



Malawi girl  
tunes radio.  
Photo: Stella Mhura

# Chapter Three Malawi

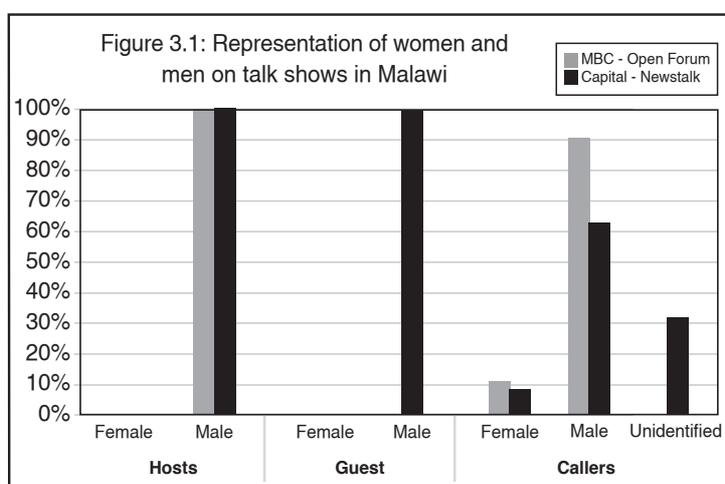
# 3

This section of the report is based on the Malawi findings of the *Mirror on the Media* radio talk show monitoring in four countries: Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa. The project monitored two radio stations in Malawi: the Malawi Broadcast Corporation's (MBC's) *Open Forum* and the privately owned Capital Radio's *Newstalk*. MBC 1 covers almost the entire nation whilst Capital Radio covers most towns in the country. Capital Radio frequently receives support from donors to air programmes on topical social and economic issues.

The monitoring included a quantitative and qualitative analysis of five shows for each station between June and July 2005; as well as an analysis of interviews with radio talk show hosts and listeners. The methodology and related tools are attached to this report at **Annex 1-3**.

### Key findings

**More so than in any other country in the study, Malawian women are grossly under-represented in all areas of talk shows:** More so than in any other country in the study men dominated in Malawi as hosts, guests and callers. As illustrated in figure 3.1, men constituted all of the hosts and guests, and women comprised only 8% of the callers (well below the average figure of 25% in the study.) MBC's *Open Forum* had slightly more female callers at 11% compared with 7% on Capital Radio's *Newstalk*.



**No gender issues discussed:** No gender-specific topics arose during the monitoring period. Gender issues were also not raised in the course of the mainstream current affairs, business and the economy sessions that dominated the discussions on both radio shows, with social issues a distant second.

**What listeners want to talk about:** All listeners, both men (55%) and women (35%) said they wanted to hear more about current affairs. But neither women nor men wanted to talk about business and the economy (which ironically dominated the shows). Women (45%) and men (25%) would like to talk more about entertainment. Women (10%) want to talk about social issues; gender and women's empowerment while 20% men want to talk about sport.

**Stereotypes go unchallenged:** The monitoring yielded examples of callers making inappropriate comments about women without being challenged by their hosts. Several comments reinforced the stereotype that males have the final word on hard issues such as politics, legal issues and the economy and that women only talk on soft issues such as textiles and home-making.

**Hosts not likely to raise gender debates within mainstream discussions:** The hosts of the talk shows did little to encourage debate on the gender dimensions of topics discussed such as the different ways in which fuel price increase and minimum qualifications for members of parliament affect women and men. They also did not make any special effort to encourage women to call in to their talk shows which are dominated by men.

***Audiences don't think it makes much difference who calls in:*** A large percentage of all listeners interviewed believe that it makes no difference to talk shows whether women or men call in. Compared to other countries in the study, there appeared overall to be a lower degree of gender and media literacy in Malawi.

## Background and context

### Media in Malawi

The Malawian media has experienced tremendous growth, accompanied by a number of ups and downs, since the return to multi-party democracy in 1994.

