

Malawi Journal of Social Science

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Book Review

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The Malawi Journal of Social Science

Editorial Note

The Malawi Journal of Social Science (MJSS) is a publication of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Malawi. The purpose of the MJSS, which is published twice per year, is to serve as an outlet for publication for both emerging and established scholars in Malawi, within the region and even beyond. The MJSS publishes theoretical, empirical and review articles as well as book reviews in the field of social sciences from scholars, practitioners, and students. Priority social sciences fields for the MJSS include demography, public administration, political and policy sciences, human resources management, social work, sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, economics, and development. The MJSS is very strict with the word length of its publications. The theoretical and empirical articles, including tables and references, shall not be more than 8000 words long. The review articles shall not be more than 4000 words long, while the book reviews shall not be more than 800 words long.

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Determinants of Judicial Corruption in Malawi: A Case Study of Child Maintenance Claims at Nsanje Magistrate Court and Zomba Child Justice Court

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Abstract

The justice sector is particularly vulnerable to corruption, and judicial corruption is potentially more devastating than other sectors (Mzikamanda, 2016: 122). Corruption in the Malawi judiciary is evident, as is the culture of silence in which judges participate to protect each other. Judicial corruption breaks the basic principle of equality before the law, and those with power get things done in their favour. This paper evaluates the determinants of judicial corruption in Malawi using findings from a study that looked at child maintenance claims at Zomba Child Justice Court and Nsanje Magistrate Court. The paper employed qualitative methods of collecting and analysing data. The paper argues that there is evidence that institutional corruption in the judiciary is or may be facilitated by three determinants of corruption: the availability of numerous and inconsistently applied laws, broad discretionary powers of judicial officers, and inadequate institutional accountability measures. The paper recommends employing a systematic approach to deal with each identified determinant through law review and capacity building for judicial officers to facilitate an effective judicial system.

Key Words: Judicial Corruption, Child Maintenance, Determinants of Corruption and Enforcement

1. Introduction

Since time immemorial, corruption has been recognized as one of society's vices. It has been described as an insidious plague with a wide range of corrosive effects on societies (United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), 2003: iii). Corruption undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to human rights violations, and erodes the quality of life (ibid: iii). It also undermines a rational basis of trust in public officials, resulting in less tax income and fewer public services (Rose, 2018: 220). No one accepted definition of corruption exists. Nevertheless, corruption can be referred to as the act of doing something with an intent to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others; a fiduciary's or official's use of station or office to procure some benefit either personally or for

someone else, contrary to the rights of others (Garner, 2007:371). Despite recognizing the effects of corruption, it continues to be a challenge faced by many countries, including Malawi. In 2022, Malawi was ranked 110 out of 180 least corrupt countries (Transparency International, 2022). Malawi's score on the index was 34 out of 100. According to the index, a country's score is the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0-100, where 0 means highly corrupt and 100 means very clean. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2023:31) also ranked Malawi at position 18 in Africa among countries improving their governance status, including the absence of corruption. The studies focused on corruption in all the state institutions critical to governance, including the judiciary.

A well-functioning justice system is crucial to address corruption effectively, which is essential for development (Gloppen, 2014:68). This can only be achieved where the judiciary is free from corruption. However, recent studies indicate that the judicial sector is not spared from the vice as it is ranked among the top five most corrupt public institutions in Malawi (Mzikamanda, 2016:124). According to the Daily Lives and Corruption survey, it was found that 39% of the citizens who came into contact with the judiciary in Malawi had to pay a bribe (Transparency International, 2011:12). This was augmented by the Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey in Malawi (2022) which observed a high perception regarding corruption done by judges and magistrates. An average of 49.7% of the respondents from urban, peri-urban, and rural areas believed that some officials indulge in corruption.

Further, according to the study by the Democratic Governance and Rights Unit (2022), it emerged that 14% of the people who were interviewed at the courts in Malawi reported that they or someone they know had been asked to pay a bribe, give a gift, or a favour to a court official to get the help they needed. The study further established that 32% of the legal professionals in Malawi admitted to having engaged in bribery to get the help they needed from the court officials. The development is distressing as it defeats the judicial system's core purpose, which is interpreting and enforcing the law and upholding the rule of law.

One of the roles of the judiciary in Malawi is to adjudicate on child maintenance cases. However, judicial corruption has adverse effects on the realization of access to child maintenance and the realization of human rights generally. The present paper tackles one of the findings from a study titled 'Child Maintenance, in Law, Policy and Practice'. The study investigated the legal and policy framework and lived realities of child maintenance claims in Zomba and Nsanje districts. The study followed recent reports on the increase in the number of child maintenance claims by women in the courts of law (Tithetse Nkhanza 2021:5). Among others, the study found that corruption in the judiciary is one of the factors that affect child maintenance claims in Malawi. This paper seeks to interrogate the determinants of corruption in the judiciary using child maintenance claims as a case study.

2. Methodology

The discussion in this paper emanates from the study findings of a research project titled 'Child Maintenance, in Law, Policy and Practice.' The paper discusses one of the findings of the Child Maintenance study which was that there is a high perception by court users in maintenance claims that judicial officers are corrupt which makes the court users lose trust in judicial processes. It is important to note that the study was not on judicial corruption. The study aimed to interrogate the legal and policy framework of child maintenance and to highlight challenges and opportunities in maintenance claims. Judicial corruption came out strongly as one of the challenges in accessing maintenance claims. The paper employed a desk review method which enabled the interrogation of legal doctrines surrounding corruption in general, corruption in the judiciary, child maintenance, and related matters. This involved reviewing and analysing the study findings from the Child Maintenance study, available literature, and doctrines in primary and secondary sources by reading legislation, international human rights conventions, byelaws, court decisions, and legal commentaries/articles on the subject matter. This assisted in ascertaining the position of the law regarding child maintenance and its interpretation by courts of law, as well as laying down the conceptual and theoretical framework for corruption. Further, the paper utilized other study findings that dwelt on judicial corruption. This was in recognition that the Child Maintenance study only tackled corruption as an emerging issue and thus necessitated a need to rely on other primary data that tackled corruption as a subject of research. Such study reports included the Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey of 2022, the Transparency International Survey of 2022, and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Survey of 2023.

3. Conceptualising Corruption in the Judiciary

Corruption has not been an easy term to define. There have been many unsuccessful attempts to have a single comprehensive definition of corruption. The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC, 2005), a leading global anti-corruption legal instrument, does not define corruption. Thus, corruption has been generally perceived as concerning each country's culture, legal system, and social, economic, and political levels of development. Nevertheless, Article 11 of UNCAC recognizes the problem of judicial corruption everywhere and provides:

Bearing in mind the independence of the judiciary and its crucial role in combating corruption, each State Party shall, by the fundamental principles of its legal system and without prejudice to judicial independence, take measures to strengthen integrity and to prevent opportunities for corruption among members of the judiciary.

According to the wording of Article 11 above, the emphasis is on the significance of making the judiciary independent in its operation. To appreciate the meaning of the concept of corruption, reference should be made to the definition by Garner (2007:371) above, which emphasizes the intent to give or procure some advantage contrary to one's duty and the rights of others. Although this is not comprehensive

enough, it still offers insights into the different forms corruption can take, thereby widening the scope of coverage of what corruption entails. The categorization of the acts has been regarded as the tangible way through which the concept of corruption can have its definition (Boisvert, 2014:1). Myint (2000: 35) tried to come up with a single comprehensive definition of corruption when he defined corruption as:

...the use of public office for private gain, or in other words, official position, rank or status by an office bearer for his benefit. Examples of corrupt behaviour would include (a) bribery, (b) extortion, (c) fraud, (d) embezzlement, (e) nepotism, (f) cronyism, (g) appropriation of public assets and property for private use, and (h) influence peddling.

The above definition is instructive on the list of corrupt behaviours that concern corrupt activities that can be undertaken by an official alone and without the involvement of a second party. Further, some corrupt activities in the list involve two parties, the giver and the taker, in a corrupt deal. It is worth noting that corruption can be done by commission or omission. A public official can either refrain from acting or act in the performance of his or her duties in exchange for a benefit from an individual or business. These factors, as well as the degree of coercion applied by the public official and the type of benefit allotted, are essential as they may affect the decision-making and rationality of the corrupt actors.

Considering the above concepts was relevant in understanding corruption within the context of the judiciary, which is understood as falling within corruption by public officers. In this study, however, a definition of judicial corruption that is diverse and complex, involving much more than judicial officers taking bribes, was adopted. The definition is provided by Gloppen (2014:69), who explains that judicial corruption includes all forms of inappropriate influence that may damage the impartiality of the courts and the proper administration of justice. This definition, therefore, covers corrupt acts by judicial officers, court officials, and lawyers as officers of the court, as well as prosecutors, and members of the public as court users. Thus, judicial corruption can harm the core judicial functions and the broader accountability functions entrusted to the judiciary in a democratic society (Mzikamanda, 2016).

3.1 Determinants of Corruption

With the growing worldwide concern over corruption, several factors have been pinpointed as responsible for the growth of corrupt practices. There is a striking consensus that corruption is universal and exists in all developed and developing countries. The contributing factors are cross-cutting with a difference in their scope and extent (Myint, 2000:33). The rising trend in the use of corruption as a tool for personal gains borders on the frailty of human nature. Naturally, humans become conflicted when altruistic and egoistic norms seem to converge such that pursuing personal interests often carry the day.¹ It should be appreciated that corruption can

¹ *Bray v Ford* [1896] AC 44

impede access to justice, specifically child maintenance, such that it should receive priority attention in any country's development agenda. Admittedly, there are still wide gaps in the current information and knowledge on the determinants of corruption. Nevertheless, the theoretical and empirical research conducted thus far has yielded fresh insights into appreciating the underlying causes of corruption, its consequences, ideas, and approaches to possible measures to combat it. Myint (2000:2000) states that a fertile ground for the growth of a thoroughly corrupt system will emerge in a country if it satisfies three conditions.

First, corruption thrives where a country has a large number of laws, rules, regulations, and administrative orders to restrict business economic activities and thereby create enormous opportunities for generating economic rent, especially if these restrictive measures are complex and opaque and applied in a selective, secretive, inconsistent and non-transparent way (Myint, 2000:2000). Similarly, Nkhata & Chipofya (2024:3) state that "cumbersome procedures for public procurement in Malawi are a clear motivation for businesspersons to offer corrupt inducements to public officials." Further, they argue that the burdensomeness of the process gives government officials involved in public procurement a reason to rationalize deviating from the rules, which in turn motivates and sustains systemic corruption (Nkhata & Chipofya, 2024:3)

Second, corruption thrives in an environment where administrators are granted extensive discretionary powers concerning making and interpreting rules, are given much freedom to decide on how rules are to be applied, to whom and in what manner they are to be applied, are vested with powers to amend, alter, and rescind the rules, and even to supplement the rules by invoking new restrictive administrative measures and procedures (Myint, 2000:38). The same is also highlighted by Nkhata and Chipofya, who observe that "laws that confer over-broad freedom on public officials to enact by-laws or subsidiary legislation create a risk of corruption." Their paper concluded that broad discretionary powers create opportunities for corruption (Nkhata & Chipofya, 2024:3). Under section 9 of the Malawi Constitution, the judiciary has broad discretionary powers to interpret, protect, and enforce the Constitution and all laws. However, this has to be done independently and impartially.

Thirdly, corruption often increases when the country has no effective mechanisms and institutional arrangements to hold administrators accountable for their actions. Although the Corrupt Practices Act (CPA) applies to everyone, including judges and magistrates, it is amenable to the interpretation and application by the judiciary itself. This can arguably be regarded as a challenge to its practical application due to conflict of interest. Nevertheless, the judiciary developed a Code of Conduct and a Code of Ethics, which regulate the acts of its officers. According to Part 2, clause 13 of the Code of Conduct, a judicial officer shall be guilty of misconduct if he or she engages in fraudulent or corrupt practices. What is fraudulent or corrupt will depend on the circumstances of each case. However, Rule 4 of the Code of Ethics hints at what is expected of a judicial officer to ensure no room for corruption. Thus, a judicial officer should not accept and should urge family members residing in his or her household

not to accept any gift, bequest, favour, or loan from anyone that could be perceived as intended to influence the performance of judicial duties. These are efforts by the judiciary to ensure that its officers' conduct is checked. The discussed determinants serve as parameters for appreciating the scope of judicial corruption in child maintenance claims. This paper will discuss judicial corruption in child maintenance claims using the three determinants as a measure.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

Several theories have tried to explain corruption, its causes, and generally as a phenomenon. Some appreciated theories include principal-agent theory, collective action theory, and institutional theory. Principal-agent theory considers the nexus between the public as a principal and the public officers as agents (Groenendijk, 1997:207). That is, corruption is seen as a conflict between the interests of the principal and the agent, such that the agent opts to further their interests at the principal's detriment. Collective action theory perceives corruption as a collective problem as it is a result of putting the behaviour of others on a continuum of analysis (Persson, 2013:449). People rationalize their corrupt conduct based on perceptions of what others would do in the same situation. Lastly, institutional theory links corruption to the structure of existing institutions to appreciate how corruption might get entrenched in such institutions (Luo, 2005:119). From the many theories interrogated, this paper adopted the institutional theory as discussed below.

4.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, also known as institutionalism, uses country and government institutional legal frameworks of well-defined pre-existing laws, such as the rule of law, and anti-corruption institutions with enforcement powers to explain corruption in the public sector. It examines the processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemas, rules, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social conduct (Scott, 2004: 465). To explain how the notion of corruption is linked to the existing institutions, the theory fuses in the social context. It provides a taxonomy for appreciating how corruption might get entrenched in the organizations in society regardless of the presence of a well-arranged legal framework (Luo, 2005:119). The general conception of institutionalism is that corruption is influenced by the character, design, and transparency of the political system and its institutions. Furthermore, the theory acknowledges the synergies between corruption and an individual. Thus, it stresses that while corruption can occur on an individual level, it can also be institutional, especially in situations where institutions are structured in a manner that makes them deviate from their original objective (Luo, 2005:119). This theory helped to understand the existence of judicial corruption in child maintenance claims despite the availability of laws proscribing the same. It also allowed assessing how judicial corruption has impeded the provision of goods and services, such as justice, to the citizenry.

5.0 Legal Framework on Corruption in Malawi

The main instrument on corruption at the international level is the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which was adopted in 2003 by the United Nations General Assembly. It is an anti-corruption legal instrument for a global response to global problems. The Convention covers preventive measures, criminalization and law enforcement, international cooperation, asset recovery, technical assistance, and information exchange in various forms and acts of corruption to all signatory countries, Malawi included.

The primary legal instrument for fighting corruption at the local level is the Corrupt Practices Act, adopted in 1995 and amended in 2004. The Act in Section 3 provides a basic understanding by defining a corrupt practice as “(a) the offering, giving, receiving, obtaining or soliciting of any advantage to influence the action of any public officer or any official or any other person in the discharge of the duties of that public officer, official or another person; (b) influence peddling; (c) the extortion of any advantage”.

The country also has supporting laws apart from the Corrupt Practices Act, which combat various forms of corruption in public sectors, including the judiciary. These are the Penal Code, the Public Procurement Act (2003), the Public Audit Act (2003), the Money Laundering, Proceeds of Serious Crime and Terrorist Financing Act (2006), and the Public Officers (Declaration of Assets, Liabilities and Business Interests) Act (2014).

In terms of official corruption, the principal offense is found in section 24 of the Corrupt Practices Act (CPA), which is titled ‘corrupt practices by or with public officers’, and it reads:

- (1) Any public officer who by himself, or by or in conjunction with any other person, corruptly solicits, accepts obtains, or agrees to accept, or attempts to receive or obtain, from any person for himself or for any other person, any advantage as an inducement or reward for doing or forbearing to do, or for having done or forborne to do, anything about any matter or transaction, actual or proposed, with which any public body is or may be concerned shall be guilty of an offense.
- (2) Any person who by himself, or by or in conjunction with any other person, corruptly gives, promises, or offers any advantage to any public officer, whether for the benefit of that public officer or any other public officer, as an inducement or reward for doing or forbearing to do anything about any matter or transaction, actual or proposed, with which any public body is or may be concerned shall be guilty of an offense.

Although the paper is not primarily concerned with criminalising corrupt practices, the wording of section 24 above is very instructive about the forms that corruption can take.

Accordingly, a person will be deemed to have acted corruptly when she or he engages in “corrupt practices”, which means any of the three things listed above. The judiciary acts in Malawi will also be scrutinized in light of the three pointers above as they (officers within the judiciary) are also public officials as per the definition of a public officer in section 3 of the CPA. Any act of the judiciary that falls within this threshold should, without hesitation, be regarded as a form of corruption. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the core of ascertaining whether corruption has occurred is the causal relationship between the benefit, reward, or advantage given to a public official and its influence or inducement on her or his conduct. This was also emphasized in the case of *Jerwe (P.H.) v The State*.² This case was an appeal by Traditional Authority Mlonyeni against the decision of the First Grade Magistrate sitting at Mchinji, who convicted him on two counts of corruption, having received money from two Group Village Headmen after their elevation from Village Headmen. It was established that the payment was a token of appreciation for being elevated, as it is expected of every chief according to their custom. In allowing the appeal, the court stated that corruption is an act intended to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others. Considering that the appellant did not solicit the payment and it was made after the elevation and in full view of other chiefs, the court held that it could not be said that the appellant intended to indulge in a corrupt act. Accordingly, this was a mere appreciation of the elevation. There was no inducement to the elevation to make it corrupt.

The existence of the seemingly many statutes that deal with corruption speaks volumes of how deeply the illicit act has manifested itself within the Malawian society, the judiciary inclusive. This has had a bearing on the functioning of the state machinery as it stifles some interests of the public. One of the interests affected by corruption, especially where the judiciary is at the epicentre of illegitimate conduct, pertains to child maintenance claims.

6.0 Child Maintenance and the Role of the Judiciary

Child maintenance is a system developed to secure children’s living standards after parental relationship dissolution. Child maintenance aims to reduce the poverty of children whose parents do not live together (Hakorvita, 2011:3). As such, child maintenance is defined as a regular contribution from a non-resident parent towards the financial cost of raising a child, usually paid to the parent with whom the child lives most of the time (Hakorvita:3). Child maintenance has become essential today with the growing number of divorce cases. Further, it is recorded that children who live with a single parent have a high likelihood of poverty and deprivation across countries. As such, states have increased efforts in demanding that non-resident

² Criminal Appeal No. 166 of 2008 (Unreported).

parents offer maintenance to their children (Plan International, 2016: 5). At the international level, Malawi is a party to conventions that address child maintenance issues. For instance, Malawi is a state party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC builds upon Article 10 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which allows state parties to recognize special measures for the protection and assistance of children without discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Article 18 of the CRC gives state parties the duty to ensure that parents have the shared responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children.

At the regional level, Malawi is a state party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Article 18(1) of the ACRWC provides that state parties shall take appropriate steps to ensure the rights and responsibilities of spouses about their children in a marriage setting or during a divorce. Malawi is also a party to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (SPGD). Article 8 of the SPGD is on marriage and family rights, requiring, among others, state parties to place legislative and other measures to ensure that parents honour their duty of care towards their children and maintenance orders are enforced. At the national level, Section 23(1) of the Constitution provides the cardinal principle that children's best interests and welfare shall be the primary consideration in all decisions affecting them. Specifically, on child maintenance, the Constitution, in section 23(4), provides that all children are entitled to reasonable maintenance from their parents, whether or not such parents are married, as well as from their guardians. Similarly, section 3(1)(a)(ii) of the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (CCPJA) imposes the obligation on a parent to provide, among others, care, assistance and maintenance for the child and to ensure his or her survival and development. Paragraph (iv), in particular, emphasizes the parents' or guardians' duty to exercise joint primary responsibility for raising their children.

The duty to order maintenance under the CCPJA lies with the courts. Section 10 of the CCPJA has provided several considerations the court needs to consider before granting a maintenance order. Section 11 of the CCPJA has allowed the court to request a social welfare officer to make a social inquiry report before a court gives a maintenance order. Sections 12 and 13 of the CCPJA have provided for the actual maintenance order and attachment order on the earnings of a party paying for the maintenance of a child. Section 22 of the CCPJA provides for offenses against a person liable to maintain a child.

The Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act (MDFRA) is the principal Act that regulates the institution of marriage in Malawi. Section 97 (1)(b) of the MDFRA, as read with section 97(2) of the MDFRA, gives the court powers to grant maintenance orders for children against a party to a marriage. Further, under section 100(2) of the MDFRA, the court is given powers to order a party to a marriage to provide another party to the marriage with maintenance and suitable accommodation for an applicant and any child entitled to maintenance.

When it comes to enforcement, the state bears the primary and ultimate responsibility of enforcing all laws under the Constitutional order. Under sections 8 and 9 of the Constitution, the executive and judicial branches of government each bear the responsibility of implementing and enforcing all laws according to the Constitution. This includes those relating to the maintenance of children. The executive exercises responsibility through organs such as the Malawi Police Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions. As for the judiciary, enforcement comes through the power to determine maintenance-related proceedings. For instance, under section 12 of the CCPJA, the court has the power to award a maintenance order to a child following an application made under section 9 of the same Act by any of the parties listed therein. Such maintenance order shall, by section 18, be enforced thirty days after the order is made unless the court makes an otherwise appropriate order.

