

**AFRICA UNIVERSITY**

(A United Methodist-Related Institution)

**PARTICIPATION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN THE  
FORMULATION OF POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMS IN  
CHIGUMULA, MALAWI**

**BY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
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## Abstract

The constitution of Malawi, section 146, the Local Government Act (Chapter 22: 01), and the Chiefs Act, (Chapter 22:03) establish a legal framework for the participation of traditional leaders in development planning. Traditional leaders are key actors in local governance because they represent their communities. Empirical literature indicates that previous studies have focused on the role of traditional leaders in implementing development programs, rather than their level of participation in planning the programs. Against this background, the study aimed to assess the participation of traditional leaders in formulating poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi. The study was guided by the theory of the ladder of citizen participation to determine whether traditional leaders hold decision-making power in shaping poverty reduction programs and to explore their levels of participation. A qualitative case study approach was used, with data collected through interviews and document analysis. Data was gathered from 16 key informants, including 14 traditional leaders and two officials from Blantyre City Council. The findings exposed notable gaps. For government-led initiatives like cash transfers and Farm Input Subsidy Programs (FISPs), traditional leaders are not involved in the formulation process at all. Traditional leaders only participate in designing Community-Led Initiatives (CLIs), but are limited by financial resources. This level of engagement is positioned on the lower rungs of the ladder of citizen participation. The study found that traditional leaders lack decision-making authority; instead, the government formulate policies without involving them reflecting inside initiative model of agenda setting. Despite their local knowledge and willingness to participate in program formulation, traditional leaders face obstacles such as conflicting relationships with elected officials, funding limitations, multiple priorities, limited understanding of participation processes, and the centralization of decision-making, which hinder their participation. A positive aspect that was highlighted in the study was the enthusiasm of participants to collaborate with the government in designing programs that reflect the actual needs of the community. Based on these results, the study recommends that the government of Malawi: (1) institutionalize traditional leadership structures as formal entities to involve traditional leaders in policy development; (2) leverage their willingness to improve citizen participation and raise awareness about participation as a constitutional right; and (3) foster collaboration among the government, traditional leaders, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to develop practical participation avenues, ensuring poverty reduction efforts effectively address the community's real needs.

**Key Words:** Participation, traditional leaders, poverty reduction programs, local governance, Malawi.

## Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my original work except where sources have been cited and acknowledged. The work has never been submitted, nor will it ever be submitted to another university for the award of a degree.

Olivia Kamphale

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**Student's Full Name**



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**Student's Signature (26/11/2025)**

Dr. Tawanda Nyikadzino

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**Main Supervisor's Full Name**



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**Main Supervisor's Signature (Date)**

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I also want to express my sincere gratitude to the participants of this study, especially the traditional leaders and Blantyre City Council. This research was made possible by their willingness to share their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Without their invaluable contributions, this study would not have been feasible.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research to my beloved mother, Christina Majawa, who has always been there for me. To Aunt Marie, Mr. Luc, and Mr. Burke, I couldn't have completed this master's degree without you. Your unwavering support has brought me this far. My Jacaranda family, friends, and relatives, thank you for your constant support. This milestone is for all of us.

## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
CBO	Community-Based Initiatives
CLI	Community Led Initiatives
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
GOM	Government of Malawi
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPC	National Planning Commission
OAU	Organization of African Unity
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, and research questions. The chapter also focuses on the assumptions, significance, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

### **1.2 Background to the Study**

The participation of traditional leaders in shaping public policies is a critical issue across the globe. It involves collaboration between the government, development partners, and traditional leaders in decision-making processes that impact people's lives. Traditional leaders are key figures in local governance because they represent their communities (Kurebwa, 2018). The concept of traditional leadership has existed since time immemorial. According to Muriaas (2019), traditional leaders play a crucial role in rural areas by regulating village life, controlling access to land, and resolving disputes since they hold public authority. Their influence empowers them to serve as channels for successful community development programs aimed at reducing poverty (Chimatiro, Hajison & Muula, 2020). It is essential to involve traditional leaders in developing programs like poverty alleviation initiatives because they can mobilize community support and help ensure these efforts are culturally appropriate, broadly accepted, and effectively implemented. Traditional leaders also serve as mediators for citizen participation by voicing the needs and priorities of local residents (Honig, 2019). This is important because, through traditional leaders, citizens can best communicate their issues and are better positioned to identify solutions that address their problems. Consequently,

this assists the government in designing programs that align with local realities and the needs of marginalized communities.

Many rural constituencies in Africa fall under the governance of traditional leaders (Carlson & Seim, 2020). These leaders play a significant role in the social and economic lives of citizens (Honig, 2019). According to Logan and Amakoh (2022), most people in African countries such as Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Zambia, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger, Mali, and others trust their traditional leaders and see them as less corrupt than elected government officials. For this reason, the legitimacy of traditional leaders in leading development projects, like poverty reduction programs, is strengthened as they work with elected officials to promote local development. The 2022 Afrobarometer results indicate that most people in Africa believe traditional leaders often serve the interests of their local communities (Afrobarometer, 2022), and involving them in policy-making processes aimed at community development is crucial. In Zambia, for example, the government implemented measures such as the decentralization of government systems to enhance citizen participation, including that of traditional leaders, in rural development projects. The adoption of a decentralized government in Zambia created an opportunity for citizens to have a voice in governance issues. Decentralized institutions facilitated the formation of various entities such as sector ministries, community-based organizations (CBOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work alongside traditional leaders to design and implement poverty reduction programs. This led to increased community involvement in poverty alleviation efforts since these decentralized bodies provided a platform for open participation. However, there are also instances of low participation, often due to lack of awareness about poverty reduction initiatives, limited

capacity among traditional leaders, disinterest in participation, and skepticism toward poverty reduction programs.

Traditional leadership remains vital in Malawi because traditional leaders hold significant influence over local communities. In Malawi, most rural residents (84%) are governed under the guidance of traditional leaders (Kanyuka et al., 2020). These leaders act as development intermediaries between the government and communities by influencing the distribution of public goods and representing citizens' demands to the state (Honig, 2019). The Chiefs Act of 1967 outlines a hierarchical structure of traditional leaders in Malawi, beginning with village headmen at the lowest level, followed by group village headmen, sub-traditional authorities, traditional authorities, senior traditional authorities, and paramount chiefs at the top. These traditional leaders are also known as chiefs. According to the Ministry of Local Governance (2023), there are a total of 400 chiefs, including seven Paramount chiefs with one vacancy for the Lomwe tribe, 131 senior chiefs, 145 traditional authorities, and 117 sub-traditional authorities. Additionally, there are 7,532 village headmen and 32,224 village heads. Traditional leaders play a critical role in efforts to reduce poverty, as their influence and deep-rooted connections within communities enable them to facilitate development initiatives. Several programs, such as Malawi Vision 2063 and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aim to address poverty (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2020). However, few studies have explored how traditional leaders participate in developing poverty reduction programs, especially in Chigumula, Malawi. There is a need to conduct research to assess how traditional leaders are involved in formulating poverty reduction programs in Chigumula. This study was carried out to gain insights into the participation of traditional leaders in designing

programs, specifically focusing on poverty reduction initiatives in Chigumula. The study was also conducted to recommend ways to strengthen their involvement in shaping poverty reduction programs.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The Constitution of Malawi (1999), Section 146; the Chief's Act (1967) [Chapter 22:03]; and the Local Government Act (1998) [Chapter 22:01] provide a legal framework for the participation of traditional leaders in local governance. Section 6 of the Local Government Act specifically states that traditional leaders are mandated to make policy and decisions on local governance and development for the local government area and promote local democratic institutions and democratic participation. These legal frameworks mandate traditional leaders' participation in development programs, ensuring community-focused, inclusive, and effective initiatives because traditional leaders are custodians of local communities (NPC, 2020). However, regardless of the strong frameworks, literature shows that traditional leaders' participation in the formulation of development programs, specifically poverty reduction programs, has been limited due to complexities surrounding their participation, which is undermining the effectiveness of these programs. This does not reflect what the Constitution of Malawi says in section 30 about the responsibility of the state in ensuring that citizens have access to opportunities and resources for addressing poverty. For instance, a study in Karonga District found that there are conflicting relations between elected leaders and traditional leaders, which undermines their participation in development processes (Gondwe, 2020). Another study in Mchinji and Nkhotakota found that development policies move from the national to community level without giving traditional leaders a chance to participate in their formulation (Walsh, Matthews, Manda-

Taylor L & Brugha, 2018). Furthermore, traditional leaders lack autonomy in influencing the creation of development programs rather, they receive top-down elite-led actions that do not reflect citizen demands (Robinson, 2024). Therefore, this study was aimed to assess how traditional leaders participate in the formulation of poverty reduction programs and the extent of their participation in Chigumula, Malawi. This is important because there is limited literature on the participation of traditional leaders in policy formulation in Malawi. Ignoring this gap means increasing the likelihood of the formulation of poverty reduction programs that are disconnected from local realities and aspirations. This study was done to fill this gap by providing new knowledge on how traditional leaders participate in program formulation, the factors influencing their participation, and also proffer recommendations to improve their participation.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

- 1.4.1 To explore poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi.
- 1.4.2 To assess the extent of participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi.
- 1.4.3 To explore factors influencing the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi
- 1.4.4 To recommend strategies to enhance the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

- 1.5.1 What are the poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?

- 1.5.2 To what extent do traditional leaders participate in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?
- 1.5.3 What are the factors influencing the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?
- 1.5.4 What strategies are recommended to enhance the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?

## **1.6 Assumptions**

The first assumption of this study was that traditional leaders are not involved in formulating poverty reduction programs. The study also assumed that poverty reduction initiatives are imposed on communities without seeking their input.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

There is limited empirical evidence on the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Malawi, especially in peri-urban and rural communities such as Chigumula. The findings of this study provide knowledge on the participation of traditional leaders in designing poverty reduction programs, the factors influencing their involvement, and insights on how to enhance their participation. Understanding the level of engagement of traditional leaders in shaping these programs can help policymakers and development practitioners design more inclusive poverty reduction initiatives that involve everyone at the grassroots level. The study's findings offer valuable insights for the Malawian government to develop better poverty reduction programs that effectively incorporate traditional leaders and define their roles clearly for maximum impact. Additionally, the findings are beneficial to traditional leaders themselves by highlighting areas where they need training or support to participate

effectively in poverty reduction efforts. This, in turn, can empower traditional leaders to become stronger advocates for their communities. The communities represented by traditional leaders also benefit from the study's insights because they reveal how effectively traditional leaders represent the needs of their people in poverty reduction programs. The study's recommendations can be used to improve the participation of traditional leaders in such programs, ensuring that they reflect the local realities of the people.

### **1.8 Delimitation of the Study**

This study mainly focused on the participation of traditional leaders in formulating poverty reduction programs. It also examined the formulation of these programs from 2023 to 2025.

### **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

Gaining access to traditional leaders and securing their willingness to participate in the study was a major challenge. Traditional leaders had busy schedules, and coordinating meetings with them for key informant interviews was often difficult. Additionally, some traditional leaders were hesitant to take part because they feared the research might expose sensitive governance issues or undermine their authority. A few leaders even exaggerated certain matters to protect their position. To address these issues, the researcher consistently reassured traditional leaders that the study was for academic purposes and emphasized that their participation could benefit the community by helping develop ways to ensure their involvement in shaping poverty reduction programs. The researcher also explained that the findings would offer insights into traditional leaders' participation and

assist the government in tailoring poverty alleviation efforts to the community's context. Meetings were scheduled in advance and arranged at times convenient for the traditional leaders to ensure their availability.