There are two principal dailies, five regular weeklies, and a few magazines. The biggest growth has been in the electronic media sector. Today there is one national television station (TV Malawi or TVM) and one satellite relay-TV operated by the South African giant Multi-Choice. The MBC has two channels (Radios 1 and 2) and there are four private commercial radios; Capital Radio, Power 101, Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ) FM, and Joy Radio. There are about six operational community radios: Radio Maria, Radio Alinafe, Radio Islam, Nkhota-Kota Community Radio, Dzimwe Radio, and African Bible College Radio.

MBC, MIJ, Capital and Power 101 broadcast nationwide. Although some are not heard in rural areas, they are available in most towns, notably in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mangochi, Zomba and Mzuzu.

### Gender and Media in Malawi

In 2002 Gender Links (GL) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) jointly conducted a study of the portrayal of women in the media in Southern Africa entitled the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS). The findings indicated that women rarely featured as sources in the news and as news makers. At 12 %, Malawi had the lowest proportion of women news sources, compared to the regional average of 17%.

The sequel Gender and Media Audience study (GMAS) found that more women (8%) than men (3%) cited news that asks for feedback like letters to the editor and talk shows amongst their favourite genre. This shows that Malawian women are interested in engaging with the media, even though - as this study shows - this is still far from being a reality.

The GMAS found that of all the countries in the study, radio in Malawi is still by far the most important source of news for both women (94%) and men (98%). This gives some indication of the potential role that radio talk shows can play in mobilising citizen participation.

### Key events during the monitoring period

The debate on the annual budget in parliament dominated the news agenda.

### Media monitored

The project monitored talk shows on two of Malawi’s popular radio stations: the privately-owned Capital Radio and the oldest public radio station, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC 1). Talk shows are a common feature on most of the radio stations. The monitors chose *Open Forum* on MBC because it is the public broadcaster. Capital Radio’s *Newstalk* has been around for a longer time than the talk shows on most radio stations.

Both *Newstalk* and *Open Forum* are current affairs and socially oriented shows. They tackle a wide range of issues from politics, business and economics to health, education and violence against women.

Date / Day	Time	Topic
16 June 2005 (Thursday)	17:05-18:05	Budget analysis
21 June 2005 (Tuesday)	17:05-18:05	Parliamentary debate quality
24 June 2005 (Friday)	17:05-18:05	What MPS must do when parliament sits next
27 June 2005 (Monday)	17:05-18:05	If budget is not passed
29 June 2005 (Wednesday)	17:05-18:05	Education views on proposed budget

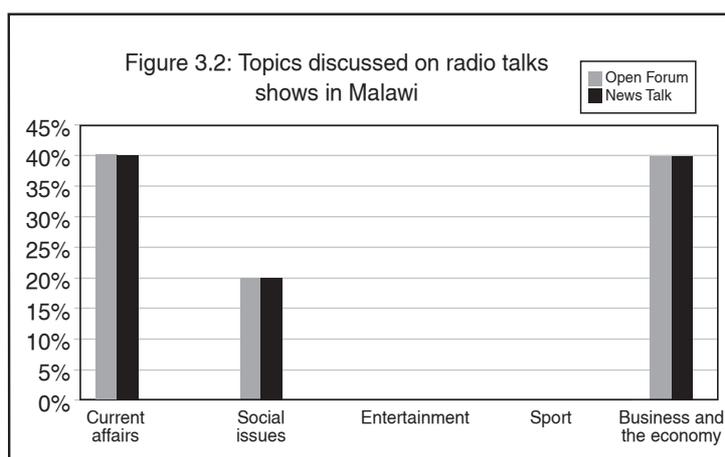
Date	Day	Topic
3 June 2005	Friday	Fuel price increase
6 June 2005	Monday	Suspension of loan fund
17 June 2005	Friday	Day of the African Child
24 June 2005	Friday	Parliament suspended
4 July 2005	Monday	Minimum qualifications for MPs

### Findings

#### Topics

As the monitoring took place during the month of June when parliament in Malawi meets to debate the following year’s budget, politics, business and the economy dominated discussions on both radio shows, as illustrated in figure 3.2.

