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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY - WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR MERCY KAZIMA – PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS EDUCATION – UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka. Welcome to 'Womanity– Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates women's milestone achievements in their struggle for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, and much more.
DR. MALKA	Joining us today is Professor Mercy Kazima who is a Professor of Mathematics Education at the University of Malawi, who has made a significant contribution to mathematics and science education in Malawi and across the region. She has led major international research projects, served as the President of the Southern Africa Association for Research and Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, and she is a passionate advocate for girls' participation in mathematics and science. Welcome to the show!
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Thank you. Thank you very much.**
DR. MALKA	Prof. Kazima, as I have come to realize, life is a series of chapters, and the version of the accomplished person you are today has been built upon various experiences that you've acquired throughout your journey. So, tracking back a few chapters, you were born in Lilongwe, you grew up as one of seven children, studied mathematics at the University of Malawi, and initially became a secondary school mathematics teacher. What was it about maths and teaching that captured your imagination, and when did you realize that these characteristics were going to become more than a profession for you?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**That is a good question. I have liked mathematics for as long as I can remember, but I can think of why I continued liking mathematics, not when I started, because I cannot remember when I started. I continued liking mathematics because of the logic it provides; I enjoy solving mathematical problems, and I enjoy finding logical ways of solving them in different ways, and throughout my school years I always liked mathematics. Then, when I finished my undergraduate studies, I became a mathematics teacher at a secondary school; that's when mathematics became more meaningful to me. Even though I enjoyed it, I started understanding that it is very, very rewarding to help others learn mathematics. So, when I was working with my students at the secondary schools, I had some who were finding difficulties and who would struggle, but then they would say, ah, now I understand, and they had that belief that when they discussed mathematics with me in class or even outside class, they would get it. That is when I really enjoyed mathematics beyond what I enjoyed already. I enjoyed helping others learn, and over the years, through mathematics education and the teaching of mathematics, it became more than a profession, as you rightly put it. I discovered that it was my way of contributing to people's success, my way of contributing to their confidence, to the opportunities that mathematics can give them, and hopefully I think I was also contributing to a pool of mathematics people in Malawi who can also contribute to the development of my country.**

DR. MALKA	It sounds incredibly rewarding, all of the elements that you've put into mathematics, educating children, and receiving their feedback in terms of their successes, and I often find on our programme that a teacher has been a source of inspiration for many women who have succeeded, and I also think that in mathematics, when you have a teacher who can explain something which feels complicated and simplify it, and you get it, it's such an enlightening moment.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, it is, and when you are teaching, you get used to your class; it's almost like they are your children. You get used to the class so much, and you can see some grow. You can see that some of them who were at first not really interested; if you motivate them, you can see the change in them, and the feeling of saying oh, now I get it, is always very rewarding for a teacher.**
DR. MALKA	So, lots of lightbulb moments. When you were growing up, I understand that there were people who discouraged you and they told you that mathematics and science are hard subjects, especially for girls, so girls were put into a little box, and later, when you wanted to pursue your mathematics honours degree, they said you've already achieved enough for a girl. So, looking back, how significant were those comments in shaping your determination to get to where you are today, and also, how do you think those attitudes, or rather what do you think those attitudes reveal about gender expectations that are placed on girls and women?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, throughout, even toward the end of primary, where there would be mostly boys who were successful in mathematics, people would wonder why I was doing that and much later, as you say, when I finished my bachelor's, that I wanted to go back to the university to specialize in mathematics, because in my bachelor's, at first I had mathematics as a major, but I had other subjects like physics as a minor, but the honours programme was going to allow me to specialize and just do mathematics. So, indeed, when I wanted to go back, it was after I had been a teacher, and at that time I had my job, I had a house, and it was like I had achieved what many people would want to achieve. So, the question people had was, why? You already have a good job, you already have this, and why do you want to go back? So, it was like, for a girl, this is enough; why do you want to go and continue? So, for me, those comments showed me how powerful social expectations can be, and I realized that barriers for girls can be those things, not their ability, and if girls start to believe that maybe indeed this is enough, they will not go beyond what they already have. So, for me, being told that this was enough for a girl made me realize that society can place ceilings on women's ambitions. The big question for me was why should we have the ceiling? And for the honours programme, for me it was a big achievement because they only allowed the top students to do the honours programme, and I had always been one of the top students, and I told myself, if anybody from our class has to go do that honours programme, why should it not be me? So, I decided not to allow people's expectations to become my own, and I decided to focus on what I wanted. I wanted to do the honours programme; therefore, I will go, and I will not worry about those comments. Of course, you cannot ignore them completely.**
DR. MALKA	Yes.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I just decided not to listen to them, and that experience taught me that I had to believe in my own potential before others can see it, because they**