## **CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter laid out the introductory framework of the study, including the background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, assumptions, significance, delimitations, and limitations. This chapter focuses on two main parts: the theoretical framework and the literature review. In the theoretical framework, the study explores the ladder of citizen participation, which was the primary theory guiding the research. The literature review was shaped by the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

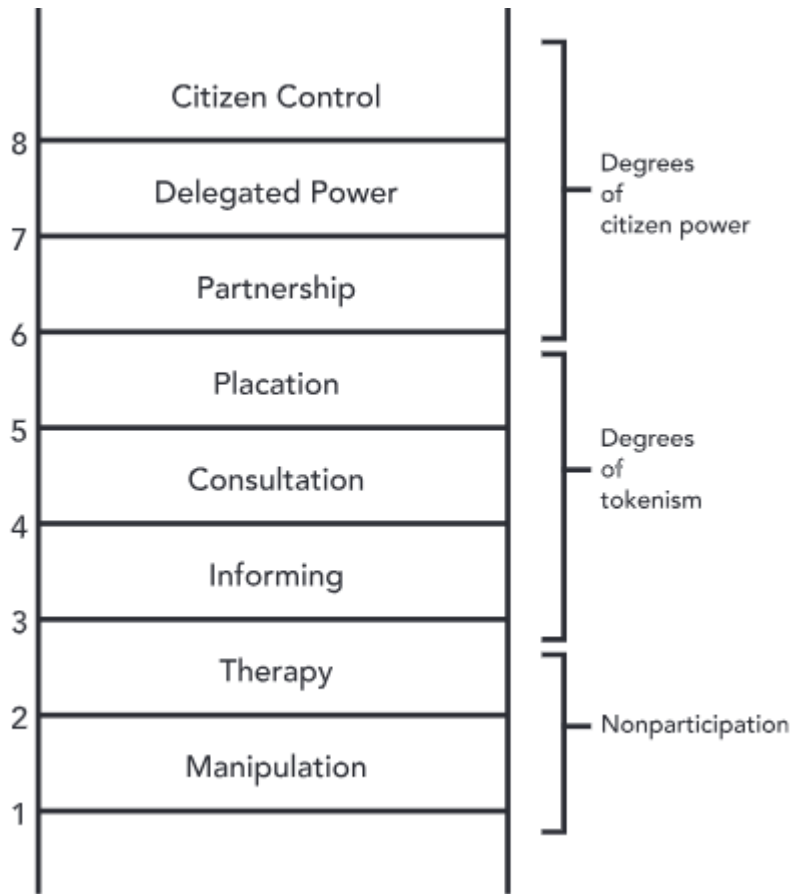
#### **2.2.1 Ladder of citizen participation**

This study uses the ladder of citizen participation theory, developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, as its theoretical framework. The ladder of citizen participation was created to help understand how people take part in decision-making processes (Gaber, 2020). Sherry Arnstein developed this theory because she was concerned that, although many governments and organizations claimed to include citizens in decision-making, the citizens were not truly influential or empowered to make decisions. She then designed the ladder of citizen participation to illustrate the different levels of participation and show how much control people really have when involved in decision-making. According to Arnstein (2019), the ladder of citizen participation consists of eight steps, also called rungs, which represent different levels of people's involvement in decision-making. Citizens have more power and control as the ladder goes up, and as it goes down, citizens become weaker and have less influence in the decision-making process. The eight steps

of the ladder include manipulation (non-participation), therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control.

Manipulation is the initial and lowest level on the ladder of citizen participation theory. People are not involved in decision-making at this stage, nor are they aware of what is happening, and their opinions are not sought. Governments or organizations make decisions for them. Therapy, as the second step, is similar to manipulation, which involves people being educated or cured by power holders. Therapy and manipulation is a substitute for genuine participation because of the assumption that people are not knowledgeable enough to make their own decisions. Informing is the third step, where people are told what will happen but are not consulted or allowed to participate in decision-making. Consultation occurs when the government asks for people's opinions and feedback, but these are not reflected in final decisions. Placation, the fifth stage, gives people the chance to express their views, but what they say does not lead to any change. Partnership, the sixth stage, allows people to share power and collaborate with decision-makers, with their input considered in the final decision. Delegated power involves granting people or citizens the authority to make decisions because decision-makers trust them. The highest level on the ladder, citizen control, grants citizens full authority over decisions. In this stage, people make decisions independently, without needing approval from others. This represents the highest level of participation according to the ladder of citizen participation theory (Arnstein, 2019). The figure below shows the eight steps or ladders in the citizen participation theory.

**Figure 1 Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation**



Source: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2018.15593888>

### **2.3 Relevance of the Theory**

The ladder of citizen participation theory was relevant to this study because it helped the researcher understand where traditional leaders' participation in formulating poverty reduction programs fits on the ladder. The first research question focused on assessing poverty reduction programs implemented in Chigumula, Malawi, over the past three years. Using the ladder of citizen involvement theory, this question aimed to determine whether traditional leaders are involved in creating these programs and what their involvement entails. Their level of participation could range from being merely informed to having full

control over the program development. The second research question aimed to understand the extent of traditional leaders' participation in developing these poverty reduction programs. Using the ladder of citizen participation, this question sought to clarify how involved traditional leaders are in the formulation process and how much of a role they play. The theory was used to measure their participation from high to low levels. The third question explored the factors that influence traditional leaders' participation in poverty reduction programs. Applying the ladder of citizen participation, this question identified factors that push leaders higher or lower on the ladder. The final question aimed to identify practical strategies to enhance traditional leaders' involvement in developing poverty reduction policies in Chigumula, Malawi. The ladder of citizen participation shaped this question by emphasizing strategies that could help leaders move from simply being informed or directed to making their own decisions, recognizing that local people better understand their own problems and are well-positioned to guide policies that can improve their lives (Kolawole, 2015).

### **2.3.1 Formulation of public policies**

Wilson (as cited in Smith, Smith & Larimer, 2017) defines public policies as “the actions, objectives, and pronouncements of governments on particular matters, the steps they take (or fail to take) to implement them, and the explanations they give for what happens (or does not happen).” (Smith, Smith & Larimer, 2017, p. 3). To address public issues such as poverty, governments formulate public policies because they are vital in developing societies and tackling complex issues faced by governments and public institutions. Public policies help address societal problems, promote public welfare, ensure social justice, and improve governance and democracy, among many other things (Biswas, 2023). The public

policy process begins with problem identification, where a visible gap between what is happening and what ought to be happening appears in the public domain (Peters, 2018). For example, if the government of Malawi designs programs to reduce poverty by 5% within four years, and after that time, nothing changes or the situation worsens, it indicates that something is very wrong or that public policies are ineffective. After identifying the problem, policy formulation follows, which is a critical step in the policymaking process because it involves defining and developing solutions to the identified issues. It also includes setting the agenda, where issues are prioritized, and stakeholders—such as government officials, traditional leaders, interest groups, and the public—play roles by determining which issues require immediate attention (County office, 2024). Next is policy analysis, in which researchers or public policy analysts collect data and evaluate options, considering the potential impacts of different solutions. This step ensures decisions are grounded in evidence and sound reasoning. Once options are evaluated, policymakers draft proposals that outline specific actions the government will take, including details like costs, benefits, and strategies for implementation (Birkland, 2010). Consultation is another essential step, where policymakers seek input from experts, stakeholders, and the public. This feedback helps refine proposals and ensure they address real problems (Choi & Wong, 2023). At this stage, proposals are reviewed and revised through detailed scrutiny to assess their feasibility and effectiveness, which may include legal, financial, and technical evaluations. Following this, policymakers select the best proposal and prepare it for approval and adoption. Once approved, the policy moves into the implementation phase to determine if it accomplishes its intended goals. Finally, the policy enters the evaluation stage, which involves an in-depth review of the social issue that prompted the creation and execution of the public intervention (Alkin, 2023). The

public policy process is continuous because, after evaluation, the steps can be repeated to check whether the same problem persists, requiring further action, or to identify new issues that need attention.

### **2.3.2 Participation in policy formulations**

Public policies are created by governments to address problems faced by citizens. Citizen participation in poverty reduction programs occurs when individuals become involved in the government's transformation efforts to benefit themselves and their children (Osei-Kufuor & Koomson, 2014). People can participate in decision-making voluntarily or out of obligation, either as individuals or as part of a group, as long as their lives are impacted by the decisions. This participation can take place within an institutional setting where civil society members or decision-makers organize citizens' committees or referendums to encourage involvement. Citizen participation is based on the principles of inclusion, democracy, and social justice, giving ordinary citizens the opportunity to influence government actions, policies, or programs that directly affect them (Bobbio, 2019). In the context of poverty reduction programs, citizen participation is especially important because it allows people to express their opinions, helping governments develop programs that reflect local realities and address the needs of marginalized communities. Engaging people in government initiatives can help incorporate local knowledge and experiences into decision-making and can strengthen the relationship between the government and its citizens. This fosters trust in the government and cultivates a sense of ownership in government programs.

### **2.3.3 Poverty interventions in Africa**

According to Nurudeen and Adekola (2023), most development initiatives in Africa focus on reducing poverty. The design of poverty reduction programs across Africa varies from international aid efforts to community-based activities at the local level. Ruja, Sumarmi and Idris (2024) note that these programs generally aim to decrease poverty through improved access to education, economic empowerment, better infrastructure, clean water, and more. The effort to reduce poverty in Africa has been progressing with different strategies over the past decades (Nurudeen & Adekola, 2023).

### **2.3.4 The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)**

AGOA is a United States (U.S.) trade act promoted by former U.S. president Bill Clinton, enacted on May 18, 2000, as public law 106 of the 106th Congress. It aims to enhance market access to the United States for qualifying Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries (Nurudeen & Adekola, 2023). The act was designed to assist the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa and promote economic relations between the U.S. and these nations through trade. Since its enactment, AGOA has been central to U.S. economic policy and commercial engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa. AGOA provides eligible sub-Saharan African countries with duty-free access to the U.S. market for over 1,800 products, including agricultural goods and textiles, in addition to more than 5,000 products that are eligible for duty-free access under the Generalized System of Preferences program (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.). Sub-Saharan African countries qualify for AGOA benefits if they continually work toward establishing a market-based economy, uphold the rule of law, allow political pluralism, and ensure the right to due process. Additionally, countries must eliminate trade and investment barriers with the U.S. and

develop policies to reduce poverty, fight corruption, and protect human rights. By providing new markets and opportunities, AGOA has spurred economic growth and reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa, strengthening economic and political ties between the U.S. and the region (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.).

### **2.3.5 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

MDGs are the eight development goals established by the United Nations (UN) member states in September 2000 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). The MDGs originated from the millennium declaration, signed at the September global summit, where international leaders pledged to fight diseases, end hunger, poverty, illiteracy, discrimination against women, and environmental degradation (Nurudeen & Adekola, 2023). The agreement stated that these MDGs should be achieved by 2015, and the UN prioritized the implementation of these goals from 2001 onward to ensure success. Although most of the targets set by the MDGs were not met by 2015, significant progress was made over the 15-year period.

### **2.3.6 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as a plan to end all forms of poverty and other hardships by implementing strategies that enhance health and education, decrease inequality, and promote economic growth through global partnerships (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Before the SDGs were adopted, the UN initially implemented the MDGs as a worldwide framework to fight poverty, including in Africa, from 2001 to 2015. In 2015, after the MDGs' timeline ended,

the UN introduced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a successor initiative. The SDGs consist of 17 goals that all UN members must work toward urgently. These include: no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, and reduced inequality, among others (United Nations, 2015).

