

**MZIMBA CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK  
GOVERNANCE GROUP**

**MACCSS PROJECT REPORT**

**FROM**

**31<sup>st</sup> MARCH TO 30<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2025**

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADC	Area Development Committee
AIP	Annual Investment Plan
AEC	Area Executive Committee
ASI	Adam Smith International
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CONGOMA	Council of Nongovernmental Organizations in Malawi
DPD	Director of Planning and Development
DAT	District Advisory Team
DC	District Commissioner
DDF	District Development Fund
DDPF	District Development Planning Framework
DDPS	District Development Planning System
DEC	District Executive Committee
DLPW	Director of Lands and Public Works
GESD	Governance to Enable Service Delivery
GVH	Group Village Headman
MACCSS	Malawi Anti-Corruption Civil Society Support
MLG	Ministry of Local Government
MZCSOINET	Mzimba Civil Society Network
MIDCT	Mzimba Institute for Development Communication Trusts
NAWLOG	National Women Lobby Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGORA	Non-Governmental Regulatory Authority
PET	Public Expenditure Tracking
PDO	Phunzirani Development Organisation
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
RIPEC	Rights People Claim
SEP	Social Economic Profile
SOAP	Society for the Advancement of People
VAP	Village Action Plans
VDC	Village Development Committee
WOFIC	World Fit for Children

## **Background**

The Mzimba CSO Network is a loose network founded on the principles of providing policy and strategic guidance, promoting transparency and accountability, advocating for and playing an advisory role in the implementation of programmes and projects by various civil society organisations both local and international across Mzimba district. It was established in the year 2012 as a network to provide checks and balances to all stakeholders including fellow CSOs, Private Sectors and Government Departments through the district Council. The Network has 62 active members implementing projects and programmes covering 10,363 square kilometers with a total population of 1, 107,363, enhancing effective and efficient service delivery as complementally to government efforts.

This project report on Malawi Anti-Corruption Civil Society Support (MACCSS) covers three months of implementation of activities from the month of April to June 2025. This report highlights several activities which were implemented together with stakeholders including; CSO Network members, M'mbelwa District Management Team, DEC members, Traditional leaders, members of Citizen Forums, the media (Zodiak Broadcasting station and Nation Publications Limited) and the general public, and. The people reached included men, women, youths and people with disabilities.

The project focused on tracking utilization of CDF from the year 2022 to 2025 in the following constituencies: i) Mzimba South West, ii) Mzimba Hora, iii) Mzimba Luwerezi iv) Mzimba South East. These constituencies were selected based on the availability of Citizen Forums. The objective of the project was to strengthen the capacity of Citizen Forums to engage, demand transparency and accountability for improved service delivery. Additionally, the Citizen Forums help to amplify civic actions and voices of the communities.

### **Rationale on Policy Framework**

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi (1994) provides for the establishment, composition and functions of rural authorities and places a duty on the central government to ensure that there is adequate provision of resources necessary for the proper exercise of local government functions. The 1994 Constitution expressly makes local government institutions responsible for welfare provision, promoting democratic institutions and participation; infrastructural development and economic development through the formulation and execution of local development plans, and the representation to central government of local development plans (section 146). In keeping with the constitution, section 3 of the Local Government Act of 1998 identifies the objective of Local Government in Malawi as the

furtherance of democratic principles, accountability, transparency, and participation of people in decision making and development processes. Section 6 of the same Act provides a further elaboration of these functions. Similarly, the decentralization policy (1998), devolves the power to the masses.

Furthermore, the Republican Constitution under Section 30 deals with the right to development. It mandates the state to take all necessary measures to realize this right by ensuring equality of opportunities for all in accessing basic resources, education, health, food, shelter, employment and infrastructure. Specifically, women, children and persons with disabilities are to be given special consideration. Both the policy and the Act seek to achieve the following:

- to create a democratic environment and institutions in Malawi for governance and development at the level that will facilitate the participation of grassroots in decision-making processes,
- to promote accountability and good governance at the local level in order to improve service delivery; and
- to mobilise the masses for socioeconomic development at the local level

### **Political Economy Analysis**

The national budget responds to the needs of the people because its formulation is participatory. One of the components in the national budget is Constituency Development Fund (CDF). Therefore, the people are supposed to know how the national budget is being implemented, especially CDF.

