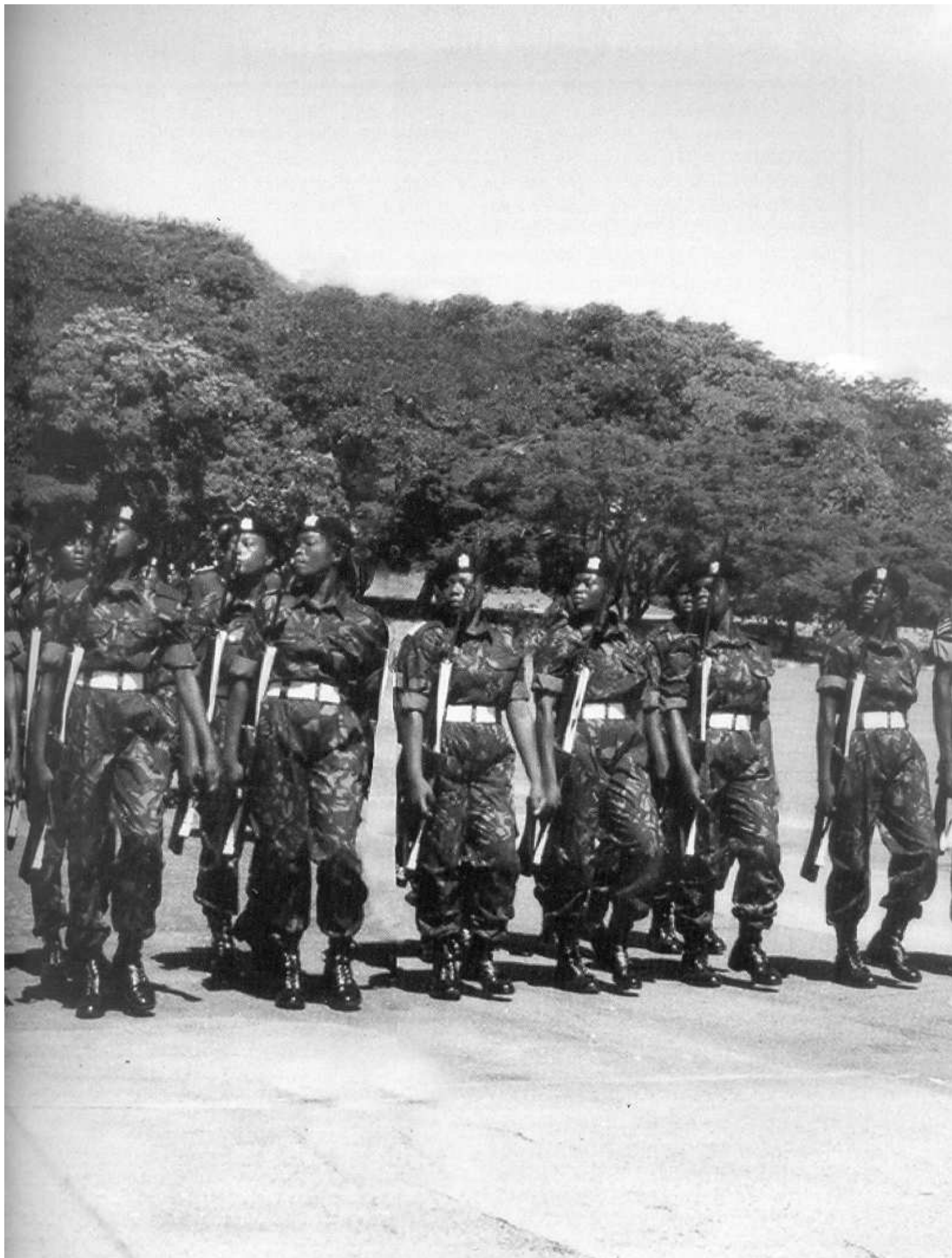




**Advancing
Gender Equality
and the Vulnerable**



10. Advancing Gender Equality and the Vulnerable

OUR AIM

GENDER

Women are majority breadwinners of the family and they work very hard. Rural women spend their day fetching water and firewood, cooking and washing, preparing gardens and nursing children and the sick. The UDF realizes that due to gender socialization and discrimination many women are left out of the development process and end up illiterate, underemployed and exploited. The UDF government will put extra resources for the empowerment of women. UDF will implement programs to ensure that every underprivileged woman is able to support herself and her family.