According to Gloppen & Kanyongolo (2007: 276), indigent people often view the legal system with distrust and fear, and this is not without reason. For them, the law reflects the power relations in society and often has an anti-poor bias, if not formally, in its application. The law offers them little protection, and the justice system is encountered in a punitive capacity, often in ways perceived as arbitrary and corrupt, particularly in developing countries like Malawi, whose legal systems are weak and subject to capture by those with resources. Gloppen & Kanyongolo (2007: 277) further state that when the law and the legal system lack legitimacy because it is at odds with socially entrenched norms, it dampens the users' inclination to turn to courts for support. With the growing perceptions of judicial corruption and its acknowledgment by the Malawi judiciary, the seekers of child maintenance may have their confidence in the judiciary and the relevance of the rule of law threatened. From the above discussion, it can be seen that the judiciary is at the centre of child maintenance claims, with applications being made before the courts and enforcement of these orders dependent, in some cases, on court-enforced orders. This, therefore, calls for a meaningful consideration of the impact of judicial corruption in child maintenance claims.

7.0 Findings on Determinants of Judicial Corruption in Maintenance Claims

The paper used Myint's conception of determinants of corruption to check whether such determinants exist in the Malawi judiciary when handling maintenance claims. Myint (2000:33) isolated three determinants as discussed under section 3.2 above, and the paper shall now discuss them with the findings from the maintenance study.

7.1 Availability of numerous laws and rules applied inconsistently

Myint argues that the availability of numerous laws, rules, regulations, and administrative orders can restrict business economic activities and thereby create enormous opportunities for generating economic rent. This is especially true if these restrictive measures are complex and opaque and applied in a selective, secretive, inconsistent, and non-transparent way. The study found numerous and somewhat inconsistent laws, rules, and regulations that apply in child maintenance cases. These

laws range from international instruments Malawi has ratified, such as the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women (Women's Protocol).

As illustrated in the sections below, the local laws on maintenance remain unconsolidated and are somewhat inconsistent with each other and these include the Constitution, the Child Care Protection and Justice Act (CCPJA), and the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (MDFRA). The presence of these numerous laws leads to the lack of uniformity in their application and creates an opportunity for corrupt practices in the judiciary. The lack of uniformity could lead to the judicial officers picking and choosing laws to apply, leading to considerable disparities in the type of court maintenance orders. The existence of numerous laws that are incoherent also brings in complexity and the laws become burdensome to the users which most often leads to bribery as the users use bribes to speed up the legal processes. Complex and burdensome laws leave court users no option but to pay money to avoid them. This form of corruption is sometimes known as “grease money” as it is used to turn the wheels of bureaucracy more smoothly, speedily, and hopefully in the right direction (Myint, 2000:35).

The inconsistency in the laws was noted during the maintenance study. For instance, there is a lack of harmony between the Constitution, the MDFRA, and the CCPJA on the definition of a “child” thereby rendering it confusing who is or should be the subject of child maintenance. The Constitution and the MDFRA peg the age of the child at 18 (section 23(6) of the Constitution) whilst the CCPJA puts it at 16 (section 2 of the CCPJA). Whilst appreciating the supremacy of the Constitution, to ensure consistency, the age of the child needs to be reconciled in all statutes that provide for child-related matters as the definition of the child affects whether one gets maintenance or not.

Second, the national laws are not fully consistent with the international laws. For instance, under local laws such as section 23 of the Constitution the duty to maintain children is borne by parents and guardians alone. However, Article 5 of the CRC extends such duty not only to a child's parents or guardians but also to a child's family and community. Further, Article 20(2) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) goes on to give a state party the duty to help parents or others responsible for a child in maintaining the child through appropriate measures but section 23 of the Constitution does not give the state such a duty. The local laws must be aligned to the international instruments that Malawi is a party to. Nkhata and Chipofya have similarly observed that laws that are numerous, uncoordinated, incoherent, incomplete/inadequate, and too abstract do not serve the needs of the people and they engender frustration. They further argue that such laws “lose legitimacy, and weaken people's inclination to comply with them and they open the door to a culture of illegality which in turn creates space for corrupt practices” (Nkhata and Chipofya, 2024:7).

7.2 Wide discretionary decision-making powers

Myint also argued that corruption thrives in an environment where administrators are granted extensive discretionary powers concerning interpreting rules. He stated that corruption happens when administrators can decide how to apply rules, to whom, and in what manner. He further argues that administrators should not be given too much power to amend, alter, and rescind the rules and even to supplement the rules by invoking new restrictive administrative measures and procedures, as this breeds corruption.

The study found that judicial officers in Malawi have extensive discretionary powers to interpret maintenance laws and rules to the disadvantage of the claimants. The amount of maintenance and items the courts can order as child support is at the courts' discretion. As such, there is no consistency as to what can be ordered. Each court orders what it deems appropriate according to the circumstances of the case. Sometimes, the court generalizes that the non-resident parent should pay child maintenance without specifying the items or amounts. This arbitrariness can be a fertile ground for corruption. For instance, the court can collude with either party to order higher amounts of maintenance in cases that do not deserve such amounts or, indeed, collude for the court to order lesser amounts in cases that deserve higher amounts. Most of the claimants in the maintenance study lamented that the maintenance orders were too low and inadequate to serve the needs of the children. The claimants suspected a collusion between the courts and the respondent or non-resident parent.

The challenge emanates from the law that puts a general obligation on the courts to order 'reasonable' maintenance (section 23 (4) of the Constitution). It is not always clear as to what the term reasonable maintenance means. However, the court in the Canadian case of *Ostrander v Kimble Estate*, 1996 stated that what constitutes proper maintenance and support is a question to be determined with reference to a variety of circumstances. The court went further to state that this cannot be limited to the bare necessities of existence and the deciding court should consider the situation of the child, wife or husband and the standard of living to which, having regard to this and other circumstances, reference ought to be had. Further, in the case of *Shaw v The City of Regina, City of Saskatoon et al* the court stated that the phrase 'reasonable provision of maintenance' means something adequate and proper under all circumstances. What can be noted from the above definitions provided by the courts is that the definitions are too wide as well as "in the eyes of the beholder" and give broad discretionary powers for the judicial officer to determine what is reasonable in maintenance claims on a case by case basis.

The effects of the wide discretionary powers were more evident in the court's decisions and the amounts that the court ordered in the maintenance claims. There was a huge disparity in terms of orders that were made at the Zomba Child Justice Court and those made at the Nsanje Magistrate Court. For instance, the Nsanje Magistrate Court mostly makes monetary orders regarding maintenance awards. All

of the 77 cases reviewed except one had monetary awards. Only one case had a combination of monetary and material child support. The highest amount awarded was MK40,000 a month, and the least was MK10,000.

Unlike the Nsanje Magistrate Court, the Zomba Magistrate Court usually awards material and cash child support. The material support included school fees, groceries, clothes, medical facilities, food items, washing and bath soap, diapers, bags of maize, and others. The money awards at Zomba Child Justice Court mostly ranged from 5,000 to 20,000 kwacha, lower than at Nsanje court. The highest amount awarded was K50,000 in a month, which was for one child. The court record indicated 43 cases with cash and material support and 59 cases with only cash support. The court record hardly showed reasoning on why the courts made the awards as they did. The trend indicates that the orders are by the taste of a particular magistrate handling the matter at a given time. The data from the court shows that there is no actual guideline that the court uses in determining the amounts for child support. The court uses discretion after assessing the child's needs and parents' financial status. As such, the law must be consolidated or provide a uniform guide across the numerous laws establishing minimum amounts and materials that can be paid in a given case. This would prevent the arbitrariness of the awards and allow uniformity and consistency in the cases. The court should only depart from the minimum thresholds in exceptional circumstances. This mechanism has the potential to close any gaps of potential judicial corruption that the numerous laws may cause. As has been observed by previous scholars "the greater the discretionary powers granted to administrators, the greater will be the corruption" (Myint, 2000:39).

The current situation in Malawi was also experienced in the United States. In the past, child support orders in the United States were determined case-by-case. Trial judges exercised discretion under statutes, leaving them mainly free to set awards at appropriate dollar amounts (Ellman, 2008:108). The result was a wide variation in the amount of child support ordered among cases whose essential facts seemed similar. The few applicable legal principles did not provide courts with much guidance. It was often said that the law required the support amount based on the living standard maintained in the intact family. Some commentators argued that child support orders were often too low to meet a child's minimum needs, much less to maintain the child's prior standard of living. This changed with the Family Support Act of 1988, which requires that state guidelines provide a dollar amount of child support for every potential case. States must require their courts to set a support order at the guideline amount unless a judge writes an opinion explaining why it is inappropriate for the particular case (Ellman & Ellman, 2008:110).

In Malawi, no statute on child maintenance limits the discretionary powers of the courts creating room for judicial corruption. The country would do well if it developed regulations for minimum payments or items that can be provided for each child maintenance claim. In such a way, each child will be guaranteed some reasonable maintenance without depending on the court's mercy. This would further prevent the

arbitrariness of the awards and allow uniformity and consistency in the cases. The court should only depart from the minimum thresholds in exceptional circumstances. This would help deal with any room for abuse of discretion and collusion, which can be a bedrock for corruption.

7.3. *Inadequate institutional accountability measures*

Myint stated that one of the determinants of corruption is a country's lack of effective mechanisms and institutional arrangements to hold administrators accountable for their actions. The study findings concurred with Myint's observations as it was shown that most court users are frustrated with the court system of administering and enforcing maintenance claims. The respondents claimed, among others, that the court hardly does its work enforcing maintenance orders. Claimants have to do continuous follow-ups, costing them time and financial resources. There seemed to be no avenues where the people could report the malfunctions at the court, especially since the court is often taken as a last resort when all other avenues have failed. As evidenced by different studies, the lapses in accountability measures and the personal experiences of court users on judicial corruption increase the weight of such perceptions. This is a consideration that the judicial officers cannot be expected to declare themselves as corrupt openly. However, the perceptions could derive from what the court users experience when using the courts, raising eyebrows regarding the vice's existence. Several issues were also highlighted concerning challenges with the judicial system in pursuing child maintenance. Some raised issues can give room for corrupt tendencies, leading to an ineffective judicial system. Inadequate institutional accountability measures that facilitate judicial corruption were evident in the issues stated below.

7.3.1 *Lack of enforcement of court orders and burdensome processes*

The lack of court order enforcement was a concern for both Nsanje's and Zomba's respondents. Maintenance provision takes several years until the child is of age and thus needs an effective and efficient court enforcement system. Most women reported becoming tired of following up on payments and giving up. A woman from Zomba reported:

After my divorce, the man stopped providing support to his children. Then, I complained to the court, and the court ordered my kids' father to start supporting his children. He accepted the order, but he did not provide support to his children. I stopped following up on the order because I was tired. It was a waste of time to seek the same thing at the court, which the court seemed not serious about.

In addition, the lack of a proper follow-up system on maintenance payments by the court was also an issue that was highlighted both in Nsanje and Zomba. First, it was said that the courts never followed up on the men who defaulted payments. Second, it was said that the women are given a further burden of physically visiting the courts to

find out if maintenance has been paid, which is costly on their part. Some suggested that courts phone the women to inform them of the payment status.

Cumbersome or burdensome processes and procedures in securing public services have been marked as a clear motivation for citizens to offer corrupt inducements to public officials (Nkhata & Chipofya, 2024:40). As for government officials involved, the burdensomeness of the process gives them a reason to rationalize deviating from the rules, which in turn motivates and sustains systemic corruption (Nkhata & Chipofya, 2024:40).

7.3.2 Missing of court files

Further, the claimants complained about the mysterious missing court files that concern their cases. The claimants were of the stern view that court officials deliberately misplaced the files in collusion with the fathers so that their matters never get to be heard. This also acts as a discouragement for women to pursue such matters further in court. One lady had this to say in Zomba:

I also have been to court before. I started with YONECO and was given a letter to go to court. The case was going well on my side. Unfortunately, on the day of the judgment, I went to court only to be told that the file for my case had been misplaced. It was in 2018, the end of my pursuit of justice. I felt that was a high setback; it was a setback because I had been going to court for about six months only to be told that the file was missing.

Surprisingly, the courts in Nsanje and Zomba rely solely on a manual filing system. In Nsanje, both Bangula and Nsanje Magistrate Courts, the clerical and magistrate's offices had no computers. The challenge of missing files could be partly solved by having an automated system that backs up the manual system. Thus, there is a need to make the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS) operational in all courts in Malawi. The findings are supported by previous research studies such as the study finding by Chawinga (2019: 2), which observed that the Malawi courts continue to rely heavily on the manual filing system of documents as the ECMS, which was rolled out in 2015, is not fully operationalized in all the courts. According to Chawinga, the traditional paper-based filing system is often prone to challenges such as missing files.

Lack of control over official court files has been said to be a frequent cause of corruption (USAID, 2009:11). This is because keeping court files in unsecured places presents a high risk that the court files might disappear. As such, there is a greater case for the operationalization of the ECMS in all courts to minimize opportunities for favouritism, delay, and abuse (USAID, 2009:11).

7.3.3 Perceived Corrupt Practices in the Courts

Some female respondents in Zomba also accused court officials of misusing maintenance money. Corruption includes the abuse of power for private gain and embezzlement of maintenance money is a form of abuse of power by the court officials. The claimants reported that they sometimes get information that maintenance has been paid in court, but when they go to court, they are told stories: either that the money has been banked or that no maintenance was paid in court.

Sometimes, you go to court to collect the money, but when you get there, you find no money. You are told that they have deposited it in the bank account, yet they know that they embezzled the money. You rush to the bank to get the money, only to find that nothing was deposited. I experienced this ordeal at Mulunguzi Court (A female participant in Focus Group Discussion in Zomba).

Further, some of the claimants accused court officials of outright corrupt acts. It was said that court marshals who are supposed to enforce court orders often receive bribes from respondents. As such, they are too lenient on respondents who fail to honour the maintenance orders. It was said that the court marshals often pleaded with the claimants to understand if the respondents failed to pay or paid little of what was ordered. A woman in Zomba said as follows:

He only pays MK15,000 for all three children and gives excuses, yet he can bribe the court marshals. Then you hear the court marshals telling you to understand him while giving false hopes that they will do something. In the end, nothing is done concerning the matter.

Some stakeholders also stated that they have, in some instances, received complaints from claimants about corruption by court officials. The stakeholders stated that some court officials ask for bribes in exchange for helping the claimants. Another stakeholder stated that in other cases, the claimants can only suspect corrupt practices between the respondents and the court officials.

We once dealt with a case where, following divorce, the court ordered the man to construct a house for the woman and children since he had chased them away. A few weeks later, the woman was summoned to the court, where she was told that the man could not construct the house due to lack of funds, yet this man was a businessman. The woman suspects that bribes might have been exchanged (WOLREC official, Zomba).

The allegations concerning corrupt practices cannot be wholly ignored in the face of corruption cases that continue to persist involving judicial officers. There have been many cases where judicial officers use their positions to solicit benefits from court users. This can also be appreciated in the case of *Republic v Mhone and Mvula* (2018). In this case, Reverend Daniel Mhone and Mlenga Mvula obtained money from the Methodist Church by falsely representing that the said money was to be given to the then Attorney General, Mr. Kalekeni Kaphale and Justices Fiona Mwale and Charles

Mkandawire, to influence them to act in favour of the Methodist Church in a case between the State, Attorney General and the Registered trustees of United Methodist Church. It should be noted that Mlenga Mvula was the judiciary's spokesperson. This can also be appreciated in the recent report by the Anti-Corruption Bureau of the arrest of Mponela Second Grade Magistrate and Mponela Police prosecutor for demanding K400,000 from a suspect for the suspect to win a theft case (Nzangaya, 2023). With the growing perceptions of judicial corruption, the victims of the illicit act can easily fall into the trap where citizens perceive judicial corruption as an established norm in the judiciary.

Concerning such corrupt acts, the women stated that most of them are not seeking court intervention for child support due to the misgivings of the judicial system. Perceptions of corruption in the judiciary are rampant. According to previous research findings by Democratic Governance and Rights (2022) on the corruption allegations, the courts have responded by saying that their decisions regarding a particular case fall within the extremes of public opinion and the law. Thus, people sometimes view court decisions with their preconceived perceptions about the corruption of the judiciary such that any outcome contrary to their expectations increases the levels of such perceptions. Nevertheless, the officers were ripe to the fact that corruption in the judiciary exists, exacerbated by inadequate remuneration and benefits of the officers, as earlier highlighted. The existence of the vice in the judiciary has also been acknowledged by the Magistrates and Judges Association of Malawi (Majma) when the board chairperson, Frank Kapanda, conceded that he is aware that some magistrates and other judicial officers indulge in corruption (Pansungwi, 2022).

9.0 Conclusion

The paper discussed determinants of judicial corruption in Malawi by assessing three factors as determined by Myint as the causes of corruption in a country or an institution. The three factors were the availability of numerous and inconsistently applied laws, broad discretionary powers of administrators, in this case, judicial officers, and inadequate institutional accountability measures. The paper relied on data collected in Nsanje and Zomba on the law and practices in cases of maintenance of children. The paper argues that there is an institutional type of corruption in the judiciary, which is facilitated by the three determinants of corruption as observed by Myint. As such, a systematic approach needs to be employed to deal with each of the identified determinants through, among others, law review, an increase in funding to the judiciary to support maintenance enforcement and electronic record keeping, capacity building for judicial officers to facilitate mindset change and an effective judicial system. Something needs to be done in the way the judiciary discharges its services to the public. Corruption allegations hurt the justice delivery system. Apart from the judiciary losing trust and confidence among the people, the people are also denied access to justice. Pursuing court justice concerning child maintenance is a right that every citizen expects the state to respect and provide a promising avenue for its

fulfilment. As a state institution, the judiciary should, therefore, strive to offer public goods and services to the citizens' satisfaction.

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Effects of Corruption on Implementation of Community Policing as a form of Co-production in Malawi's Lilongwe District

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Abstract

Community policing as a form of co-production was introduced in Lilongwe in 1997. It was introduced to bridge the gap between police and citizens, improve citizen trust and confidence in the police, improve citizen participation in delivery of public safety and security services and to improve police legitimacy. Despite more than two decades of community policing in Lilongwe, citizens continue to express dissatisfaction and mistrust in the police. The media remains awash with reports of police corruption and its effects on community policing. The media rate police among the top most corrupt government agencies in Malawi. Yet little has been documented in policy and academic discourse about police and citizens' perceptions of how corruption has affected the implementation of community policing in the country. Using the phenomenological and qualitative approach, this study examined the police and citizens' perception of the effects of corruption on community policing as a co-production in Lilongwe District of Central Malawi. Results revealed that police and citizens perceived corruption as the major contributor towards mistrust in the police, low community participation in community policing, poor police-community relations, mob justice, assault on police officers and damage to police infrastructure. Using the political trust theory, and based on primary qualitative data, the paper explored the implication of corruption on the implementation of community policing as a form of co-production.

Key words: Corruption, Community Policing, Co-production, Trust, Political trust.

I. Introduction

Community policing has become a focal point of many modern law enforcement strategies across the world (Menon, 2023). The hallmark of community policing is to bring together the community and police to solve neighborhood safety and security problems (Setu and Tekle, 2017: 9). Community policing enables the police to become part of the locality and this assists police get a better sense of community's

needs and helps residents to develop greater trust in the police (Dominique et al, 2007). In Malawi, community policing started in 1997, three years after the change from the one-party political system of government to multiparty in 1994 (Community Policing Manual, 2020). It was first piloted in Lilongwe district. Under the one-party system, the Malawi Police Force (MPF) served dual roles: preventing and responding to crime and maintaining the power of the then ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (Mutharika, 2003). The police were mainly used as an oppressive tool to suppress political dissent and people's freedom. During the one-party era, there was no real form of community policing, and the MCP youth wing had organized itself in such a way that it provided a form of self-policing at the local level (Mutharika, 2003). This made the MPF unable to work in a democracy where the police are required to work with people.

Although community policing as a form of co-producing public safety and security is now a major component of crime control in Malawi, it has been heavily affected by corruption. In Malawi, corruption remains deeply entrenched in public institutions (Chunga and Manthalu, 2022). The police ranks among the top most corrupt government agencies in Malawi (Mtuwa and Chiweza 2023; Chunga and Manthalu, 2022). Charges of corruption have on several occasions affected serving police officers of various ranks and positions. Many police officers have been convicted while others are answering charges on suspicion of involvement in corrupt practices Chitete, (2022). Despite that, little has been documented in scholarly and policy discourse about police and citizens' perceptions of how corruption has affected the implementation of community policing as a form of co-production in Lilongwe.

The main aim of this study, therefore, was to analyse police and citizens' perception of the effects of corruption on implementation of community policing as a form of co-production in Lilongwe district in Malawi. Analysing people's perceptions in this study was important because they were first line of witnesses and victims of corruption on implementation of community policing in their areas. Lilongwe district was targeted because it was one of the districts where community policing was first piloted in the country. Findings of the study will contribute towards academic and policy discourse on police reform and how corruption can be dealt with to mitigate its negative impact on implementation of community policing as a form of co-production.

2.0. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, and relied on both primary and secondary sources. The qualitative research approach best suited the study because the study relates to human experiences that cannot just be counted or expressed in numbers (Gephart & Rynes, 2004). Purposive and snowballing sampling was used to identify respondents (Burnham et al., 2008: 108). In-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and observations were used to explore, analyze, observe and interpret personal perceptions, behaviours, narratives and experiences. Respondents included serving and retired police officers, members of the Civil

Society Organizations (CSOs), community policing and neighbourhood watch groups and common citizens. Lilongwe, where the study was conducted, is a Class A police station with the largest population of police officers in the country. There is constant interaction between the police and the people in various ways including on the roads and as they report and follow up on their cases.