This project identified two political economic analysis tools namely; Public Expenditure Tracking and Social Audit, which are essential in assessing the flow and use of public funds. It also empowered supporting beneficiaries to hold duty bearers to account, thereby improving service delivery.

Consolidating support from the CSO Network, District council management, and the DEC, as well as compliance of the council to provide information and partake in the interface meetings, strengthened the authenticity of the project in district.

Through the consultative and interface meetings it was discovered that Members of Parliament have had absolute powers over Constituency Development Funds (CDF) in the period under study. Therefore, MPs disregard the CDF guidelines, that state that; communities shall participate in identifying their own projects (Demand driven); the projects should foster community empowerment through participatory approaches; participate in the implementation process (community ownership); Public good (the projects

should not be on private good and services); Transparency and accountability (Projects should be implemented in a transparent and accountable manner) and; Community contribution (the beneficiaries should contribute 10% to enhance community ownership). As such, the PEA is that, the power dynamics in the implementation of CDF is inconsistent with the laid down guidelines.

Another inconsistency that the PEA area discovered is that the Council Secretariate is **not** in full charge in the CDF implementation processes. For example, soliciting and handing over contractors to project sites, as well as procuring and delivering materials to the project sites. The PEA discovered that these are being handled by the MPs.

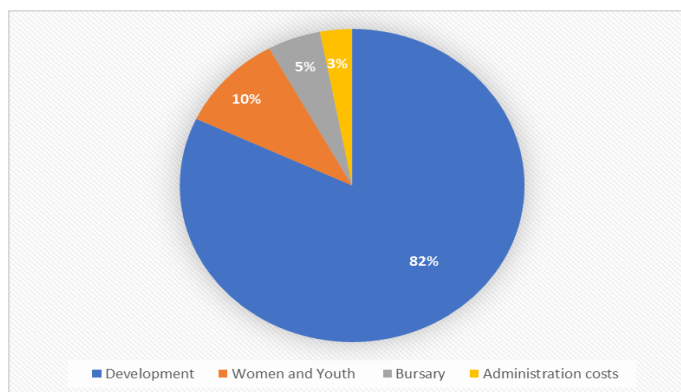
The PEA also discovered that the Ward Councilors are not involved in all CDF processes. Furthermore, realizing that the Thematic Group is not an end to itself, sought the support of the Network mother body, then the council management before the District Executive Committee (DEC) which approved for the project implementation. Further engagement with the District Commissioner as the controlling officer enabled the deployment of the DLPW as a key duty bearer throughout the interface meetings. In the field, the group engaged with key stakeholders in development especially traditional leaders, ADC and VDC and the citizens.

### Funding category of CDF

The graphs below depict the funding category of CDF

1. Development projects 82%
2. Bursary 5%
3. Women and Youth Empowerment 10%
4. Administration 3%

Figure 1 CDF funding categories



The figure above shows the components of CDF as outlined in the guidelines (2022).

Although, the funding exists in the categories as shown above, it was found out that, majority of the citizens are not familiar with the quotas. In addition, the Bursary as well as the youth and women empowerment quotas have not been well utilized. The PEA found out that **no significant** group has ever benefited from the youth and women empowerment category from 2022 to 2025.

### **Activities planned and implemented**

- i. Information gathering on CDF 2022 to 2025
- ii. CSO Network Briefing Meeting
- iii. Interface Meeting with the District Council Officials
- iv. Entry meeting at DEC
- v. Development of the user-friendly data capturing tools in both English and Tumbuka language
- vi. Consultative meetings with Citizen Forums in Kabuwa, Kapopo, Kanjuchi, Khosolo, Luwerezi, Emfeni, Mzalangwe and Edingeni
- vii. Bi-Monthly review meeting and reporting
- viii. Follow up action point from Citizen Forums
- ix. Interface meetings with the communities
- x. Reporting

### **Achievements**

#### **i. CDF information gathering**

The thematic group consolidated CDF expenditure reports from M'belwa District Council, for 2022 to 2025 financial years. The council provided reports for the whole district, from which the thematic group isolated projects for the selected constituencies. These reports were evidence basis for the subsequent activities in the accountability tracking project.