### **2.3.7 The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)**

NEPAD is an African economic development program of action created by the African Union (AU), which succeeded the Organization of African Unity (OAU). NEPAD was adopted in 2001 in Zambia by the assembly of heads of state during the 37th session. The program was developed by the AU to provide a clear vision and policy framework to help African countries accelerate economic cooperation and integration. The main goal of NEPAD, as outlined in 2001 and reflected in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) and the declaration on democracy, political, economic, and corporate governance, is to improve the quality of governance by establishing and applying policies that promote good governance. The AU introduced the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as a tool for self-monitoring, which is a voluntary process that member states of the AU agree to undertake (Nurudeen & Adekola, 2023).

### **2.3.8 Other Interventions**

The World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in collaboration with national governments, have developed poverty reduction policies to achieve sustainable

development goals. The World Bank has implemented various poverty reduction efforts, such as the International Development Association (IDA) initiatives, which provide development financing to many poor African countries by offering low-interest loans to address complex challenges like poverty and to fund their development activities such as primary education, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation, among others (International Development Association, n.d.). Additionally, the World Bank has supported conditional cash transfer programs in African countries like Egypt and Morocco, aimed at distributing income to poor households under the condition that they send their children to school and attend health check-ups. Cash transfer programs are designed for social protection and to reduce current and future poverty by facilitating investments in human capital development (Loeser, Özler, & Premand, 2021). The IMF aids in poverty reduction strategies in Africa through collaboration with low-income member nations to promote macroeconomic stability (International Monetary Fund, 2005). One Acre Fund is a well-known community-based poverty reduction program in Africa that assists smallholder farmers in Kenya, Burundi, Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Ethiopia with tools and training to succeed in farming (One Acre Fund, 2025). The program helps smallholder farmers access better farming inputs and offers education on modern farming techniques to increase food production, end hunger, and ultimately reduce poverty.

Poverty intervention programs in Africa have helped alleviate some challenges faced by African nations, but they have not succeeded in eliminating poverty entirely across the continent. Currently, most African countries still struggle with poverty, and Africa remains regarded as a poor continent. The U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

report of 2023 states that while AGOA may have had positive effects in areas like poverty reduction and job creation in some countries, it has also had negative impacts elsewhere. For example, countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Lesotho, and Ethiopia are able to access the U.S. market because their industries, like cars and clothing, meet AGOA's trade requirements. Conversely, other African nations are unable to access the U.S. market or benefit from AGOA because their products do not qualify. Some of the items these countries export are already permitted entry into U.S. markets without extra tariffs, even without AGOA, causing them to miss out on potential trade benefits (USITC, 2023). Africa Renewal (n.d.) reports that the implementation of MDGs led to a decrease in the proportion of very poor people in all developing countries from 27.9 percent in 1990 to 21.3 percent in 2001, but the percentage in sub-Saharan Africa actually increased. During the same period, the number of poor Africans rose from 227 million to 313 million. Additionally, global pandemics like COVID-19 have wiped out the progress made in poverty reduction over recent decades, making it unlikely that most African nations will meet most of the SDGs targets by 2030 (Economic Commission for Africa, 2023).

#### **2.4 The extent of participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs**

In Africa, many countries face economic crises and limited government resources. This prompts numerous African nations to seek financial aid from external sources to prevent further economic struggles. That's where external donors and international organizations come in. Most poverty reduction programs in Africa are initiated by external donors who often do not engage with local citizens or traditional leaders, limiting or even eliminating participation in development efforts. Organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, and

United Nations provide significant funding to support development projects in health and economic sectors to combat poverty (Loeser et al., 2021). This results in these donors having considerable influence, as local citizens, including traditional leaders, are often not involved in identifying their own problems or solutions. For example, in Tanzania during the early 2000s, to help address poverty, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the European Development Bank loaned money to Tanzania with conditions for further loans and debt relief that included privatizing water supply in Dar es Salaam (Bayliss, 2008). The outcome was harmful—water bills surged, and many residents resorted to using unsafe water, creating additional issues. Critics argued that the project's failure was due to Tanzania not consulting local stakeholders, including members of parliament (Kjellén, 2006).

## **2.5 Factors influencing the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs**

### **2.5.1 Government policies and political will**

In most African countries, government policies and political will greatly influence the participation of traditional leaders in creating poverty reduction programs. The involvement of traditional leaders in developing initiatives depends on how effectively governments establish frameworks that recognize and incorporate traditional leadership into formal governance structures. For example, the constitution of Zimbabwe allows traditional leaders to participate in development efforts (Kurebwa, 2018). Additionally, traditional leaders are expected to remain apolitical, even though they hold significant influence within their communities. This expectation can limit their participation, as they

may avoid engaging fully in policy-making to prevent being perceived as political actors. In Botswana, many believe that traditional leaders make valuable contributions to the country's democracy and should actively govern local communities. Still, the same people expect traditional leaders to stay out of politics, which restricts their involvement in politically driven development programs (Afrobarometer, 2020).

### **2.5.2 Non-compliance to the participatory strategy of the poverty reduction program**

Most times, the sponsors of poverty reduction programs, such as the World Bank, are not directly involved in implementing the programs. This means that the development of institutional frameworks needed to ensure traditional leaders participate in poverty reduction efforts is left to people who may not be properly trained to facilitate their involvement (Elem & Nwankwo, 2017). Even if the programs specify citizen participation as a key principle with strategies for involving them, the personnel responsible may not follow those strategies, resulting in non-compliance with the guiding principles set by the program creators.

### **2.5.3 Decentralisation of the government institutions**

The decentralization of government institutions allows for the creation of categories of organizations that provide platforms for people to get involved in poverty reduction programs (Madimutsa, 2006). According to Madimutsa (2006), in Zambia, decentralized government structures that promote citizen participation, including traditional leaders, in poverty reduction efforts include decentralized sector ministries and devolved government

agencies. These structures are also supported by community-based organizations (CBOs), external donors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international donors. These institutions have helped establish community structures to encourage local people's involvement, especially traditional rulers, in poverty alleviation activities.

#### **2.5.4 Over-politicization of poverty reduction programs**

Politics plays a crucial role in policy-making processes, and excessive political interests in poverty reduction programs hinder citizens' participation in these initiatives (Elem & Nwankwo, 2017). Politics among those responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of poverty reduction programs determines who can participate and who cannot. Politically driven poverty reduction programs may only permit the participation of certain groups aligned with a specific political affiliation, excluding others. This results in situations where citizens, including traditional leaders, are not given the opportunity to take part in poverty reduction efforts.

#### **2.5.5 Lack of awareness about poverty reduction programs**

When people are unaware of the existence of poverty reduction programs in their communities or countries, they cannot participate. In Zambia, the lack of awareness among some local residents about the poverty reduction programs implemented by various institutions in their communities results in low participation. Sometimes, even when people are aware of the programs, they may choose not to participate voluntarily because they have other commitments, such as going to work or fetching food for their households, rather than taking part in collective poverty alleviation efforts. Additionally, some

individuals do not trust their governments due to unfulfilled promises and are skeptical about participating in any poverty reduction programs implemented by their governments in their communities.

## **2.6 Strategies for enhancing the participation of traditional leaders in poverty reduction programs**

### **2.6.1 Decentralization of government institutions**

Participation in poverty reduction programs can be more successful if decision-making power is transferred to local authorities because they have a better understanding of their communities' concerns, being close to citizens and more responsive to their needs. Several studies have shown that citizen participation in poverty reduction programs is more effective in countries where local governments are given authority, empowered, and allocated sufficient resources (Ngunjiri, Check, Abdelkarim, Chakunda, & Hassan, 2023).

### **2.6.2 Awareness campaigns for poverty reduction programs**

To ensure meaningful participation in poverty reduction policies, adequate information about the programs should be continuously shared with the people. This information must be communicated in clear language that local residents can understand (Obona & Nwankwo, 2017). This is crucial because without awareness campaigns for these programs, citizens would be unaware, leading to a lack of participation. Information should be distributed to citizens through bottom-up approaches, where those initiating poverty reduction programs engage with community members to listen to their needs

during roundtable discussions and to determine which poverty reduction strategies align with their realities.

### **2.6.3 Capacity building**

In most African countries, capacity issues typically stem from limited financial, human, and structural resources of local governments, which hinder their ability to effectively engage with citizens in poverty reduction efforts. Sometimes, local authorities in several countries appear to conduct public participation activities just to comply with laws and policies, rather than to facilitate meaningful consultation (Ngunjiri et al., 2023).

### **2.7 Participation of traditional leaders in poverty alleviation programs in Zambia**

In Zambia, Clever Madimutsa conducted a study in 2006 to examine the level and nature of popular participation in poverty alleviation activities through a case study of Mumbwa district. The researcher used purposive and systematic sampling methods, with a sample size of 243 participants, including key informants from various wards of Mumbwa district. The study found that Zambia's decentralized government system facilitated the creation of several institutions that allowed local people to participate in poverty alleviation efforts. These included devolved government bodies, community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international donors. However, despite the existence of decentralized institutions in Mumbwa, the study revealed low participation in poverty alleviation activities. It showed that, out of all participants, “less than two percent of the local people had participated directly in poverty alleviation activities implemented by the District Council; 24.2 percent had participated in activities run by

Traditional rulers; 14.4 percent in activities by CBOs; nine percent in activities by NGOs; and four percent in activities carried out by donors.” (Madimutsa, 2006, p. v). The findings suggested that traditional leaders influenced more community members to engage in poverty reduction programs than other organizations. The study also discovered that low participation in Mumbwa was due to various reasons: some locals were unaware of the programs, some lacked interest, others were too busy with personal matters, some were sceptical about participating, and some felt the government had let them down due to unfulfilled promises, leading them to believe participation wasn't worthwhile.

### **2.8 Participation of traditional leaders in poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria**

Another study was conducted in Nigeria in 2017 to identify factors that hinder local people from participating in poverty reduction programs in Ebonyi State (Obona & Nwankwo, 2017). The study focused on the Ebonyi State community-based poverty reduction program, which was implemented to help improve the lives of people living in Ebonyi State. The researchers specifically examined this program to understand the level of participation among local residents because it is important for people to actively engage in initiatives designed to assist them. The study argues that poverty reduction programs cannot succeed unless the affected communities are involved. The findings were based on the analysis of existing written materials on the topic, and participatory theory served as the theoretical framework. The study found that participation in poverty reduction programs was low because the Nigerian government did not employ participatory methods. It also identified that excessive political involvement made it difficult for citizens to participate. Consequently, the study recommended that the Nigerian government encourage those responsible for implementing poverty reduction programs to

adopt participatory strategies that ensure citizen involvement and develop policies that enable poverty reduction agencies to operate independently of political interference (Obona & Nwankwo, 2017).

## **2.9 Summary**

The ladder of citizen participation theory was used as a theoretical framework guiding this study, which helped the researcher understand the different levels of participation in decision-making. Poverty reduction programs as public policies help address challenges that communities face, and involving local people in these programs is important for their well-being. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are some of the major poverty reduction initiatives in Africa. While these programs have succeeded in reducing poverty in some countries, they have not achieved the best results in others, as poverty still persists.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters provided the introductory framework, the theoretical framework, and the literature review. Chapter 1 discussed the introductory framework, while Chapter 2 covered the theoretical framework and literature review. This chapter focuses on the methodology the researcher used based on the research questions presented in Chapter 1. It details the research approach, research design, population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection tools, and analysis methods. The chapter also addresses some ethical considerations the researcher reflected on during the study.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

The study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is defined by Hassan (2024) as a method that seeks to understand human experiences, behaviors, and interactions by exploring them in depth. This approach is used when the researcher wants to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of participants. The researcher used qualitative methods to collect non-numerical data, gain insights, and understand traditional leaders' opinions and personal experiences in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi (Bhandari, 2025). This methodology helped address the main research question of the study, which aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of traditional leaders' participation in developing poverty reduction programs.