The study deployed phenomenological analysis to collect and analyse data. This method was most appropriate for this study because individuals who were directly involved with community policing spoke about their lived-experiences on the effects of corruption on community policing. Interviews were conducted in the local language, Chichewa, and transcribed to English. Interview transcripts were managed and analyzed using Atlas.Ti8. The researchers developed a codebook using inductive and deductive methods to identify and organize emerging themes. Being qualitative, the study was limited by the sample size which was relatively small (66 respondents). Triangulation through the use of multiple data collection methods and instruments as well as different sources from which the data was collected helped to improve dependability and reliability of the research data. Furthermore, the small sample size was offset by the fact that the study was done in both rural and urban areas of Lilongwe. This approach provided a true picture of people's behaviour in both rural and urban environments.

3.0. Literature Review

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Richard L. Cole's political trust theory. As one of the early advocates of political trust theory, Cole (1973), argued that when politicians and public servants are involved in corruption, the public loses trust in public or political institutions. Distrust, in turn, breeds dissatisfaction among members of the public. Consequently, members of the public avoid partnering with public institutions such as the police in the co-production of public safety and security.

3.2. Community Policing: The Concept, Definition and Goals

Formal concepts of community policing began in the late 1970s in the United States and the United Kingdom in an attempt to increase the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of citizens (Moore, 1992: 99; Cordner, 2014: 148). It was an intentional re-introduction of the old "beat cop" approach to dealing with crime and disorder, where police officers conducted patrols every day and on foot in neighborhoods, getting to know and becoming respected by the community (Bullock and Johnson, 2016). According to OSCE (2008: 5),

Community policing is defined as a philosophy and organizational strategy that promotes a partnership-based, collaborative effort between the police and the community to more effectively and efficiently identify, prevent and solve problems of crime, the fear of crime, physical and social disorder, and neighbourhood decay in order to improve the quality of life for everyone.

Moore (1992) and Cordner (2014) also define community policing as a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of working partnerships and problem-solving techniques between police and community, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. In Malawi, the *Community Policing Manual* (2020: 1) defines community policing as a strategy of police work, based on the idea that police officers and the community can work together, resolving in various creative ways problems at the level of the local community relating to crime, fear of crime, various forms of social deviance, and several other safety challenges.

3.2.1. Goals of Community Policing

The central goal of community policing is establishing and maintaining successful working relationships between police agencies and the public to reduce crime (Portland State University, 2011). In Malawi, the *Community Policing Manual* postulates that the main goal of community policing was to bridge the gap between the police and the community (2020: 24). According to Part II of *The Police Act* of 2010 section 119, key objectives of community policing include establishing and maintaining partnership between police and the community; promoting communication between the police and the community; promoting cooperation between the police and the community; improving the rendering of police services to the community at national, regional and district levels and promoting joint identification of problems and solving of such problems.

3.3. Community Policing and Co-production

Pestoff (2011: 2) defines co-production as “the potential relationships that could exist between the ‘regular’ producer (street-level police officers, schoolteachers, or health workers) and ‘clients’ who want to be transformed into safer, better educated, educated, or healthier people”. Norman (1984), cited in Loeffler and Watt (2009), defines co-production as working with or in the place of professionals where citizens and users more directly and actively participate in the production or delivery of public service, undertaking some of the activities formerly carried out by professionals.

The introduction of community policing to improve citizenry participation in crime prevention led to the growth of co-production in the area of public safety and security (Moore, 1992; Cordner, 2014). In the co-production discourse, community policing can be described as “the concept where police officers and private citizens and communities work together in creative ways to help solve contemporary community problems” (Trajanowicz, Kappeler, Gaines, & Bucqueroux, 1998: 3). Approaches to co-production of public safety and security include organizing neighborhood watch groups, using CCTV, property marking, having watch dogs, purchasing guns, vigilantism, organizing safe schools’ initiatives and hiring private security guards (Szescilo, 2017: 146; Percy 1987; Eijk, Steen and Verschuere, 2017: 323). Despite some notable successes of community policing as a co-production, studies show that

corruption remains one of the key obstacles affecting its implementation in many jurisdictions such as Nigeria and South Africa (Obeagu, 2014; Mthombothi, 2023).

3.4 Corruption: Definitions and Impact on Community Policing

Studies show that corruption remains a huge problem that affects delivery of public services in Malawi (Mtuwa and Chiweza, 2023; Chunga and Manthalu, 2022). Police and citizens' perceptions of the impact of corruption on community policing from across the globe show that corruption greatly lowers the level of community trust in the police, demotivates the community from participating in co-production of public safety and security, contributes towards poor police-community relations, and damage to police infrastructure thereby making police services not easily accessible and increasing cases of mob justice (Obeagu, 2014; Uhnnoo & Löfstrand, 2018; Divon, 2021).

The word “corruption” has its origins from the Latin term “corruptus” which literary means to disrupt, break, spoil or contaminate (Nicholls et al. 2006: 1, as cited in Singh, 2022: 2). According to Kurer (2015, as cited in Singh, 2022: 2), “corruption simply means the misuse of power and authority for private benefit”. Transparency International (2021) defines corruption as abuse of entrusted power for private gain, even if the returns are not attained. In Malawi, the *Corrupt Practices Act* (1996; Cap 7:04, Section 3, Laws of Malawi) defines corrupt practice as “offering, giving, receiving, obtaining or soliciting of any advantage to influence the action of any public officer or any official or any other person in the discharge of duties of that public officer, official or other persons.”

Regarding police corruption, Bayley and Perito (2011: 3) define it as the “misuse of police authority for personal gain”. For example, demanding money or gratitude for not writing a traffic ticket (extortion) and bribery (which is giving or receiving money or any item of value in exchange for not enforcing the law or even just releasing a criminal suspect on bail) would be taken as corrupt acts. According to the 2013 Global Corruption Report by Transparency International (TI), the police were the most often bribed institution in Malawi, followed by the Malawi Revenue Authority (Chunga and Manthalu, 2022).

3.5 Corruption and the Police in Malawi

In April 2022, Afrobarometer released results of its 2022 survey which revealed that the police were widely viewed as more corrupt than other key state institutions in Malawi. Soon after the Afrobarometer report, the Malawi Police Service (2022) issued a statement acknowledging corruption challenges and indicating that the Service had been working to improve its professionalism and image (Chunga and Manthalu, 2022). According to this Afrobarometer report, many citizens reported having to pay bribes to get police assistance or avoid problems with the police. The report indicated that among citizens who requested help from the police in 2021/22, 62% said it was difficult to get the assistance they needed, and 40% said they had to

pay a bribe. Among those who had other types of encounters with the police, such as during traffic stops or investigations, 43% said they had to pay a bribe to avoid problems. Charges of corruption have on several occasions affected serving police officers of various ranks and positions (Chitete, 2022).

4.0. Effects of Corruption on Community Policing as Co-production

Studies show that corruption has affected security as well as community policing as a form of co-production in myriad ways including: loss of trust in the police, poor police-community relations, demotivation of the citizens' participation in co-production of safety and security, mob justice, injuries to police officers and damage to police infrastructure (Obeagu, 2014; Uhnoo & Löfstrand, 2018). For example, Ikuteyij (2008) argues that the citizens' belief that the police are corrupt and cannot be trusted is a threat to the success of community policing. In Nigeria, Obeagu (2014) found that abuse of human rights, including corruption by police and members of community policing and neighbourhood watch groups, greatly affected community participation in the co-production. There is limited literature on effects of corruption on community policing as a form of co-production in Malawi.

4.1. Corruption, Trust in the Police and Community Policing

Trust is regarded as a cornerstone for effective community policing. When the public perceive the police as trustworthy, there is effective co-operation with them in the co-production process (Goldsmith, 2005; Pelsler, 1999: 11). Recent studies posit that one aim of community policing is to enhance public trust and legitimacy by making police more present, visible and engaged in local areas and thus strengthening relationships with residents (Skogan, 2019). Unfortunately, studies from many parts of Africa, including South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia, show that most people do not trust the police particularly because of their bad behaviour, corruption and ill-treatment of community members (Mthombothi, 2023: 71; Gjelsvic, 2020; Transparency International, 2022). Such behaviour frustrates citizens from collaborating with the police. Similarly, in a recent study by Gyamfi (2022) in Ghana, a majority of the participants indicated that they did not trust the police because the police officers were corrupt. According to the study, when criminals were arrested and sent to the police for court action and justice to prevail, they were soon released after offering bribes to police officers. In his study on "Exploring public trust in policing at a community in Ghana", Gyamfi (2021) finally argued that "fractured relationship between a community and the police breeds social disorderliness". Grace (2022), in her study on challenges affecting implementation of community policing in Liberia, also found that lack of trust in the police was among the reasons why citizens were demotivated to participate in community policing, with sixty (66) percent of respondents responding as such. In Malawi, the Afrobarometer Report of 2022 indicated that fewer than half of Malawians trust the police.

4.2. Corruption and Community participation

Once the police become involved in corruption, citizen participation is greatly affected and compromised. In Nigeria, for example, Osayande (2012), at the maiden edition of Etim Inyang International Lecture on Community Policing organised by Police Community Relations Committee at Port Harcourt, admonished Nigerian police officers for their involvement in acts of negligence and collusion to collect monies and gratifications in order to facilitate release and escape of offenders or suspects from custody, leak vital security information, as well as decline arrest of suspected criminals. He lamented that such practices in turn eroded community's trust in the police and ultimately reduced community's motivation to participate in co-production of public safety and security and support the police in various forms. Such practices demotivated well-meaning citizens from sharing vital crime information with the police, thereby making community policing a failure.

4.3. Corruption, Vandalism of Police Infrastructure and Accessibility of Police Services

The advent of community policing is expected to facilitate ease in accessing and reaching police services by all the communities. Accessibility means not only availability of police officers, but the ability of the community members to obtain assistance and services in terms of time and costs (Masogo et al 2014,: 116). However, evidence shows that when the police are perceived to be corrupt, the citizens lose trust and confidence in them. Loss of trust in the police has made many police stations to be looted and set ablaze. For example, in 2016, a police unit at Chilomoni in Malawi was set on fire due to the fact that the police stopped the public from killing a murder suspect who was already in police custody (Nzangaya, 2016). The community wanted to take the law in their hands, arguing that the accused would soon be seen amongst the community after being granted bail corruptly by the police. Vandalism and looting of police infrastructure ultimately reduce the number of police facilities, thereby making police services less accessible to the citizens. In turn, crime thrives and fear of crime increases in locations.

4.4. Corruption and Police-Community Relations

When the police are corrupt, citizens lose trust in them and the police eventually find themselves isolated (Mutupha and Zhu, 2022). In a free and democratic society, law enforcement agencies are most likely to obtain the citizens' support and cooperation when they display interest to relate with citizens (Cordner, 2014. Studies show that friendliness, willingness to help, fairness, attention when listening to citizens, and willingness to explain to citizens what exactly is going on in their local communities greatly influences citizens' feeling of satisfaction and perception of safety (Borovec, et. al. 2021: 157). However, evidence from recent research shows that the majority of citizens (62%) in Malawi believed that the police were not as friendly as they expected and that for them to obtain assistance or services from the police, they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer (Chunga and Manthalu, 2022). As

a result of police corruption, it has been difficult for the police to create a friendly environment for citizens.

4.5. Corruption, Mob Justice and Community Policing

Reports of mob justice are no longer a strange phenomenon in Malawi (Mkupasha, 2022). Crime statistics from the National Police Headquarters indicate that the Malawi Police Service (MPS) registered an increase in mob justice cases from 42 to 62 in the first eight months of 2022, representing eight cases every month (Mkupasha, 2022). Evidence showed that incidences of mob justice were mainly influenced by the community's lack of trust and confidence in the police, among other reasons, due to corruption. Due to loss of trust and confidence in the police, citizens have resorted to mob justice as a way of dealing with criminals. Commenting on the relationship between police corruption and the apparent increase in cases of mob justice, the Catholic Bishops in Malawi, in March 2022 issued a Pastoral Letter in which they lamented that "loss of public trust in law enforcement agencies and the Judiciary fueled mob justice, public anger and was a recipe for civil disorder" (Kahiu, 2022). When people perceive the police to be corrupt, they doubt the capacity of the institution to uphold justice.

5. Findings

5.1. Demographic Data of Respondents

Fifty (n=50) respondents participated in the KII, and these were: 17 active police officers of various ranks, four (4) retired police officers, all of senior ranks, seven (7) members of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), twelve (12) members of community police forums/crime prevention panels (CPFs/CPPs), five (5) members of neighbourhood watch groups (NHW), and five (5) ordinary members of the community who were beneficiaries of co-production in the area of public safety and security. Three (3) FGDs (n=16) were conducted with active police officers, CPF members and NHW group members respectively. The total number of respondents for the study was 66, of which 16 were females (24.2%) and 50 were males (75.7%).

5.2. Corruption

In this study area, participants were asked to share their views, experiences and perceptions on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that corruption negatively impacted on community policing as a co-production tool. Options used to rate the participants' opinions included *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*. Results revealed that all retired police officers (n=4) strongly felt that corruption negatively impacted community policing. The majority of active police officers (n=8/17) strongly agreed while 7 active police officers agreed that corruption negatively affected community policing, and 2 officers remained neutral. A majority of CSO members (n=6/7); CPF members (n=10/12); community members/citizens (n=5) and NHW members (n=4/5) strongly agreed that corruption negatively impacted community policing. A majority of participants from three FGDs strongly

agreed that corruption was a major issue that needed attention. For example, a retired police officer from Lilongwe urban said that when people see every police officer, they just see a cruel person or a thief or someone who is just corrupt. He indicated that this view is exacerbated by announcements on TV which show that the police is number one of all departments in terms of corruption. As such, when police officers move in the streets, especially when they board a minibus, people just relate them with corruption or regard them as people who cannot survive without corruption. In agreement with a retired police officer from Lilongwe urban, a member of a CPF from Lilongwe rural said that people view police as cruel, and not as people to whom they can relate. He further pointed out that sometimes common citizens stone the police when they have come to arrest their relative. He gave an example whereby someone was arrested and police demanded K50,000 from that person for him to be released. After releasing him, the police claimed that the released suspect was mentally sick. He stated that the police demand money from suspects, or else the suspect will receive bad treatment at the station. The findings revealed that a majority of respondents agreed that corruption had a negative effect on the provision of public safety and security to the communities.

5.3. Corruption, Citizen Trust in the Police and Community Policing

In this study area, respondents were asked to share their opinions and perceptions on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that corruption affected citizen trust in the police or not, and if in turn this affected citizens' participation in the co-production of public safety and security or community policing. The options of *strongly trusted*, *satisfactorily trusted*, *neither trusted nor trusted*, *not trusted* and *strongly not trusted* were used to assess participants' responses. Responses were disaggregated according to low density, high density and rural areas as follows:

5.3.1. Trust in the Police (Low-density)

In this study area, respondents were asked to share their opinions and perceptions on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that citizens in low-density areas of Lilongwe trusted the police or not. A majority of police participants (n=18/21) felt citizens residing in low-density areas had a satisfactory level of trust in the police. A majority of members of the public (n=20/29) who participated in the survey felt that citizens living in low-density areas had a satisfactory level of trust in the police. For example, a police officer from the rural location said that in town, people with money and status trust the police, since they are able to call the police for help and trust that they will be assisted. A citizen from Lilongwe urban also said that in urban areas residents from low and medium density areas trust the police, while residents from high-density areas have no trust in the police. "In high density areas that is where the problem is," he said. He also indicated that in rural areas people who have money trust the police, while people who do not have money do not trust the police. He added that, "for those that have money the cases will just go through without any trouble. The poor are able to see those things happening".

5.3.2. Trust in the Police (High-density)

In this study area, respondents were asked to share their opinions and perceptions on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that citizens in high-density areas of Lilongwe trusted the police or not. Results revealed that the majority of police respondents (n=19/21) felt that the citizens habiting in high-density areas did not trust the police. Results also revealed that all members of the public (n=29) who participated in the study felt that citizens living in high-density areas did not trust the police. For example, a member of a CPF from the urban area lamented that people in high-density areas of Lilongwe do not trust police that much. He observed that there are some areas where criminal activities take place, and at one point you would see a police officer visiting such places thinking that they will arrest the culprits without knowing that he only went there to collect money from them. This removes trust from the people, and a member of community policing cannot apprehend those people. Another citizen from the urban location also indicated that in high-density areas people do not trust the police.

5.3.3. Trust in the Police (Rural Areas)

In this study area, respondents were asked to share their opinions and perceptions on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that citizens in the rural areas of Lilongwe trusted the police or not. Results revealed that a majority of police respondents (n=17/21) were undecided on whether citizens living in rural areas trusted the police or not. A majority of members of the public (n=16/29) felt that people living in rural areas did not trust the police. For example, a member of a CPF from the rural area said that most police officers are corrupt: they personalize their work, they take sides and forget that police officers are not supposed to receive bribes, but are employed by government and they are paid to serve the people professionally. Because of bribes, most people do not trust them. Another member of a CPF from the rural area said that nowadays, people know that, it was not the role of the police to give judgment but only to write a statement when there was a complaint and bring a suspect before the court of law. He lamented that this does not happen. Frequently, cases were dealt with at the police station and suspects are released right there at the police station, a practice that brought doubt to the public, and eventually people take the law into their hands. Overall, a majority of police respondents felt that citizens from low-density areas demonstrated satisfactory to strongly satisfactory levels of trust in the police. On the other hand, results revealed that a majority of respondents felt that citizens from high-density and rural areas of Lilongwe did not trust the police. On average it was revealed that respondents from Lilongwe have low trust in the police.

5.4. Assault on Police Officers and Damage to Police Infrastructure

In this study area, respondents were asked to share their experiences, opinions and perceptions on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that corrupt practices by police officers result in citizens taking the law into their hands, resulting in assault to police officers and damage to police infrastructure. Results indicated that all active

and retired police officers (n=21) who participated in the KII lamented that police officers suffered assaults while on duty. Seven (n=7/12) participants drawn from CPFs and 4 (n=4/5) members of NHWs also indicated that the police were often attacked, assaulted, injured and police infrastructure often damaged in the course of duty. Three (n=3/5) of members of the community and four (n=4/7) members of CSO equally indicated that the police suffer lots of assaults from members of the community. Sometimes their properties have been damaged by members of the community simply for simply doing their job. For example, a police officer from Lilongwe urban indicated that police officers were often verbally insulted by people who do not understand police work. He also indicated that police officers were sometimes stoned, other people snatched suspects from the police simply because they believed the police would release them on bail after receiving bribes. A senior police officer from the urban area also said that trust in the police has been lost due to bribes. He indicated that people do not like the presence of police. He further indicated that he had seen people attacking traffic police officers, which indicated that there was a problem and possibly underscored the loss of trust in the police. Results indicated that a majority of respondents agreed that police officers were often attacked, assaulted and sometimes police infrastructure destroyed in the process.

5.5. *Corruption and Mob Justice*

In this study area, participants were asked to share their views, opinions and experiences on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that police, CPF and NHW members' corruption influenced citizens to commit mob justice. A majority of active and retired police officers (n=16/21) agreed that police corruption was one the major reasons citizens felt dissatisfied and resorted to mob justice. A majority of CSO leaders (5/7) strongly agreed that police corruption was a major contributor of mob justice. A majority of members of the community (n=3/5) agreed that police corruption was a main cause of citizens' dissatisfaction with the police, resulting in many cases of mob justice. All five (5) members of the NHW group from Area 49 agreed that the police were largely corrupt, resulting in citizens' dissatisfaction with the police. FGDs also agreed that police officers were corrupt. A police officer from the urban location narrated that many people felt that mob justice was increasing because citizens thought the police often granted bail to criminals after getting bribes, and these criminals went back and terrorized them. He added that this was an indicator that there was loss of trust in the police. Additionally, a member of a CSO from the urban location said that loss of trust in the police was the major contributor to mob justice. He said that citizens know that if they apprehend a criminal and send him to the police, he will be out in a few days. That is why there are a lot of incidents of mob justice. A majority of respondents felt that police corruption resulted in loss of trust in the police. People were dissatisfied with the police. As a result, justice according to law has been lost to mob justice.

5.6. *Corruption and Community Participation in Co-production*

In this study area, participants were asked to share their views, opinions and experiences on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that police corruption affected the level of community policing in co-production of public safety and security. A majority of active and retired police officers (n=12/21) agreed that corruption by police officers greatly demotivated members of the community from participating in community safety and security activities in their areas. A majority of CSO leaders (6/7) strongly agreed that police corruption contributed to poor community participation in co-production. All members of the community (n=5) agreed that corruption greatly demotivated members of the community from fully participating in co-production. All twelve (12) and five (5) members of CPFs and NHWs agreed that corruption was a major contributor to poor community participation in community policing activities. An FGD member from Lilongwe rural said that when the police take crime suspects from them, in a few days the suspects are released. He further narrated that police officers even ask for bribes from the suspects to be released, a practice which he said compromised citizens' trust in the police and demotivated the community from working with police. A member of a CPF from Lilongwe rural also narrated that sometimes there were good relations between citizens and the police, but they did not last. He lamented the police practice of releasing crime suspects after getting bribes. He expressed concern that sometimes they would apprehend suspects at night for cases of breaking and entering or theft, and take them to police, but unfortunately early in the morning even before the complainants had given their statements the suspects would already be out of police custody. He added that sometimes police officers released crime suspects under the pretext that the suspect was insane. Such challenges demotivated the citizens from participating in co-production. A majority of respondents felt that police misbehaviour and involvement in corrupt practices demotivated citizens from participating in co-production.