#### **ii. CSO Network Briefing**

The governance group understanding its allegiance to the mother body of MZISONET, sought blessing and support from the network to mark the way forward in implementation of planned activities. On 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2025 the group briefed the Network, while garnering input from the participants. The house unanimously endorsed the project for presentation to other stakeholders lined up in the activities.

iii. **Interface with M’mbelwa District Council management**

With endorsement of the MZSISONET, the Thematic group proceeded to brief and seek approval for project presentation at District Executive Committee (DEC). On 11<sup>th</sup> April, after scrutiny and deliberations, the Thematic group was granted a go-ahead to present the project at DEC.

iv. **Entry meeting at DEC**

On 18<sup>th</sup> April, the project was presented to over 50 DEC members, who scrutinized and provided necessary insight and endorsed the project to be implemented in the District. This marked the official clearance of the thematic group to implement the three months project.

Consolidating support from these stakeholders enhanced the conduct of the thematic group and the whole project in a transparent and accountable manner.

v. **Development of user-friendly data capturing tool**

the implementation team designed and validated a questionnaire to be used in generating evidence-based information in issues around CDF. Considering the social demography, the tool was designed in English and Tumbuka/Chitumbuka languages to ease communication and consolidation of relevant data. The tool also aided in extinguishing potential misinformation such as witch-hunting of politicians.

vi. **Consultative meetings.**

The consultative meetings were conducted with citizen forums in the following areas: Kabuwa, Kapopo, Kanjuchi, Khosolo, Luwerezi, Emfeni, Mzalangwe and Edingeni.

As the determiner of the interface meetings, consultation with citizen forums aimed at generating issues which duty bearers were to respond to. In that regard, citizen forums were oriented in the CSO network role in ensuing good governance; project structure and aims; existing revised CDF guidelines and; alleged projects paid for by CDF in the respective consistencies.

The orientation was important to have the citizen forums acquainted to the CSO network by realising its independence and objective role, familiarising them in the project cycle and narrowing the scope of deliberations to CDF issues only.

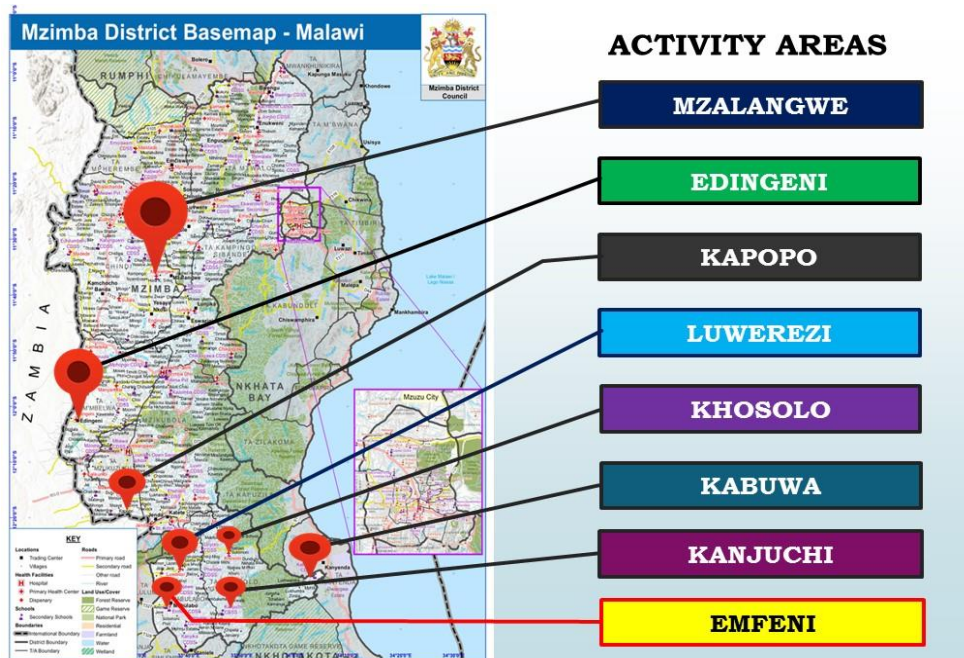


Figure 2 Map indicating areas covered by the project

The consultative meetings revealed a number of issues including;