None of the topics in the shows monitored focused specifically on gender issues. The qualitative analysis shows that hosts did not draw out the gender dimensions of the mainstream issues discussed, such as fuel price rises. The debate on the minimum qualifications for members of parliament, which leant itself to a discussion on how this might affect the already low representation of women, also failed to raise debate on the gender dimensions of such standard-setting for women’s increased participation in decision-making.



### Who chooses the topics?

In an interview, the Chief Reporter at Capital Radio indicated that the topics are proposed by anybody in the newsroom, particularly the duty host, and later discussed with the Station Manager. The topics are usually chosen from news headlines.

At MBC topics are suggested to anchors by the station's news and current affairs department. Selection of topics and invitation of guests are approved by more senior officials. This suggests that any interventions to ensure greater gender balance need to be directed to these decision-makers as well.

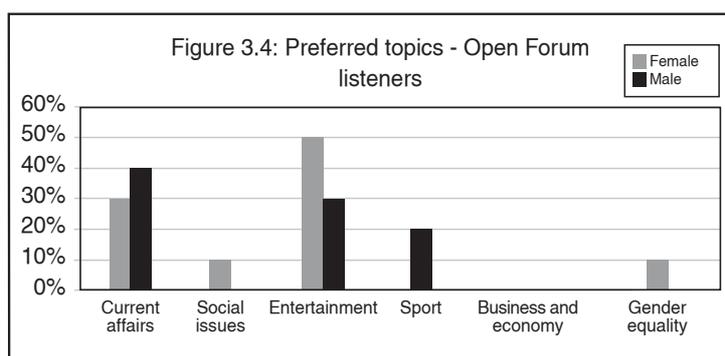
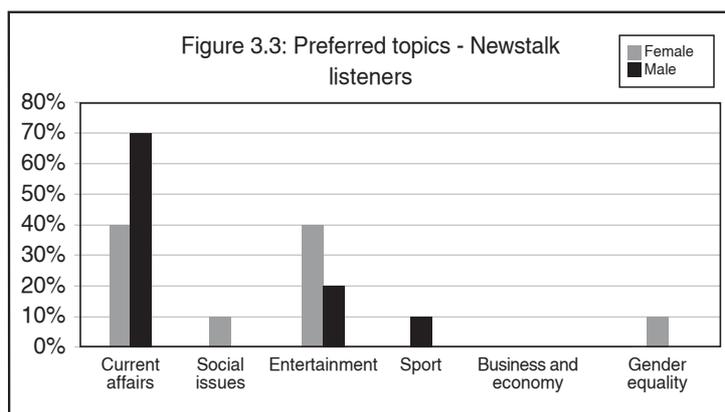
### What listeners want to talk about

The survey of listeners showed that there is a gap between the prevailing topics and what listeners actually want to talk and hear about. Whilst a large number, but more men (55%) than women (35%) want to talk about current affairs, neither women nor men wanted to talk about business and the economy; the predominant topic in the talk shows monitored.

Both men (25%) and especially women (45%) who listen to both shows want to talk more about entertainment. 10% women (but none of the men) want to hear more about gender equality, women's empowerment and social issues. 20% of the men interviewed want to talk about sport compared to no women.

These findings for Malawi vary slightly from those in the GMAS which showed that women are most interested in political stories, social issues including health, HIV/AIDS and education whilst men were most interested in sports and political stories.

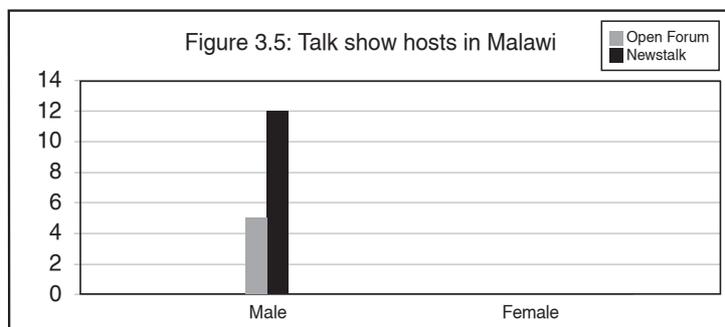
Some of the MBC listeners interviewed felt that topics are imposed on the people and they suggested that the hosts give the listeners an opportunity to suggest topics for discussion. The hosts indicated that they could take on the idea of listeners suggesting some of the topics since the objective of the programme is to promote democracy and good governance.



