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The United Nations  
Democracy Fund

Malawi Human Rights Youth Network

# REPORT ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN MALAWI PROJECT 2015



# *Consolidating the Foundations of Democracy*

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# ***Consolidating the Foundations of Democracy***

***“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.”***

*Kofi Annan, cited in World Development Report 2007: Development for the Next Generation (World Bank, 2006)*

## **1.0 OVERVIEW**

Over the last decade or so, youth have gained increasing prominence on the global development agenda. In Malawi, 50% of the population comprises of the youth up to 35 and below, making them a constituency difficult to ignore. Increasingly the government, development partners and civil society are recognizing both the specific needs and vulnerabilities of youth as well as their huge potential to contribute positively to development.

Therefore, with funding from the United Nations Development Fund (UNDEF), the Malawi Human Rights Youth Network (MHRYN)<sup>1</sup> is implementing a two-year (2014-16) “Youth Empowerment for Participation in Local Governance in Malawi” project. The objective is to empower youth to effectively participate in local governance targeting three regions in Malawi. The expected results are that, there will be increased capacity of members of youth organizations to meaningfully participate in local governance; that there will be an increased public and local government awareness of the role of youth in local governance, their needs with better representation of such; a strengthened local governance structures through increased youth participation in decision-making processes.

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

Youth consultative meetings have been convened in the three-targeted regions in Malawi. The forum findings have led to the development of the roadmap for youth participation in local governance and inform the advocacy and capacity development strategies for the youth organizations. The forum ensures ownership of the youth agenda in local governance, setting out critical issues to be advocated for; identifying hurdles to be dealt with and set out solutions.

## **3.0 REGIONAL YOUTH CONSULTATIVE FORUMS**

The three two-day Regional Youth Consultative Meetings held in December 2014 and January 2015 involved 60 participants drawn from MHRYN’s affiliate members selected based on leadership position; gender; age; and activism. The discussions at this level centered on:

a) Declaration of 10 Commitments for Youth and Children in Malawi stipulated under the following priorities: Priority 1-Promote High Quality Education; Priority 2-Promote Youth

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<sup>1</sup>MHRYN is a network of youth organizations with membership of over 45 youth affiliate organizations in all the regions of Malawi.

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Economic Empowerment; Priority 3-Health, Human Rights and Sanitation; Priority 4-Infrastructure Development; Priority 5-Security; Priority 6-Sports and Recreation; Priority 7-Agriculture; Priority 8-Activeness and Availability of elected members to the electorate; Priority 9-Accountability and Priority 10- Disability Issues. The declaration was assented by the President elect of Malawi; Presidential candidates during the 2014 elections; some Members of Parliament and councilors.

b) Youth apathy in local governance: This topic was discussed at regional level to ensure that regional disparities and context are taken into consideration.

c) Possible recommendations and solutions as a roadmap toward the development of the advocacy strategy that will be used by the project in addressing youth participation and governance challenges faced by the youth.

### **3.1 NATIONAL FORUM**

The national level meeting involved 21 youth leaders (one representative from each of the 17 districts with MHRYN affiliates, one each from the four cities). The national forum consolidated findings from regional forums to develop the national coherent roadmap.

This report presents the concerted voice of the youth to allow for a platform for increased youth participation in local governance. The report is an advocacy tool to be used by the youth and other stakeholders, and will be made available online on the MHRYN website.

The advocacy strategy has been developed separately with the aim of ensuring there is a strategic approach as to how the key issues identified with this report are to be addressed. The advocacy strategy lays out the advocacy approach for each issue raised, identifies the key stakeholders and their ability to influence the outcomes; developed the message for each strategic issue.

The advocacy strategy has been made available to affiliates and will be a useful advocacy tool for the affiliates who will be at the frontline in advocating for change within the local governance councils and development committees as it will allow them to articulate their needs to duty bearers.

### **4.0 DEFINITIONS**

**“Participatory Governance”** – Participatory governance can be defined as the ‘sphere of public debate, partnership, interaction, dialogue and conflict entered in to by local citizens and organizations and by local government’ (IIED, 2011).