1. That ward councillors are mostly **not** involved in the implementation of the CDF initiatives and projects
2. Unavailability of Project Implementation Committees (PICs), Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs), visitors register books and records books, in most of the project sites [and where PIC was present like in Kanjuchi they lacked capacity to operate]
3. There is little or no knowledge of the revised Constituency Development Fund (CDF) guidelines among the citizen forums and the general population.
4. Unavailability of copies of Bills of Quantities (BoQs) in all known project sites
5. There are no copies of delivery notes in all known project sites
6. Unavailability of copies of project handover notes in all known project sites
7. Cases of hostile relations between contractors' and community development structures (ADC, VDC, Citizen Forums) and the general population. Hence, monitoring was inefficient. In other cases where the contractors were in close ties with the MP, such as during the construction of Luwerezi Police Unit and Njewe school in Emfeni (Luwerezi Constituency) contractors barred citizens entry to the sites for monitoring purposes, despite having necessary authority.
8. Poor supervision by the Council. Without visitor register and record books at the sites, there is **no** evidence that the council visited the project sites for monitoring purposes.

9. Bursaries have not been accessed accordingly by the desired population.
10. Public ignorance of project costs except for Luwerezhi EPA office valued at MK60 million. This is likely due to un-involvement of the citizens and other structures in project selection.
11. Ghost projects such as School block at Echikhangeni Primary School and Kabuwa Primary without specification of the project. These projects appear only on paper and **not** on the ground.
12. Unavailability of **project site billboards** giving description of the project. As a result, project information was mostly not readily available to the public.
13. A mismatch between project reports and what is on the actual sites. For example, several unfinished projects were quoted as complete in the project reports. e.g. Kabuwa PEAs house (**Figure 4**), Kabuwa CDSS Girls hostel, Phazi CDSS Girls hostel, Luwerezhi Police Unit (**Figure 3**), Kasongolo bridge (**Figure 9**), just to mention a few. Furthermore, quoting projects implemented by other stakeholders as if funded by CDF

The issues above, beg a question of transparency and accountability in the utilization of Constituency Development Funds in the period under study. However, despite other shortfalls including those cited above, there are cases of successful implementation of initiatives and projects from CDF. Thus:

14. The finished and operational projects e.g. Luwerezhi EPA office and Inkosi Ya Makhosi M'mbelwa V's office. [**figure 5**]

**Figure 3; Luwerezzi Police Unit.**



**Figure 4 Kabuwa PEAs House**



The PEAs' house is budgeted at MK23 Million. However, MK19 million is alleged to have been spent at this level,

**Figure 5 Luwerezi EPA office and Inkosi Ya Makhosi M'mbelwa V's office.**



**Luwerezi EPA office. Luwerezi Constituency**



**Inkosi Ya Makhosi M'mbelwa Vs' office. MZ SW. Constituency**

Figure 6 Consultative meetings in pictures



vii. **Interface meetings**

From 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> June, the Governance Thematic Group hosted interface meetings in 3 constituencies namely: Mzimba South East (Khosolo), Luwerezi (at Emfeni) and Mzimba South West (Mzoma).

The objective of the interface meetings was to get duty-bearers closer to the citizens in respective constituencies and be accountable with regards to CDF projects. The dialogue between duty bearers and citizens facilitated sharing of accurate information and knowledge of various CDF projects and generate a common understanding as well as developing tangible resolutions. The retrospect, redifed lines of responsibility which strengthens cordial relationship between duty-bearers and the citizens in the spirit of good governance as the duty-bearers, especially the council officials clarified some of the issues the community did not know regarding CDF.

However, MPs and Councillors were not available, yet they were very important in such meetings, with the exception of Mzimba South West, where the Personal Assistant to the MP was present and responded to some of the questions, the community asked.

**Figure 7 Interface meetings at Khosolo, Emfeni and Mzoma**



The chairperson for Khosolo citizen forum (Standing) posing a question to the duty bearer, the DLPW. (20<sup>th</sup> June, 2025)



The DLPW responding to questions from the Luwerezi and Emfeni Citizen forums at Emfeni Magistrate Court, (20<sup>th</sup> June, 2025).



