

Women lawyers engage media in property rights

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Malawi chapter of the Women in Law Southern Africa (WLSA Malawi) last week trained journalists from different media disciplines to effectively document cases where women suffer injustices of unfair distribution of marital property due to the current legal framework.



Seodi White

The journalists were trained to be able to conduct case review compilation workshop with journalists where they will present cases, draft stories and peer review them.

"We have involved the media because they publicize and educate the public on critical issues on women's rights for example," explained Seodi White, WLSA Malawi National coordinator.

Educating the media

White said it is important to engage the media by educating them, and imparting critiquing skills on the subject matter of women property rights on them so that in turn they can write proper investigative stories.

"We hope such stories will inform both policy makers and the public about some of the injustices that women are facing with regards to women property right in marriage," she said.

She said that now that journalists have been trained WLSA expects them to go and compile cases where women have suffered unfairness with regards to distribution of marital property.

"These case studies will be presented at a case review compilation workshop with journalists where they will present cases, draft stories and peer review them," said White.

Journalists are expected such cases from Malawi's High Courts in Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzuzu that occurred between 2009 and 2012.

Women's marital property rights

The stories which the journalists would have developed will be published in a handbook entitled *Visibilising the Impact Of The Current Laws On Marital Property In Malawi*.

Some of the marital case stories White says will run in *The Nation* newspaper column called 'Women and Law' for three months.

During the training journalists learnt that WLSA Malawi has been engaged in a country wide discussion on women's marital property rights and the current construction of the law with regards to this subject matter.

White who took the leading role as the resource person during the training said this discussion has been done and continues to be done against the background that previously in 2009, WLSA Malawi launched a constitutional challenge in the Constitutional Court of Malawi.

"The case was heard in part on 25th November 2011. Ordinarily in terms of the rules of the Constitutional Court; the court should have given its judgment within 30 days," pointed out White. "It has been over one year since the argument before the court and despite various reminders through the office of the Registrar; the court is yet to make a ruling."

Women's rights in Malawi...

She said WLSA Malawi therefore decided to document live cases as well as specific court cases on the impact of the current marital law framework and to visibilise direct impact of the current state of the law on women rights in Malawi.

But in order to have maximum impact she said WLSA has decided to work with specific group of journalists who were trained on the current legal framework and how to identify live cases of women who faced discrimination and oppression and injustice through the current interpretation the marital law legal framework.

WLSA says it will also popularize some of these findings on national radio, television and the print media.

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