## Hosts

During the monitoring period one man hosted all the talk shows at *Newstalk*. Different men co-hosted the *Open Forum* programmes. Thus no women hosted any shows in Malawi during the period and on the programmes reviewed.

The qualitative analysis by the monitors revealed that the hosts, on the whole, were good facilitators and that they were fair, giving all callers an equal opportunity to participate.



In the audience research, none of the *Open Forum* listeners felt that the host discouraged callers from speaking their minds. The majority of women (60%) and men (70%) felt that the host encourages callers to speak their mind. 11% of the women listeners of *Newstalk* and 20% of the men said that they believed the host discourages callers from speaking their mind. The majority, 44% women and 30% men believed that the host makes no difference to what people say.

However, the monitors observed that the hosts of MBC's *Open Forum* appeared to stifle the debate when they interrupted callers criticizing the government in the show on the fuel hike claiming that this would contribute to increasing poverty. The hosts also did not examine or encourage callers to examine the gender dimensions of their topics.

## Guests

MBC Radio's *Open Forum* had no guests during the period of monitoring. Capital Radio's *Newstalk* invited four guests, all male. The Chief Reporter at Capital Radio explained that the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) sponsored the budget session and chose "experts" to come as guests. He explained that in the case of sponsored talk shows the Radio Station has no choice but to take guests from the sponsoring organisations, which are themselves male-dominated at top management level.

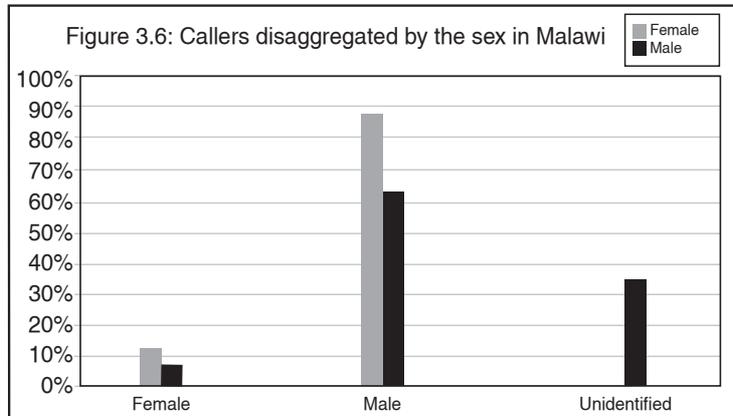
The Chief Reporter explained that the nature of the topic dictates who contributes. For example, he said, men dominate when politics, legal issues and the economy are debated but women comment a lot on such topics as textiles and home-making. He added that often when women are asked to participate they refuse to do so.

## Callers

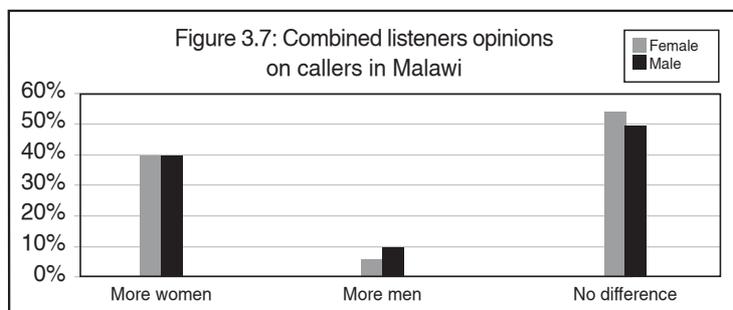
Women made up a mere 8% of callers to both talk shows; the lowest such figure in the study. This figure is even lower than the GMBS figure of women constituting only 12% of news sources in Malawi.