	couldn't see my potential; they just thought, oh, maybe she will go and fail or something like that, and then that is when I thought, no, I should just do it, believe in my own potential, and not listen to that. So, that is when I went, and it was the best decision, because it made me see more mathematics, do more mathematics, and see much more of what I can do with mathematics beyond teaching.
DR. MALKA	Your life is a real lesson in perseverance, resilience, self-belief, and overcoming naysayers. You've highlighted a reality, and I think that often people have their own limitations, and they almost project those limitations onto other people. For girls and young women who may be experiencing a similar scenario, perhaps it's not maths; perhaps it's another ambition or a career that they're wanting to focus on, what advice would you give them to stay true to their dreams and keep believing, keep doing, and making it happen?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I would say to look into themselves first. What is it that they want to do, and not to listen to other people, because other people's limitations should not decide, should not make them believe in limitations, because for me, even when people were telling me that this would be too hard, it was probably hard for them and they just think it will be hard for every girl. So, the fact that something was difficult for one person doesn't mean that it will be difficult for them. So, I will tell the girls that if they have a vision, if they have a dream, they should define their own dream, not let others define them, and the limitations of others should not be projected onto them. So I will just say persevere. Perseverance is important, and they can listen to that advice, because sometimes people who tell you are people you respect, so you cannot just brush them off; you can listen to what they are saying, but reflect on it and say, these are their own fears, these are their limitations, they should define my limitations, and then go for their dreams. That is what I would advise them.**
DR. MALKA	Good words of advice. Staying with your career as you run up the ladder, in 2009, this was a very momentous occasion; you became the first woman dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malawi since the university was established in 1965. What was that moment like for you personally and professionally?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**That was a very significant moment and a very proud moment, and as you say, both personally and professionally. Personally, I felt a very big sense of achievement, a great sense of achievement, because I could look back to where I had come from, and I felt, really, I have achieved something, but professionally I understood that it was a big responsibility. I was getting into a position that was more than just for me. It's for the faculty, it's for the institution, and it had never been done by a woman before, and I was aware that people were watching, but for me, the most important people watching were the women and the girls. So, I wanted to do a good job so they could see that this position can also be occupied by a woman and she can also do a good job.**
DR. MALKA	And did you find in that experience that it opened the doors for more women?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I hope it did. By showing that a woman can do it and also a woman can do it well, but I will be a bit cautious, just to think that because a woman has a position, then automatically it helps all other women. I think it works both ways. The women that you support, the women in position, and the women in positions should also help all the other women, as well as the**

	men, of course, but also help to see what women go through to help also grow.
DR. MALKA	Strong words of leadership and wisdom coming through there.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, thank you.**
DR. MALKA	And I also think that it's like when you see someone who looks like you, when you see someone that represents you, that then you have this belief that I can do it too.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, exactly, because if we are taking this example of me as being the first female dean of education, as the first woman in the faculty of education, there were also many girls studying to become teachers, and throughout the years they had never seen a woman dean. So, I think it was also good for the women, the young women that were studying at the University of Malawi to see me there, and they could see possibilities for them as well, that they can occupy big positions; otherwise, some people might not even dream, because they think it's not possible for a woman.**
DR. MALKA	It goes right back to what we were talking about earlier, about those limitations that people expect for themselves.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes.**
DR. MALKA	Now, in your career, it hasn't only been focused on Malawi; you have studied at the University of Leeds, you have studied at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, and you've worked with researchers and women from different countries across the world. How did those international experiences change the way that you saw yourself as a woman, as an academic, and also as a Malawian?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, I worked with many institutions, both for studying at the University of Leeds; that is where I did both my master's and my doctorate. The University of the Witwatersrand is where I did my postdoc fellowship and my postdoc research, and for many years now, more than 10 years, I have been working with the University of Stavanger in Norway on research projects, and I have had other work with projects with other universities all over. My work with international colleagues has taught me a lot, and one of the things that was very good for me at the beginning was learning that my work in Malawi has meaning, because when I presented, when I worked with others, they could find my work interesting and they could use it, and that was also a big moment for me to know that it's relevant, my work is relevant, and working with others in other countries, we also see that the issues, although the contexts are different, most of the issues in education are the same. We find that they also have questions about gender in mathematics. They have questions about language, about how to prepare teachers, and also about inequality. So, that was also interesting for me, knowing that it doesn't matter what the context is; most of the educational issues are similar. When I focus on women, about my being a woman and how that shaped me, I have also felt a sense of knowing, a sense of relief to know that it's not just us in Malawi or the African women, it was all over, where women in different parts of the world sometimes had to prove themselves, had to prove their competence, they had to enter maybe a field or a space where there are very few women in there, but they had to prove their competence and their capabilities, and then I saw**