5.7. *Corruption and Police-Community Relations*

In this study area, participants were asked to share their views, opinions and experiences on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that police corruption affected the good relations between the police and the community. The majority of active and retired police officers (n=13/21) agreed that corruption by police officers negatively affected police relations with the public. The majority of CSO (5/7) leaders strongly agreed that police corruption contributed to strained relations between the police and the community. The majority of members of the community (n=4/5) agreed that corruption was one of the main factors leading to bad blood between the police and the community. All twelve (12) and five (5) members of CPFs and NHWs agreed that corruption was a major contributor to antagonism between the police and the citizens. FGDs also agreed that the police were involved in corruption and extortion, and this contributed to poor relations between the police and the community. A member of a CPF from Lilongwe rural said that incidences of releasing crime suspects

before taking them to court have worsened the relationship between the community members and police. People assume police receives bribes from the offenders for them to be released. A retired officer from Lilongwe urban also stated that he has seen on TV police stations being torched. That shows that there was no friendship between the community and police. He added that he also had heard that a police officer had intentionally been run over by a car. According to him, these were serious indicators that when people see a police officer, they just think the police officer was a thief. These results revealed that the relationship between the police and citizens was not good.

6.0. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 *Corruption, Citizen Trust in Police and Participation in Community Policing*

Findings from the study revealed that a majority of participants, both police officers and members of the public, strongly agreed that corruption was among the major contributors towards low citizen trust in the police, increased cases of assault on police officers and damage to police infrastructure, mob justice, demotivation of the community to participate in co-production and poor police-community relations. These findings were similar to findings from recent studies in Malawi done by Mtuwa and Chiweza (2023); Chunga and Manthalu (2022) and Mtupha and Yapeng Zhu (2022). Literature from other countries such as Nigeria, Liberia and South Africa also shows that corruption had a significant negative impact on citizens' trust in the police (Govender and Pillay, 2022; Uhnnoo & Löfstrand, 2018 and Obeagu, 2014). Sabet (2014) also found that corruption reduces the incentive for citizens to report crime to police. From the study findings as well as from literature that was reviewed, it is clear that once the police indulge in corruption, extortion and bribes, citizens lose trust in them.

Intriguingly, the study found that a majority of police officers and members of the community perceived citizens residing in low-density areas as having a satisfactory level of trust in the police. This finding was particularly unique and needs further enquiry. On the other hand, the majority of respondents felt that citizens living in high-density as well as rural areas did not trust the police. Results also revealed that the majority of members of the public (n=16/29) felt that people living in rural areas did not trust the police. On average, results indicated that that a majority of respondents perceive that citizens from Lilongwe have a low level of trust in the police. Respondents lamented that corruption as seen in traffic, police bail and the way police prosecuted cases largely contributed to citizens' loss of trust in the police. These findings are similar to what Gyamfi (2022) found in a study carried out in Ghana.

Further results indicated that the majority respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that police corruption contributed to poor citizen participation in co-production. Respondents argued that once citizens perceive the police to be corrupt, the level of

motivation to participate in safety and security issues goes down. These findings agree with Osayande's (2012) admonishment to Nigerian police officers for corrupt practices, which lead to the failure of community policing.

6.2. *Corruption, Police-Community Relations, Assault on Police Officers and Vandalism of Police Infrastructure*

A majority of respondents agreed that corruption, bribes and extortion by police officers negatively affected relations between the police and citizens. An Afrobarometer study also found that the majority of Malawians believed that the police were not as friendly as they expected and that for citizens to obtain assistance or services from the police, they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to a police officer (Chunga and Manthalu, 2022). Mutupha and Zhu (2022) also suggested that when the police are perceived to be corrupt, citizens lose trust in them and the police find themselves isolated. Strained relations between the police and the community defeat one of the key tenets of community policing as a co-production, which is to improve police-community relations. Corruption breeds citizen dissatisfaction in the police and makes it difficult for the police to create a friendly environment with citizens. Once citizens are unfriendly to police, they cannot work together or share vital information with them. Sour relations between the police and citizens make crime thrive in the community. As a result, citizens tend to attack police officers and damage police infrastructure. Damage to police infrastructure renders police services inaccessible to the community, thereby defeating the very tenet of community policing which is to bring the police close to the people (Masogo et al 2014, p. 116). Poor citizen-police relations, attack on police officers and vandalism and looting of police infrastructure affects implementation of community policing in local areas since the community lacks proper infrastructure where they can report cases, access police service or work together in partnership. In turn, crime thrives and fear of crime increases in locations.

6.3. *Corruption and Mob Justice*

Results from the study indicated that a majority of respondents agreed that corrupt conduct by some police officers has brought about citizen dissatisfaction with police services. As a result of dissatisfaction in the way police handle issues such as bail, traffic ticketing and investigations and well as bringing offenders to justice, citizens prefer taking the law into their hands. This finding agrees with the Catholic Bishops' lamentation on the loss of public trust in the police (Kahiu, 2022). Community policing promotes justice according to law and not mob justice. When citizens are dissatisfied with police way of service delivery, they lose trust and confidence in the police. In turn, justice according to law is lost and justice according to the mob thrives, defeating the very essence of community policing.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study has established that the majority of respondents perceive corruption as among the major contributors to loss of trust in the police which ultimately breeds citizens' dissatisfaction with the police. Dissatisfaction demotivates citizens from actively associating with the police and fully participating in co-production of safety and security services. Mistrust and dissatisfaction force citizens to take the law into their own hands, looting and damaging police infrastructure. Demolishing and torching of police infrastructure affects accessibility of police services by the communities. This defeats the very tenet of community policing which is to have police services close to the people. Respondents also indicated that police officers are assaulted because citizens are frustrated with police culture of corruption, bribes and extortion. The major implication for the study is that for community policing as a co-production to achieve meaningful results, there is need improve people's trust in the police by addressing corruption among the ranks and file in the police service.

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School Children on the Rampage: Young Citizen Activism or Manipulation? A Case of Primary School Pupils' Unrest in Malawi

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Abstract

The democratisation process in sub-Saharan Africa saw a rise in student protests in secondary schools and universities. Of late, primary school pupils in Malawi have been taking to the streets in protests for various reasons. This paper reports on a case study of a primary school where pupils protested following the relocation of a 'good teacher' from their school. The study explored whether the protest was a case of young citizen activism or manipulation by a teacher who was resisting transfer. The school was purposively sampled and the research participants were identified through purposive and snowball sampling. The results are presented using a chronological structure and a thematic approach. The study found that the pupils' protest was a reaction to a combination of factors ranging from continued centralization of power, and indecisiveness in handling teacher indiscipline, to locational factors. All these conspired to create a state of paralysis at the school. The paper argues and recommends for the creation of safe spaces in schools to hear authentic pupils' voice as part of learner-centred education and school democratisation.

Key words: Pupil activism; Teacher discipline; Democracy; Pupils' voice.

1.0. Introduction

Africa experienced a wave of democratisation in the 1990s following the collapse of communism that relaxed the West's hold on authoritarian regimes (Animashuan, 2020). This was part of a global trend towards democratic governance covering sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East Asia, South America, and the Far East (Davies, 1999; Harber and Trafford, 1999). For Africa, the democratisation process was filled with contradictions as it was imposed on poor countries as a condition for the receipt of aid (Englund, 2004). To access aid, countries had to adopt democratic reforms swiftly and at times reluctantly (Abdi, Ellis and Shizha, 2005). Some of the reforms were at odds with local cultures hence making implementation problematic

(Davies, Harber, and Dzimadzi, 2003; Namphande, 2021). With respect to education, challenges have been noted regarding the role of communities in school governance in a decentralised structure (Davies, Harber and Dzimadzi, 2003; Okitsu and Edwards, 2017; Rose, 2005).

In Malawi, multiparty democracy was re-introduced in 1993 after the collapse of the 1960s democratic experimentation and the subsequent rise of single-party authoritarianism. The advent of democracy led to constitutional changes, including the promotion of human rights. Essentially, all institutions had to adopt a culture of respect for human rights. In the public sector, a number of reforms were adopted. In education, for example, the reforms included the decentralisation of powers from central government to local councils and schools, increased local stakeholder participation in school decisions, and introduction of an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) curriculum with its focus on Learner-Centred Education. Pedagogical efforts under OBE were meant to put pupils at the centre of education and prepare them for their role as citizens of a democratic country. Despite the efforts towards decentralisation, the central government has maintained control over teacher recruitment, deployment, and remuneration. This centralization creates governance problems related to accountability at local levels. Furthermore, tensions still persist regarding human rights, pupils' voice, and school discipline (Namphande, 2022).

The advent of democracy saw a rise in student protests in schools. This rise was attributed to students' misunderstanding of democracy and human rights on one hand, and to students' reacting to cases of injustice at the hands of school authorities on the other hand (Kuthemba-Mwale, Hauya and Tizifa, 1996; MacJessie-Mbewe, 2007). Since the 1990s, almost all cases of student protest were confined to secondary schools. Of late, however, there have been cases of primary school pupils protesting, especially in urban areas. In the recent past, pupils from a primary school rioted apparently to protest against the relocation of a "very good teacher" from the school. This study, therefore, explored the underlying causes of the riots. The aim was to explore whether the rioting was a case of active citizenship by pupils whose voice had been marginalised, or a case of manipulation by teachers as a form of resistance to relocation. Specifically, the study set out to answer the following questions: Why did the pupils riot at the school? How did the pupils organize to stage the riots? What was the aftermath of the pupils' riots? The study argues that the pupils' protest was a reaction to a combination of factors ranging from continued centralization of power, and indecisiveness in handling teacher indiscipline, to locational factors, all of which conspired to create a state of paralysis at the school. This paper first presents a description of formal education in Malawi. This is followed by the conceptual framework, and a review of relevant literature. The methods section explains the research decisions made, provides a brief description of the case study school, and the ethical considerations. The results are presented in two segments following a chronological structure and a thematic approach. This is followed by the interpretation of the results in the concluding remarks, highlighting some recommendations.

2.0. Formal Education in Malawi

Formal education in Malawi follows an 8-4-4 structure, that is, 8 years of primary, 4 years of secondary, and up to 4 years of tertiary education. The official age range for primary school pupils is 6-13 years (Ministry of Education, 2023). At the end of the primary cycle pupils sit for the Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) examinations which determine their eligibility for entry into secondary school. Access to secondary education is restrictive and is based on selection depending on candidates' performance in the high-stakes PSLCE examinations. The transition rate from primary to secondary education is 42.5% (Ministry of Education, 2023), creating very high competition among candidates. In addition, candidates are selected into a hierarchy of secondary schools. These include top-tier national secondary schools, which are very few and relatively well resourced; the second-tier district secondary schools, which have a districtwide catchment area; and the third and last-tier community day secondary schools (CDSS) which are found locally and serve several primary schools in a catchment area. Since the introduction of multiparty democracy, primary education has been free but not compulsory. In practice, parents and communities contribute income and labour towards school infrastructure development (Rose, 2003).

In terms of organisation and management of education, there is a hierarchy of authority starting with the Ministry of Education (MOE) headquarters. Below MOE are six divisional/ provincial offices, each managed by an Education Division Manager. Under the divisional offices are 34 Education Districts, each managed by a District Education Manager (DEM). Each district is sub-divided into zones which are a cluster of around 10 primary schools. The zones mostly serve the purpose of in-service teacher education. Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) manage and coordinate teacher professional development activities in each zone. Additionally, the PEAs also act as 'eyes and ears' of the DEM on management related issues (Government of Malawi, 2015).

Primary school teachers possess a secondary school leaving certificate plus a teachers' certificate. Once they graduate from a Teachers' Training College they are employed by the central government and deployed to various districts for posting to schools. The DEM is responsible for deploying new teachers to schools within the district and also transfers serving teachers from one school to another depending on need. The central government retains the responsibility for teacher remuneration, and handling of teacher discipline cases. The centralization of responsibilities, however, creates challenges related to teacher accountability. One observation is that with a primary school teacher workforce of over 74000 there are massive delays in resolving teacher discipline cases due to bureaucratic procedures. This leads to managers devising internal means of punishment to avoid the inefficiency occasioned by centralization. A World Bank study on primary education in Malawi reports that "even in cases where improper teacher behaviour is reported, this often only results in the offending teachers being transferred to another school" (Ravishankar, et. al., 2016, xviii).

3.0. Conceptualizing children's rights

The discourse of children's rights has always been a source of controversy. This is more pronounced in Africa where there is tension between some elements of the traditional culture and human rights (Chonzi, 2007; Tabulawa, 2013). Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan (2004) posit that research on children's rights presents two distinct, if not contradictory conceptualizations. These are children's rights to *welfare*, and children's rights to *self-determination*. Children's rights to *welfare* rest on adults providing care, education, and guidance to children. These provisions are made "in the best interest of the children". Hence, the adult is taken as a responsible person, better placed to articulate the needs and secure the welfare of the children than the children themselves. In political terms, the state affirms and refines the obligation that adults have over children, producing a situation where children become more dependent on adults (Wyness, et al., 2004: 88). In contrast, children's rights to *self-determination* give children the agency and degrees of autonomy to do things for themselves. In this case, *self-determination* rights can easily supersede *welfare* rights since children are in a position to overrule adult definitions of their "best interests" (Wyness, et al., 2004: 88). Hunt (2014) adds that children's rights to *self-determination* take power and obligations from adults as children have the right to make their own decisions. These rights can, therefore, be problematic because they pose a threat to adult authority and also obstruct their paternalistic and protective privileges.

Wyness, et al. (2004: 89) articulate the ambiguity between political inclusion and the imperative to protect children by making a distinction between children's "needs" and children's "interests". They argue that a "needs" model of children flows from *welfare* rights. Children's "needs" implies a deficit model of the child. In staking a claim to meet the "needs" of children, many political actors use the negative discourse of child incompetence and child innocence. In the politics of children's "needs", the child is basically absent. Similarly, Giroux (1985: 28) argues that "in the discourse of 'need fulfilment', the concept of 'need' represents an absence of a particular set of experiences". In contrast, children's "interests" suggest agency where children are viewed as active and involved, able to make claims to the state at various levels. Children's "interests", therefore, converge with children's rights to *self-determination*, the only difference being that children's "interests" are fundamentally political, defining the aims of a specific group in society. In these terms, children can be viewed as a minority group. The notion of children's "interest" hence suggests a degree of separateness from non-child groups in society and the construction of channels through which this separateness can be articulated.

In a cultural setting where primary school pupils are considered immature, teachers may exercise control and power purportedly in the "best interests" of the pupils. This position gives teachers power over pupils as they are seen to provide for the *welfare* needs of the pupils. This study, therefore, explored whether the unrest at the school

was a result of pupils making claims to their rights for *self-determination* or the failure of the school to make provision for the *welfare* needs of the pupils.

4.0. Student activism and democratisation in Africa

Students have been involved in political activities for various reasons at key points in Africa's history. With the exception of isolated cases of secondary school and high school student activism, most political activity has been confined to universities. Zeilig and Ansell (2008) state that African university students have for long been engaged in political activism, responding to changing political, social, and economic circumstances. They argue that during colonialism, students in the few universities rioted in protest against forms of segregation and agitated for political liberation and independence (Zeilig and Ansell, 2008). After independence, activism focused on wider social issues such as rising prices, falling standards of living, and unemployment. Englund (2004) asserts that the anti-colonial movements in Africa in the early and mid-twentieth century were more about self-determination than democracy. As such, the decolonized and newly independent countries were swiftly replaced by civilian dictatorships.

With dictatorship taking root and spaces for expression of dissent shrinking, universities became the only spaces for expressing discontent (Nkinyangi, 1991). This was mostly perceptible under neo-liberalism. Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) resulted in shrinking government financing of universities, and the introduction of cost-sharing measures which brought about hard economic conditions (Benbow, 2011; Zeilig and Dawson, 2008). In the light of protests against communism in Eastern Europe, and economic hardships occasioned by the SAPs, students across Africa took the lead in fighting for a democratic transition to multiparty political systems (Benbow, 2011; Klopp and Orina, 2002; van Gyampo, 2013; Zeilig and Dawson, 2008). Englund (2004) calls the resultant democratisation Africa's second liberation.

Following this wave of transition, student activism in African universities receded (Zeilig and Dawson, 2008). Indeed, after the 1990s there was a period of silence, save for isolated cases of protests due to further deteriorating conditions brought about by the SAPs. Student activism resurfaced again in South Africa in 2015. Luescher and Klemencic (2017) describe this re-emerged activism as unique because it was activism beyond students' role in the change of governance systems. In addition, the students used both physical and online spaces to organise protests which were held for various reasons. For example, the protests which started at the University of Cape Town were aimed at decolonizing the university and getting rid of offensive colonial symbols. Known widely by the use of the Twitter handle #RhodesMustFall, the protests spread to other universities across the country addressing issues of concern such as increase in fees under the hashtag #FeesMustFall (Luescher and Klemencic, 2017). This activism was also followed by another period of silence.

As noted earlier, most of the student activism in Africa has been confined to universities. Writing about South Africa, Diseko (1992) argues that cases of student activism in secondary and high schools were rare because school principals kept a vigilant eye on students to keep politics out of schools. This could be true for the rest of Africa as cases of activism in primary and secondary schools are viewed as indiscipline. As Wyness (1999) argues, all deviant actions (by pupils, in this case) are considered subversive without focusing on their transformative potential in shifting educational agendas towards the interests of children.

Considering the subordinate role of pupils and the privileged status of teachers, this study explored whether the protest was an act of young citizen activism or manipulation by adults.

5.0. Methodology

This is a qualitative case study that focused on a single primary school as a case. The school was purposively selected because of the riots. Details about the school are presented later in this section. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify study participants. Data were generated from various sources to aid triangulation. Firstly, the study conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders. These were the District Education Manager (DEM), the previous headteacher of the school, the deputy headteacher, three teachers, and the Deputy Chairperson of the School Management Committee (SMC). Some of these participants had relocated to other schools and hence had to be followed to their new schools. The semi-structured interviews offered the flexibility to follow up on issues with participants and seek clarification (Thomas, 2011). Using pseudonyms, the study participants are presented in Table 1 below.

Secondly, the study held a focus group discussion with standard 8 pupils. Cohen, et al. (2011: 433) advise that “it is important to understand the world of children through their own eyes rather than the lenses of adults.” Similarly, Arksey and Knight (1999) advocate for the active involvement of children in issues that affect them. The focus group discussion was appropriate for pupils because it is socially oriented and less intimidating than a one-to-one interview (Flick, 2011). Thirdly, the study reviewed official documents. The headteacher’s *Log Book* provided insightful data. A file provided by the Primary Education Advisor (PEA) contained a record of events that took place prior to and after the riots. These documents served as substitutes for records of activity that could not be observed directly (Stake, 1995). The data were analyzed qualitatively, constructing a chronological structure (Cohen, et al., 2011) and developing themes. The results are presented using both thick description (Holliday, 2002), narratives, themes, and direct quotes from research participants.

Table 1: Study participants

Name of participant	Responsibility and role during the unrest
DEM	District Education Manager at the time of unrest and key informant in the study
Headteacher Christina	Long term Headteacher at the school. Was transferred to another school just before the riots.
Teacher Beaton	Standard 8 teacher whose transfer sparked the riots.
Teacher Thomas	First deputy headteacher under Headteacher Christina. He became acting headteacher when Headteacher Christina was transferred to another school. He was later shifted to another school just before the riots.
Deputy head	Appointed deputy headteacher after Teacher Thomas was transferred. He was available at the time of the riots and made an effort to contain the situation.
Teacher Kingsley	Another Standard 8 teacher who was available at the time of the riots.
Vice Chair Janet	Vice Chairperson of the School Management Committee (SMC). She was present at the time of the riots.
Focus group discussion (8 pupils)	Four girls and four boys randomly selected from a standard 8 class of 240 pupils. Standard 8 pupils started the riots following announcement that Teacher Beaton was on transfer.

5.1. The case study school

The case study school known as Nachiswe Primary School, is located in Chifule Urban Education District. Although designated as a school in an urban area, Nachiswe is remotely located on the fringes of the district and exhibits characteristics of a rural school. It has no electricity, and uses a borehole for its water supply. It is about 12 kilometres off the main road leading to the city and is accessed through an earth road that is impassable during the rainy season. These conditions make it difficult to retain teachers. The World Bank study on primary education in Malawi states that “levels of teacher satisfaction and motivation are greatly influenced by school location and remoteness, and the most disadvantaged teachers...are not ...adequately

compensated” (Ravishankar, et. al., 2016, xviii). While teachers are in short supply nationally with an average teacher-pupil ratio of 1:61 (Ministry of Education, 2023), Nachiswe Primary School had a ratio of 1:149 at the time of data generation. In line with national decentralisation guidelines, the school had a School Management Committee (SMC) and a Parent-Teacher Association that was meant to facilitate effective school governance and community participation in school affairs respectively.