### **3.3 The Research Design**

This study used a case study research design to understand how traditional leaders participate in developing poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi. A case study, as defined by McCombes (2023), is a research approach that helps researchers gain thorough, contextual, and detailed knowledge about a specific real-world subject. It also allows for an in-depth exploration of a single case. Geographically, the study focused on Chigumula, specifically looking at how traditional leaders are involved in poverty reduction efforts. This research design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to fully understand the unique context and dynamics of Chigumula and how these influence traditional leaders' involvement in creating poverty reduction programs (Hassan, 2024). Additionally, the case study approach helped assess complex relationships and interactions that other research methods might not be able to capture.

### **3.4 Population**

Bhandari (2023) defines population as the entire group of elements from which a researcher wants to draw conclusions. These include people, objects, events, organizations, countries, and more. The population for this study consisted of all traditional leaders living in Chigumula, Malawi, because the main purpose of the study was to examine the participation of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs in that area.

### **3.5 Sample Size**

Sample size in qualitative research is not predetermined. Literature indicates that it is determined by the saturation principle (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The saturation principle states that a researcher should continue sampling until no new information about the

phenomenon emerges (Alele & Aduli, 2023). In other words, following the saturation principle involves asking participants until the area of interest becomes saturated and no new insights are gained. Several empirical studies have shown that the saturation point typically occurs between 9 and 17 participants in one-on-one interviews (Alele & Aduli, 2023). The sample size for this study was 16 participants because the researcher reached saturation at that point.

### **3.6 Sampling Techniques**

Given the nature of this study, which aimed to explore the participation of traditional leaders in poverty reduction programs, the researcher used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling, also called selective sampling, involves intentionally selecting research participants who can provide detailed and specific insights about the topic being studied (Alele & Aduli, 2023). The researcher chose purposive sampling to specifically select traditional leaders, as they were the main participants who could offer the insights needed for this study. Traditional leaders were purposefully chosen based on their relevance to the study and their knowledge of poverty reduction programs in their villages (Hassan, 2024). Snowball sampling was used alongside purposive sampling; it is a non-probability sampling method where existing participants recruit future participants, expanding the sample (Nikolopoulou, 2023). Snowball sampling often helps identify other participants who meet the criteria but are not known to the researcher beforehand (Alele & Aduli, 2023). Although this method gives the researcher less control over who is included, it is helpful for gaining access to participants who might otherwise be unreachable (Nikolopoulou, 2023). The researcher first identified the initial participants—traditional leaders—and after interviewing them,

asked for referrals to others who might provide valuable additional information. These individuals were not necessarily traditional leaders but were involved in poverty reduction programs within their communities.

### **3.7 Data Collection Instruments**

#### **3.7.1 Interview Guide**

An interview guide was used as a data collection tool for this study. An interview guide primarily functions as a memory aid that directs the researcher and ensures the collection of all necessary information about the topic being studied (Roulston, 2018). It was essential because the researcher collected data through interviews. The researcher used it to conduct face-to-face interviews where participants, traditional leaders, engaged in a question-and-answer session to gain insights into their participation in developing poverty reduction programs (Taherdoost, 2022). The researcher used interviews to explore the experiences, understanding, opinions, and motivations of traditional leaders in creating poverty reduction initiatives (Berkovic, 2023). Although interviews are time-consuming, the researcher chose this method to allow participants to express their views freely without being confined to specific frameworks or predetermined answers (Taherdoost, 2022).

#### **3.7.2 Document Analysis**

The researcher used document analysis as a secondary data collection method. Document analysis in qualitative research involves reviewing and evaluating documents that offer historical and contextual insights about the topic being studied (Kutsyuruba, 2023). Document analysis helped the researcher uncover additional insights to complement the

data collected during interviews. Combining document analysis and interviews enabled the researcher to triangulate the data, enhancing the validity of the findings and increasing the study's reliability.

### **3.8 Analysis and Organization of Data**

This study employed a thematic data analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used to analyze qualitative data, where the researcher carefully reviews the data to identify common themes or patterns of meaning that appear repeatedly (Caulfield, 2023). The researcher began by transcribing audio data collected from interviews into text, making it easier to analyze. The textual data was then used to generate codes that highlighted various phrases corresponding to specific ideas. Each code represented ideas or experiences of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs. After coding, the researcher used these codes to identify recurring patterns, which were then organized into themes that captured the essence of the data. This entire process was conducted using NVivo, software designed to help organize, analyze, and visualize data themes. The researcher chose thematic analysis because it provided flexibility in interpreting the data. However, a primary limitation of this method is its subjectivity, as it depends on the researcher's judgment and nuances in the data might be overlooked (Caulfield, 2023). To ensure accuracy, the researcher paid close attention to the data and reflected carefully on the interpretations, verifying that they were grounded in the collected information. The researcher also repeated all steps to maintain consistency and accuracy in interpreting the data.

### **3.9 Validity and Reliability**

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher conducted a pilot test. After developing an interview guide, the researcher carried out two interviews with traditional leaders to test the tool. The researcher then revised the interview guide and clarified questions that were difficult to understand. The researcher triangulated primary data from interviews with secondary data from document analysis to verify the validity of the findings and the reliability of the study. In chapter 4, the researcher used thick descriptions and included direct quotes from participants to present the data.

### **3.10 Ethical Consideration**

#### **3.10.1 Informed Consent**

The researcher received consent from all participants. Before data collection began, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study to the participants. The researcher also explained the risks and benefits associated with the study so that the participants would be able to make an informed decision about whether to participate or not. After the explanation, the researcher gave the participants an opportunity to ask questions for clarification. When this was done, the researcher asked the participants to sign an informed consent form. Participants who were not comfortable signing were asked to give oral consent.

#### **3.10.2 Confidentiality and anonymity**

The researcher maintained the privacy and anonymity of all participants throughout the study. Personal identifiers such as participants' names and village names were removed from the data to protect their identities. Codes consisting of numbers and letters were used

to ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity. For example, the first participant was referred to as P1TL, the second as P2TL, and so on. The codes included the following.

**Table 1: Participants' Codes**

<b>Participant Identifier (Code)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Code Category</b>
P1TL to P13TL	Participant 1 to Participant 10	Traditional Leaders
P14BCC and P15BCC	Participant 14 and Participant 15	Blantyre City Council Officials
P16TL	Participant 16	Traditional Leader

Data was securely stored, with access limited to the researcher only. The researcher did not include any information that could reveal the identities of the participants in data presentation and analysis.

### **3.10.3 Ethical Approval**

The researcher received ethical approval from the Africa University Research Ethics Committee (AUREC), ensuring that the study complies with all ethical standards set by AUREC. Additionally, the researcher obtained approval from Blantyre City Council to carry out the study in Chigumula.

### **3.10.4 Transparency and honesty**

The researcher honestly explained the potential risks and benefits of the study to all participants. The researcher did not manipulate the findings to fit any narrative and used detailed descriptions to ensure transparency.

### **3.11 Summary**

This study used a qualitative research approach and a case study to gain insights into the participation of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was employed to select a sample of 16 participants, using data saturation to determine the sample size. Additionally, data was collected through an interview guide and document analysis as data collection tools. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes that provided insights into the involvement of traditional leaders in creating poverty reduction programs. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, ethical approval, confidentiality, and anonymity were carefully addressed in this study.

## CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 4.1 Introduction

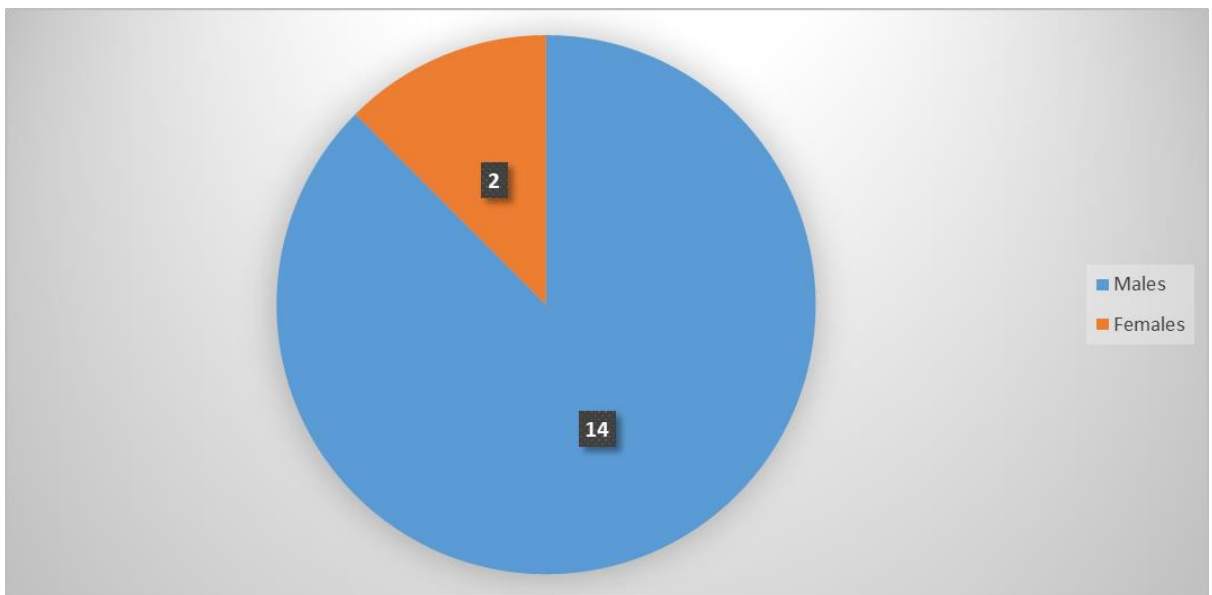
The previous chapter outlined the methodology of this study including the research approach, research design, population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection tools, and analysis methods used by the researcher. This chapter presents the findings of this study, interpretation, and discussion.

### 4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

#### 4.2.1 Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic characteristics include all measurable features of the participants (Babbie, 2016). They encompass, but are not limited to, gender, age, and education level. The study outlined the distribution of participants by gender and their experience level.

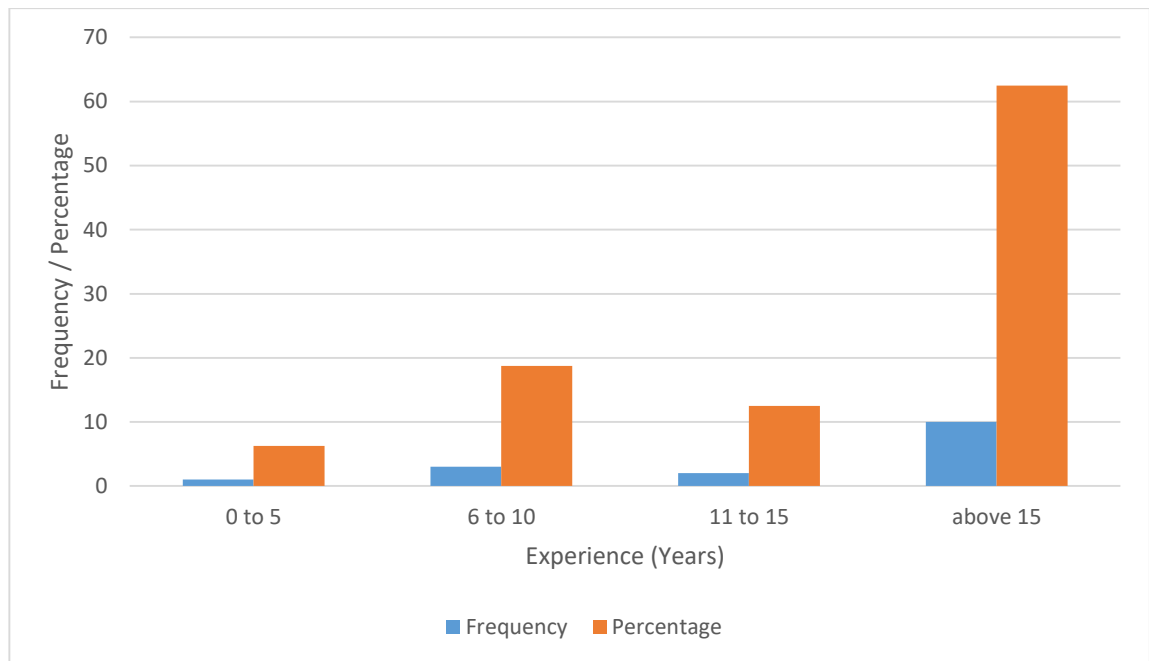
**Figure 2 Distribution of Participants by Gender**



Source: Own illustration

A total of 16 participants were interviewed. Of these, 14 were selected from various villages in Chigumula, while two came from Blantyre City Council. As shown in the pie chart above, there were more male participants than females.