The DLPW responding to questions from Edingeni and Kapopo citizen forums, at Mzoma. ST/A Chimtunga Jere and, Personal Assistant to the MP look on. (24<sup>th</sup> June, 2025).

### viii. **Bi-monthly meetings**

In the course of implementing activities, review meetings were conducted to assess progress, initiate corrective adjustments and plan for the succeeding activities. In addition to being de-briefing and post-mortem meetings, these meetings provided a platform for drafting and validating reports for activities.

### **Best Practices**

1. The project is a spotlight on how CDF and possibly other development funds are abused. For example, on average **NO** youth or women group has benefited from the 10% allocation for their economic empowerment.
2. Unveiled how the CSO network is strategically and objectively positioned to ensure good governance in public service delivery, by working with relevant stakeholders in harmony.
3. Compliance of the duty-bearers from the District Council in the initiation phase of the project enhance a smooth implementation.
4. The attendance of the council to interface meetings was crucial in strengthening the status of the project and contribution to advancing community demanded transparency and accountability.
5. Presence of traditional leaders for instance Chitunga Jere at Mzoma and Beneka Jere at Emfeni, in demanding transparency and accountability from duty-bearers added value to the grassroots voice.
6. Unearthing of different incomplete projects and stimulating resumption of implementation works at project sites. For example, at Kasongolo bridge in Luwerezhi Constituency and Kambindingu Bridge in Khosolo (Mzimba South East Constituency).
7. Revealing council administrative inefficiencies resulting to cropping out of ghost and incomplete projects quoted as complete in the reports. After the interface meetings the council deployed officers to revisit project sites.
8. Constant engagement with the council throughout the implementation period strengthened cordial relations between the CSO network and the council towards promoting development in the district.

### **Success stories**

1. Empowered citizen forums
  - For example, Luwerezhi and Kanjuchi Citizen Forums is continuing to track project progress and conducting interface meetings with duty bearers such as the MP (the Governance Thematic Group was invited) to demand accountability.
  - Enhanced ownership of the initiative, signalling sustainability.

- Unearthed the imbalance between the money spent on bursary and the list of beneficiaries for example in Mzimba South West Constituency. The amount of money spent on bursary is bigger than the number of beneficiaries on the list.
2. Citizen forums taking an initiative to disseminate information related to CDF and other development strategies, to the masses utilizing public platforms and events like funerals
  3. Citizen forums engaging diplomatic approaches with duty bearers, enhances objective dialogue towards bridging the operational gap with duty bearers and relevant structures such as ADC, VDC and other committees.
  - 4.
  5. Involvement of traditional leaders and other local level duty bearers such as ADC and VDC, strengthens ownership and sustainability of accountability tracking initiatives.
  6. Unearthing non-existing projects paid for, like Kajankhama bridge in Luwerezi Constituency. In response, the DLPW clarified that there is no Kajankhama bridge rather a slope on the edge of Chimaliro forest reserve which was paid for by CDF.
  7. Taking duty-bearers (Council officials), to interface meetings.
  8. Unearthed a mismatch between reports and what is on the ground. For example,
    - Echikhangeni Primary School in Luwerezi constituency and Kabuwa Primary [unspecified in the report] in Mzimba South East Constituency.
    - In 2024/25 financial year MK16.5 million was spent on 65 students [10 at Kabuwa, 15 at Ng'ombechinda, 36 at Kanjuchi and 4 at Unyolo] in Mzimba South East Constituency who on average each student is supposed to be paid 90, 000 per year which amounts to MK5,850,000. This begs an accountability question of did the MK10, 650,000 go? Also, where the guideline puts a ceiling of 5% translated to MK8 Million, how is the surpassing of the 5% justified?
    - In Mzimba South West, the reports indicate bigger number of pupils benefiting where in reality there are issues such as; One of the 4 students at Mtuzuzu CDSS dropped out in 2019 however her name appears in the 2023-2024 payments. On the other hand, Edingeni CDSS does not have a beneficiary student; 4 at Kavuwula CDSS (only paid for a single term); 4 at Mzoma with a questionable allocation of MK9 Million reported disbursement.

### **Strategies for success in the project**

1. Coaching and mentorship of the citizen forums

2. Citizen forums taking lead in the enhancing transparency and accountability of duty-bearers.
  - Developing action points
3. Blending members with different calibres and background
  - Men, women, youth, traditional leaders, ADC members, VDC members
4. Mainstreaming political economy analysis to maintain stakeholder cooperation in the initiative.