	that this is the same, and then you start thinking that oh, women are all the same everywhere. Some are more advanced in the way women are treated, but the issues were very similar, and I saw that women in different parts of the world usually face the same issues. What was also interesting for me was that I found that when you hear their stories, most of the women would also talk about learning from other women, and what we were talking about earlier, about seeing a woman in positions and knowing that I can do it too, is powerful. I saw that representation is powerful, because most of the women would talk about how they were encouraged by another woman or they saw other women and so on. So, this is something I thought these experiences kind of strengthened my belief, which I already had, that we should not just succeed as individuals when we are women; we should create opportunities for other women to succeed as well and encourage the girls to also succeed.
DR. MALKA	One of the interesting aspects I found about your research is that it goes way beyond theory. It really has practical interventions which include teaching mathematics in multilingual classrooms, strengthening numeracy in early school years, and improving the quality as well as the capacity of mathematics teacher education in Malawi. Tell us about how these projects have helped change mathematics outcomes in real classrooms.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Oh, I think these projects and the research that was done in these projects have given us a lot of knowledge on what it means to teach mathematics, and one important lesson I've learned from my work on trying to improve the teaching and learning of mathematics, and improving mathematics teacher education, is that we cannot try to improve teaching in schools by just targeting one classroom and one teacher. It is not simply about telling teachers to teach better. Teachers need to have strong mathematics content knowledge, and they also need to have knowledge and appropriate resources, and also one of the most important things, they should have opportunities to learn from one another. The people I have worked with in my projects, the teachers, they could be from one school, and within the project we could observe teaching and discuss and do some mathematics, and we found that sometimes it was the first time the teachers were learning from each other, but they had been teaching in the same school for years. So that is one of the things that we have learned: that it is not just talking about what is better teaching; it's what they do as they are teaching. Improving their own knowledge of the subject, learning from one another, and reflecting on their teaching and trying to grow together as a school, as a group of mathematics teachers in a school, but every time we worked with a school and even long after the project, we found that the schools usually continue to work together. It's just that sometimes they never think about it, or they just think that this is my class and this is my job, and they don't ask what you are doing in the other class. Except when schools actually have a way of bringing teachers together to learn together, but most schools did not. So, in our project working with the teachers, we found that they also enjoy learning from each other, something that they were not doing, and that may be a big difference in how they can improve their way of teaching.**
DR. MALKA	You've also written about equity and quality in mathematics education, including differences between female and male learners, and also between rural and urban schools. From what you've seen through your research, what would

	you say are perhaps some of the biggest inequalities that affect girls' access to quality education?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**For inequality, I think there are many layers. There is access to schools, and then there is access to resources, and as you've seen, between rural and urban areas in Malawi, I don't know about many other countries - it's about their differences, including the number of qualified teachers. You find that the rural areas are the ones that do not have as much as the urban areas, but there is also inequality in terms of what opportunities are offered to them. So, if they have qualified teachers and they have better resources, the opportunities for learning are better than when they don't. So, for girls, they have to have access to education first, but also, we should think about after they access education, what is happening? How are they learning, how are they participating, are they gaining their confidence, are they progressing, or do they have ambition to progress? All these will help them progress and go further than primary, go to secondary, and even go to university. So, if we talk about gender equality, we need to move beyond the access part, because sometimes you can encourage all the girls in the village to go to school, but if you think about what happens at the school, are they getting the opportunities to learn and the opportunities to succeed, and the opportunities to dream about what they should do with their education and continue their education.**
DR. MALKA	It's so multidimensional, because like you say, you can have access, but if you don't have qualified teachers, it doesn't really matter if you have access; you're just in a different environment, and you're not learning, but if you've got the right teachers …
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**You are not learning, yes.**
DR. MALKA	… you've got the opportunities to go beyond. What happens after an education? What can I do with this education, where is it going to take me? And I think another reality that we really have to talk about is that Malawi is a relatively poor country, and the girls often have to contend with family duties and family responsibilities that may take priority over getting an education.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, but there has been a lot of work around those areas, and we can see that access is not as big an issue as before, but what I worry about now is what I was just talking about: that when we encourage families to send their girls to school, then we can make the schools really conducive for learning, and then the girls will also see the use of going to school and what they can do, given the education that they are going to get. There have been many things happening in Malawi about encouraging girls to school, so I think in a way the access part has been achieved, but I worry about what happens when they go to school. How do we retain the girls in school? They can enrol, but we want them to stay in school.**
DR. MALKA	Life is full of challenges, but it keeps us on our toes, and it means we've always got something to do. Now, you've spent eight years coordinating the Malawi National Mathematics Olympiad, and in doing that, you've also become a role model for many girls. What does it mean to a girl to see a woman like you occupying a space in mathematics and academia?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I indeed was coordinating the Mathematics Olympiad for eight years. I enjoyed doing it a lot. It was for secondary schools, and for the finals they would come to the university, and these were in form three year; one year**