**“Youth”** are defined according to the UN definition of youth as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years without prejudice to the age bracket of 10 to 35 years as spelt out in Malawi National Youth Policy 2013.

**“Decentralization”** is the process by which central government gradually transfers some political power, responsibilities and financial resources to local governments.

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## **5.0 PRIORITIZED ISSUES**

The meetings focused on identification of prioritized issues that would be advocated by the youth leaders in the various local governance platforms in their respective regions. While each region has its own unique priorities due to cultural and socio-economic differences, the priority issues highlighted below resonate with all the youth in all the regions.

### **5.1 Priority 1: Youth Economic Empowerment**

The youth recognize that they are a key ingredient to Malawi's economic growth and development. It is therefore critical for the youth to become economically empowered as they are critical engines of economic growth for the country. There is need to create more economic empowerment avenues for the youth both in the formal and informal sectors; promote the growth of informal enterprises and their graduation into the formal sector; and promoting youth entrepreneurship for self-employment. The agriculture sector with its diverse value chains offers particularly high opportunities for job creation compared to other sectors of the economy. In line with this, skills' training centres in all the wards in the constituency and exposure to internships, on the job trainings, apprenticeships and volunteer programs are imperative for the youth to gain much needed experiences.

### **5.2 Priority 2: Education**

The personal development of the individual young person, along with the development of local communities and the country as a whole is inextricably linked to the provision of quality, relevant and well-managed education system. Access to quality affordable and accessible education with adequate infrastructure, resources and IT materials are critical for the youth to contribute positively in society in any form.

### **5.3 Priority 3: Health**

Health (physical, mental, social and psychological well-being) is essential for the development of the country. Young people need to enjoy a health status that enables them to lead an economically and socially productive life. Information on health and nutrition is made available and accessible to the youth. This notwithstanding, youth still remain vulnerable to many health risks such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV and AIDS, early pregnancies, drug and substance abuse, poor nutrition. It is therefore critical to have youth friendly health services that are well stocked with medicines. Water and sanitation also form a critical element under health whereby there is provision of clean environment, sanitary mechanism of waste disposal and availability of clean and safe water to all Malawians.

### **5.4 Priority 4: Agriculture**

As Malawi's economy relies on the agricultural sector, financing of agro-businesses for the youth will have a boost in the economy and ensure food security. Provision of farm produce markets will motivate the youth to participate in agricultural activities and be self-reliant.

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### **5.5 Priority 5: Legal Issues**

Legislation and policies need to be favorable to the youth and their agenda. These policies include the 2013 Youth Policy, District Development Plan, Decentralization Policy just to mention a few. The youth groups were encouraged to be interested in acquiring knowledge on how these policies operate and be able to hold accountable those in authority if they do not deliver in accordance to what the respective policies require.

### **5.6 Priority 6: Infrastructure Development**

Science and Technology are pre-requisites to increase in productivity and promoting sustainable development. It has to be understood, however, that for the economy to grow it does not only require capital investment but also science, technology and environmental management. Participation of youth in science, technology and environmental management initiatives is however on the lower side. Hence, promotion of young people's participation in science, technology and environmental conservation and management is a necessity for economic growth and sustainable national development.

### **5.7 Priority 7: Sports and Culture**

Sports and Cultural activities and recreation are important to the total well-being of young people. Young people have physical needs that include general body fitness that can partly be attained through physical exercises. Socially and culturally, young people grow up and develop within a society or community and family that have various beliefs, customs, and norms and practices that impact on their lives. In this regard, relationships that exist between the young person and the family, community, school and peers etc. should be taken into consideration when coming up with programmes for young people.

Social needs for young people also include recreational, cultural and sporting activities. Facilities that provide recreation, cultural and sporting activities help to keep young people busy and occupied hence they can hardly find idle time to engage in risky behaviours that would predispose them to HIV infection and other social ills. However, a quick availability assessment shows that there is a serious inadequacy for these structures. Where these are available, they are either in a dilapidated state or are largely inaccessible by the youth. This therefore militates against expressed policy of mass participation in sports, recreation and cultural activities.

