

PROFILE OF WLSA MALAWI 2009

Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust Malawi National Office (**WLSA-Malawi**) is an action-oriented research organization founded in 1998. The main objective of WLSA is to conduct research that supports action to improve the socio-legal position of women. WLSA has offices in seven countries of Southern Africa: Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with a regional office in Lusaka, Zambia.

WLSA-Malawi was established as part of the WLSA regional family ten years after WLSA's initial inception in 1998. Since its inception into WLSA, the Malawi National Office has conducted five grounded action-researches on the Justice Delivery System and have since published two reports entitled ***In Search of Justice: Women and the Administration of Justice Delivery in Malawi (2000)*** and ***Dispossessing the Widow: Gender Based Violence In Malawi (2002)***. The latter examines the ways that the justice delivery system addresses gender based violence, specifically the dispossession of the widow in inheritance and succession matters. The findings of this publication have been widely popularized: UNICEF has utilized the findings as a resource base in popularizing this issue and WLSA Malawi has disseminated the research results on CNN and BBC.

WLSA-Malawi is an outstanding Women Human Rights organization. Among its unique distinguishing facts are:

1. WLSA-Malawi is the only organization that champions the intersection between women's rights, gender equality and the law.
2. WLSA-Malawi engages in feminist legal anthropology in which it uses an action-research approach in which research results are translated disseminated and it designs a programme to rectify gaps found and further uses the information to change the situation of women in Malawi.
3. WLSA-Malawi has a professional and skilled staff that has competence and capacity and commitment to work at multiple levels.
4. WLSA-Malawi has a high degree of visibility nationally, regionally, and internationally.
5. WLSA-Malawi plays a strategic role in engaging with policy and law makers to effect positive change.
6. WLSA-Malawi uses a gender and human rights approach to HIV prevention and management.

WLSA-Malawi has conducted the following research:

- ***Feminisation of HIV/AIDS in Malawi: Women's Right to Life and Factors That Create Vulnerability to HIV Transmission***
- ***Women And HIV/AIDS In Six Districts In Malawi: Balancing The Equation Between Grounded Realities And The Appropriateness Of The Response***
- ***Poor, Invisible and Excluded: Women in State Custody Malawi***

These three researches are currently being published. The former formed the basis for a course that the National Coordinator of WLSA Malawi designed to teach at the University Of Toronto Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Centre for Women's Studies in Education the fall term of 2007.

WLSA Malawi has also published a number of publications including:

- **Discussing the Prevention of Domestic Violence Legislation in Malawi: Multi-sectoral Perspectives (2003)**
- **Domestic Violence Awareness Handbook (2003)**
- **WLSA Malawi 5 Years in Review (2003)**
- **Beyond Inequalities, Women in Malawi (2005)**
- **Gender, What does it entail? Engendering Parliament in Malawi (2005)**
- **Contributing towards the Realisation of Women's Human Rights and Gender Justice: Recommendations for a More Equitable Constitution Blantyre Malawi (2006)**

Since WLSA Malawi began its programmes, it has collaborated with other WLSA countries through management and regional meetings on action programmes and the research programme. At the national level, WLSA Malawi has undertaken work in both its research and action programmes with the Government of Malawi through the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Justice; the Judiciary; The Law Commission, District Commissioners; traditional leaders; the police service; other NGOs; international donors and the ultimate beneficiaries, women.

WLSA-Malawi's action research programmes have had significant impact on various sectors of society. WLSA's study on the Justice Delivery System has been used by various organizations to pursue some of the human and legal rights issues identified in the study. For example, following WLSA's recommendation for extensive research on the role of traditional structures in delivering justice, DFID is currently implementing a project regarding access to traditional justice delivery system in Malawi.

Various stakeholders have utilized WLSA's research findings to advocate for changes in the policies and laws in Malawi. For example, The Special Commission on Gender Related Laws has utilized recommendations made in WLSA's study on the Wills and Inheritance Situation in Malawi to review the Wills and Inheritance Act. Further to this, after the Justice Delivery Study WLSA conceived and initiated the idea of coming up with a law preventing domestic violence in Malawi. Since 2001, WLSA engaged in strategic lobbying exercise to ensure that the law is drafted and passed. On 28th April, 2006, the law was passed. This is a major achievement of WLSA and it is unprecedented by any NGO in Malawi.

In 2006, joined in partnership with two other NGOs, WLSA-Malawi led the NGO delegation to the United Nations where it presented Malawi's First Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This Report is entitled "**Taking Malawian Women's True Lived Realities to a Global Forum**".

WLSA Malawi has also organized and conducted training workshops and courses on gender related issues in various sectors of the economy in the country. Members of staff have been invited to present papers and give talks to various institutions in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands and many countries in Africa such as South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Zambia.

The Specific Objectives Of WLSA Malawi are:

- Conduct research on gender issues in Malawi and Southern Africa, particularly on issues related to legal rights.
- Provide information on gender and the law in order to influence policy and legal reform.
- Conduct relevant training and education.
- Explore and develop new methodologies and new perspectives for the study of gender and the law.

WLSA Addresses The Law From Three Perspectives That May Discriminate Against Women:

- The “substantive” area of the law which relates to either documented laws or customs that are in force and operational.
- The “structural” area of the law which relates to problems with the courts, enforcement and administrative areas of the state.
- The “cultural” area of the law which relates to the shared attitudes and behavior towards the law.