**Figure 3 Experience level distribution among participants**



Source: Own Illustration

The above bar graph shows that most participants had six or more years of experience, indicating that they were sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced to contribute meaningfully to the study.

#### **4.2.2 Poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi**

The study found that, overall, the Malawian government has been implementing various programs nationwide aimed at improving people's livelihoods and reducing poverty.

Specifically, in Chigumula, the most frequently mentioned programs by participants were cash transfer initiatives and the Farm Input Subsidy Programs (FISPs).

#### 4.2.2.1 Cash transfer programs

The study found that cash transfer programs, locally known as “ntukula pakhomo”, are the most popular poverty reduction initiatives in Chigumula. These programs are run by the government for the people. Several participants mentioned that cash transfer programs have been active in their villages for the past three years (P1TL, P6TL, P16TL). For example, P12TL noted that, “Here, we have cash transfer programs where poor and most vulnerable people receive money from the World Bank through our government.” Several other participants agreed with this view and shared their opinions by saying that, “Occasionally, the government gives residents of this village a monetary sum of 150,000 kwacha” (P10TL). “Some people were called to the football field to receive money from the government as part of the cash transfer program” (P8TL).

The above data highlights the significant role of the Malawi government in supporting programs aimed at reducing poverty. The study also found instances of exclusion in several villages, where participants claimed that cash transfer programs have never been implemented. For example, P7TL stated that,

Ever since I became a chief in this village, there have never been any programs implemented to address poverty. We just hear that our friends in other villages are receiving money from the government, but this program has never reached us.

P4TL supported the fact that some villages have never received government support through cash transfer programs and said that, “to be honest, we have never had any cash transfer programs in this village.” These findings suggest that although the government

actively addresses poverty through cash transfer programs, some villages are being left behind. This exclusion indicates that cash transfer programs do not reach everyone. Furthermore, the study found that in villages where these programs are implemented, traditional leaders do not benefit directly. Several participants said they do not receive money like the rest of the villagers because the government prohibits it due to their status as traditional leaders. Participants highlighted that,

“As a traditional leader, I do not get to benefit from ntukula pakhomo because our government does not allow us to do so. As you can see, I am very old and I cannot work to take care of myself” (P1TL).

“The government discriminates against us. They say we are not supposed to receive money from cash transfer programs because we hold the title of traditional leader. As for me, I hustle to feed my family, but some traditional leaders are very old and cannot fend for themselves. Shouldn’t those be allowed to benefit from cash transfer programs?” (P16TL)

From these findings, traditional leaders do not directly benefit from cash transfer programs even though some of them qualify for such support. When those who are meant to be supported are absent from key initiatives like cash transfer programs, poverty reduction efforts are left incomplete.

#### 4.2.2.2 Farm Input Subsidy Programs (FISPs)

The study also found that FISP is another popular poverty reduction program implemented in Chigumula. Several participants said that FISPs have significantly improved the lives of many individuals. P1 said that,

For the past few years, we have received coupons from the government through the FISP program to buy subsidized seeds and fertilizer. This help has been

essential for our farming activities, as many people here cannot afford to buy seeds and fertilizer on their own without government support.

P16TL shared the same view and stated that, “People in this village get coupons they can use to buy fertilizer and maize at lower prices, helping them harvest enough food for the entire year.” This data shows that FISPs have enabled smallholder farmers to participate in farming activities they otherwise couldn't undertake without the programs. However, some participants raised criticisms about FISPs. Their main concerns focused on how FISPs are implemented. Several participants acknowledged that the implementation of FISPs faces issues such as corruption and delays in distribution. Participants had this to say:

“FISPs used to be excellent in the past, but now, the people responsible for distributing the coupons are often corrupt to the point that they make deals with vendors by giving them coupons to claim farm inputs at a discounted price and sell them at a higher price. Sometimes, there are delays in fertilizer distribution, and the involvement of political parties in the programs has made the situation worse” (P5TL).

“FISP is riddled with corruption. The officials responsible for running the program are deceitful. They aren't even ashamed to sell fertilizer meant for the people to vendors” (P8TL).

“Last year, we missed the planting season because we couldn't buy the seeds in time. The rains came, but we didn't have seeds, so we had to use our local seeds, which didn't perform well” (P6TL).

This data suggests that issues like corruption hinder fair implementation of FISPs, leading to delays in assistance and limiting the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts.

### **4.2.3 Traditional leaders' participation in the formulation of poverty reduction programs**

The ladder of theory participation served as a guide to measure how much traditional leaders are involved. The theory helped the researcher identify where traditional leaders' participation in the formulation of poverty reduction programs falls on the ladder. The study's findings clearly show that traditional leaders' participation is mostly on the lower levels or rungs of the ladder. Specifically, their participation falls into two categories: non-participation and tokenism.

#### **4.2.3.1 Non-participation category (Manipulation)**

The study found that traditional leaders have no power to make decisions about the programs the government implements. They are simply there to accept decisions already made by policy makers or the government and to relay the messages to the community. Several participants said that,

“The government approaches us to make it seem like we understand how these programs originated, not because they value our opinions but because they want to use us to mobilize our community. For example, they ask us to gather people so they can select beneficiaries for cash transfer programs” (P12TL).

“The government has never consulted us on how we can solve the problems we face to reduce poverty. They impose these programs on us, thinking they are the best solutions to our issues. In the past, we were well respected as traditional leaders, but now we just follow what they tell us, like puppets” (P5TL).

“We, as traditional leaders, do not have any say in the formulation of programs like FISPs. One day, we woke up and the government decided to give us coupons

for subsidized seeds and fertilizer. Since then, we have been receiving the coupons almost every year” (P16TL).

This data shows that traditional leaders are only instructed on what to do during program implementation. The programs are imposed on them which prevent their participation in planning the programs, allowing those with power to decide what kind of programs are formulated. The government makes the decisions because they are seen as experts, and they inform traditional leaders about these decisions before community members. It might appear that traditional leaders helped make decisions about the programs with the government, but that is not the case. This indicates that the government determines the best solutions for the people in terms of poverty reduction efforts. Traditional leaders are required to follow predetermined decisions and lack any real voice in the decision-making process. This represents the lowest level of participation, which is manipulation on the ladder of citizen participation, situated at the bottom.

#### **4.2.3.2 Tokenism Category (Informing)**

The study found that, while traditional leaders were informed about poverty reduction programs, they were not asked to participate in their development. Several participants said that they were not consulted during the design phase and were only briefed about the programs after decisions had already been made. Participants said,

“One day, representatives from the government came to me and told me that the government received money from the World Bank and plans to distribute it to the poor, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those who can't afford basic necessities” (P1TL).

“We do not get involved in designing these programs. The government contacts us only to inform us of their decisions. Most of the time, our role is to gather people and let them follow the instructions given” (P8TL)

“The government comes to us to let us know what they plan to do in our village. Our job is to call for meetings and let people know about the government plans to do” (P11TL).

These findings highlight that traditional leaders lack a say in programs designed to address their issues. Traditional leaders are primarily used as channels for disseminating information and implementing directives. These findings reflect a form of participation that is purely informative, where traditional leaders are simply instructed on what to do, lack real power to influence decisions, and serve as information dissemination tools between the government and the community.

#### **4.2.3.3 Tokenism Category (Consulting)**

The study also found that, at times, traditional leaders are consulted to discuss the issues they face as a community and to suggest ways to improve their communities. However, their involvement does not influence any decisions. This tokenistic form of participation was revealed when P10TL said that,

There was a time when the government came to me and asked for the names of the elderly, orphans, and the poorest people in this village, claiming it had plans to help them. What really surprised me was that after a few weeks, they asked to gather my people and then wrote new names, ignoring the ones I had provided.

In line with the above view, P3TL explained that,

I remember a time between 2018 and 2019 when we went to Blantyre City Council to ask them to build us a factory that would produce farm inputs like organic

fertilizers. We told them that we would supply the raw materials and that we needed the government to help us with machinery and formulas so we could make organic fertilizers that would not only support our community financially but also boost agricultural activities. This, in turn, would benefit our country and help reduce poverty. Although they told us they would consider the idea positively and assist us, we never heard back from them (P5TL).

This data indicates that although traditional leaders were sometimes given opportunities to identify beneficiaries of certain poverty reduction initiatives, they lacked real power to ensure their views were included in the final decisions. It also shows that traditional leaders are capable of generating ideas on how they can help improve people's lives if given the opportunity and resources. Elevating the participation of traditional leaders to higher levels would create an ideal situation where they can effectively represent their communities in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

#### **4.2.4 Factors influencing traditional leaders' participation in the formulation of poverty reduction programs**

The study identified factors that either enable or hinder traditional leaders' participation in designing poverty reduction programs. While enabling factors create opportunities for traditional leaders to get involved in their own affairs, hindering factors have the opposite effect.

##### **4.2.4.1 Enabling factors for participation**

###### **4.2.4.1.1 Local knowledge, authority and strong relationship with the people**

The researcher found that traditional leaders understand the people's situations because they live close to them (P4TL, P11TL, P13TL, P5TL). Several traditional leaders reported

that people respect them and that they have significant influence in getting others to listen. Traditional leaders also explained that they have good relationships with the community because they are regarded as the elders of the villages. For instance, participants mentioned that,

“We live with the people and understand the problems they face. We are better equipped to propose solutions that effectively address these issues” (P7TL).

“I consider the people in this village as my family. Their problems are my problems. I know the challenges that most families in this village face. I know what our community needs to escape the shambles of poverty, only if the government gives me the chance to do it” (P11TL).

“You know, the people in this village pay attention to what I say. If I ask them to do something, they do it because they understand I always want the best for them. We rely on each other. When things get difficult for me, I reach out to them. This has helped us develop a good relationship” (P1TL).

This data suggests that traditional leaders’ direct connection to the local people enables them to perceive situations accurately, helping them develop appropriate solutions. Their influence, concern, and compassion motivate them to find ways to improve their community's wellbeing. While many participants agreed that their knowledge of local issues helps them better understand their problems, several also argued that traditional leaders often use their position for personal gain. Several participants said that,

“We know who the most vulnerable members of our community are. Nevertheless, the government approaches us for cash transfer initiatives and insists on identifying beneficiaries on its own. I believe the government does this because some traditional leaders would only want their families and friends to benefit from the initiatives” (P3TL).

“I feel like the authorities don’t want us to choose our own names for receiving coupons because some of the traditional leaders are corrupt. They misuse their power by favoring those they like and know to benefit from the poverty reduction programs” (P6TL).

