



ANNUAL REPORT

2025



2025

YEAR IN NUMBERS



4,121

Total Direct Beneficiaries

15

Partnerships Established with
2 Formal MoUs Signed

2,859+

EmpowerLine Platform Users

11

Electoral
Interventions

14

Mobile Court
Judgements

30

Community Liaisons Trained

800,000+

Radio Listeners

Executive Summary

In 2025, our eighth year of operation, the Gender and Justice Unit (GJU) moved from being a growing participant to becoming a leading feminist force in Malawi. This was a year of major recognition and institutional growth. Chisankho Watch, the citizen-led election monitoring consortium of which GJU was part, received the 2025 Madeleine K. Albright Democracy Award in recognition of its citizen-led monitoring, civic education, and Process and Results Verification for Transparency (PRVT) methodology in safeguarding the integrity of Malawi's 2025 elections.

At the same time, GJU's Executive Director, Sarai Chisala-Tempelhoff, was recognised by the Segal Family Foundation as an African Visionary Fellow, affirming her leadership in advancing gender equality and justice through legal empowerment in Malawi. In March 2025, she represented GJU at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women in New York, bringing Malawian feminist perspectives into global conversations on gender justice and the Beijing+30 review process.

In the same year, GJU launched its 2024-2028 Strategic Plan alongside EmpowerLine, the first platform of its kind in Malawi, marking a significant step in both organisational growth and digital access to justice. Through EmpowerLine, we leveraged digital tools to strengthen access to justice for survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), expanding access to legal information, reporting pathways, and survivor-centred support.



What changed for Women?

- **Justice was localised:** Mobile courts brought formal adjudication closer to communities, delivering 14 judgements in places where legal systems had once felt impossibly distant.
- **Barriers were dismantled:** GJU halved travel times for GBV reporting in remote areas by equipping 30 community liaisons with bicycles.
- **Safety was digitised:** More than 2,859 users accessed legal information and reporting tools through the EmpowerLine IVR and the EmpowerLine Malawi mobile application. EmpowerLine also contributed to the first use of IVR technology in electoral monitoring in Malawi.

From the courtrooms of Dedza to the digital spaces of Chisankho Watch election monitoring, GJU helped ensure that, for thousands of women, justice was no longer a distant idea but a lived, increasingly accessible reality.



Introduction

In 2025, GJU experienced significant growth and global recognition, marked by the Madeleine K. Albright Democracy Award and participation in international forums like the Commission on the Status of Women.

Their success stemmed from survivor-centered, digitally enabled justice models, such as the EmpowerLine for reporting abuse anonymously. GJU aligned with Malawi's National Action Plan to Combat GBV and the Sustainable Development Goals, enhancing its institutional impact through strategic partnerships.

Supported by international donors, GJU continued to be a leading feminist force in Malawi, achieving national systemic change and promoting democratic practices.



Chisankho Watch's receipt of the 2025 Madeleine K. Albright Democracy Award placed Malawi's citizen-led democratic innovation on the global stage, while Sarai Chisala-Tempelhoff's recognition as an African Visionary Fellow highlighted the strength of the feminist leadership driving GJU's mission.

Impact



Legal Empowerment and Advocacy

GJU empowered communities in Dedza and Lilongwe by deploying female liaisons, strengthening GBV referral pathways, and promoting women's rights with initiatives like legal clinics and the EmpowerLine, earning the 2025 Madeleine K. Albright Democracy Award.



Strategic Partnership and Advocacy

GJU overcame funding challenges by partnering with key stakeholders and media, enhancing survivor-focused approaches and reaching 800,000 listeners, while also integrating psychosocial support with legal services to ensure dignified care for survivors.



Community Engagement and Empowerment

In 2025, GJU's EmpowerSafe project transformed community engagement by providing legal services to women through clinics and mobile courts, reaching 4,121 people and surpassing targets by 77%.



Legal Research and Innovation

In 2025, GJU launched EmpowerLine, a groundbreaking GBV reporting and legal information platform available via app and toll-free IVR. Rooted in feminist values, it maintains anonymity and addresses barriers with audio content in four languages, benefiting over 2,859 users.



Organizational Capacity Strengthening

In 2025, GJU, with support from the Segal Family Foundation and Trócaire, launched its 2024–2028 Strategic Plan and the EmpowerLine IVR system, boosting its national visibility and government interest.