5.2. Ethical considerations

Yin (2014) recommends that between the design of a case study and the collection of data, the researcher has to show how she/ he plans to protect the human subjects in the study. In the present study, care was taken to ensure that participants were protected. More importantly, sensitivity was exercised considering that some of the participants were school pupils who were minors. Cohen, et al. (2011: 84) argue that “while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better”. In this regard, a number of steps were taken to protect participants. Firstly, the study sought written permission from the DEM to collect data at the school. The permission was also helpful in gaining access to participants who had relocated to other schools within the district. Once permission was granted informed consent was sought from all participants. For the pupils, informed consent was sought from the headteacher and informed assent from the pupils themselves. Secondly, participation in this study was voluntary hence participants had the right to withdraw without giving any reasons. Finally, participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality. To maintain confidentiality and keep the study participants anonymous, pseudonyms are used for the district, the school, and the participants.

6.0. Results

The study set out to explore whether the rioting at Nachiswe Primary School was a case of active citizenship by pupils whose voice had been marginalised, or was a result of manipulation by teachers as a form of resistance to relocation. Specifically, the study set out to answer the following questions. Why did the pupils riot at the school? How did the pupils organize to stage the riots? What was the aftermath of the pupils’ riots? Interestingly, although the study set out to investigate the role of pupils in the riots, it established that the major players in the build-up and the aftermath of the riots were teachers. The study established that the rioting was a culmination of a sequence of events that had been playing out in the school caused by a number of factors. The study noted that although the riots took place on 20th October, 2017, tension had been mounting since 2015 as school staff were polarized into two antagonizing camps. Camp 1 comprised of Headteacher Christina, the 1st Deputy Headteacher and 5 other teachers, while Camp 2 comprised of the 2nd Deputy Headteacher, and the remaining 8 teachers. The conflict was further complicated by family ties as Headteacher Christina and her younger sister, also a teacher at the school, originally came from the area where the school was located. These sisters and Camp 1 teachers had the sympathy of the SMC. On the other hand, the 2nd Deputy Headteacher, who belonged

to Camp 2, was married to a sister to the chief in whose area the school was located. As a result, teachers in Camp 2 had the support of the village chief and most members of the community.

In this section, the paper presents the results organized in two segments. The first segment provides a chronology of events that build up the conflict leading to the riots. The second segment presents the findings following the research questions. These segments are followed up with a discussion and interpretation of the findings, locating the position of the pupils in the conflict, and responding to the question of whether the rioting was an act of young citizen activism or manipulation.

6.1. Events building up the conflict and leading to the riot

As alluded to earlier, the conflict started building up before 2015. However, after 2015 there was an apparent period of calm until the issues resurfaced aggressively two and half years later. Documentary evidence and narratives of research participants have been reconstructed and are presented below in chronological form.

21/01/2015: The District Coordinating PEA, and two PEAs held a meeting with teachers at Nachiswe School to resolve issues after teachers complained about Headteacher Christina's management style.

06/06/2017: Teachers wrote a letter to PEAs complaining about the same issues that were addressed during the 2015 meeting.

17/06/2017: PEAs wrote a report to the DEM on their response to the letter written by teachers. The report showed that they had been to the school to meet the teachers and the SMC but Camp 2 teachers refused to discuss stating that SMC members should be excluded because they were "uneducated" and "not professionals".

23/06/2017: There was a 'mutiny' at the school whereby 9 teachers from Camp 2 held a separate school assembly declaring independence from the school administration and announcing that the school would be called by a different name. The school was to be named after a nearby river.

26/06/2017: Camp 2 teachers boycotted classes demanding the removal of Headteacher Christina from the school. A member of the community joined and attempted to grab keys from Headteacher Christina to force her out of office. To bring peace, the District Education Office provisionally suspended Headteacher Christina till further notice, and appointed Teacher Thomas, who was 1st Deputy Head, as Acting Headteacher. However, this appointment did not please Camp 2 teachers.

27/06/2017: Camp 2 teachers wrote a letter to the PEA requesting that they be transferred from the school.

18/09/2017: Camp 2 teachers boycotted classes and sent pupils home to 'wait' for 2 weeks.

19/09/2017: DEM addressed teachers at the school but detested the conduct of Camp 2 teachers which she described as "open defiance to authority". Following this meeting Headteacher Christina was formally transferred to another school. Furthermore, three Camp 2 teachers considered as "ringleaders" would also be transferred to other schools. Teacher Beaton was among the three 'troublesome' teachers.

19/10/2017: Pupils went on a rampage following an announcement during the school assembly of the transfer of the three teachers from the school. Some members of the community joined the protests, burning tires and blocking the access road to the school to prevent police vehicles from coming to the school.

The spark: The study established that the manner in which the announcement of the teachers' transfer was made was provocative. Firstly, it should be stated that although Teacher Beaton was considered as "troublesome", the Standard 8 pupils liked him because he made a commitment to the class that for the first time, not less than a hundred pupils would be selected for secondary school. Prior to this time, records showed that only around 4 pupils used to be selected. The Standard 8 class had 240 pupils. This commitment naturally made the pupils and most parents side with Camp 2 teachers. On the material day, the announcement of the transfers was made by the sister to Headteacher Christina (Camp 1). It is reported that the announcement insinuated to the pupils that although Headteacher Christina had been transferred from the school, their beloved Teacher Beaton was also on transfer, and that the pupils could follow him to his new school if they so wished. This angered the pupils and two versions of events that followed are presented in the narratives below:

Narrative 1: Following the assembly, the Standard 8 pupils regrouped in their classroom (allegedly Teacher Beaton was in the classroom) and afterwards went to the Headteacher's office to demand that the transfers be cancelled. However, they were not given a chance to be heard. Instead, the Deputy Head shouted at them for making noise. It is alleged that to disperse the pupils, the Deputy Head took a stone and threw it at a pupil, which sparked a reaction from the rest who started throwing stones in retaliation.

Narrative 2: The provocative manner of the announcement of the transfers drew a reaction from the pupils who jeered at the teacher. This angered her and having pinpointed one pupil that insulted her, she threw a stone at the pupil. This sparked a reaction from the rest of the pupils who retaliated by throwing stones at teachers and school buildings.

6.2. Causes of the conflict leading to the riots

This segment presents the findings following the research questions. The first part considers the question of "Why did the pupils riot?". This part is presented

thematically using thick description and direct quotes from participants. Inductively, three main themes came up in the analysis, namely: situation and conditions at “Maula”; management style; and the personal attitude of the headteacher.

6.2.1. Situation and conditions at “Maula”

The study found that Nachiswe Primary School had earned itself the unenviable name of “Maula” because of its remote location and the apparent nature of the teachers that used to be posted there. Maula is a maximum-security prison in the capital city, Lilongwe, where notorious convicts are incarcerated. Nachiswe Primary School was called “Maula” because teachers who allegedly committed offences in their previous schools would be sent there as a form of punishment. It should be recalled that due to its remote location, Nachiswe Primary School faced the challenge of teacher shortage, as most teachers were reluctant to work there. At the time of data collection, the school had a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:149. It is also worth recalling that due to the centralised and bureaucratic nature of resolving discipline cases by the Teaching Service Commission, most education managers preferred internal means of punishment for offending teachers. The most common form of punishment was to transfer troublesome teachers to remote schools such as Nachiswe Primary School.

The study established that Nachiswe Primary School, indeed, had several teachers who had allegedly committed offences in their previous schools. For example, Teacher Beaton had been a deputy headteacher at two schools prior to his transfer to Nachiswe Primary School. He was removed from that position and sent to Nachiswe after allegedly getting involved in the theft of maize flour meant for the pupils’ school feeding programme. When asked why he was removed from the position of deputy headteacher and sent to Nachiswe school, he responded that:

[It was] very unfortunate that there was a certain incident which happened at Mphasa [school]... concerning... *Mary’s Meals* flour. It was discovered at a certain time that flour was stolen from the stores. And because that ...period, I was the one who was ...distributing the flour to the... women who were cooking, I was told that, I was responsible for the loss of the flour. Because of that, I was... transferred from Mphasa to Nachiswe (Teacher Beaton).

Headteacher Christina described the school as a dumping ground for offending teachers. She cited names of teachers who had issues at their previous schools and ended up at Nachiswe Primary School; and referring to the teachers in Camp 2, she emphasized that “all the teachers had problems”. This outcome agrees with the findings of the World Bank study in Malawi which stated that where improper teacher behaviour is reported, the offending teachers often get transferred to other schools (Ravishankar, et. al., 2016). The present study considers this kind of management as a recipe for trouble. Indeed, the collection of ‘troublesome’ teachers at Nachiswe School resulted in teacher frustration and demotivation.

The study noted that although management at the district level was aware of the problems at the school, it was unable to decisively deal with them due to contextual factors. The shortage of teachers at the school, its remoteness, and the challenge of getting good teachers to the school made it difficult for management to handle the situation conclusively. The DEM acknowledged this challenge and the levels of teacher frustration when she was asked why it had taken so long to deal with the problems decisively. She explained that:

...teachers have been refusing to be posted there because it's in the peri-urban, so it is treated as a school which is in a remote area to an extent that there's a history which was also raised in their [teachers'] complaints to say, "You know the people who are found here are rejects! we are rejects! we are here for a punishment... when are you going to remove us from here?". (DEM)

The study, therefore, argues that the mounting frustration and the prevailing state of indecision provided an opportunity for teachers in Camp 2 to force action in their favour. Two options were available, with the first one being to have a headteacher of their choice who would manage the school in the way they would dictate. However, this option would look like convicts taking over Maua prison. It should, nevertheless, be recollected that at one point this option was tried by Camp 2 teachers whereby they declared themselves independent of the school administration. The second option was to demand that they be removed from the school. Considering that under prevailing conditions, the worst form of punishment for causing trouble would be to transfer them to another school, the conflict presented them with an opportunity to escape from Maua. In this case a transfer from Nachiswe Primary School would mean a release from incarceration at Maua which would look like getting rewarded for misconduct. It can, therefore, be argued that the collection of troublesome teachers at Nachiswe Primary School, the state of indecision by the district management, and the practice of transferring teachers as a form of punishment provided a fertile ground for deepening the conflict at the school.

6.2.2. Management style

The study established that the management style of Headteacher Christina contributed to the crisis at the school. Headteacher Christina can be described as a formidable manager who used to take a tough stand against teachers' unprofessional behavior. Two factors stood out regarding the management style. The first is that she used to make unpopular decisions which created a schism between her and some teachers, and the second is that she used to show favouritism in allocating responsibilities and "privileges".

Firstly, the study noted that Headteacher Christina did not shy away from making tough and unpopular decisions regardless of the perceived consequences. For instance, she elevated Teacher Thomas from the position of section head to fill the vacant position of first deputy headteacher, sidelining the second deputy headteacher who was considered as the most likely candidate. The second deputy head was

overlooked because of unprofessional behavior. Headteacher Christina described him as “lazy” and “not performing well” in his responsibilities, “reporting late for work and knocking off earlier than the required time”. This decision was a turning point in the school as it created two main opposing forces to Headteacher Christina. The forces were the teachers in Camp 2 who sympathised with the overlooked second deputy headteacher, and the village chief who was his brother-in-law. It is alleged that, from that point, the second deputy headteacher used to work ‘behind the scenes’ to gang-up support and undermine the authority of Headteacher Christina. Explaining the origin of the two Camps at the school following the elevation of Teacher Thomas, Headteacher Christina said: “I was the headteacher, Teacher Thomas [was] the first deputy, then himself being the second deputy, he decided to gang up with other teachers. I had 5 teachers who were behind me and he had 9 teachers. So, the school was divided into two groups. (Headteacher Christina).”

The study, indeed, noted that Camp 2 teachers exhibited unprofessional behavior. The tough stand by Headteacher Christina might have been taken in an effort to curb these unprofessional practices. For example, the headteacher had developed a routine practice of calling for a staff meeting every morning to talk to teachers about any issues she felt were pertinent for that day. During these meetings, she would admonish teachers that had reported late for work, or had no lesson plans. If a teacher had no lesson plans, he would not be allowed in class until he prepared and showed them to her. This practice annoyed teachers who felt that it was a waste of valuable class time. This issue came up as one of the grievances against Headteacher Christina. Commenting on the outcome of investigations by the District Education Office, the DEM explained that “to me what was cited, which we could actually see that could be a weakness, is where they complained that the headteacher is full of morning caucuses where they are gathered on a daily basis and ...are reprimanded on whatever... when the mood is for them to go and teach” (DEM).

Secondly, Headteacher Christina was accused of favouritism in allocating responsibilities. It was observed that Camp 2 teachers were overlooked in favour of Camp 1 teachers. Besides the elevation of Teacher Thomas, other key positions such as that of School Health and Nutrition Coordinator were allocated to Camp 1 teachers. Explaining the grievances raised by teachers, the DEM said:

...one of the complaints ...raised ...was that the headteacher was favouring ...the sister in terms of opportunities. In terms of whether it’s an opportunity for a CPD [Continuous Professional Development], an opportunity to be a School Health and Nutrition teacher, which is involved in the distribution of *Mary’s Meals* to the volunteers; so that in the schools it’s felt like it’s ...a privilege. (DEM)

It should be recalled that the position of School Health and Nutrition Coordinator is the one that had landed Teacher Beaton in problems at his previous school. Similarly, Camp 1 teachers would also be favoured for CPD workshops taking place outside the school. It should be stated that besides allowing teachers to update their knowledge

and skills, CPD workshops had the added advantage of allowing teachers to earn extra income that would supplement their salaries. The income would be in the form of upkeep allowances. In a setting where teachers' salaries are meagre, attending a CPD workshop could be considered a big privilege and, therefore, the choice of a teacher to attend could be contentious. Explaining the favouritism and how it created further divisions among teachers, Teacher Kingsley said:

So, there were some practices which were not pleasing members of staff like biases. [For] most of the things that were happening here, the name that was mentioned was Teacher Thomas only. If there is a... workshop out there, Teacher Thomas was the one sent to that workshop. So, Teacher Thomas and the headteacher... were on good terms but not with the rest of the members of staff (Teacher Kingsley).

Considering the undercurrents to undermine Headteacher Christina's leadership by Camp 2 teachers, the practice by the headteacher of assigning responsibilities to the teachers she trusted could be well understood. However, the practice widened the gap between Camp 1 teachers who could be considered as a privileged group with access to power, and Camp 2 teachers who were aggrieved. It can, therefore, be argued that for Camp 2 teachers, such practices would be a source of cohesion and naturally strengthen their resolve to act with one voice in search of a desired outcome.

6.2.3. Personal attitude of the headteacher

The study established that the attitude of Headteacher Christina created a further rift between her on the one hand and teachers, pupils, parents, and the community on the other hand. The study participants considered Headteacher Christina as "insulting", "unsympathetic to teachers' problems", and "boastful". The study noted that in an effort to correct teachers' and pupils' untoward behaviour, she ended up offending them because she would either use her family as a model of achievement, or use members of the community as examples of people encountering problems because they neglected education. Pupils attributed the divisions among teachers to the headteacher's attitude. In a focus group discussion (FGD), they cited cases where Headteacher Christina was insulting and boastful. The following excerpts capture the conversation:

Interviewer: When you say the headteacher would shout at pupils and teachers in an undignified manner, can you please provide an example?

PUPIL 3: She once shouted at a teacher. A teacher was seeking permission to take care of her daughter who was in hospital, so she wanted to take care of her as a guardian. So, the headteacher said "How can a person like you who has AIDS look after a patient?" So, the teacher got out of the headteacher's office while crying, and when other teachers inquired "What is wrong?" she did not respond, but just left for her home – that is her house (*pointing*).

PUPIL 4: All the times she would get in class, she would not teach but be boasting, praising herself and insulting our parents that they are uneducated.

Interviewer: Can you give one example?

PUPIL 4: She would say “Your parents are uneducated, they dropped out of school, their occupation is working in other people’s gardens. All my children are educated... one of them is an accountant, another one is a graduate”... a lot of self-praise.

PUPIL 8: It’s true she does that. There is also another teacher who left this school because she was insulted that she is saturated with ARVs [Anti-Retroviral drugs]. It’s really true about her child... we stay close to her and her last-born child has just completed his education, so she says that in this village there are dull children, so she wants to make us intelligent, but instead of just advising us, she insults us...

PUPIL 2: (Laughing) ...she is so insulting. She says that “Some of you use mosquito nets at night as a blanket while my blanket was imported from Johannesburg” (*laughs*).

PUPIL 6: (Laughs) She says that she meets a lot of women that she had taught right here, carrying sacks of vegetables on their heads... So when people had a strike [referring to Camp 2 teachers], she kept on insulting that even if pupils do not learn, it’s none of her business because she is already educated and her children are also well educated.

The findings from the FGD were corroborated by interviews and documentary evidence. For example, the letter that Camp 2 teachers wrote asking for transfer from Nachiswe Primary School accused Headteacher Christina of using abusive language, insulting teachers in the presence of community members, addressing weaknesses of teachers in the presence of pupils, and revealing to members of staff information shared to her in confidence. In addition, a report written by PEAs to the District Education Office carried a recommendation that Headteacher Christina should control her temper as she was fond of using abusive language when she was angry. Similarly, minutes of the meeting held at the school way back on 21st January, 2015 accused Headteacher Christina of calling teachers “rejects” who had been chased away from other schools. This attitude, coupled with the autocratic form of leadership, could not inspire any hope for the teachers. This created a frustrated group of teachers who easily conspired to make the school ungovernable. In addition, her attitude swayed the opinions of pupils and community members against her, hence they sided with Camp 2 teachers in the conflict.

As it can be noted, the cause of the conflict was complex as several factors came into play. It can, therefore, be argued that the riots were caused by a complex set of factors ranging from systemic to school level. At system level, the study argues that the centralization in handling teacher discipline and the massive shortage of teachers did not provide any motivation for the District Education Office to report cases of teacher indiscipline. Instead, availability of cases of teacher indiscipline provided

opportunities for the District Education Office to allocate teachers to schools located in hard to reach areas such as Nachiswe. With this practice, schools located in disadvantaged areas such as Nachiswe Primary School could get teachers who were not only troublesome, but were also frustrated. The concentration of troublesome and frustrated teachers at Nachiswe Primary School, and the lack of effective consequences for teacher misbehavior provided the drive for the teachers to mount resistance against a tough, formidable and ‘unsympathetic’ headteacher. A combination of all these factors at Nachiswe Primary School created a state of conflict which just required a spark to be manifested. The transfer of Teacher Beaton and how it was handled hence provided the spark.

6.3. How pupils organised to stage the riots

The preceding section has demonstrated that Nachiswe Primary School was in a state of conflict awaiting a trigger event. This section, therefore, uses data that has been presented in the chronological structure to respond to the question of how pupils organised to stage the riots. The data in the chronological structure presented the announcement of Teacher Beaton’s transfer as the spark event. Two narratives in the chronological structure explain the chain of events following this announcement. It should be acknowledged that the state of conflict at the school made the situation amenable to pupil manipulation to provide the spark event. However, contrary to this observation, this paper argues that the rioting was a spontaneous action by the pupils following the announcement of the transfer of Teacher Beaton on the school assembly. The paper argues that the time between the announcement of the transfer and the rioting was not adequate to allow the pupils to get organized and plan for the riots. In all the two narratives presented in the chronology, the rioting was a result of provocation by a teacher on a situation that was already volatile.

It should, nevertheless, be acknowledged that with the opinions of most adults including class teachers, parents, and community members tilted against Headteacher Christina and Camp 1 teachers, and hence in favour of Camp 2 teachers, the circumstances might have had a subtle and unstated influence on the attitude of pupils and their consequent riotous actions. However, much as this subtle influence was very strong, it falls short of manipulation. The rioting was hence an act of pupil activism to claim their rights to ‘*self-determination*’ following the failure of the school to provide for their *welfare*. It should further be maintained that the pupils’ actions were legitimised by the prevailing public opinion in favour of Camp 2 teachers. The persistence of the conflict, the failure to decisively arrive at a solution, and the sidelining of the pupils could be considered as a failure to consider the *welfare* of the pupils. In an environment of massive competition for secondary education, Teacher Beaton was seen as a window of hope for the pupils and parents hence his transfer was seen as a massive blow. This is the reason why the pupils requested the cancellation of Teacher Beaton’s transfer. Ruitenbery (2010) cautions against the closing of spaces for the expression of dissent. The paper maintains that it is the effort to mute the voice of the pupils that eventually led to violence.

6.4. The aftermath of the riots

The paper has so far noted that in the build-up to the riots, the voice of pupils had been silent. There was no consideration of pupil participation in meetings and other efforts to resolve the conflict before the riots occurred. It is only the riots that granted pupils visibility and made their voice heard. From the focus group discussion and interviews, the study learned that after the rioting, pupils took to the streets intending to march roughly the 17 km distance to the DEM's office to demand that the transfer of Teacher Beaton be rescinded. The pupils were, however, stopped in their tracks by the police. In addition, when the police got to Nachiswe Primary School, they carried out preliminary investigations and picked Teacher Beaton for questioning. When pupils heard that Teacher Beaton had been locked up, they marched to the police station to demand his release. They were, however, unable to meet him at the police station. Three days later, Teacher Beaton was tried in a court of law and eventually acquitted of the charges of inciting pupils to riot. At the time of data collection, only 1 teacher had been posted to Nachiswe Primary School following the removal of a total of 5 teachers. The Standard 8 pupils lamented this development as their class of 240 pupils had only Teacher Kingsley remaining. It should be noted that after the riots, apart from the investigation by the police, no effort was made administratively to investigate the pupils' actions. This could be due to the legitimisation of their actions and realisation that their actions were spontaneous, occasioned by the events that obtained at the school.