The UDF government will protect all women from gender-based violence and discrimination by enforcing and refining the existing legal frameworks. The UDF will ensure that women participate fully in gainful employment, politics, and decision-making.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Over 1 million people in Malawi are disabled and this is far too big a number to ignore. Disabled people have special needs which should be provided if they are to participate effectively in mainstream development. The UDF government will therefore put measures in all institutions to ensure that the disabled are treated fairly. The UDF will implement affirmative action to enable disabled individuals enter the job market and positions of responsibility.

ORPHANS AND THE ELDERLY

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has created over 1 million orphans in Malawi. As productive members of the family die from Aids, the responsibility of raising the orphans is transferred to the elderly, most of whom do not have adequate resources to cope with the extra burden. The UDF government will implement programs to strengthen extended families and encourage the adoption of orphans. The government will provide educational bursaries to orphaned children and construct decent housing for the elderly.

GENDER

WHAT WE PLEDGED

Removing persistent gender disparities has always been at the center of the UDF'S manifesto. Recognising that women are socially and economically disadvantaged the UDF government for the past 10 years has struggled to attain gender equity by ensuring equal participation of men and women in all aspects of development.

The UDF government promised to incorporate gender in the legal and policy frameworks and to increase female enrollments in education.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

- The UDF government has developed a National Gender Policy which is guiding the inclusion of women in all aspects of social, economic, and political development.
- Women have been accepted in the military service and are pursuing careers in non traditional fields including the police, civil aviation, fire fighting, quantity surveying and the clergy.
- The status of women in decision making has improved. Compared to 10 years ago when women did not perform leadership roles, the nation has elevated women to positions of



chief executives, high court judges, ambassadors, principal secretaries, cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, and deputy mayors.

- Women at the grassroots level are being given the means to economically empower themselves through small scale businesses and increased access to special credit schemes such as NABW.
- Rural Women have more access to agricultural inputs through the Starter Pack Program. The UDF women task force has established modalities to ensure that women have fair representation in farmers clubs and have access to extension services, agricultural training, and credit.
- To reduce the heavy burden of domestic and farm activities, the UDF government has focused on providing labour saving devices and appropriate technologies to rural women such as water pumps, grinding mills, maize and groundnuts shellers, and cooking stoves.
- The curricula at all levels of education has been made gender sensitive and issues of gender are mainstreamed throughout all educational activities.
- The representation of women in the media has improved in terms of portrayal and number of female journalists.
- Women groups and associations have emerged, offering a support system for aspiring women and young women leaders.

THE CHALLENGES

- Despite the fact that women account for 51% of Malawi's population, female access to educational opportunities is still limited. There

is a high drop out rate among girls at the lower primary level. As a result, not many girls enter secondary school. Those who access secondary schools often do not perform well enough in national examinations and are not selected to enter colleges and universities. Women form only 25% of enrolment in all higher education institutions. This situation impacts women's participation in mainstream development.

- 91.5 percent of all management positions are occupied by men. There are only 17 female members of Parliament compared to 183 men and 4 female cabinet ministers compared to 42 men. As such, most decisions are male biased and perpetuate gender disparities.
- Social cultural constraints continue to retard the gains made by the UDF government in closing gender gaps. Women are still marginalized especially in work environments. They continue to experience discrimination in promotions and appointments to leadership positions.
- Gender based violence continues to persist, leading to physical and sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies and high HIV infection. In 1999, there were 8,000 reported cases of violence against women.
- Women continue to bear the heavy burden of domestic work and agricultural production with limited means to do so.