### **Emerging Issues:**

- Resistance by policy holders to release information (bursary and infrastructure projects) as requested by the citizen forum e.g. Kanjuchi, and Mzalangwe CDSS's, the Head teachers refused to release bursary beneficiary list.
- Existing gap between the council and local level development structures especially the ADC and VDC and constituents from project identification, implementation to monitoring. Henceforth, undermines good governance in public service delivery.
- The District Council admitted to failure to train Project Implementation Committees (PICs) and Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) in constituency development project sites.
- Poor planning and budgeting of CDF projects leading to unfinished projects. Additionally, the other issue is appeasement from the MP to the constituency leads to mismanagement of resources.
- The MP creates own structures for the CDF projects which is against laid down guidelines and this is yet another critical challenge unearthed.
- Poor coordination between the Directorate of Public works, Procurement and the respective MPs hampers accuracy and credibility of information on CDF projects. For example, faulty projects cited by the citizen forums were sampled from list of projects issued by the district council itself. During the interface meetings the DLPW alleged that the cited projects, needed to be crosschecked in the system again. This is a clear sign that there is poor coordination lack of updated information on these projects.
- The DLPW gave a unjustifiable excuses in line with the utilization of the 3% administration allocation is not enough for effective monitoring of these projects, while in fact, the main challenge lies in lack of proper planning on the part of the Directorate of Public Works.
- Bringing together a number of citizen forums in a constituency to an interface meeting enhances sharing of knowledge, expertise, skills and wide coverage of issues in the constituency.

### **Lessons learned**

1. The project was an eye opener to the District Council and the citizens with the unearthing of issues affecting the state of development aimed at transforming the district and wellbeing of the citizens. In this way, the stakeholders plan and initiate corrective strategies for example, the Council deployed its staff to verify projects and validate the reports and ensure measures are out in place to rectify the hiccups in public service delivery.
2. Rights holder (citizens) driven advocacy is self-sustaining in demanding accountability
3. Good cordial relationship between CSO and key stakeholders [Council, Traditional leaders, political structures, local government structures (ADC and VDC)] creates a strategy that enhances good governance.
4. Empowered citizens with knowledge of principles and their role in project identification, implementation, monitoring as well as demanding.
5. Support from traditional leaders is critical in promoting transparency and accountability of public resources and service delivery.
6. There is a disconnect between elected duty-bearers, development structures and the citizens, which negatively affects good governance.
7. The approaches, tools (PEA PET Social Audit) and strategies can be used in other projects and initiatives in other constituencies to generate positive results.
8. Government, CSOs and local government structures (ADC, VDC and Citizen forums) need to strengthen the status of partners in development to foster good governance and improved public service delivery in Mzimba district.

### **What can be done in the future**

1. Initiate and facilitate citizen forums ‘peer learning’ to enhance sustainable community demand driven accountability.
  - Weak citizen forums should learn from active citizen forums like Luwerezi Citizen Forum.
2. Conducting interface meetings through the media to enhance wide publicity.
3. Capacity building for CSOs and Citizen forums in technical elements to boost understanding of critical areas of project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
4. Empower Citizen forums to source project information from the council on their own and in using scorecards on CDF and related projects.

5. Capacity building for Citizen forums in lobbying and advocacy, record keeping.

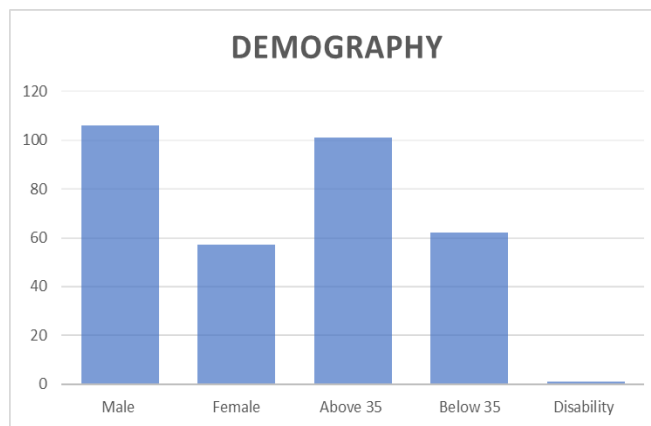
### Challenges

1. Absence of elected duty-bearers undermined the value of the interface meetings, as participants had more questions for them as compared to the DLPW.
2. Elected duty-bearers issuing threats to media personnel for covering the stories in the initiative