## **6.0 CHALLENGES FACING THE YOUTH IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

### **6.1 Transparency and Openness**

With an aim to increase access to information on financial management, the central government provides and publicizes information on central government transfers to councils. There has also been a push from the councils to have participatory budgetary process. There is general access to information in particular council documents such as budgets, plans, meeting minutes). However, the degree to which councils avail documents related to approve participatory budgets and



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expenditure reports is limited. Further there is also limited access to development plans (in draft or finalized) to which these budgets and expenditure reports speak. The lack of transparency and openness makes citizen participation difficult. Further there is no stipulation by law on which civil society representatives should be consulted while interpretations vary in terms of what adequate representation is including youth representation.

### **6.2 Youth Involvement in development projects**

The youth noted that there were very few youth focused activities that had been incorporated into development plans. Where youth activities were included youth were not involved in identifying the activities to match their needs. This has led to a lack of ownership and a disconnect between the youth and councils.

### **6.3 Funding constraints**

Youth identified the lack of available funds at council level to undertake youth related activities as a major challenge. The funding provided to local councils by central government is a fraction of total government expenditure, in most cases the funds are not sufficient to cover recurring costs and, initiate and implement development plans. Councils have struggled to expand and increase their revenue bases. The ability, therefore, of councils to meet the needs of all interest groups, including youth, is limited. For urban councils, central government funding is only for infrastructure projects therefore any revenues generated by council goes towards meeting recurring costs. Even more, meaningful participatory governance also has cost implications and funding constraints are hindrance to its realization. The scope of participatory planning processes is determined by the available budget which is non-existent with the councils.

### **6.4 Misunderstanding and narrow vision of youth needs**

The needs and issues concerning youth are usually envisioned narrowly, and in most cases are slumped up as other interest groups. Often, youth issues are left to be addressed by the civil society organizations with the council feeling that they have no responsibility to the youth and mainstreaming youth issues into the council's agenda and plans. There is also a lack of appreciation that the youth have diverse needs. Increasingly, council administrative staff and councilors have demonstrated stereotype views of young people and their needs. This seems symptomatic of the more generally limited understanding of the youth needs at council. For example, youth are commonly viewed as prone to violence, idle, unwilling to work, and primarily interested in sports.

This view runs along with the common view that youth are primarily interested in sport. On the other hand, other council staff appear to have a more balanced view of the needs of youth and certainly the need for job creation and skills building were commonly cited as priorities for youth. Generally though, few council representatives seem willing to champion broader youth issues and promote a more mainstreamed vision.

### **6.5 Capacity of Councilors**

Malawi had its first local government elections in 2014 after a hiatus of over ten years. The Councilors currently running the councils are therefore new to their roles with very little

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experience of the workings of council. In addition to that they have minimal understanding of the roles and responsibilities of their positions. The capacity of the Councilors is integral to the effectiveness of the council and their ability to represent the youth and their needs. While the councils and other stakeholders such civil society and development partners have undertaken orientation and training for the councilors, there are still huge capacity gaps in the targeted training needed for Councilors to effectively represent the youth.

### **6.6 Legal and policy constraints**

The youth identified a number of legislations and policies that are an obstacle to effective council-youth engagement. The youth noted that within the current legislation and policies, there is no clear prescription for youth representation in council meetings, committees and in other council structures. Therefore youth representation and participation is largely left to the discretion of the councils and therefore the extent of interaction, composition, and scale vary. The youth should be considered as a key stakeholder and not as other interest group.

### **6.7 Partisan politics**

There is a tendency to politicize council business even before the local council elections in 2014. This politicization of council business has become a huge challenge to participatory governance. With the coming in of Councilors, there is a tendency among most Councilors to favour youth representatives or supporters of their respective political persuasions rather than a wider non-political youth representation, both in terms of involving them in council processes/consultation and in terms of channeling resources. Such a practice is affecting local development.