7.0. Young citizen activism or pupil manipulation? Concluding reflections

The study argues that the rioting by pupils at Nachiswe Primary School was an act of young citizen activism. This argument is advanced considering the broader context of primary education in Malawi, the narrow context of Nachiswe Primary School and the factors that took place in the build up to the conflict. The democratisation process that took place in Malawi in 1993 led to a drive towards decentralisation. The benefits of decentralisation of power to local levels such as district councils and schools are well articulated in literature (Rose, 2005; Evans and Rose, 2007; Bartnett, 2013; Porter, 2014; Yamada, 2014). It is argued that decentralisation leads to increased participation of stakeholders at local levels, improved decision making (Davies, Harber and Dzimadzi, 2003), and enhances the democratic attributes of community members (Rose, 2003). However, the decentralisation process in education was problematic. While power was devolved to local councils and local communities, central government held on to power in key areas such as teacher recruitment, remuneration, and teacher discipline. This created problems of accountability as local communities had no powers to hire and fire teachers. Under these circumstances, it can be argued that local communities would likely consider themselves as beneficiaries and not necessarily as active citizens who could demand accountability from service providers. A study by Davies, Harber and Dzimadzi (2003) on the decentralisation process in Malawi actually reported cases of conservatism by some powerful people at central office and some power dynamics at local levels hence

frustrating the process. Similarly, a study by Karlsson (2002) in South Africa noted that the decentralisation process did not empower local communities but rather led to the re-concentration of power in the hands of headteachers and teachers.

The present study noted that the bureaucratic nature of discipline cases made it less motivating for districts to report cases. As a result, internal discipline measures were employed. In an environment of high teacher shortage, internal discipline became an opportunity to fill vacancies existing in schools located in remote and hard to reach areas. This observation agrees with the World Bank study in Malawi which found that reported improper teacher behaviour often led to the offending teachers being transferred to other schools (Ravishankar, et. al., 2016). This paper maintains that the ambiguity between decentralisation and continued centralisation led to a state of indecisiveness which contributed to the events leading to the conflict at Nachiswe Primary School.

The study observed that the situation at Nachiswe Primary School was further complicated by family ties, and a formidable headteacher who was very tough in dealing with teacher misbehaviour. In addition, the headteacher's attitude created a situation which afforded the teachers an opportunity to escape from a punishing situation. A related study by Okitsu and Edwards (2017) in Zambia noted that systemic factors and the school context made it complicated to discipline teachers and demand accountability for services offered by schools. Therefore, this paper argues that several factors – a failed decentralisation process and the continued centralisation of power by the central government, massive shortage of teachers in the country, indecisiveness in handling teacher indiscipline at both district and school levels – all conspired and led to a state of paralysis at Nachiswe Primary School.

Conspicuously absent in the mix-up at the school was the pupil, who is the main stakeholder in education. All the efforts to resolve the conflict did not include pupils. Several studies have reported on the marginalisation of pupils and children in the decision-making space (Wyness, 1999; Jans, 2004; Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan, 2004; Torres-Harding, et al., 2018). The marginalisation of learners in the conflict, therefore, puts to question the widely acclaimed learner-centred approach adopted under the Outcome Based Education in Malawi. Ironically, this paper observed that there was an apparent pupils' *right to welfare* approach to the problem in the build-up to the conflict. The welfare approach privileges adults to make decisions in the interest of the pupils (Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan, 2004). Although the indecisiveness at the school was affecting pupils in a negative way, authorities claimed that this inaction was done in the interest of the pupils. It was feared that taking decisive action against the misbehaving teachers would deprive pupils of their right to education as they would have no teachers at all. The paper considers this approach as part of the politics of school governance whereby the availability of teachers in schools alone is seen as sufficient without considering their professionalism and effectiveness.

The last straw that broke the pupils' silence was the transfer of a teacher who had won their confidence. This action awakened the pupils' *right to self-determination* and

added their voice to the conflict. As Robinson and Taylor (2007) argue, voice (such as that of the pupils) does not only include the spoken voice, but also the many ways in which pupils may express their views about any aspect of their school experience. Therefore, the paper maintains that the rioting was a form of citizen activism by pupils who had been marginalised for so long. Jans (2004) points out the ambivalence between autonomy and regulation in child participation. He states that the element of protection allows child participation to take place in protected arenas such as child parliaments and student councils. As observed in this paper, there was lack of formal spaces for pupil participation in decision making at Nachiswe Primary School. As Ruitenberg (2010) cautions, the lack of spaces for expression of grievances means opening up new battlefields. Indeed, pupil regulation at Nachiswe Primary School denied authorities an opportunity to hear pupils' voice formally and also denied pupils the socialization into formal spaces and boundaries of acceptable participation. As a result, the building up of tension led to violent pupils' voice which brought them into confrontation with law enforcement agents. de Weerd, et al. (2002) describe this kind of pupils' voice as unconventional political participation which is a form of active citizenship that challenges elite status and contests established practices.

The study extends our understanding of causes of pupil activism, especially at primary level. The study has allowed us to understand that although cases of activism may be on the rise in Malawi, their causes may be linked to systemic factors such as decentralisation and its associated repercussions. In addition, systemic factors may also interact with unique local level and contextual factors which may conspire to create a state of paralysis, making it difficult to provide for the *welfare needs* of pupils.

Another important observation of the study is the sidelining of the pupils' voice in affairs that affect their education. The paper, therefore, recommends the creation of safe spaces in schools to hear authentic pupils' voice as part of learner-centred education and school democratisation. This, it should be acknowledged, is easier said than done, especially in Africa where culturally adult privilege overrides pupils' interests. However, democracy requires making tough decisions and tough choices, hence to reap the benefits of democracy, adults must be willing to move out of their comfort zone and authentically allow child interests to flourish.

8.0. References

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The Impact of Work Friendliness and Safety on Absenteeism of Healthcare Workers in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of work environment characteristics on the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi. Within the context of challenging healthcare systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Malawi, the study seeks to shed light on why absenteeism remains high among healthcare workers in Malawi. The research employs a quantitative approach where it collects data through a cross-sectional survey and analyzes it using linear regression. The study focuses on two main aspects of work environment characteristics: workplace friendliness (supervisor friendliness and coworker friendliness) and workplace safety (personal and coworker safety) to determine if they are predictors of health workers' absenteeism in Malawi. The results indicate that workplace friendliness—both supervisor ($\beta = -0.292$, $p < 0.05$) and coworker friendliness ($\beta = -0.123$, $p < 0.05$)—significantly impact the absenteeism of healthcare workers. The results also reveal that workplace safety—both personal ($\beta = -0.168$, $p < 0.05$) and coworker safety ($\beta = -0.101$, $p < 0.05$)—also significantly impact the absenteeism of healthcare workers. The study highlights the importance of fostering positive workplace relationships and ensuring a safe environment to mitigate absenteeism and ultimately enhance healthcare worker performance. Healthcare organizations should thus strive to achieve friendly work environments by rolling out training programs for supervisors and coworkers that emphasize effective communication and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, healthcare organisations should invest in measures to enhance employee safety, such as providing necessary materials and training to curb occupational hazards as well as promote a safety culture, and encourage healthcare workers to report safety concerns.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Healthcare workers, Work environment, Workplace friendliness, Workplace safety.

1.0 Introduction

The healthcare systems within Sub-Saharan African countries face significant challenges, such as fragile infrastructure and a serious shortage of healthcare workers (Palmer, 2006). A notable critical issue exacerbating this problem is the high rate of healthcare worker absenteeism, which refers to the proportion of scheduled health workers absent from duty at any given time (Sheffel et al., 2022). Different research studies have shown alarmingly high rates of absenteeism within the region, with Malawi experiencing a rate of 37%, a proportion that surpasses the Sub-Saharan African average (Sheffel et al., 2022). Healthcare workers' absenteeism has a detrimental impact on the performance of healthcare organizations. The patients who often find themselves victims of the issue face long wait times when healthcare workers are absent, which deters them from accessing healthcare services (Tomlinson et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Moreover, absenteeism creates a cycle of increased workload for those healthcare workers who are present, which leads to job dissatisfaction and a higher intention to leave the organization (Khan et al., 2021; Berman et al., 2021).

Several factors contribute to healthcare workers' absenteeism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Poor wages, delayed salaries, and corrupt employment practices are major drivers of absenteeism (Ackers et al., 2019; Onwujekwe et al., 2019). Sociocultural factors, such as important community events and domestic responsibilities, often lead to hesitancy in sanctioning absent health workers (Oche et al., 2018). Health reasons, transport-related challenges, understaffing, weak supervision, lack of security, and lack of employee engagement have also been cited as drivers of absenteeism (Di Giorgio et al., 2020; Tumilson et al., 2019). Although there is a high prevalence of healthcare workers' absenteeism, limited research has examined the relationship between work environment characteristics and absenteeism. Existing studies have not adequately explored the impact of specific attributes of the work environment, such as workplace friendliness and workplace safety, on the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi (Sheffel et al., 2022; Edem et al., 2017; Tumilson et al., 2019; Di Giorgio et al., 2020). Understanding these factors is crucial in developing targeted solutions to address the underlying causes of absenteeism among health workers.

In this regard, this research explores the impact of work environment characteristics on the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi. The primary research question guiding this study is: "Do work environment characteristics affect the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi?" To address this question, two specific questions are explored: (1) Does workplace friendliness (supervisor friendliness and workmate friendliness) affect the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi? (2) Does workplace safety (personal safety and coworker safety) affect the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi?

This article's succeeding sections are in the following order: 1) literature review and hypothesis development, 2) methodology, and 3) results. Under the literature review and hypothesis development section, the article discusses the context of the Malawian

health system, previous studies on health workers' absenteeism, and the conceptual framework of the study. Under the methodology section, the article explains the study design, population, sampling technique, and data analysis method. Under the results section, the article discusses the findings of the study as well as their implications.

2.0 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Healthcare System in Malawi

The healthcare workforce in Malawi consists of all those who provide or help in the provision of health services or who aid in the operation of healthcare facilities (WHO, 2019). This comprises healthcare workers inside and outside the healthcare facility, such as registered nurses, physicians, clinicians, technicians, and doctors. In Malawi, the health sector faces challenges in keeping pace with the rising demand for healthcare services, given the three percent annual average population growth and high HIV prevalence (nine percent) (Shiroya et al., 2021). Shiroya and colleagues further argued that the health system of Sub-Saharan Africa, including Malawi, is fragile and is faced with severe problems in critical areas of human resources for health, including size, quantity, absorption of health workers, skill mix, the management capacity of health workforce and geographic and health facility level distribution of healthcare workers.

There are fewer than 23 health professionals per 10,000 inhabitants in Malawi, a key level below which it is impossible to provide necessary health services. Inadequate and uneven distribution of health professionals is a critical impediment to the provision of vital health services in Malawi, according to Berman et al. (2019). In addition, the country has a healthcare workforce shortage of 48% compared to its national targets, with only 1.48 healthcare workers per 1,000 individuals within the population, which is far below the World Health Organization's recommended minimum density of 4.45 doctors, nurses, and midwives per 1,000 population for nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (WHO, 2019). In rural regions, where eighty-four percent of Malawi's population lives, labour shortages are especially severe, resulting in inequities in healthcare services and health outcomes between rural and urban areas. For instance, there were 0.7 doctors per 1,000 people in rural locations in 2014 compared to 1.8 clinicians per 1,000 people in metropolitan areas. This means the country has a long way to go to meet the threshold and be the best in balancing the healthcare professionals with the population.

The problem also exists in South Africa. Ilha (2023) reported that the case was worse between 2011 and 2015, with a high trend associated with resignation in the medical field due to challenging working conditions in public hospitals. Sadly, after resignation, these professionals never returned to serve the public sector as they often relocated to other provinces, private sectors, or abroad. This only highlights a few countries, but it is clear that most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are below the minimum threshold stated. Others have achieved the target of having a minimum of two hospitals per 100,000 population nationally. This is yet to be achieved regionally.

2.2 Workplace Friendliness and Absenteeism of Healthcare Workers

Friendliness is a voluntary, personal relationship that is characterized by the provision of intimacy and assistance (Fehr, 1996). The definition of workplace friendliness (WF), however, is different from general types of friendliness because WF is focused on friendliness that occurs in the workplace (Song, 2005). As social structures, organizations are always composed of individuals, which consequently generates some social connections. Friendship at work extends beyond the social platform recognized in official organizational structures due to a variety of variables, including shared personal interests, style of life, and cultures. Thus, friendship on the job is a natural occurrence (Han et al., 2020). The relevance of workplace friendliness has received great attention in the global literature because of its positive association with several employee behaviors, such as employee performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover (Mao et al., 2012; Markiewicz et al., 2000; Song and Olshfski, 2008). Although many studies have investigated the impact of work friendliness in organizations, such studies have not tackled several important specific questions about work friendliness, two of which are 1) To what extent does supervisor friendliness influence the absenteeism of healthcare workers? and 2) To what extent does coworker friendliness influence the absenteeism of healthcare workers?

Employees who have best friends at work are committed to their work, tend to get more work done in a short period, have fun in their work, have a safe workplace with few accidents, are more innovative, and easily share new ideas (Rath, 2006). Workplace friendliness has been considered a very important phenomenon for both individuals and organizations. Workplace friendliness increases support and resources that help individuals accomplish their jobs, reduce work stress, and provide increased communication, cooperation, and energy (Choi and Ko, 2020; Dartey-Baah and Amoako, 2011; Fine, 1986). Hamilton (2007) also suggested that when in a friendly workplace, employees will feel comfortable with their workplace friends and reduce feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. They also share more information and empathize with workplace friends about work-related problems and concerns. Jehn and Shah (1997) further argued that employees who share friendship exchange words of encouragement, confidence, trust, respect, and critical feedback, which may increase enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

Because the health system of low-income countries like Malawi is already understaffed (Berman et al., 2019), we must understand the triggers of absenteeism. The global literature, though it has a corpus of studies examining the importance of workplace friendliness, still lacks insights when it comes to demonstrating which attributes of workplace friendliness impact the absenteeism of health workers. Since supervisor friendliness and workmate friendliness are all attributes of workplace friendliness, the current study sought to explore how each of them specifically impacts the absenteeism of health workers in Malawi. To achieve such an aim, the following two hypotheses were proposed for testing in this study:

H1: Perceived supervisor friendliness has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers.

H2: Perceived coworker friendliness has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers.

2.3 Workplace Safety and Absenteeism of Healthcare Workers

Workplace safety is defined as an attribute of work systems reflecting the (low) likelihood of physical harm—whether immediate or delayed—to persons, property, or the environment during the performance of work (Beus et al., 2016). Employees will always have a coherent set of perceptions and expectations regarding safety in their organisation. According to McQuerrey (2022), safety and absenteeism in an organization may easily become a vicious cycle. This is because when an organization is prone to accidents and workplace injuries, employees may react by shunning work hence leading to an increase in absenteeism. Previous studies have established a correlation between job safety and the incidence of absenteeism among healthcare workers (Kaburi et al., 2019). Higher absenteeism has been linked to factors such as injuries and accidents, exposure to dangerous products, and general views of workplace safety. This is further confirmed by the fact that workers who feel comfortable at work are less likely to miss work due to stress, sickness, or injury (Kaburi et al., 2019). In addition, research indicates that facilities with strong safety procedures have reduced absenteeism. This is the case because effective safety programs foster a culture of safety that encourages workers to report dangers and incidents, as well as collaborate to enhance workplace safety. In sectors where mental acuity is essential for the execution of job responsibility, a considerable decrease in workplace safety may result in poor morale among employees which in turn would increase their absenteeism (McQuerrey, 2022).

Despite increasing focus on safety by many organizations, several employees continue to be seriously injured at work with some even dying from work-related injuries (Thurston and Glendon, 2018). Risk exposure influences employee attitudes about safety in their organization (Ford and Wiggins, 2012; Henning et al., 2009; Itoh et al., 2004). There, however, have been conflicting results regarding the association between workplace safety and absenteeism which have been either positive (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998), or negative (Ose, 2005), or have shown a null effect (Roelen et al., 2008). Also, all such studies had been conducted in Western countries without any from sub-Saharan Africa, let alone Malawi. It thus remains unknown how workplace safety impacts the absenteeism of healthcare workers in Malawi. Since personal safety and coworker safety are all attributes of workplace safety, the current study sought to explore how each of them specifically impacts the absenteeism of health workers in Malawi. To achieve such an aim, the following two hypotheses were proposed for testing in this study;

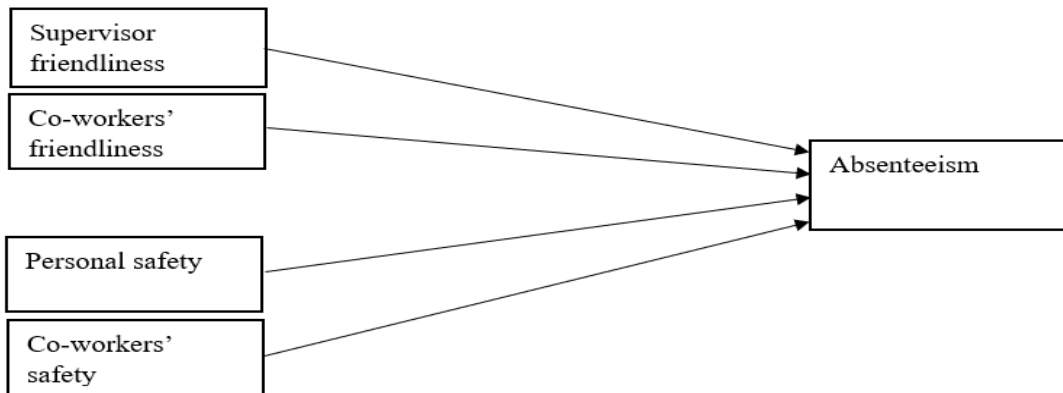
H3: Perceived personal safety has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers

H4: Perceived coworker safety has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers

2.4 Study Conceptual Framework

This study’s conceptual framework grasps the relationship between four independent variables (supervisor friendliness, coworker friendliness, personal safety, and coworker safety) and one dependent variable (absenteeism). Only four independent variables are included in this study because based on past research their statistical linkage with absenteeism has been under-researched.

Figure 1: Research conceptual framework



3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This research study adopted a quantitative approach where data was collected through a cross-sectional survey. Cross-sectional surveys acquire data from a representative sample of a population at a single time point (Wang and Cheng, 2020). This type of research approach is beneficial for evaluating the prevalence of a specific condition or behavior in a community and identifying possible risk factors connected with that condition or behavior.

3.2 Study Population and Sample

The population of interest for the study included healthcare workers, such as physicians, nurses, clinicians, doctors, and other medical personnel. These individuals were selected based on their employment and work settings, such as hospitals or primary care clinics. The research used purposive sampling to draw its sample. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling strategy where the researcher picks specified persons or groups to participate in the study based on specific criteria (Campbell et al., 2020). Purposive sampling was used because the study involved healthcare workers from across hospitals and primary care clinics in Malawi where the sampling frame (list of all people forming a population) was unknown to the researcher due to HR data unavailability. Only when the sampling frame is known can

random sampling be done and in the case of this study such a sampling frame was and remains unavailable. A total of 158 healthcare workers participated in this research.

3.3 Measures

A structured questionnaire was used to measure the 5 variables involved in this research. According to Roopa and Rani (2012), a structured questionnaire is a group of predetermined quizzes intended to extract specific data and information from the respondents. These questions were pre-written, and responders were given a list of predetermined answer possibilities. The questions in the following survey were meant to evaluate particular variables (supervisor friendliness, coworker friendliness, personal safety, coworker safety, and absenteeism) and ask participants for specific types of information (experiences and perceptions). Additionally, the answer possibilities were specified using the Likert scale of 1 to 5. All the questions were adopted from previous research. Table 1 summarizes the construct measures used in this research.

Table 1: Construct Measures

Measure	Survey Questions	Source
Supervisor Friendliness	How often do you feel that your supervisor treats you with respect? How often do you feel that your supervisor listens to your ideas and concerns? How satisfied are you with the level of support provided by your supervisor?	Singh et al., 2017
Coworker Friendliness	How often do you feel that your coworkers treat you with respect? How often do you feel that your coworkers are supportive of your ideas and concerns? How satisfied are you with the level of camaraderie and teamwork among your coworkers?	Al-Shammari et al., 2011
Personal Safety	How safe do you feel while performing your job duties? How often do you feel physically threatened while at work? How often do you feel emotionally stressed while at work?	Kim et al., 2018
Coworker Safety	On a scale of 1 to 5, how often do you feel your coworkers practice safe work habits? On a scale of 1 to 5, how often do you feel your coworkers put your safety at risk?	O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2010

	<p>On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with the level of safety training provided by your employer?</p>	
<p>Absenteeism</p>	<p>How likely is it that you would be voluntarily absent from work because you are feeling depressed? How likely is it that you would be voluntarily absent from work because you had a fallout with your workmates or supervisor? How likely is it that you would be voluntarily absent from work because the schedule of a personal activity conflicts with your work schedule? How likely is it that you would be voluntarily absent from work because you did not wake up on time to go to work? How likely is it that you would be voluntarily absent from work because you are experiencing minor domestic problems?</p>	<p>Munyenembe and Chen, 2021</p>

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using linear regression in the SPSS. The questionnaire results were used to generate a data set containing many observations (responses) for each dependent and independent variable. The linear regression analysis was then used to evaluate the strength and direction of the connection between the dependent and independent variables and to predict the value of the dependent variable based on the values of the independent variables.