“For example, our village group head received maize from the government to distribute to the nine villages under his leadership. The maize was not distributed fairly. Some villages received 30 bags of maize, while his village received 150 bags” (P10TL).

This means that while traditional leaders may possess legitimate knowledge about how to support their villages, their participation in designing programs is biased due to favoritism and lack of transparency, which results in programs that do not benefit everyone.

#### 4.2.4.1.2 Community-Led Initiatives (CLIs)

The study found that some traditional leaders, along with community members, design their own initiatives as a way to improve their well-being. As stated by P3TL, who once engaged with the people in the village and developed programs that they implemented to enhance their well-being. Supporting this, P4TL said that,

We have some community-based programs currently being implemented to improve people's lives. These initiatives were started by me, but to ensure the community feels involved, my advisors and I selected a committee of community members responsible for gathering ideas from everyone and managing the initiatives.

In addition, P7TL also agreed with P4’s argument and emphasized that,

Apart from the programs being carried out by the government, we also have our own community-led initiatives. For example, in this village, we are always in need of things like bridges and good roads. We sit down as a village and decide on the best way to do these things on our own.

These findings indicate that traditional leaders do not simply wait around for the government to address their challenges. Instead, they also take initiative in developing ways to improve their lives because they recognize that they share the responsibility to actively participate in development. The study also found that, although traditional leaders are responsible for leading in CLIs, they face a significant obstacle of insufficient funds. Several participants pointed out that they were unable to implement some CLIs due to a lack of financial resources.

“Sometimes, we have programs that we want to implement, like constructing a tarmac road to make transportation easier, but we fail to do it because we lack the money. On our own, we can only manage to clear the roads, but laying down tarmac is another matter we cannot do on our own” (P7TL).

“We want to create our own programs to eradicate poverty, but we are unable to do so due to lack of funds” (P3TL).

“There are so many things we can do here as a village. I have many good ideas for programs that could improve our lives. The only thing holding us back is the money which we do not have” (P2TL).

This data shows that communities are capable and motivated to design CLIs as a way of participating in crafting poverty reduction programs, but financial limitations significantly hinder the implementation of these programs. This means that while traditional leaders participate in program design, their involvement does not lead to successful results in implementation.

#### **4.2.4.2 Hindering factors for Participation**

##### 4.2.4.2.1 Conflicting relationships between traditional leaders and elected officials

One of the main barriers to participation frequently mentioned by the participants is the poor relationship between traditional leaders and elected officials, specifically Members of Parliament (MPs) and Councilors (P1TL, P2TL, P7TL). The study found that most government-led poverty reduction programs are routed through political party structures rather than directly through traditional leaders, which fosters mistrust and feelings of exclusion. Several participants highlighted that, for programs like FISPs, political parties are involved and are responsible for selecting beneficiaries, often based on political affiliation rather than need.

“What limits our participation is the involvement of political parties. These political parties are usually at the forefront of everything. They also engage with some chiefs to make decisions that do not serve the best interests of the people, to the point that only those affiliated with their party benefit from programs. Councilors and MPs don’t really help us at all” (P4TL).

“Here, the party members are the ones enjoying themselves. All development efforts come from them. If you are not a party member, then you cannot eat with them” (P8TL).

“We often don't get involved in development because the party leaders are the ones in charge. They want to control everything, so we just watch. After all, what can we do?” (P15TL).

The data above indicates a lack of power sharing between traditional leaders and elected officials, confirming that the participation of traditional leaders in programs mainly involves the lower levels of Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation. This suggests that

only those close to political parties receive the largest share of national cake, unlike those without party ties. These findings imply that the unequal distribution of power between traditional leaders and elected officials hinders true representation of people's needs in parliament, as the two actors are unable to unite the people.

#### 4.2.4.2.2 Multiple priorities and limited understanding of participation processes

The researcher found that traditional leaders have to juggle several priorities at the same time, which limits their participation. As explained by P5TL, most traditional leaders lack information on major development policies and how they can participate in development activities. Several participants stated similar views that they are not fully informed about programs like Malawi Vision 2063 and are usually preoccupied with taking care of their families. Their priority is their own survival, and taking care of community needs comes second. For instance, P11TL had this to say,

I have other things I do besides being a traditional leader. I have a family to take care of because the government doesn't pay us for being chiefs. However, this doesn't mean I don't care about my people. It's just that I have other priorities too.

In line with the above argument, P16TL highlighted that, "I just hear about Malawi Vision 2063 on the radio, but I really don't know what it is about in detail." Furthermore, P7TL added that,

You know, I don't get paid for being a traditional leader. I have to hustle to feed my family. I don't even know how to approach our government to help us with some activities that we can do to support ourselves.

These findings suggest that traditional leaders have multiple responsibilities, including personal needs, which may interfere with their community duties. Balancing these

responsibilities limits their ability to fulfill their role as traditional leaders and participate in designing development programs. Additionally, the findings indicate that a lack of understanding of development plans, especially those focused on poverty reduction, prevents traditional leaders from effectively participating in their formulation, as they cannot engage in meaningful conversations about topics they do not understand.

#### 4.2.4.2.3 Centralization of decision-making

Participants highlighted that the government bypasses traditional structures when developing policies related to Blantyre. Community development decisions are led by elected officials because they possess authority and decision-making power. Several participants mentioned that,

“What happens is that, when Blantyre City Council decides to implement a development initiative in communities, they consult councilors. The councilors then decide whether or not to include the traditional leaders” (P14BCC).

“As Blantyre City Council, we do not have the power to approach traditional leaders directly because our point of contact is the ward councilors. The council and the councilors make decisions on development activities. The traditional leaders are the recipients” (P15BCC).

“All decisions regarding the development of this community come from our councilors, MPs, and Blantyre City Council. They decide everything for us. The Council does not even contact us directly. The only time they come to us is when a donor wants to do something in our village without involving the elected officials” (P11TL).

Traditional leaders, who are considered lower level, rely on what the elected officials say for guidance and direction in community development. The elected officials decide who

receives what based on the size of the village or community. This results in a lack of shared decision-making between elected officials and traditional leaders.

#### 4.2.4.2.4 Apathy and frustration

The study found that due to past and repeated disappointments, traditional leaders no longer trust their elected officials. As P7TL stated, traditional leaders have lost confidence in the government system because they believe the government does not take their needs seriously. Several participants shared this view and said that,

“As for me, I know these politicians don't think about us at all. They only show up during campaign periods, act nice, lie, and make promises they know are false. After we vote for them, they disappear only to reappear during the next election season” (P9TL).

“Once we vote for these people, they disappear. They don't even live with us anymore. They go to Lilongwe. How can we depend on such a person who doesn't even know how we are living?” (P5TL).

“You know, these politicians are clever. They pretend to be nice during campaign periods because they want us to vote for them. They think that we are balls to be tossed around. So when they ask us what we want in terms of development, we know that they are bluffing” (P2TL).

These findings suggest that traditional leaders feel indifferent about participating in development planning, especially in designing poverty reduction programs, because they strongly believe their efforts will be futile and that the government will continue to ignore them.

#### **4.2.5 Implication of low participation of traditional leaders in poverty reduction programs**

The study found that the non-participation of traditional leaders in development plans leads to the creation of programs that do not address the real needs of the local people. Participants believed that when those affected by the programs have no say, the programs might become irrelevant (P1L, P5TL, P8TL). Additionally, people do not feel a sense of ownership when poverty reduction programs are imposed on them (P16TL). P15BCC stated that, “Sometimes, you see people receiving fertilizer coupons, but they don’t even own land for farming. They then sell the coupons to vendors because what this person needs is not fertilizer coupons but money.”

In agreement, P10TL emphasized that,

We face so many problems because the government does not ask people like us to participate in choosing the right individuals who need help. In many cases, people do not want things like fertilizer, but instead they assume that everyone has land. Some people spend the money they receive from the government on alcohol.

Additionally, P14BCC emphasized that a lack of participation encourages irresponsibility among beneficiaries of programs by stating that,

If we go into the villages and ask people what they did with the money they received from the government, you'll realize that most beneficiaries wasted it on beer or betting because they don’t really feel they need to use the money wisely since it is something they did not sweat to earn.

At the same time, P15BCC and P3TL remarked that,

“The only reason why cash transfer programs aren’t working is because when people receive the money, they don’t think about how they can use it to support themselves for a while. It’s like once they get the money, they use it to buy things they wouldn’t normally buy on ordinary days.”

“I asked one of the beneficiaries of cash transfer programs what he did with the money he received. He told me that when he got the money, he saw it as an opportunity for his family to eat good food. So he bought meat.”

Based on the information above, lack of participation prevents people from having a voice in decisions that affect them. As a result, this absence of involvement can further marginalize the most vulnerable individuals, leading to ineffective interventions and ongoing cycles of poverty. Additionally, when people do not feel ownership of poverty reduction programs, it can result in poor targeting, unmet needs, and weak program sustainability. Participants agreed that if traditional leaders do not participate in designing programs, these initiatives may not resonate with the community. Although several participants mentioned that government-led poverty reduction programs are sufficient, they still feel that their lack of involvement makes these programs seem disconnected. For example, P2TL said that,

FISPs are beneficial. They support our farming activities. Most residents in this village cannot afford to buy farm inputs at regular prices, a fact the government is aware of. However, as I mentioned earlier, we do not truly feel connected to the programs because we are not involved.

Similarly, P4TL said,

If you ask me what people want in this village, I will tell you. People want clean water and electricity. Cash transfer programs are fine, yes, but we believe access to clean water could make a bigger difference.

The participants agreed that the government understands how some programs can best help people, even if they may not be addressing the most urgent needs.

#### **4.2.6 Strategies to increase participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs**

The final objective was to suggest strategies for increasing the involvement of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs. The study identified several approaches to improve their participation. These strategies can elevate traditional leaders' involvement on the higher levels of citizen participation. The strategies are outlined below.

##### 4.2.6.1 Institutional Inclusion

The study found that participants want the government to formalize the involvement of traditional leaders through official development planning committees at the community, ward, district, and national levels. For instance, P7TL said that,

I think that there should be committees for development planning where traditional leaders are included to give them a chance to participate in the formulation of development initiatives, including poverty reduction programs” and P15BCC agreed by saying, “there should be special community committees that are formally recognized by the government that will allow Blantyre City Council to work with traditional leaders directly without involving elected officials.

Several participants also agreed that formalizing their participation through official committees will give traditional leaders an opportunity to discuss the issues that truly

matter and develop solutions that will drive the country toward progress, with P14BCC saying,

It is important that we all come together as Malawians and support each other in finding ways to develop our communities. If the government can establish committees for local development and ensure that traditional leaders are included, that would be beneficial.

In agreement, P3TL stated that,

Before any program is implemented, the government should consult us as traditional leaders so that we can sit down and discuss whether the program will be in the best interest of the people. In fact, they need to include us in their development committees so that we can all be on the same page.

The findings of this study have consistently shown that traditional leaders often feel sidelined, especially when they are only involved in the implementation stages of development initiatives. This means that, even if they accept the programs, they might not truly feel a sense of ownership over them. Officially involving them in the planning and designing of programs would make them feel genuinely engaged, and they would sense that their input is meaningful rather than just symbolic. Their participation would also ensure that programs are suitable and realistic, based on a deep understanding of local dynamics, community needs, and social structures. Including traditional leaders in formal committees is not just about giving them a platform to represent their communities but is also a way of empowering the most important social structure, which has the power to contribute significantly to poverty reduction efforts and promote sustainability.