	to go before they finish their secondary. So, when they came to the rest of the finals, just coming to the university to do the final part of the Olympiad was a big event, much more than we realized at first, and most of them would always say, now I am coming to university, I am coming to university and they wanted to come to our campus where we had the Olympiad, and for me, being a woman and working with those young students, I enjoyed it very much, and I could see how the girls were also liking seeing me there. They could see that this is something that they can do, and although at that point they were already part of the good students that came to the finals of the competition, they could see that they could go beyond what they had done because of seeing us, and I should say that within our team, the rest of the team were men, and I was coordinating, so it was good for them to see a woman on the team, and I was also the coordinator. So, I really enjoyed those moments. I enjoyed my role as the coordinator of the Mathematics Olympiad because it encouraged me to interact with young people and demonstrate that mathematics is a space for everyone, not just for boys. Girls can have that space as well.
DR. MALKA	It must have been incredibly rewarding. I wanted to highlight some of your achievements, and I don't know if I have the full list. So, in your work, you've got through the Regional Mathematics Education Networks, your presidency of SAARMSTE, being the first national coordinator for the Female Education and Mathematics and Science in Africa (FEMSA), a project for Malawi which included several other African countries, being the coordinator of the Project Sustain for Malawi, whose objectives include teaching science for sustainable development, and also addressing gender issues in mathematics and science education, and as I said earlier, you were the first female dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malawi. So, a tremendous set of achievements, but as a woman progressing into senior academic leadership, what types of gender related obstacles have you encountered?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I think there have been similar ones where usually you have to demonstrate, work hard, and to show your competence. When you are in that position as a woman, people usually see the woman first, before they see your competence. So, we usually work harder to demonstrate competence and then gain the trust that they give you after they see that you are confident. They see that you are confident and you are competent and you can do the job. So, that was one of the main things I would say, that it wasn't usually accepted to say, oh, this one is going to be competent, you have to show that you know what you are doing, and I had to really prove myself. After some time, when they see what you can do, that's when the respect comes, but usually people see the woman first, and that's the sad part about it, and I think that was the big challenge. I could see that I always had to show my competence, that I can do this, and after that, that is when things run smoothly.**
DR. MALKA	It's so interesting how you've expressed that, that people see a woman first and not her qualifications, not her competence, not her confidence, and then you have to go through and prove competency and confidence, and then they accept you.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes.**