### 3. Participation in the activities

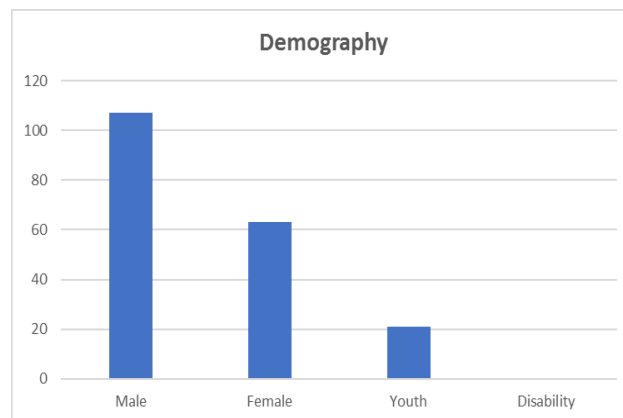
- The consultative meetings had a turnout of 163 participants comprising of 106 males, 57 females. Out of this 101 were above the age of 35 while 62 were below the age of 35 (Youth). Furthermore, 1 person living with disability participated in the consultative meetings.

**Figure 8 Demographic data for the consultative meetings**



- The interface meetings interacted with a total of 170 participants, comprising of; 107 males, 63 females. Out of this figure 21 were below 35 years old (Youth).

**Figure 9 Demographic data for interface meetings**



### **Recommendations**

In light of the foregoing, we recommend the following items

- The council should create an enabling environment for public access to information in line with access to information law.
- Ministry of Local Government should consult the citizens on who should be mandated to handle CDF.
- M’mbelwa District Council should improve on its roles in project identification, implementation and monitoring processes and enforcing policies and measures.
- The council should improve in project information gathering, screening and management throughout responsible departments.
- It has to be a perquisite condition for the establishment of well-trained and equipped PICs, GRMs, Bursary Committees and Women and Youth empowerment committees to manage the projects and initiatives as stipulated in the guidelines. For infrastructure development, there is need for erection of project site billboards before project implementation activities commence.
- The delegated powers on trust to constituency structures should be revised and be arranged with relevant conditions enabling transparency and accountability.
- Local development structures such as ADC, VDC, Citizen forums and others should exclusively be involved in all relevant project implementation processes. Furthermore, clear lines between contractors and aforementioned committees of their responsibilities in projects and project activities.

- Need to lobby for amendment of the CDF guidelines to de-touch a political hand in establishment of relevant committees in managing the CDF. For example, the restructuring of the ‘MP being responsible for establishing the committees to manage sectors of beneficiaries in the CDF’. The amendment should enable complete independence of CDF from political interference and strengthen the public service delivery capacity as intended.
- Given adequate financial support, the project has to be scaled up to other constituencies throughout the district to resolve existing issues and strategize for sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

In support of aspirations of good governance, CSOs in Mzimba believe local governance enhances both the legitimacy of government by strengthening transparency and accountability and the efficiency of public service delivery. To the contrary, the CSO Network has observed poor information flows from the council to the communities. It is from this premise that, the support from ASI-MACCSS project has been a blessing in disguise to the people of Mzimba. It is therefore, the feeling of the CSOs in the district that given continued support, the network will ably build the capacity of the citizens to demand better service delivery.

### Cumulative Progress for the Project

Activity	Indicator of Achievement	Planned Achievement	Actual Achievement
<b>Output 1:</b>			
Sourcing project information	List of projects collected	1	1
CSO Briefing	Number of CSO participated.	• 62 Members	• 30 Attended
Briefing M'mbelwa District council management	Number of members of staff in attendance Approved	1	1
DEC entry meeting	Approved	1	1
Consultative meetings with citizen forums	Number of meetings held	8	8
Bi-Monthly review meeting	Number of bi-monthly meetings held	2	2
Interface meetings	Meetings held	3	3