#### 4.2.6.2 Funding Opportunities / Financial Support

Several participants stated that if the government dedicated more funds for local development, which go directly to traditional leaders, it would help them implement some of their ideas (P7T, P9TL). P3TL and P5TL, respectively, stated that,

“We can decrease poverty if the government provides us with funding to support some of our programs.”

“We can solve the issue of poverty if the government simply enacts legislation that directs the distribution of development funds to us, the traditional leaders, rather than to councilors. This is because we can utilize the funds to create our own initiatives that we believe will help alleviate poverty. We have considered starting many programs, but we are not succeeding since we lack the funding.”

The above findings mean that if the government provides financial support to traditional leaders, they can fully participate in developing poverty reduction programs because their main limitation is a lack of funds.

#### 4.2.6.2 Disseminating information and changing mindsets

The study found that traditional leaders need education about major development policies the country is implementing to reduce poverty. P6TL specifically mentioned that,

I hear about Vision 2063 whenever I turn on my radio, but to be honest, I really don't know what it's about. The government needs to educate us about these important things so that we can participate fully because we will all be on the same page.

In line with this argument, several other participants stated that,

“As for me, I always thought Malawi Vision 2063 was for those people in town and didn't really have anything to do with us. I am even very surprised that you are asking me about it now. I think that the government needs to do a better job explaining to us what Malawi Vision 2063 is. After all, the fight against poverty is for all of us” (P8TL).

“I don't really know what Vision 2063 is, but I have heard people mention it on the radio. It would be nice if the government explained what it is about” (P2TL).

This data clearly shows that a knowledge gap exists that must be addressed for traditional leaders to participate effectively in development initiatives, especially poverty reduction programs.

### **4.3 Discussion and Interpretation**

The findings of this study reveal that the most popular poverty reduction programs are cash transfer programs and FISPs. The World Bank (2025) defines cash transfer initiatives as financial support for vulnerable households aimed at enhancing their well-being and reducing poverty. In Africa, these programs are essential for social protection and improving people's livelihoods, with notable examples in Zimbabwe and Ghana (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2018; Sackey, 2019). South Africa has the largest cash transfer program in Sub-Saharan Africa, benefiting nearly 30% of its population, with grants targeted at various vulnerable groups (Zwayne et al., 2025). Literature indicates that cash transfer initiatives have significantly improved food security, school enrollment, and eased short-term poverty across the continent (World Bank, 2012). However, the study uncovered that some deserving people do not benefit from the initiatives. This supports Eluwa et al. (2015), who argue that, in Nigeria, eligible non-beneficiaries of cash transfer programs experienced more severe hunger than those who

benefited. On the other hand, the findings of this study suggest that FISPs, which support smallholder farmers in buying farm inputs at a discounted price (Pangapanga-Phiri et al., 2025), have greatly contributed to poverty reduction efforts in Chigumula. The effect of FISPs have been similar in most countries in East and Southern Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Zambia, which reintroduced FISPs following the 2003 Maputo Declaration to boost smallholder farmers' income and increase productivity (Nyirongo & Khataza, 2025). Studies show that FISPs have yielded mixed results—some reports indicate they have improved smallholder farmers' access to agricultural inputs in countries like Zambia (Malama & Mudenda, 2025), while others suggest FISPs have increased corruption, with implementation issues such as distribution challenges and fragmented stakeholder coordination. Additionally, Chirwa and Dorward (2013) note that there have been reports from Nigeria, Tanzania, Mali, and Senegal about the diversion of FISP fertilizer, concerns over fertilizer quality, late deliveries, and ineffective price controls. These challenges may therefore explain why poverty levels continue to rise despite ongoing efforts to reduce it.

The findings of this study clearly show that traditional leaders have a minimal role in decision-making. Specifically, the study found that traditional leaders lack the authority to influence the programs the government implements. This represents the lowest level of citizen participation on the ladder (Arnstein, 2019), where traditional leaders are merely given a predetermined decision and have no say in the process. This is a common problem with many expert-designed programs, which often ignore the insights of those who understand their realities best. Multiple studies have shown that programs often fail due to a lack of input from the affected communities (Flint & Natrup, 2018). The people

impacted by these programs know their situations best, and traditional leaders are the most suitable individuals to represent their interests to program designers because they live close to the people. These findings imply that if people are not involved in their own affairs, efforts to reduce poverty will not accurately address their real needs.

Additionally, the study revealed that since traditional leaders have no decision-making power, they are informed about poverty reduction programs only after decisions have already been made. This means that their lack of involvement in planning these programs keeps them at a lower level of citizen participation and disconnects the programs from the realities of the people. These findings align with literature emphasizing that the participation of traditional leaders in poverty reduction programs is limited but essential. Abdullah (2024) points out that limited beneficiary involvement during the planning of poverty reduction interventions in Ghana led to a misalignment between the interventions and the actual needs of the people. These findings are reinforced by Salifu and Kufoalor (2022), who found that the effectiveness of Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) was hindered due to lack of engagement and interaction between program beneficiaries and district officials, proving that programs that do not include the voices of those affected are ultimately ineffective.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that traditional leaders are occasionally consulted to discuss issues they face as a community and to propose ways to improve their communities. However, their involvement does not influence any decisions made, reflecting a tokenism form of participation in line with Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. This is common in Africa, where communities participate in policy creation, but the actual decisions are made by those in power, overlooking community needs and

placing participation at a lower level on the ladder. This pseudo participation is often driven by donor conditionalities and implies that traditional leaders' involvement is only symbolic. If traditional leaders continue to be excluded from decision-making, poverty reduction programs will remain top-down and fail to address the realities faced by the people. There is a need to empower communities to control their decisions to improve their participation, thereby elevating their role to a higher rung on the ladder. Literature shows that using a participatory approach in poverty reduction efforts yields more effective results (Ndlovu, Ndlovu, & Ncube, 2025).

The study revealed that some traditional leaders use their local knowledge of perceived community needs to design programs through small-scale CLIs such as road maintenance and bridge construction. This form of participation reflects local ownership and a sense of empowerment, representing citizen participation on the ladder. It aligns with the United Nations mantra 'Leave no man behind,' as outlined in Agenda 2063, which emphasizes the importance of participation in decision-making (Ndlovu et al., 2025). Although this type of participation is not formally promoted by the government, it demonstrates that traditional structures possess a participatory spirit that goes beyond tokenism. The main challenge, as noted by participants and supported by existing literature, is financial barriers that hinder the full implementation of CLSs (Miller, 2017). As Arnstein (1969) stated, this illusion of power-sharing leaves traditional leaders no option but to depend on external actors for resources. The study also found that poor relationships between traditional leaders and elected officials limit their participation, corroborating Walsh et al. (2018) findings in Nkhotakota and Mchinji, where decision-makers bypass traditional structures. Furthermore, traditional leaders often have multiple priorities, and their limited

knowledge of how to engage in designing poverty reduction programs prevents their involvement in development initiatives, as stipulated by the Malawi constitution. This viewpoint aligns with Hussain and Khuhro's observations, who argued that people's participation in development programs is often hindered by a lack of information and understanding of the participation process (Hussain & Khuhro, 2019). Additionally, centralized decision-making among elected officials hampers participation, as seen in rural Kenya, where vital development projects aimed at improving well-being and fighting poverty are carried out with minimal community involvement (Walter & Juma, 2025). Literature indicates that apathy and frustration caused by repeated disappointments from unsatisfactory outcomes contribute to non-participation in policy discussions (Zhel'nina, 2020), and this study's findings support that argument.

The study revealed that increasing traditional leaders' involvement in developing poverty reduction programs requires including traditional structures in decision-making, providing financial support options, and running public awareness campaigns, along with a shift in paradigm.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The main findings of this study show that cash transfer programs and FISPs are the most popular poverty reduction programs that the government is implementing in Chigumula. Traditional leaders have no decision-making power regarding these programs, and their participation is at the lowest levels of citizen involvement. However, traditional leaders are fully involved in community-led initiatives where they ensure that the voices of those affected by the programs are heard and influence decisions. The study also found that local

knowledge, authority, and close proximity to the people enable traditional leaders to participate actively in their own development because they better understand their situations than anyone else. Conversely, conflicting relationships between traditional leaders and elected officials, multiple priorities, limited knowledge, centralization of decision-making, and feelings of apathy and frustration hinder their participation. Non-participation is risky because it results in programs that do not address the people's real needs. Strategies to enhance the participation of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs include institutional inclusion, financial support, information sharing, and changing mindsets.

## **CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the major findings of the study. Based on the findings, this chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

### **5.2 Discussion**

Limited empirical evidence on the participation of traditional leaders in policy formulation was the main motivation behind this study. Past studies have mainly focused on specific roles that traditional leaders play in development programs, rather than their actual involvement in shaping those programs. This study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap, recognizing the importance of participation in development policies. The primary objective was to assess how traditional leaders participate in the formulation of poverty reduction programs. The theory underpinning this study was the ladder of citizen participation, which helped the researcher identify where traditional leaders' levels of participation fit on the ladder. The study was guided by four specific objectives: exploring poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi; assessing the extent of traditional leaders' participation in formulating these programs; exploring factors influencing their participation; and recommending strategies to enhance their engagement. The research adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews to collect data. The findings reveal a gap between legal provisions and actual practices on the ground. The government dominates policy formulation, and ordinary citizens, including traditional leaders, have limited roles in the process. Traditional leaders lack decision-making power regarding poverty reduction programs in their villages, and their participation level resides in the lower rungs of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. No measures have been

implemented to reinforce legal frameworks that provide for traditional leaders' participation in development policies. The major findings of the study are as follows:

- Major poverty reduction programs in Chigumula are carried out by the government, which is responsible for making all decisions about the programs. Traditional leaders are only involved during the implementation phase and mainly serve as a means to mobilize people.
- Traditional leaders lack the power to make decisions about poverty reduction programs, placing their level of participation lower on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation.
- Traditional leaders' participation in developing poverty reduction programs is enhanced by their close contact with the people, which gives them knowledge to identify the actual needs of the community and CLIs. However, their participation is also limited by politicization of programs, juggling responsibilities, limited knowledge of participation processes, centralization of decisions, and lack of interest in participation.
- Traditional leaders are willing to collaborate with the government on policy making. If the government involves them, they will do their best to ensure that grassroots voices are included in the policy process.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

This study was conducted to achieve four objectives. The first objective was to explore poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi. The study found that the government of Malawi implements cash transfer programs and FISPs as part of its efforts to fight poverty in the country. Cash transfers provide monetary assistance to the most vulnerable

families to improve their well-being, while FISPs provide small-holder farmers with subsidized farm inputs to enhance food security. The study also found that some villages design CLIs as a way of solving their local problems.

The second objective was to assess the participation of traditional leaders in designing poverty reduction programs. The study found that traditional leaders do not typically participate formally in developing programs implemented by the government. Instead, they are mainly involved in the implementation stage and are primarily used to mobilize people. They only participate in the formulation stage of their own CLIs.

The third objective aimed to investigate the factors influencing traditional leaders' participation in formulating poverty reduction programs. The study found that traditional leaders understand the problems their communities face because they live with the people. This knowledge enables them to propose solutions they believe are the best, which enhances their participation in designing programs. However, the study also found that political interference and a lack of understanding of the participation process limit traditional leaders' involvement. These findings suggest that traditional leaders do not hold decision-making power over programs that affect them. Additionally, multiple priorities, along with apathy and frustration, hinder their participation in planning stages. In some cases, traditional leaders initiate their own community-based programs with the people but are restricted by a lack of financial resources. The study revealed that, despite the Chiefs Act and the Local Government Act providing a legal framework for participation in development activities, traditional leaders' involvement remains limited, indicating that their participation is on the lower rungs of the citizen participation ladder.