DR. MALKA	Prof Kazima, we're coming towards the end of the show, and one question I ask all my guests is about some of the factors they feel contributed to their success. So please could you share with us what has been your recipe?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I think for me it was that I will say several things, but what I would highlight is discipline in myself, and persistence, and I could say a strong sense of my purpose. So, like at the beginning, even when I was young and when I was coming from my honours, I had to be disciplined and know that this is what I want, and then I would focus on it and persist, because in mathematics and even in leadership, talent alone is not enough. We always have to keep going, even when you have distractions, and even when the motivation becomes low due to other things; you have to keep going, and discipline helps a lot. I also found that persistence and resilience are important, because it's part of life. You meet disappointments, you meet setbacks, and sometimes, as a woman, you meet resistance, and you have to be severe, be resilient, and continue, keep on working. As a leader, I have also tried to continue learning, wanting to learn from the people I am working with, listen to them, even the ones I disagree with, listen to what they are saying, and together work out what it is that we can do. I find that useful as part of leadership. I can say as a leader now, I will find that having this purpose known, or vision, or whatever we can call it, to say what I want to do for this institution or for this department, or whatever you are leading for this project, that vision, if it is clear and we make it known, people know what it is you are trying to do, and then you can work with them through that and listen to what people say, what they agree with, what they don't agree with, and work together. I find that useful as a leader.**
DR. MALKA	It's really important of having not just your own purpose but also the purpose of the institution, that everyone buys into the idea of where you're going.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes, they should buy into the idea of where you are going, and in our institution, there are also all these conditions, the policies, and there are things that are acceptable and things that are not acceptable, and as a leader, knowing all the policies helps. So, if you are in an institution like a university, and most places now have, for example they have a gender policy, you have to read all those things and know what it is the institution expects and then lead with integrity. You have to be the example for the other people, and if you are the leader and you don't understand the policies, you can end up doing something contrary to what the institution wants you to do, so it becomes difficult. So, you have to be on top of everything and know everything that you need to know. I think that is a challenge that is there, is that if you don't, people will just see the woman as failing. So, you have to be on top of everything, know all the relevant policies and live by them with integrity, and be the example. I found that very useful, and people respect you for that, because when they go off policy you can always point it out and they can't come back to you and say, but you did this, because you have always been leading by the policies.**
DR. MALKA	It's a strong formula you've got there and also having the boundaries of policy for governance if anything or anyone steps out of bounds.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Yes.**

DR. MALKA	And can you share with us a few pivotal moments in your life when you were growing up?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I think I would say it was through the education itself. I think when I went to secondary school. In primary school, we only had one teacher, so I was used to that. When I got to secondary school, we had different teachers, and I enjoyed all those different things, and I enjoyed mathematics, as I said before. Knowing that I could do this and that, and I could decide which university to go to, what to study, all those were important moments, but I think the pivotal ones were when I started teaching, and I knew that I could offer more than just mathematics to students. When I went back to the university, I did my honours, and then I started working as a mathematics researcher, learning about teaching mathematics was also pivotal for me, because I knew that I needed to do more than just teach mathematics - more than just teach students how to teach mathematics - but I had to know what it means to teach mathematics through my research, and I learned the most important thing about research. So, that's one of the things that I have found as pivotal for me. Also, when taking up leadership roles, I also found that you have to step up and do more for others. So, in my work, I try to work with others. You are a team so that we have more mathematics educators that we can work together, and they should also grow as much as I have grown. So, I don't know whether that is what you're asking, but that's what I see as important moments for me as a mathematics educator.**
DR. MALKA	And because we're a gender-based show, who have been some of the strong women in your life?
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**There have been many women who have been strong for me. I think professionally, like Professor Jill Adler, I was her postdoc fellow. She is a very strong woman, and I admired her a lot, and when I worked with her, I could see what a woman can do. Some of the women who have been very inspirational for me I have never even met; it is the work that I have read, the research work, I could see that it was written by a woman that I could say, wow, this is something that women can do, and it really encouraged me in my educational research as well. Like going to conferences, seeing women as keynote speakers - those were the kind of things professionally that helped me see how far a woman can go when they are dedicated, when they are disciplined, and they continue working in their field and not have those voices that women cannot do it. Other women would be, not all role models are famous people, or something like that, within society, in my family, there are some women who could see that their perseverance and hard work, their encouragement, were also useful for me.**
DR. MALKA	And lastly, as we close our conversation today, please use our platform to share a few words of inspiration or motivation for women and girls listening to us.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**I think for the women, let's maybe start with the girls. I would say don't let other people's limitations define your dreams. They should always believe in their own potential, and they should then show people how good they are, but they should not be defined by what other people think of them. They should identify what they want to do, work hard, and show their potential. For women, I would also say the same, especially women in big positions; for those who do not have positions, don't be afraid to take up positions. If you get into a position as a woman, work hard, do**

	everything the way you are supposed to do it, and inspire others. Grow and inspire others, and when you get there, when they succeed, don't close the door behind you; leave it open for others to succeed as well.
DR. MALKA	Important words. Thank you so much for joining us today and for sharing insights into your life, the journey that you've taken, the work that you've done, and the contributions that you've made to students, to the discipline of mathematics and to the broader educational economy in the Southern Hemisphere. It's been a pleasure to host you.
PROFESSOR KAZIMA	**Thank you for having me.**
	PROGRAMME END