OUR COMMITMENT

The UDF government is committed to providing equality of opportunity between men and women of all ages. The government will strive to transform the Malawian society in a way that women

men. Above all the government will give recognition to women's rights, responsibilities, and roles.

The UDF government will create an enabling environment where men and women are equally empowered to participate effectively in the development of the nation and in their own personal enhancement.

OUR PLEDGES

The next UDF government will:

General

- Continue to strengthen capacity for the implementation of the National Gender Policy.
- Establish gender focal points in all stakeholder institutions and develop tools for gender monitoring and evaluation.
- Enhance gender responsive planning and implementation by providing training in gender analysis and establishing gender documentation centers.
- Develop a policy on engendering sectoral budgets and creating gender responsive plans and budgets.
- Enforce laws and legislation to remove gender based discrimination and control domestic violence and property grabbing.
- Improve women's access to education and training to ensure their full participation in decision making and leadership.
- Introduce gender based affirmative action in the appointment of individuals to public, political, and leadership positions.
- Strive to attain the SADC requirement of 30% women in Parliament.

Education

- Increase incentives to keep girls in school by expanding the school feeding program.
- Encourage role modelling programs in which women who have succeeded at breaking gender barriers should play a role in encouraging young women and girls to attain education.
- Provide scholarships, bursaries and grants to female students.
- Construct more secondary and tertiary institutions specifically for girls and women.

Agriculture

- Continue to increase access by women to agricultural credit, extension services and training in production.
- Ensure that women are provided with the necessary agricultural inputs for increased production.
- Continue to provide labor saving devices and appropriate technology to rural women.

Industry and Trade

- Continue to provide opportunities for women to access small loans for starting small-scale business.
- Provide an enabling environment for women to trade locally and internationally.
- Ensure that women are able to secure big loans from banking institutions for the establishment of viable enterprises.
- Build the capacity of women to prepare business plans, package, and market their products.



Employment

- Enforce gender policies in employment to ensure that women are not discriminated against during recruitment and promotions, and to curtail sexual harassment.
- Introduce an affirmative action policy which will guarantee that women are represented in all sectors of the economy.
- Create conducive work environments that enables women to balance their dual roles as employees and care givers without being compromised.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, ORPHANS, AND THE AGED

WHAT WE PLEDGED

The UDF pledged to ensure that vulnerable groups in our society, including the disabled, orphans and the aged, are not discriminated but given the opportunity to be productive and self-reliant citizens. The UDF promised to increase access to health services, encourage their participation in decision making, and contribute towards their basic needs.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the past 10 years, the UDF has notably improved the lives of disadvantaged people in the following ways:

- Developed a national policy on people with disabilities.
- Promoted the social integration of people with disabilities at all levels of society.
- Recently allocated K2.5 million to assist disabled individuals engage in income generating activities.

- Assisted many disabled and orphaned children with school fees, wheel chairs, crutches, and other needs.
- Assisted with job placement of some disabled individuals.
- Introduced support to extended families that are taking care of orphans.
- Provided food, clothing and housing to orphans and the elderly.

CHALLENGES

Lack of appreciation for diversity often results in biased attitudes towards people who are different. The UDF government faces the daunting task of changing people's attitudes towards people with disabilities who are viewed as a burden to society by some people. Some elderly people are abandoned or sometimes left alone to take care of orphans without support.

OUR PLEDGES

The next UDF government promises the following:

- Successfully implement the national policy on people with disabilities.
- Elevate more qualified people with disabilities to positions of responsibility to serve as role models.
- Ensure that public facilities and academic institutions cater for the needs of the disabled.
- Provide more education bursaries to disabled children so that they can eventually become independent members of society.
- Support the elderly by building decent houses and providing them with basic social amenities.
- Encourage the adoption of orphans by well to do families.