### **6.8 Knowledge of council processes**

One of the key issues highlighted during the meeting is the lack of knowledge among the youth of the existing channels through which they can influence council or other layers of local decision-making. Awareness among the general public regarding council processes, fora and means of engagement is low. The rights and obligations laid out in the various acts and policies are also not widely known.

### **6.9 Quality and calibre of youth leaders and representatives**

Dynamic and talented youth leaders who can overcome the barriers to meaningful engagement are essential for meaningful participation. Leaders and representatives not only need education, training and experience to undertake effective and constructive lobbying and advocacy, but must also have a visionary and developmental mindset to look beyond their own immediate priorities and be able to understand and promote the needs of the wider youth population and most importantly their communities.

The emergence of such champions for youth is challenged by many factors. One factor is the widespread illiteracy, and poor education. Also critical are the attitudes among appointed leaders and duty bearers of short-termism and self-interest and expectation of rewards for positions of authority. The emergence of strong youth leaders is further challenged by the traditional lack of concerted voice among the youth and the general perception of the youth in Malawi's culture as recipients of development. This therefore results in few young people having experience of



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contributing towards decision-making or challenging decisions taken. It is also undermined by the occupation of youth representative roles by people over 35 years who do not have young people's interests at heart and are reluctant to make way for younger representatives.

Despite these difficulties, strong dynamic young leaders do exist. Many of these young people are visionary and innovative, finding new ways to overcome the challenges faced by young people and acting as inspiring role models to other youth. Supporting such youth leaders through training and capacity building is an important role that civil society can play. Given the importance of effective youth leadership and representation, the legitimacy of those holding formal youth representative roles, both those elected and appointed, should also be taken into consideration.

### **6.10 Youth Platform and Networking**

There is an understanding among the youth that their agenda is best driven when there is a common ground and understanding on the youth needs, challenges and strategies towards increased youth participation and representation within local governance structures. However, with this understanding, there is need for appropriate youth platforms at the council level to allow for the youth to network and share their experiences. Examples of existing coordination structures are the Sector Working Group on Gender, Children, Youth and Sports, the Technical Working Group on Youth (TWGY), the Youth Technical Committees (YTC) – an inter-agency coordination structure at district level have not yet been set up though they would work with all district-level structures in the youth sector.

## **7.0 POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TOWARDS INCREASED YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

The priorities were arranged based on the issues that are most experienced by the youth groups they come from. This gave the participants a chance to analyze and see gaps that are in their respective areas at the end of the day as well as harmonizing the priorities which were presented and rated by the different groups. The process of harmonizing requires selection of the priorities that affect the youth in general accessing their needs and wants. The youth forums have given the youth a platform to air out their views over different decisions that are being made by the authorities and act as watch dogs in the provision of basic services and also be able to hold members of parliament, councilors and the president accountable if they are not fulfilling the commitments they signed for.

### **7.1 Grassroots Civic Education**

The youth will promote grassroots civic participation within their communities. This is an important mechanism in ensuring civic participation becomes normalized in society so that people build the experience and knowledge of participatory governance from a young age and from the lowest level of community decision-making. Structures such as, Ward/Block Development Committees, Village Development Committees, and Area Development Committees – are all potentially forums where citizens and youth can be empowered to contribute on a local level to decision-making that has a direct effect on their lives and in doing so gain the experience and the confidence to contribute at other levels of governance.

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## **7.2 Community level Civic Education**

While experiencing the reality of participatory governance in practice is essential for people to feel empowered to influence decision-making, education and sensitization also have a role to play in promoting active citizenship. Civic education will impart knowledge on council processes; the provisions of the various policies and legislation; or the mechanisms through which they, as citizens, can interact with local government. This community level civic education will be promoted by the youth who will sensitize community members in a transforming process for the youth through increased ownership. Community-level civic education and sensitization programmes, can also play a role in transforming cultural perceptions and attitudes towards, for example, the participation of women or youth in politics.

## **7.3 Building knowledge and understanding of youth needs by council**

Trainings for the councilors will be essential to build the knowledge and understanding of individual Councilors with regards to youth issues. Training could focus on topics such as the principles and practice of participatory governance; how to work with young people and youth organizations; understanding and assessing youth needs and the principles of mainstreaming.

