Why is it important for women to be involved in economic activities?
- How has the EEW project changed your life?
- Are there any problems that you encounter as you engage in these economic activities?
- This project is run by Nkhoma Synod, C.C.A.P, are you a member of this church/
- If not, do you intend to join it because it is offering you training?
- If you are a member of Nkhoma Synod, how do you work with women of other faith?
- Are there any benefits for men and women to work together?