Of the total of 81 callers to the MBC, 72 (89%) were male while 9 (11%) were female. 217 listeners responded to *Open Forum* on Capital radio either by calling or sending SMS's, 134 (62%) were male, 15 (7%) female and 68 (31%) unidentified. Those categorised as unidentified participated in the show by giving answers or comments through their mobile phones.

SMS opens interesting possibilities for citizens to participate at affordable prices. Unfortunately it is not possible to get gender disaggregated statistics for this medium of response.

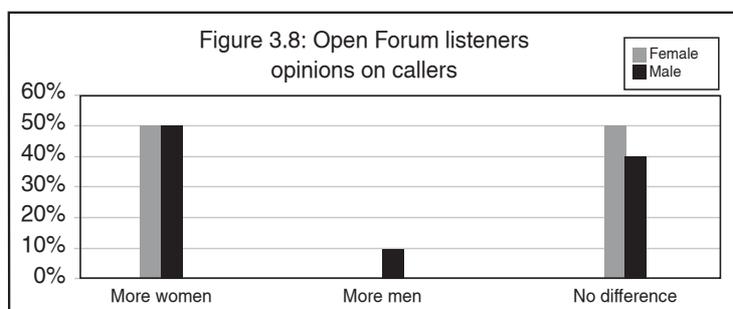


In the case of both stations, male and female audiences perceived that more men than women call into radio talk stations. Listeners of the two talk shows were asked the question - *Would talk shows be more interesting if more women called in, more men called in or it makes no difference?*

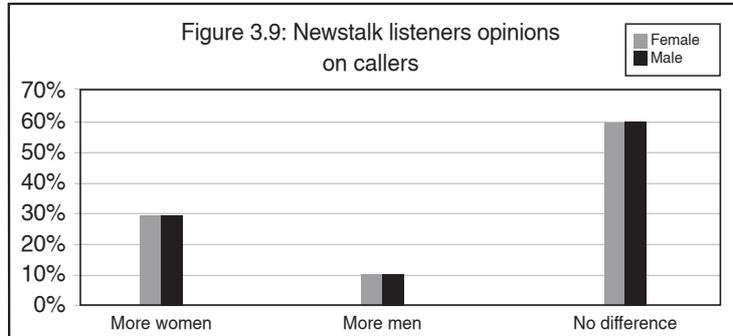


Malawi is the only country in the study in which more women (55%) than men (50%) believe that it makes no difference to talk shows whether women or men call in. Equal numbers of women (40%) and men (40%) believe that talk shows would be more interesting if more women called in.

Half of all *Open Forum* listeners, male and female believe that talk shows would be more interesting if more women called in. 10% of the men think that more men should call. 50% of the women interviewed and 40% of men think that it makes no difference who calls.



The majority (60%) women and men listeners of *Newstalk* said it makes no difference to radio talk shows whether it's women or men calling in. 30% think that more women callers would make the shows more interesting and 10% believe that more men callers would make the shows more interesting.



These findings are in sharp contrast to the GMAS where a high proportion of women (65%) and men (69%) said that they would find the news more interesting if the ideas and views of women were reported more often. Only a small percentage of women (9%) and men (8%) said that the news would be “no different” if the ideas and views of women were reported more often.

### **What was said on the programmes**

In general the hosts handled the shows professionally explaining the gist of the show and how they expected their callers to contribute. However, the monitoring yielded several examples of hosts failing to stimulate interesting and topical gender debates or challenging gender stereotypes.

In a discussion on the *Day of the African Child* on the plight of orphans and vulnerable children a male caller accused women of being “generally cruel” and abusing orphans and vulnerable children, with no evidence to back this assertion. The host did not challenge the caller’s view or pen it to debate.

In another discussion on MBC Radio regarding parliament being suspended due to the collapse of the Speaker a woman caller appealed to the MP’s to calm down and “not behave like emotional women”. None of the three male hosts challenged this stereotype or encouraged further debate on the issue.