Cross-Cutting Programming

In 2025, GJU, led by Judge Charlotte Malonda, evaluated the Community-Led Access to Justice Model in Dedza, finding it reduced barriers and increased legal literacy for GBV cases, serving 256 survivors and engaging 30 liaisons.



Challenges

Compressed Implementation Timelines

Late fund disbursement for projects led to pressure on delivery schedules.

Mitigation: GJU coordinated intensively with stakeholders to ensure timely delivery.

Resource Constraints

A tough funding environment in 2025 limited support for women's rights organizations, affecting staffing and program continuity.

Mitigation: GJU enhanced partnerships and collaboration to extend reach despite limited resources.

Cultural and Social Barriers:

Beliefs about marital rape and child marriage hindered access to justice services.

Mitigation: GJU utilized legal clinics, community engagement, and tools like EmpowerLine to promote awareness and support for survivors

Court Process Challenges:

- Absenteeism delayed case resolution.
- Heavy magistrate caseload limited court sessions.

Mitigation: GJU re-served summons and advocated for more judicial resources.

Limited Geographic Coverage vs. High Demand

Legal service demand exceeded project coverage, especially in underserved areas.

Mitigation: GJU used community liaisons, radio, mobile courts, and EmpowerLine to expand outreach and identify areas for growth.

Digital Access and Literacy Gaps

Barriers included low smartphone ownership, limited digital literacy, and unreliable connectivity.

Mitigation: GJU added a toll-free IVR system, multilingual content, radio outreach, and in-person demos to enhance accessibility.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



Practical, interactive training methods proved more effective than traditional theoretical instruction,



Mobile courts play a crucial role in building trust in the justice system, particularly in rural communities.



Community structures are essential for sustainability.



Integrated approaches create clear pathways to justice.



Digital tools help bridge distance and extend access.



Emerging GBV trends require closer attention, and targeted programming.



Legal awareness initiatives empowered women and GBV survivors.

Recommendations



- **Strengthen community structures:** Deepen investment in community-based organisations, mother groups, Community Victim Support Units, and traditional authorities as anchors of sustained GBV prevention and response. This should include follow-up mentorship, simplified Chichewa visual aids, and practical tools to help community actors retain and apply legal knowledge over time.
- **Expand the frequency of legal clinics:** Communities expressed strong demand for more regular legal clinics, recognising that complex legal information requires repetition, reinforcement, and follow-up. Quarterly clinics would deepen legal literacy, strengthen confidence in using justice pathways, and support the practical application of knowledge by survivors and community members alike.
- **Scale technology-enabled solutions:** Expand the promotion and use of EmpowerLine, as it effectively bridges the gap between one-off interventions and continuous support. By providing accessible legal information and referral pathways without requiring physical travel, the platform extends survivor support beyond face-to-face engagements and increases reach into underserved communities.
- **Advocate for permanent justice infrastructure:** Intensify advocacy for the reopening of Maonde Court while continuing mobile courts as an interim access-to-justice solution. Evidence from the mobile court model should be systematically documented and used to support resource allocation, judicial deployment, and long-term investment in decentralised justice delivery.

2026: Forward Look

In the coming year, GJU will focus on deepening reach, strengthening systems, and sustaining the momentum built in 2025. Priorities for 2026 include:

- Expanding EmpowerLine into additional vernacular languages so that no woman is excluded from legal information and support because of literacy or language barriers.
- Scaling geographic reach in Dedza by moving beyond the current 2 Village Development Committees and progressively extending services across the district.
- Replicating the Dedza model in additional districts through multi-year support from the IMS Foundation, enabling GJU to scale its community-led access to justice approach across a total of 11 districts.
- Institutionalising justice delivery through intensified advocacy for the reopening of Maonde Court as a permanent and accessible justice facility.

In 2026, GJU will build on the foundations laid in 2025 to ensure that access to justice becomes more local, more inclusive, and more sustainable for women and girls across Malawi.



Connect with Us!

GENERAL ENQUIRIES



0880 351 009



info@genderandjustice.org



Off Msokela Road, Area 47/3,
Plot 149, Private Bag B324,
Lilongwe.

EMPOWERLINE

Legal
empowerment
in your pocket!
Dial 4285 - Toll
free

GBV RESPONSE



0999 300 911 / 888 100 911



Response@genderandjustice.org
Legal@genderandjustice.org

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