## **7.4 Building Council - civil society interaction**

There should be concise efforts that should be made to strengthen the fora for council-civil society interaction. The interaction can be strengthened by council to council learning programs to impart good practice among councils. These platforms will allow the information flow through monthly coordination meetings to share information and provide feedback on activities.

## **7.5 Advocate for the setting up of youth forum at council level.**

The youth-dedicated council-level forum will be important in championing for the mainstreaming of youth issues at Council. It will allow the youth organisations a platform to interact and share ideas while at the same time working towards common youth agenda. The youth affiliates will also promote the creation of a dedicated youth desk officers in every council whose role would be to champion the mainstreaming of youth issues.

## **7.6 Strengthening formal youth representation**

Formal government-endorsed youth representation will be advocated for which would play a primary role in representing and promoting the needs of the wider youth population. For them to be able to do that they need to be recognized, legitimate, empowered and resourced.

## **7.7 Youth mainstreaming**

Critically, the youth agenda will include reviewing all related local governance policies and acts to ensure a number of key issues. The youth will advocate for the creation of youth committees at council level with a push for quotas for youth representation taking into account equal gender representation. This can also be extended to council administrative staff and even councilors. Overall there is a need for synergy, coherence and effectiveness in legislation and policies and ministries such as the Ministry for Local Government and the Ministry of Gender and Youth need to communicate and coordinate effectively in performing their respective roles. The youth

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strongly recommended that youth issues are an equally cross-cutting concern and should therefore be given the same treatment in policy.

### **7.8 Building the youth**

Civil society Organizations (CSOs) have a central role to play both in demanding greater participatory governance opportunities and empowering and educating every day citizens to engage in participatory governance processes. It is important that grassroots youth organizations are strengthened through training and capacity building to improve their lobbying and advocacy skills, as well as their ability to engage with and effectively represent their own youth constituents. Sharing of innovations and best practice in enhancing youth participation is a critical strategy to ensure that ideas are shared and capacities strengthened.

### **7.9 Youth Coordination**

The Secretariat would play a central role in coordinating youth civic participation activities and acting as a mouthpiece for advocacy in that area. A key role for civil society is to help overcome the negative stereotyping of youth by demonstrating the positive contributions they can make to society. When this approach is taken with council (i.e. demonstrating specifically how youth can be valuable partners to council) it can have an immediate and positive effect on the way that youth are regarded and the relationship between civil society youth representatives and council.