The fourth objective was aimed at recommending strategies to increase the participation of traditional leaders in the development of poverty reduction programs. The study found that traditional leaders should be formally included in policy-making through official structures. There should also be opportunities for funding CLIs to empower villages to turn their ideas into action. Additionally, there is a need for a mindset shift, where people are educated about the importance of participation in development activities and their right to exercise their constitutional rights.

This study concludes that traditional leaders' participation in policy formulation remains weak and limited despite clear evidence of their willingness to engage. Their empowerment is only partial because decisions are often imposed on them, and they typically learn about poverty reduction programs only after decisions are already made. Occasionally, they are consulted during policy development, but this rarely influences the final decisions, indicating low levels of participation on the citizen participation ladder. Traditional leaders' influence on decision-making is restricted by a lack of resources, institutional barriers, political interference, frustration, and apathy. These factors further push traditional leaders down the levels of Arnstein's ladder, risking development efforts that may not serve the best interests of the people. It would be wise for the government to involve traditional leaders in policy development, as they act as a link between the government and the community. Such inclusion could promote greater inclusivity and lead to more effective poverty reduction programs that genuinely meet community needs.

#### **5.4 Implications**

The findings of this study have various implications. Firstly, the findings reveal a serious gap between what Malawi aspires to be and what is happening on the ground to achieve

those aspirations. The findings imply that there is a lot of work to be done to educate traditional leaders about the importance of participation in policy making and to formalize their involvement. If traditional leaders' lack of confidence in the government system continues to breed apathy and frustration, inclusive governance will never be achieved. Traditional structures should be officially institutionalized to ensure that participation becomes formal. The provisions of the Chiefs Act and the Local Government Act need to be fully operationalized to guarantee that traditional leaders are represented in policymaking at all levels.

Secondly, limited understanding of participatory processes among traditional leaders highlights the need to empower them. Providing traditional leaders with knowledge on how they can participate in development planning and enhancing their capacity to engage can lead to better grassroots representation in creating poverty reduction programs. This can help traditional leaders advance from the lower levels of Arnstein's ladder to the higher levels. Additionally, traditional leaders should be given decision-making authority so that they are not just involved in designing programs but also have their voices carry weight in final decisions. Without this, participation might improve superficially, but it would be pseudo participation, as the final decisions would reflect the views of those in power rather than the traditional leaders themselves.

Furthermore, the limited implementation of CLIs due to a lack of financial resources means that traditional leaders rely heavily on government or externally designed programs. This suggests that development depends on what the government chooses to do. If the government opts not to take action in a particular village, development will come

to a halt. Therefore, there is a need for financial support to strengthen CLIs in order to promote self-reliance among villages.

Lastly, the findings of this study reinforce the arguments of Arnstein's theory of the ladder of citizen participation. The findings show that meaningful participation involves the even distribution of power and resources. Mere consultation, information, and manipulation without empowerment lead to symbolic participation. Therefore, power and resources need to be distributed equally among development partners (government, traditional leaders, and external donors) for there to be true participation.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be made based on the findings of this study. These recommendations can be adopted by the government of Malawi and traditional leaders themselves. Blantyre City council can also adopt the recommendations to enhance the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs.

### **5.5.1 Recommendations to the government**

To address the issue of low participation by traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs, due to the centralization of decision-making, where only those with power, such as the government, are involved, as revealed in Chapter 4, the study recommends that the government of Malawi should establish clear guidelines for including traditional leaders in policy formulation at all levels. The government can do this by creating community committees at the national and district levels to work directly with policymakers, ensuring that people are well represented in every decision made. This inclusion will cultivate a sense of ownership of poverty reduction programs. It will also

ensure that poverty reduction programs address the actual needs of the people. As a result, poverty reduction programs will become more effective and sustainable.

To address the issue of the lack of participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs due to a lack of resources, the study recommends that the government establish a dedicated financial support grant for community development. Traditional leaders should be allowed to submit proposals detailing how they plan to improve people's lives, and the most practical and sustainable plans should receive funding from the government. The government could deduct part of the funds allocated for community development that currently go directly to Councilors and include them in this special program, ensuring that some of the money dedicated to community development flows through traditional leaders.

The study also recommends that, to address the low participation caused by limited knowledge of major development policies, such as the Malawi Vision 2063, and lack of understanding of participation processes, the government of Malawi should establish training programs for traditional leaders. These programs should teach traditional participatory planning, budgeting for programs, and managing projects without relying on external financial sources. There is also a need for information dissemination on government policies for poverty reduction to raise awareness and understanding.

### **5.5.2 Recommendations to traditional leaders**

To address the issue of low implementation of CLIs due to lack of financial resources as discovered in the findings in chapter 4, the study recommends that traditional leaders should be creative in developing ways to implement programs by themselves using locally

available resources. For example, villages own land that can be used for farming and selling produce. The income can then be used to support CLIs.

Traditional leaders should also actively advocate for their inclusion in policy processes, especially during policy formulation. Instead of merely expressing dissatisfaction with the government's exclusion, they should approach the government proactively to discuss ways to enhance their participation. By strongly advocating for their involvement, traditional leaders can position themselves as vital partners in development. This, in turn, increases their chances of being involved in shaping poverty reduction programs implemented in their communities.

### **5.5.3 Recommendations to Blantyre City Council**

To address the gap between Blantyre City Council and the traditional leaders, where they do not work directly on development issues because the first contact for the council is elected officials, the study recommends that the council should advocate for recognizing traditional leaders within local government structures because their involvement would be essential for effective development. The study also recommends that the council should enhance collaboration among the council, local government, traditional leaders, and elected councilors to ensure that marginalized populations are represented in community poverty reduction programs. The council should promote collaboration with Blantyre District Council to engage directly with traditional leaders in community development efforts. Although Chigumula falls under Blantyre City Council's jurisdiction, many villages within it mostly exhibit rural characteristics, which require the District Council's involvement to tackle development challenges. This partnership would ensure that rural

villages within the city receive development solutions suited to rural needs and that their progress is not hindered by being under the city's jurisdiction.

The study also recommends that Blantyre City Council should collaborate with CSOs to advocate for platforms that provide dialogues between the government, traditional leaders, and communities; advocate for formal inclusion of traditional leaders in government systems where they are recognized as important actors for social development; and advocate for raising awareness and educating people on their constitutional right to participate in development plans and how participation helps people to represent their needs in policymaking. This will give everyone a chance to be in touch with the realities of the people.

### **5.6 Suggestions for Further Research**

For further research, the study recommends conducting another study comparing the participation of traditional leaders in different areas of Malawi to assess whether similar patterns exist. Additional research could also explore the political dynamics between traditional leadership and elected officials in policy processes or evaluate the long-term effects of community-led initiatives on poverty reduction outcomes.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Data Collection Instrument

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE

TOPIC: Participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	GUIDING QUESTIONS
RQ1: What are the poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?	RQ1.1: Can you describe the poverty reduction programs that have been implemented in Chigumula for the past three years?
RQ2: To what extent do traditional leaders participate in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?	RQ2.1: How do you get involved/what role do you play in the planning and formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula?  RQ2.2: Can you share experiences and cases where you influenced the designing of specific poverty reduction programs in Chigumula? How did you feel about your extent of participation?  RQ2.3: In your opinion, do you think that the government is involving you

	adequately in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula?
<p>RQ3: What are the factors influencing the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?</p>	<p>RQ3.1: What enables your participation in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula?</p> <p>RQ3.2: What limits your participation in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula?</p>
<p>RQ4: What strategies are recommended to enhance the participation of traditional leaders in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi?</p>	<p>RQ4.1: What could be done to ensure your participation in the formulation of poverty reduction programs in Chigumula?</p> <p>RQ4.2: What could the government of Malawi do to ensure that your voices are heard during the formulation of poverty reduction programs?</p>

## **Appendix 2: Consent Form**

### INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Olivia Kamphale, and I am a final-year Public Policy and Governance student at Africa University. I am conducting a study on the participation of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi. I kindly ask you to participate in this study by answering interview questions.

The purpose of this study is to examine how traditional leaders participate in developing poverty reduction programs in Chigumula, Malawi. You have been chosen because you are among the traditional leaders in Chigumula. Other traditional leaders in this community will also take part. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer interview questions from the researcher. This will likely take about 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be recorded to assist with analysis. The information gathered will only be used for academic research. There are no expected risks or discomforts from participating. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, please feel free to inform the researcher.

This study's findings will offer insights into the participation of traditional leaders in developing poverty reduction programs, the factors affecting their involvement, and provide recommendations or insights on how to enhance their participation. The results will also guide policymakers and development practitioners in creating inclusive poverty reduction initiatives that involve everyone at the grassroots level. Additionally, the study will assist the government of Malawi in designing more effective programs that integrate traditional leaders and clearly define their roles to ensure meaningful impact. It will also help traditional leaders identify areas where they need training or support to participate more effectively in poverty reduction efforts. This, in turn, can empower traditional leaders to become stronger advocates for their communities. The communities represented by traditional leaders will benefit from the study's results as well, as the findings could reveal how well traditional leaders represent the needs of the people they serve in poverty reduction programs.

Any information obtained during the study that could reveal your identity will not be shared without your permission. Names and other identifiers will not be requested during the interview. The researcher will assign numbers to identify participants; for example, the first participant will be referred to as P1TL, the second as P2TL, and so on. Participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect our future relationship. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw your consent and stop at any time without penalty. Before signing this form, feel free to ask any questions about any part of this study that is unclear. You may take as much time as needed to consider your decision. If you agree to participate, please sign below to indicate that you have read, understood, and agree to the information provided above.

-----  
Research Participant Identifier

-----  
Date

-----  
Signature of Research Participant or legally authorized representative

If you have any questions about this study or the consent form beyond what the researcher has answered, including questions about the research, your rights as a research participant, or if you feel you have been treated unfairly and want to speak with someone other than the researcher, please feel free to contact the Africa University Research Ethics Committee at telephone (020) 60075 or 60026, extension 1156, or email aurec@africau.edu.

Name of Researcher: **Olivia Kamphale**

## Appendix 3: AUREC Approval Letter



*"Investing in Africa's future"*

AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (AUREC)

*P.O. Box 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe, Off Nyanga Road, Old Mutare-Tel (+263-20) 60075/60026/61611 Fax: (+263 20) 61785 Website: www.africau.edu*

Ref: AU3410/24

30 July, 2025

**OLIVIA KAMPHALE**

C/O Africa University

Box 1320

**MUTARE**

**RE: PARTICIPATION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN THE FORMULATION OF POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMMES IN CHIGUMULA, MALAWI**

Thank you for submitting the above-titled proposal to the Africa University Research Ethics Committee for review. Please be advised that AUREC has reviewed and approved your application to conduct the above research.

The approval is based on the following.

a) Research proposal

- **APPROVAL NUMBER** AUREC 3410/25  
This number should be used on all correspondence, consent forms, and appropriate documents
- **AUREC MEETING DATE** NA
- **APPROVAL DATE** July 30, 2025
- **EXPIRATION DATE** July 30, 2026
- **TYPE OF MEETING:** Expedited  
After the expiration date, this research may only continue upon renewal. A progress report on a standard AUREC form should be submitted a month before the expiration date for renewal purposes.
- **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS** All serious problems concerning subject safety must be reported to AUREC within 3 working days on the standard AUREC form.
- **MODIFICATIONS** Prior AUREC approval is required before implementing any changes in the proposal (including changes in the consent documents)
- **TERMINATION OF STUDY** Upon termination of the study a report has to be submitted to AUREC.



Yours Faithfully

MARY CHINZOU

FOR CHAIRPERSON

**AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

## Appendix 4: Blantyre City Council Approval Letter