4.0 Results

Preliminary tests were first conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. These tests included the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test for sampling adequacy, Harman's single factor test (to assess common method bias), Cronbach's alpha test (to measure internal consistency), and multicollinearity assessment. After the data had passed all preliminary tests, a regression analysis was run in SPSS.

4.1 KMO and Bartlett's Tests

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test are common tests used in quantitative data analysis. They are used in the context of factor analysis to determine

data suitability for subsequent analysis. In particular, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test is used to measure the adequacy of the data sampling to determine whether the variables included in the analysis are relevant for factor analysis (Nasution et al., 2023). Values closer to 1 indicate that the data are highly suitable for factor analysis. At the same time, a value above 0.5 is generally considered acceptable. On the other hand, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity assesses whether the variables' correlation matrix significantly varies from an identity matrix. This means that the test helps determine if there are significant relationships among the variables. When variables are correlated, significant results are obtained (Nasution et al., 2023). This indicates that factor analysis or other related multivariate strategies are appropriate. In this research, KMO values for all 5 variables were above 0.5 and significant at a 95% confidence level.

4.2 Cronbach Alpha Tests

Cronbach's alpha test of all variables is significant in evaluating the reliability of the scale or questionnaire. A high Cronbach's alpha value shows strong internal consistency, suggesting that the items within the scale are highly correlated and reliably measure the intended construct. On the other hand, a low Cronbach's alpha value suggests poor internal consistency, indicating that the items may not be measuring the construct consistently or reliably. Interpreting the results of Cronbach's alpha test involves considering the value of Cronbach's alpha, which ranges from 0 to 1. A value of 0.70 or higher in Cronbach's alpha is considered acceptable for most research purposes, suggesting satisfactory internal consistency (Taber, 2018). In this research, Cronbach alphas for all 5 variables were above 0.7.

4.3. Common Method Bias

Harman's single-factor test is used to assess the presence of common method bias in a dataset. Common method bias is the potential bias that arises when the same method or source of information is used to measure multiple variables, leading to inflated relationships among the items or the variables. Harman's single-factor test helps researchers identify this bias by examining whether a single factor accounts for a substantial variance in the measured variables (Aguirre-Urreta and Hu, 2019). Interpreting the results of Harman's single-factor test involves assessing the proportion of variance explained by the single factor. If a single factor accounts for a large portion of the variance (i.e., more than 50%), it suggests the presence of common method bias. In this research, the test showed that no single factor accounted for more than 50% of the extracted variance and therefore no common method bias was detected.

4.4. Multicollinearity Assessment

Conducting a multicollinearity assessment is significant in determining the presence and severity of multicollinearity among the predictor variables in a regression or multivariate analysis. Multicollinearity refers to a high degree of correlation between

two or more predictor variables, which can distort the analysis results and make it difficult to interpret the individual effects of the predictors. Assessing multicollinearity helps researchers identify problematic relationships between predictors and take appropriate steps to address or mitigate them. Researchers can learn about potential issues such as redundant predictors, unstable coefficient estimates, and inflated standard errors. The cutoff point for VIFs is often chosen considering the general guidelines and heuristics. Although there is no universally agreed-upon cutoff, the commonly used threshold is a VIF value of 10. If the VIF for a predictor exceeds 10, it suggests a high degree of multicollinearity, indicating that the predictor is highly correlated with other predictors in the model. In this research, the test showed that there were no VIFs above 10 hence no multicollinearity was detected.

4.5 Regression Analysis Output

Linear regression was conducted to test the impact of four independent variables (supervisor friendliness, coworker friendliness, personal safety, and coworker safety) on one dependent variable (absenteeism) translating to a total of four hypotheses tests. The impact of perceived supervisor friendliness on the absenteeism of healthcare workers is captured by hypothesis 1. The impact of perceived coworker friendliness on the absenteeism of healthcare workers is captured by Hypothesis 2. Hypotheses 1 and 2 relate to how social needs affect the absenteeism of healthcare workers. On the other hand, the impact of perceived personal safety on the absenteeism of healthcare workers is captured by Hypothesis 3. The impact of perceived coworker safety on the absenteeism of healthcare workers is captured by hypothesis 4. Hypotheses 3 and 4 relate to how safety needs affect the absenteeism of healthcare workers.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceived supervisor friendliness has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers. The results revealed a statistically significant negative regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.292$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore hypothesis 1 is supported based on the aforementioned results. The interpretation of this statistical result is that when employees' perceptions regarding supervisor friendliness increase by 1 unit, their absenteeism declines by 0.292 units. More positive perceptions regarding supervisor friendliness are thus associated with lower absenteeism incidents. This highlights how important the friendliness of a supervisor is in mitigating negative employee-related behaviors such as absenteeism.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that perceived coworker friendliness has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers. The result revealed a negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.123$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore hypothesis 2 is supported based on the aforementioned results. The interpretation of this statistical result is that when employees' perceptions regarding coworker friendliness increase by 1 unit, their absenteeism declines by 0.123 units. More positive perceptions regarding coworker friendliness are thus associated with lower absenteeism incidents. This highlights how important the friendliness of coworkers is in mitigating negative employee-related behaviors such as absenteeism.

The results of hypotheses 1 and 2 which show a significant negative association between supervisor friendliness and absenteeism as well as coworker friendliness and absenteeism support Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Abraham Maslow proposed that humans have five sets of needs that act as a source of their motivation, with one set of needs being social needs (Baridam, 2002). The social needs comprise companionship, affection, and friendship. Social needs refer to the need to have relationships with others. Maslow considered the social stage an important part of psychological development because employees' relationships with others help them reduce their emotional concerns such as depression or anxiety. The absence of supervisor friendliness and coworker friendliness will thus lead to a situation where employees feel a lack of the fulfillment of social needs, a void that easily triggers negative behaviors such as absenteeism from work.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that perceived personal safety has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers. The results revealed a negative regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.168$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore hypothesis 3 is supported. The interpretation of this statistical result is that when employees' perceptions regarding their personal safety increase by 1 unit, their absenteeism declines by 0.168 units. More positive perceptions regarding personal safety are thus associated with lower absenteeism incidents. This highlights the importance of personal safety in mitigating negative employee-related behaviors such as absenteeism.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that perceived coworker safety has a significant impact on absenteeism among healthcare workers. This showed a significant negative association with absenteeism ($\beta = -0.101$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that when health workers feel that their colleagues are working in a safe environment, it lowers their absenteeism. Hypothesis 4 is thus supported. The interpretation of this statistical result is that when employees' perceptions regarding coworker safety increase by 1 unit, their absenteeism declines by 0.101 units. More positive perceptions regarding coworker safety are thus associated with lower absenteeism incidents. This result underscores the importance of coworker safety in mitigating negative employee-related behaviors such as absenteeism.

The results of hypotheses 3 and 4 which show a negative association between perceived personal safety and absenteeism as well as perceived coworker safety and absenteeism also offer credence to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Abraham Maslow proposed that humans have five sets of needs that act as a source of their motivation, with one set of needs being safety needs (Baridam, 2002). Safety is an evolutionary need, which is often manifested in what employees refer to as the "fight or flight" response. Employees use environmental information to determine whether they are safe – in which case, they will usually stay – or unsafe – which will typically encourage them to leave (i.e. flight) or attempt to change their current circumstance (i.e. fight). When environmental information suggests there is some potential threat to employees, they experience an emotional response, which sensitizes them so that they are ready for action. In this regard, absenteeism can be looked at as

a “flight” response where they are trying to change their current circumstance after perceiving poor work safety.

5.0 Conclusion

The results of the research align with previous studies highlighting the importance of good work environments (work friendliness and safety) in shaping positive employee behavior (Alfayad and Arif, 2017; Choi and Ko, 2020). In healthcare, where teamwork and collaboration are essential, a friendly and safe work environment fosters job satisfaction and engagement and reduces absenteeism. These findings suggest that healthcare organizations in Malawi should prioritize strategies that boost work friendliness and safety to mitigate the problem of absenteeism among healthcare workers.

A friendly work environment can be achieved through training programs for supervisors and coworkers that emphasize effective communication and interpersonal skills (Kaburi et al., 2019). Also, creating opportunities for team-building activities and fostering a positive culture can promote coworker friendliness and collaboration among colleagues. On the other hand, ensuring workplace safety is necessary for the effective functioning of the health facilities. Healthcare organizations should invest in measures to enhance employee safety, such as providing necessary materials and training to curb occupational hazards. Additionally, promoting a safety culture and encouraging healthcare workers to report safety concerns will contribute to personal and coworker safety (Ackers et al., 2016).

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Demystifying Strategic Planning and Performance in Public Organisations in Malawi

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Abstract

The debate surrounding the effectiveness of strategic plans in enhancing organisational performance has given rise to two opposing perspectives among scholars. While one camp advocates for the positive impact of strategic plans, another argues against their efficacy. This study is driven by the need to demystify this ongoing debate, which has gained relevance since the Government of Malawi implemented a policy directive in 2000, mandating all public organisations to formulate strategic plans. The underlying belief was that the adoption of strategic plans would lead to more efficient service delivery. Employing a qualitative research approach and drawing from both principal-agent and public value theories, this study conducted a content analysis of data to unravel the complexities of this issue. The study's findings reveal that, despite the widespread adoption of strategic plans, public organisations in Malawi continue to underperform. Consequently, this research advocates for the establishment of a comprehensive legal and policy framework aimed at ensuring more efficient and effective service delivery within these organisations.

Key words: Strategic plan, public sector reforms, governance and public service delivery

1.0 Introduction

This paper aims at demystifying the myth about strategic planning and performance in public organisations in Malawi as some scholars believe that a strategic plan is a tool that enhances performance in organisations whilst others believe it is a sham. According to Bryson (2018), a strategic plan is defined as a direction or control mechanism for allocating resources in an organisation in order to meet certain objectives. It is a way of determining how organisational resources, skills and competencies should be combined to create a competitive advantage. A strategic plan is a popular management instrument within contemporary public organisations worldwide (Bryson, 2010). Despite its popularity, it remains a myth whether or not a strategic plan actually 'works' in a public sector setting. Some scholars argue that the

complex adaptive context of public organisations inhibits effective application of strategic plan and incremental processes might be needed whilst other scholars argue that a strategic plan is more than a fad and can contribute to positive outcomes (George, 2017).

This paper is produced against a background of divergent views and beliefs that exist amongst scholars, practitioners and academicians as to the myth about strategic plans and performance in public organisations. One school of thought, led by Bryson (2018) and Bert (2019), backs the implementation of strategic plans as an efficient and effective tool for achieving organisational goals and objectives. This school states that a strategic plan has become a valuable tool and major technique that organisations use to posture themselves with a sense of direction, increase operational efficiency, and increase market share and profitability in the ever-changing environment.

Another school of thought, led by Mintzberg (1994) and George (2018), opposes the view that a strategic plan is a tool that enhances performance in organisations. This school states that contrary to the positive performance derived from elaborate, well developed and designed strategic plans, evidence suggests that some organisations with strategic plans continue to register unsatisfactory performance in achieving commitments derived from the implementation of these plans. This group criticises strategic plans by asserting that public sector organisations are not meant to embark on strategic plans because they tend to reinforce a unitary, centralised hierarchical mode of decision making which is antithetical to the types of flexible, decentralised decisions organisations must take in a changing environment. They even wonder if strategic plan as a management tool works (Vinzart et al, 1996).

Despite this debate on the myth about strategic plans and performance, the Government of Malawi introduced strategic plans in public sector organisations in September, 2000, as part of public sector reforms. The aim of introducing strategic plans was to enhance performance in public organisations. It was believed that the introduction of strategic plans would lead to efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public services as the public sector acts as an engine for development (Khunga and Magolowondo, 2023).

Public organisations in Malawi play a significant role in the economy. In accordance with the 2003 Public Finance Management Act, public organisations, also known as state owned enterprises (SOEs), are defined within the broad spectrum of a statutory body as a corporate or unincorporated body that has been set up as a specific entity to provide a specific good and/ or service. This includes any corporation or subsidiary of a corporation where the Government directly or indirectly controls the composition of any board of directors, controls more than 50% of the voting power of the body or holds more than 50% of any of the issued share capital of the body either directly or through another agency or statutory body. Public organisations are a channel that Government uses to address its strategic economic and social objectives and its commercial objectives.

This paper seeks to demystify the myth on whether or not strategic plans enhance performance in public organisations. This stems from the fact that the main reason why the Government of Malawi introduced strategic plans was to improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in Malawi.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study

Strategic plans have been central to several public sector reform efforts. Kimuyu (2015) observes that in recent times, many public sector organisations have been engaging in activities that will improve their service delivery to their clients. One such activity is the development of strategic plans. Byrne (2010) states that not only is a strategic plan used as a tool to improve service delivery in most organisations, it is also an indicator of top management's commitment to developing and implementing coherent and comprehensive organisational strategies and a key for promoting inclusive public management in a democratic society and a way of creating public value. According to Bryson (2018), it is through strategic plans that an organisation can predict changes in the environment and act proactively.

A number of scholars, including Rothwell and Kazanas (2003), have vehemently defended strategic plans as a means to achieve company objectives and enhance organisational performance. Johnsen (2022), who conducted a study in Norway in about 140 public organisations, found out that strategic plans are used extensively in the public sector and have improved service delivery. Likewise, Wachira (2015) found a resounding success in service delivery in public hospitals in Kenya all because of the implementation of strategic plans as tools for the improvement of service delivery.

However, much as there are such revelations, there are some scholars who dispute the importance of strategic plans as tools for improving performance in public organisations. Collins and Porras (1994) claim that it is only a myth that companies perform because of strategic plans. They observe that there are many organisations that have both performed and grown without strategic plans. Despite the introduction of strategic plans in public sector organisations by the Government of Malawi in 2000, both Kayuni (2016) and M'banga and Sharma (2021) state that evidence suggests that government agencies continue to register unsatisfactory performance in achieving commitments derived from the strategic plans. This is despite that every financial year these public sector organisations enter into an agreement with the Government, called the 'Shareholder's Letter of Expectations', where they agree on targets in order to improve public service delivery. This dismal performance is also evidenced by the Malawi Annual Economic Report (2023).

Several studies have been conducted on strategic plans in public organisations worldwide but most of them have either concentrated on the process of devising the strategic plans rather than the implementation thereof. For example, Ugboro (2011) and Johnsen (2015), who conducted their studies in the USA, showed that strategic plans in Government were a successful innovation that contributed positively towards improving the agencies' performance. Likewise, Huang (1997), who conducted his

research in Florida's Department of Corrections in USA, found that all managers expressed commitment to the strategic planning process and made positive assessment of its organisational impact. However, his study is faulted for concentrating on the executive management in the organisation leaving behind the other workers who are also involved in the strategic planning process in the organisation.

In Malawi, Kayuni (2016) analysed the strategic planning process in the public sector by asking who initiated the process, what approach determined the process and what was the possible potential of the adopted strategic plan approach in enhancing the reform agenda. He concluded that leadership (political and professional) has played a role in the failure of strategic plans. He observed that leaders are responsible for spearheading the process of managing these plans to achieve the goals contained within them.

This is corroborated by Malunga (2007), who considered means of improving the role of strategic plans in local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malawi and argued that an effective strategic plan requires top managers' active roles in defining the strategic direction of the organisation and creating an environment that recognizes a strategic plan as a tool of strategic management.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the trend for most of the scholars has been to focus on the process of formulation of the strategic plans as opposed to exploring why and how strategic plans can be a tool in enhancing performance in public organisations. This paper aims at demystifying this myth about strategic planning and performance in that while some scholars have touted strategic plans as a magic wand for enhancing performance in public organisations in Malawi, other scholars doubt its effect and impact on performance. This myth has not been fully demystified in current literature in that whilst strategic plans have been considered as a tool that can contribute to positive outcomes in an organisation, some scholars still doubt their effectiveness and contend that they are a sham, not worthwhile and only a waste of resources. This motivated this study as there is a gap in the available literature to demystify the myth on whether or not strategic plans are tools for enhancing performance in public organisations in the context of Malawi.

There are a number of theories which explain strategic planning in public and non-profit making organisations. These include New Public Management (NPM) theory, public choice theory, principal-agent theory and public value theory. On NPM, Tambulasi (2009) stipulates that its paradigm features dominate in both contemporary public-sector reform and public-sector management literature. Key to NPM is the introduction of market principles in the running of the public sector. The rationale of NPM is to replace the excessively rigid and bureaucratic traditional public administration with a fast-moving form of public management so as to achieve high levels of efficiency, effectiveness and economy in the delivery of public goods and services.

Tambulasi and Kayuni (2013) state that NPM is an approach that seeks to build an administration by implementing flexibility, transparency, minimum government, de-bureaucratization, decentralization, the market orientation of public services and privatization. The NPM philosophy seeks to reinvent government business by being adaptable, accountable and responsive to citizen needs as asserted by Osborne and Gaebler (1992). However, this theory lies contrary to how public organisations are run in the western world. Even within Malawi, shareholders, boards and management of public organisations believe in corporate governance as a way of running public organisations instead of applying market principles in the running of the public sector.

Public choice theory by Buchanan (1958) states that decision makers in government institutions prioritize their own interests over public interest and social benefit. Sikwese (2021) states that this theory advocates the application of economic models of human action to politics and other social activities, basically pointing to the behaviour of individuals that men and women always seek to maximize their benefits and pursue the least costs in their decisions. However, this also is not the way public organisations are managed as it runs contrary to corporate governance tenets of transparency, accountability, integrity and openness, among others. This research will employ two theories—principal-agent theory and public value theory—as they are more relevant as per the aims and objectives of this paper.

2.1. Principal-agent theory

Cheshire et al (2017) state that principal-agent theory is a contractual and governance theory which sets out a fiduciary relationship between the principal and the agent. In this case, the shareholders of the public organisation are taken as principals, and they appoint directors to act as ‘agents’ to run the affairs of the public organisation on trust. When principals appoint agents, their aim is to ensure that the agents run the affairs of the organisation according to the aims and objectives for which they established the public organisation. In other words, the shareholder, who is the owner or principal of the organisation, delegates day-to-day decision making in the company to directors, who are the shareholder’s agents.

Pont (2020) clarifies this by stating that in corporate governance, the directors are vested with the following fiduciary duties in running the organisation: duty to act in accordance with the purposes for which the organisation was made, duty to use powers for a proper purpose, duty to promote the success of the organisation, duty to exercise independent judgment, duty of care and skill, and duty to avoid conflict of interest, amongst others.

The problem that arises as a result of this system of corporate ownership is that the agents do not necessarily make decisions in the best interests of the principal. One of the principal assumptions of principal-agency theory is that the goals of the principal and agent conflict and that creates the agency problem as elaborated by Busch et al (2015).

The reason why Government, who is the owner or principal shareholder in public organisations, establishes public organisations is to deliver efficient and effective services to its citizenry. Knowing Government as the principal shareholder cannot be involved in day-to-day running of the affairs of the public organisations, it appoints directors on its behalf who make decisions in the day-to-day running of the public organisations (Muhome, 2016). In the Malawian case, Government directed that strategic plans should be implemented in public organisations to enhance delivery of public services and that those services should deliver public value. It is therefore the aim of this paper to assess whether or not strategic plans are indeed enhancing performance in public organisations.

2.2. Public value theory

This theory was advocated by Moore (1995) as an alternative approach to the New Public Management theory and espouses principles of good governance. The theory describes the value that an organisation or activity contributes to the society and is centred around the needs of the public as citizens as well as consumers, and the creation of value rather than achieving targets. Public value theory urges leaders and managers of public and non-profit organisations to be effective strategists to fulfil their missions, meet their mandates, satisfy their constituents, and create public value (Bryson, 2018).

Moore's central proposition in advocating the concept of public value in public management was that public resources should be used to increase value in a way which is analogous to how the private sector creates, increases, or maximizes value on inputs to the satisfaction of its customers. The crux of the public value theory is that if the private sector is guided in their operations by the shareholder values, so too public sector managers should be guided by the citizen's choices as citizens are ideally the shareholders of the public service (Seddon, 2008).

According to Bryson (2018), public value theory has four key dimensions which augur well with the aim and objectives of this paper. These are:

- (a) *Outcome achievement*: this is the extent to which a public body is improving publicly valued outcomes across a wide variety of areas. These can be social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes.
- (b) *Trust and legitimacy*: this is the extent to which an organisation and its activities are trusted and perceived to be legitimate by the public and key stakeholders.
- (c) *Service delivery quality*: this is the extent to which services are delivered in a high-quality manner that is considerate for users' needs. These will be maximized when service users are satisfied and when they perceive the service to be accessible, convenient, and responsive to their needs.

- (d) *Efficiency*: this is the extent to which an organisation is achieving maximal benefits with minimum resources. (By using these key dimensions, the question arises on how the strategic plans is a magic wand for enhancing performance in a public organisation by creating public value. Sikwese (2021) states that for public managers to be guided by the citizenry, there is need to have a mechanism for engaging these citizens in planning, delivery, and evaluation. It is the strategic plan which will be used in holding public officers and managers accountable for the quality delivery of services they are responsible for and to evaluate public value in the delivery chain. It is therefore public value that will concretize the aims and objectives of this study to assess whether strategic plans enhance performance in public organisations.