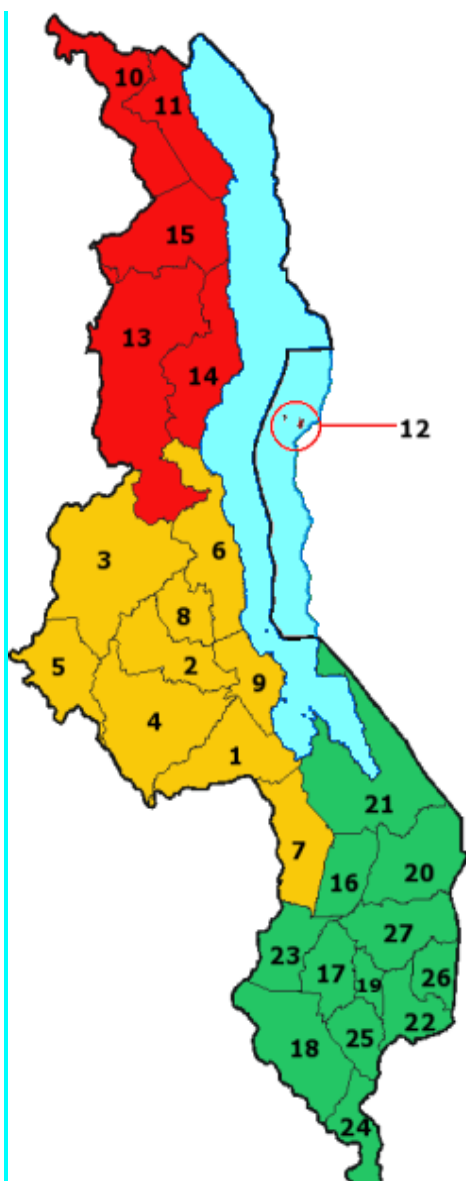
## **8.0 CONCLUSION**

### **8.1 Drawing the Road Map for Youth Participation in Local Governance**

The forums are a positive step towards increase youth participation. Through the forums, there has been a change in mindset of the participants and sparked their interest to actively participate in the project. Through the forums, affiliates representatives were clear in terms of the roles they were expected to play in advocating for increased youth participation in local governance.

The roadmap for the increased participation has been spelled out in the advocacy strategy that has incorporated all recommendations on solutions to address the challenges.

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Revised Guidebook on Local Government Systems in Malawi: Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development 2013

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### NORTHERN REGION

- 13. Mzuzu**  
 1. Saved by the Ball  
 2. Pace Theatre Organisation
- 13. Mzimba**  
 3. Mzimba Youth Association  
 4. Youth Net & Advocacy (YONEA)
- 15. Rumphi**  
 5. Gemmacadeet Youth Organization  
 6. Girls Platform for Social Action (GIPSA)
- 11. Karonga**  
 7. Chilumba Golden Target for Developemnt (CHIGOTAYO)  
 8. Kachira Youth Initiative
- 14. Nkhata Bay**  
 9. Timbiri Youth Organisation  
 10. Bandawe Cngregation Youth Group

### CENTRAL REGION

- 4. Lilongwe**  
 11. Forum for Concerned Young People (FOCO-YOPE)  
 12. Arise & Shine Youth Organisation  
 13. Youth on the Move  
 14. Samalani Youth Organisation  
 15. Christian Youth Development Organisation  
 16. Young Politicians Union  
 17. Unity Youth Organisation  
 18. Kataira AIDS Support Group Unity Youth Organisation  
 19. Youth Initiatives in Development (YIDE)  
 20. Airport Youth Development  
 21. Country Minders for People's development  
 22. Kang'oma Youth Group  
 23. Centre for Youth Development & Social Empowerment (CYDSE)  
 24. Eye for Youth And Civic Education  
 25. Divine Touch Organisation

### 6. Nkhatakota

26. Nkhotakota Youth Organisation  
 27. Chansolo Youth Organisation

### 3. Kasungu

28. Development (DREAM)  
 29. Centre for Youth and Development

### 8. Ntchisi

30. Ntchisi Organisation for Youth Development

### 9. Salima

31. Salima Youth Organisation  
 32. Bless-bay Foundation

### 1. Dedza

33. Golomoti Youth Organisation  
 34. Dedza Youth Advocacy Organization

### 7. Ntcheu

35. Bwalola Ana Youth Active Community Organisation (BLAYACO)

### 5. Mchinji

36. Youth Alive Mchinji  
 37. Community Initiative for Social Development

### SOUTHERN REGION

### 16. Balaka

38. Nkhadze Youth Organization

### 17. Machinga

39. Youth Impact Organization

### 18. Blantyre

40. Youth Arm Organisation  
 41. Matindi Youth Organisation  
 42. Project Child Malawi  
 43. Blantyre Young Voices (BYV)  
 44. Young Givers Foundation  
 45. Centre for the Deaf Foundation (CEDE)

### 19. Mangochi

46. Tiphunzitsane Youth Organisation  
 47. Mangochi Orphans Education & Training (MOET)

### 20. Zomba

48. Youth Development & Productivity (YODEP)  
 49. Thondwe Youth Skills & Development Organisation (THOYODO)  
 50. Zomba Centre for Creative Arts (ZOCCA)  
 51. Sowing the seeds of Love

### 21. Phalombe

52. Mithungu Youth Organisation

### 22. Mulanje

53. Modern & Active Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Livelihood Organisation (MAYESLO)

### 22. Chiradzulu

54. Mwakofu Youth Organisation

### 23. Thyolo

55. Thyolo Active Youth Organisation (TAYO)