The linkage of principal-agent theory to public value theory rests on the fact that the Government, who is the principal in the public organisation, sets up the organisation with managing of its affairs delegated to the directors who act as agents on behalf of the Government. Their aim in managing and running the day-to-day affairs of the public organisation is to ensure that the services provided create a public value to the citizenry. Once the directors are running the affairs to the contrary then there will be an agency problem as they are under a fiduciary duty to create public value in their managing of the public organisation.

In order to create public value, the Government as the shareholder has directed that the directors should create an instrument that will be used to measure their performance and evaluate the public value. That is the strategic plan.

3. Context of Strategic Planning and Performance in Public Organisations in Malawi

The debate on the myth about strategic planning and performance in organisations was initiated as far back as 1980s by people such as Mitchell and Birnbaum (1981) who stated that there is no clear systematic relationship between a strategic plan and a firm's performance. Since then, several authors have criticised the effectiveness of strategic plans. These include critics like Collins and Porras (1994), who claimed that many companies make profits even without strategic plans. Shrader et al (1984) state that strategic plans are not effective in public organisations and cannot enhance performance because of their rigidity as they encourages excessive bureaucracy in organisations. This was corroborated by Mintzberg (1994) and Miller and Cardinal (1994), who criticised strategic planning by asserting that it is not equal to strategic thinking and that a strategic plan tends to reinforce a unitary, centralized hierarchical mode of decision making which is antithetical to the types of flexible, decentralized decisions organisations must take in a changing environment. They have wondered if the strategic plan as a management tool works.

The debate is also supported by Vinzart and Vinzart (1996), who note that strategic planning is rigid and drives out important innovations that are not a part of the plan, and Martin (2014), who emphasizes the big lie of strategic plans and claims that

strategic plans deceive managers into believing that a strategy can be controlled. This debate is echoed by George (2018) who concludes that public sector organisations are not to embark on strategic plans as they are a waste of time. This debate is opposed by proponents of strategic plans, such as Martinez (2014) and Bryson (2018), who assert that strategic plans have a positive, moderate and significance impact on organisational performance. This is supported by Walter and Monster (2019), who vehemently support strategic plans as a means to enhance organisational performance. They state that strategic plans are necessary tools for organisations to survive the harsh turbulent business times and make appreciable contributions in such an environment. However, although there has been a debate on the effectiveness of strategic plans in public organisations, the question that emerges in this paper is: why are governments like that of Malawi so keen on strategic plan implementation?

Initially, strategic planning in public organisations in Malawi was not mandatory. It largely depended on the preferences of particular leadership in their respective Ministry, Departments or Agency (MDAs) to either initiate the process or not (Kayuni, 2016). Strategic plans in Malawi were introduced with the establishment of public sector reforms in early 2000 when Government started implementing the more comprehensive public sector reforms initiatives for Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Tambulasi and Kayuni (2013) state that public sector reforms in Malawi can be categorized into two: first-generation reforms and second-generation reforms. First-generation reforms refer to those implemented in the Kamuzu Banda era while second-generation reforms are those implemented in the democratic era.

The democratic era reforms undertaken between 1994-2014 aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness of all branches of the state i.e., the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary. It is in this democratic era that public sector organisations in Malawi started developing strategic plans following the directive from Government through a circular that directed that all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) should develop strategic plans as part of a renewed impetus for reforms (Kayuni, 2016).

However, since the promulgation of the public sector reforms, the renewed impetus for reforms and the subsequent introduction of strategic plans, there have been mixed views on the role of strategic plans in enhancing performance in public organisations. According to 2023 Malawi's Annual Economic Report, some public sector organisations with strategic plans performed well whilst others did not. This has led to a debate as to whether strategic plans assist in enhancing performance in public organisations, or if they are just white elephants that gather dust in the offices of management personnel, given that public sector reforms have been heralded as a panacea for enhanced service delivery and public sector efficiency and effectiveness (Khunga and Magolowondo 2023).

4. Research Methodology

The research for this paper was conducted at Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) and Malawi Posts Corporations (MPC) which were used as the main unit of analysis. These organisations were selected because they are both public organisations and operate in the communications sector. MACRA is a regulator of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) services and MPC is an operator of postal services. These two organisations are also categorized as commercial public organisations by Government, meaning they are expected to declare dividends to Government as their principal every financial year. The choice of these public organisations was because the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has been reporting MACRA in its Annual Economic Reports and Consolidated Reports for State Owned Enterprises from 2016-2022 as one of the best performing public organisations in the communications sector, while MPC has been listed as one of the organisations with a dismal performance. Apart from MACRA and MPC, the research was also conducted at Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning as they house the Public Reforms Unit, the Department of Statutory Corporations (which looks after all public organisations) and the Department of Human Resource Management and Development (DHRMD), who are overseers of strategic plan implementation in public organisations. This was done for triangulation purposes.

The researcher used a qualitative research approach. This approach was adopted because it provides the flexibility to consider different dimensions of the problem in question. As asserted by Wilson (2014), the qualitative research approach is feasible to generate rich, quality data on the subject matter. The study had 50 participants in total, who were selected by purposive sampling. These respondents were Executive Management and top managers from MACRA, MPC and Government officials from the above-mentioned Government sections. The research used a number of data collection methods. Primary data was collected through interviews and secondary data was sourced through desk research using journals, books, magazines and government reports in assessing how strategic plans enhance performance in public sector organisations in Malawi. The study was undertaken with an open mind in order to guard against infidelity of implementation as espoused by Creswell (2016) and Saunders (2019). As such the researcher crafted the interview questions with this point in mind. After gathering all the data, the researcher therefore analyzed the data by content analysis.

5. Results and Discussions

Having analyzed the data from the respondents, the researcher found out that the majority of the respondents indicated that strategic plans can be used as tools for enhancing performance in public organisations. However, they further stated that most public organisations encounter problems in implementing strategic plans due to governance, political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal

challenges which affect successful performance of the strategic plans and efficient and effective service delivery and creation of public value as follows:

5.1. Governance challenges

Many respondents from both MACRA and MPC reported that most of their leaders had not embraced public sector reforms by Government and the introduction of strategic plans in their institutions as they felt threatened by change that this would bring. This posed a threat in implementing strategic plans as there was resistance from the top as one respondent avidly put it as follows:

The directive from government that all public organisations should implement strategic plans came as a shock to many leaders as they had no knowledge of how strategic plans work. Most had neither been trained in strategic plan processing nor implementation. As such, it posed a threat to their contracts as they were afraid that once the contracts came to an end, Government as their principal would not renew them.

30 out of 50 respondents insisted that leaders in public organisations were dragging their feet in implementing strategic plans as they feared that once they were found out that they are not following the strategic plans they would be dismissed by their Board of Directors. As such, they were not willing to present progress of strategic plan implementation at each and every Board meeting for fear that they would lose their jobs.

A significant number of respondents noted that instead of presenting the progress reports of strategic plan implementation at each and every quarter to the Board of Directors, Management waits until the end of the strategic plan period to present a report to the Board, which should not be the case.

One individual commented that “most leaders who are in the executive management team fear for their jobs. As such, they do not present a true picture of how they are implementing strategic plans to their bosses who are the Board of Directors representing Government.” This comment is also asserted by Kayuni (2016), who found that leadership has contributed to failure of strategic plans in public organisations due to the absence of security of tenure. Most leaders are politically appointed and once the government that put them into power loses elections, they get dismissed by the new government.

5.2. Political challenges

A majority of respondents reported that it was a challenge to implement strategic plans successfully due to political interference by Government in the process. It was noted that, due to change of Government after the 2020 elections, most public organisations had their top management teams replaced and this affected proper implementation of the strategic plans as the new teams had to be oriented on the implementation of the plans. One respondent commented that:

...because of change of Government in 2019 after Malawi Congress Party and Tonse Alliance came into power replacing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), there was change of leadership in most public organisations with a new set of management teams replacing the previous management teams. These new guards had no clue about what their counterparts wanted to achieve in implementing the strategic plans which were already in place. As such, they had to be oriented first in order to adopt what their counterparts wanted to achieve. This took valuable time of the organisation instead of concentrating on the core business of implementing the strategic plans' goals and objectives.

This is also echoed by M'bunga and Sharma (2021) who indicated that like all African democracies, in Malawi, the change of government means a complete overhaul in government priorities and ad-hoc developments emerge at the expense of planned change. Most public organisations experience the unusual change of direction whenever a new government is ushered into power and implementation of activities outside the strategic plans becomes the order of the day.

5.3. Economic challenges

Some respondents reported that due to inadequate funding of the public organisations, it was a challenge to implement strategic plans as most of the activities that were lined up for implementation required some funding. 35 out of 50 respondents noted that because of the economic downturn in Malawi, it was a challenge to implement most of the activities lined up in the strategic plan. An example was given of Malawi Posts Corporation which requested for a bailout from Government when it was failing to perform effectively. MPC also reached the extent of suggesting the retrenchment of some of its employees as a result of economic challenges.

Interview with the Postmaster General was telling:

MPC is going through tough economic times because of the economic downturn the country is going through. The organisation has found itself in an economic quagmire that it is failing to implement most of the activities that it had lined up in its 2016-2022 strategic plan. MPC has twice requested for a financial bailout from government to assist in performing some activities it had put in its strategic plan, to no avail.

Most respondents also noted that most strategic plans in public organisations have no financial resource frameworks to provide an indicative cost estimate for their implementation as observed by M'bunga and Sharma (2021). This was, however, not the case with MACRA which had budgeted and did set aside finances for the implementation of its 2015-2020 strategic plan and had a dashboard with a dedicated official to highlight areas which needed urgent implementation at any given time.

5.4. Social challenges

A significant number of respondents indicated corruption as a social challenge that affected implementation of strategic plans in enhancing performance in public organisations. It was observed that the levels of corruption in most public organisations have increased to alarming rates such that it has become the norm.

One respondent had this to say:

In most public organisations, funds that are set aside for implementation of strategic plans are not well policed, such that they become prone to corrupt use. There is no accountability and transparency in the way strategic plan activities are implemented and this leaves room for corruption by officials who are involved in implementation of strategic plans.

This finding is collaborated by the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) data that shows that Malawi's fight against corruption has weakened in the 10 years dating back to 2012 and that most of the corrupt activities are happening in public organisations.

5.5. Technological challenges

37 out of 50 respondents indicated that the use of modern technology is a challenge to most Malawians. This includes public organisations, where most people are not conversant modern technology. As most organisations are moving away from the use of brick-and-mortar methods to the use of modern technology, it was a challenge to implement strategic plans. Many respondents noted that for a strategic plan to be effectively implemented, it requires a dashboard to trace and track its implementation. This can be easily done through a software application which assists in tracing and tracking each and every activity to be implemented at a given time. With lack of capacity in the knowledge of ICT in most public organisations, this becomes a challenge. Lack of knowledge in ICT mainly affected MPC, as one individual observed:

MPC is in the process of restructuring as most of the employees do not have the requisite knowledge for the jobs they perform. The lack of knowledge in ICT is also one of the reasons why MPC is failing to compete with other new entrants on the market. MPC would have by now been a market leader in the provision of financial services had it grasped ICT since its establishment.

5.6. Environmental challenges

Most respondents reported that they faced environmental challenges in implementing strategic plans as there were limited monitoring and evaluation frameworks to measure success due to unwillingness by the leaders to embrace change. Many respondents noted that most public organisations do not have proper monitoring and evaluation tools to assist them with tracking the implementation of strategic plans. As already observed, it was noted that most public organisations lacked a tracking and

tracing device for strategic plan implementation. Comparing MPC and MACRA on this aspect, it was noted that lack of monitoring and evaluation of strategic plans did not affect MACRA as it had a dedicated member of staff who was obligated to monitor and evaluate the activities in the strategic plan using a dashboard and submit the reports every time there was a Board meeting.

5.7. Legal challenges

Most respondents indicated that there was lack of a comprehensive legal framework for the implementation of strategic plans in public organisations. They further reported that there is a *laissez-faire* approach in the implementation of strategic plans due to lack of a proper legal framework. There are no measures taken when a public organisation does not successfully implement a strategic plan and no rewards given to those who successfully implement strategic plans. One respondent from Government indicated the following in an interview:

The failure of Government to put in place stringent measures and a proper legal and regulatory framework for the implementation of strategic plans is what is breeding a *laissez-faire* attitude by most leaders in public organisations. These people know that regardless of the fact that their organisations have dismally performed in implementing strategic plans, they will still have their contracts renewed as there are no measures put in place to monitor progress. While most contracts are based on performance on paper, it is still lip service on the ground as politics take centre stage in renewal or non-renewal of contracts in public organisations in Malawi.

Apart from the interviews, the researcher also depended on secondary sources for data collection and these included books, journals, and Government reports. According to the Malawi Economic Report (2023), MACRA's revenue base has grown from K17 billion to K23 billion from March, 2022 to March, 2023, representing a 35 percent growth. MACRA's asset base also grew from K23 billion to K29 billion, unlike MPC which recorded losses and requested for Government bailout in the same period. MPC also requested Government to consider removing it as a commercial service provider as it was not making profits.

Analyzing the public organisations' financial performance from the Consolidated Reports for State Owned Enterprises from 2016-2021, the research found that MACRA continued to report increases in surpluses over the past years. However, MACRA recorded a drop in revenue in the 2018/19 financial year where the Authority realized K17.7 billion in revenue while its surplus was at K6.9 billion. The decline in revenue was due to a continuous decrease in incoming international call minutes which is the basis for circulation of international call termination fees. The other reason for the decline was due to the implementation of the Universal Service Fund (USF) where the Authority is required to apportion 20% levy receivable from operations to USF.

An analysis of the financial risk for MACRA from the Consolidated Report for State Owned Enterprises showed that in 2019/2020 the liquidity position of the Authority remained healthy and capable of meeting short term obligations as they fall due, as measured by a current ratio of 1.5:1 in 2020. Additionally, MACRA's working capital was adequate to finance its day-to-day operations. In comparison to MACRA, Malawi Posts Corporation's analysis of the 2016/2019 financials indicated that though the MPC reported a profit after tax amounting to K224 million in 2019, this was due to the accounting treatment of K2.4 billion on items not reclassified to profit on loss. However, the actual position was a loss of K1.5 billion, an improvement from a loss after tax of K3.6 billion recorded in the 2017/18 financial year, which worsened in the year 2018/19.

MPC's liquidity position remained very weak with a current ratio of 0.57:1 reported in 2018/19, a decline from the 2018 position of 0.64:1. This signified that MPC had inadequate resources to meet its current debt obligations as they fell due. Furthermore, the working capital was still on the negative side, signifying that it had inadequate working capital to finance its day-to-day operations. The performance of MPC was also poor in the year 2019/20, compared to the position reported in 2018/19. The revenues increased by 21 percent to K4.2 billion in 2019/20 from K3.5 billion in 2018/19. On the other hand, expenses slightly decreased by 5 percent in 2019/20 (from K4.8 billion to K4.6 billion during the same period 2018/19 financial year), resulting in a loss of K3.2 billion.

The financial performance by MPC led the organisation to perform dismally on creation of public value unlike MACRA as it did not meet the dimensions which were set up by Moore (1995). There was no trust and legitimacy for MPC from the general public and the service delivery quality of postal services by MPC was not satisfactory. MPC was also not efficient in its service delivery to the general public due to the financial challenges it was facing during the implementation of its strategic plan. From the foregoing, the research demystified the myth about strategic planning and performance in public organisations in that strategic plans enhance performance in public organisations in Malawi but not as much as expected. This is in line with Khunga and Magolowondo (2023) who also found that some public sector reform initiatives such as performance contracts help to improve service delivery but only marginally due to some challenges. In the case of strategic plans, some challenges which the public organisations face include those related to political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal and governance matters.

6. Conclusion

This paper aimed to demystify the myth about strategic planning and performance in public organisations in Malawi. The research used the comparative case of MACRA and MPC as a unit of analysis. It is clear from the discussion that the paper has demystified the myth as it has shown that strategic plans enhance performance in public organisations in Malawi, but only to an extent due to some impediments such as political, economic, social, technological environmental and legal challenges.

These challenges need to be addressed if strategic plans are to truly be efficient and effective tools in enhancing performance in public organisations in Malawi. The study concludes that a strategic plan can be a tool to enhance performance in public organisations in Malawi if the challenges that it meets during implementation are ironed out. The paper therefore recommends that Government of Malawi, as the principal, should put in place supportive policies and stringent measures to enable strategic plans to enhance performance in public organisations in order to create public value and deter a laissez-faire attitude on their implementation. The Government need to develop a strong legal framework for the implementation of strategic plans in all public organisations in Malawi to punish public officers who do not implement strategic plans in their organisations.

In order to create public value, Government as a principal should also assist in building the capacity of members of executive management teams and officers in public organisations through its Department of Human Resource Management and Development (DHRMD) in order to enable them to implement strategic plans efficiently and effectively. This will reduce the cost of hiring consultants to draft strategic plans which in most cases do not reflect the happenings in the organisation. There is also need to raise awareness through civic education initiatives to the general public on the performance of the public organisations to enable them to demand the value they should get from the delivery of services. The citizens need to be vigilant to demand such services and even take to court public organisations and officials that are not delivering the services to their satisfaction. This is called active citizenship. Since this study only focused on two public organisations due to limited time and resources, the researcher recommends further research to obtain in-depth information on how strategic plans can enhance performance in public organisations using a quantitative methodological approach. The study will be significant as the results will inform policy makers on how strategic plans enhance performance in public organisations in Malawi to further demystify the myth.

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Book Review

Nkhoma, Bryson G., *Bettering their foods: Peasant production, nutrition and the state in Malawi, 1859–2005*, African Humanities Association, Makhanda, 2023, pp. i-215, ISBN: 9781920033941 (paperback).

Coming in the aftermath of a recent surge in manuscript publications on Malawian history by Zoe Grove (2020), Paul Chiudza Banda (2020) and Gift Kayira (2023), this book by Bryson Nkhoma adds another unique tapestry to the Malawian historical discourse.³ The book projects the history of Malawi through the lens of peasant agriculture, food production and nutrition and provides new insights into modern debates on state interventions, food security, nutrition, ecological change and sustainable development. It dwells on the history of peasant agriculture with particular emphasis on how the state and other players intervened in Malawian peasant's food production and nutrition politics. The narrative is chronologically reconstructed from the late pre-colonial to the postcolonial era, thus methodically providing an expansive perspective on a subject that has traditionally been documented abstractly or 'over shorter spans of either pre-colonial, colonial or post-1964 history.' (p. xiv) As such, the book unpacks its analysis in six substantive chapters, with the first chapter exploring the interface of pre-colonial African agriculture in southern Malawi with early European encroachment by explorers such as David Livingstone, Christian missionaries and white farmers from 1859 to the eve of colonialism in 1882.

With the coming of colonial conquest and rule after 1883, the second chapter takes us through the early disruptions to food production that the African peasants encountered until 1894, before they transformed into critical food suppliers until 1910. As the Malawian colonial economy gradually connected with the global markets, chapter three chronicles how African peasants increasingly grappled with global market prices, colonial displacement, outside competition from Indian traders and state interference over soil conservation and nutrition. Chapter four examines the impact of the Second World War on food production revealing how the war increased pressure on the need for peasants to produce more food and their entanglement with the subsequent food supply initiatives and the resultant post-war agricultural policy. It underscores that the campaign to encourage peasant production was cosmetic and conveniently exploitative for the state. Unfortunately, after the war, Malawi faced a dreadful famine in 1948/49, which together with the legacies of the war drastically shaped state agricultural interventions informed by compulsion, conservation, nutrition, and community development as detailed in chapter five. The final chapter looks at peasant food production and nutrition in relation to agricultural development in postcolonial Malawi till 2005. With much of the early policies based on Kamuzu

³ See Zoë R Groves (2020), *Malawian Migration to Zimbabwe, 1900-1965: Tracing Machona*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Paul Chiudza Banda (2020), *The State, Counterinsurgency and Political Policing in Malawi, 1891-1994*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books; Gift Wasambo Kayira (2023), *The State and the Legacies of British Colonial Development in Malawi: Confronting Poverty, 1939-1983*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Banda's agrarian populism, the chapter discusses the drives made to improve food production and nutrition and the resultant achievements from 1964 to 1978. Nkhoma however shows that the relative success of these early actions was undone in the period 1979 to 1993, with policies that affected peasant production leading to perennial food shortages, which the post-1994 liberal democratic regimes tried to reverse through various agricultural reforms but to no avail. The chapter accounts for the failure of the independent state to create a vibrant peasant economy and improve food security and nutrition due to ill-thought-out state agricultural interventions and colonial legacies.

Overall, by showing the ubiquity of the state in African food production and nutrition, the book raises questions about the power of the state as the main driver for change and modern science as the blueprint for rural development. It thus 'historically demonstrates the extent to which well-intended scientific projects are bound to fall short when providers fail to take into their equation the beneficiary communities, including their history, competitive interests and class diversities' (p. xiv). Be that as it may, the role of other non-state actors in peasant food production seemed muffled throughout the book. For example, for a narrative that began with missionary interventions, it would be expected that the role of the church or religion in shaping African nutrition, in particular, would have been well nuanced across all periods. Nonetheless, this is an important and timely publication for academics, researchers, students of empire, economic, environmental, agricultural history and rural development, as well as policymakers who may seek to understand and improve Malawian food production and security amidst the perennial unconvincing state attempts at 'bettering their foods' since 1964.

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