

Gender and Poverty Reduction in Malawi

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1. The past is prologue: gender and development in historical perspective

This paper looks at the nature and progress of planning and implementing engendered development in Malawi: it provides a cursory review of the gendered situation in key sectors and what can be done to accelerate progress.

The odyssey of planning and implementing gender and development programs has been a winding and tortuous one, but recalling it provides lessons for how to do gender and development work going forward. After gaining political independence from Britain, the Government of Malawi (GoM) formulated the Statement of Development Policies: 1971-1986. The strategy made no mention of gender or women's issues. So the earliest programs that dealt with women's issues were handed over from the colonial government, lodged in the ministries of agriculture, community development, and also education. Farm home assistants, female community development assistants and teachers specializing in home economics were trained at Magomero community development training college, various Farm institutes and teacher training colleges. They taught needlecraft, and home care skills, cookery and nutrition the hallmark of which was teaching people to eat the 'three food groups.

From 1986, for another ten years there was a hiatus in producing long term/medium term plans. In the early 1980's the Women in Development movement started to influence the research and planning of extension in the Ministry of agriculture. The extension programs moved beyond reaching women with practical homemaking skills to empowering them with access to strategic resources and skills (Moser 1989). This led to activities to reach women farmers with credit and inputs. After the Nairobi UN Women's Conference in 1985, the Malawi government formed the National Commission for Women which spearheaded new programs. The most successful of these was the Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education. By the time of the Beijing conference women programs had more sophistication, even if only in rhetoric. A policy on Women in Development was prepared which was used to direct GoM efforts. After the Beijing conference a national gender machinery was institutionalized, carrying varying nomenclature over the years. Government formulated a policy on gender and the girl child became a key area of the policy.

In 1998 Government published and launched Vision 2020 a long term perspective study of economic growth and development in Malawi. It was rather gender blind even though women's issues were highlighted in some parts of the document. It did not bring out the role of men in attaining gendered development goals. This issue is important in areas of family planning, safe motherhood, HIV/AIDS prevention, and gender based violence. Also being a long term development document it did not have specific plans and targets as these were to be introduced in the medium term, and annual

implementation plans. Because of this observed deficit, the Ministry of Gender began to speak more explicitly of the move from the WID approaches to Gender and development approaches

The momentum set by the Beijing conference and the democratic dispensation led to the creation of NGOs focusing on gender issues. The emphasis on women's strategic needs of economic and political empowerment was heightened. The most influential of the NGOs were dealing with micro-finance, law reform, and domestic violence. Some research and reform of laws on family, wills and inheritance were strongly advocated for and ensued under the Law Commission. A bill was prepared though it is not yet enacted. A law on domestic violence has been enacted. More recently the Gender and Development Network has spearheaded reputable work on including women in political leadership.

In 2001 the GoM published the Poverty reduction strategy (PRSP) 2001-4. Its aim was to make development planning and implementation more poverty focused, as opposed to what was happening under the Structural adjustment programs that government had been implementing between 1986 and 2000. During this time the World Bank and the IMF put many countries, Malawi included, under receivership and direct supervision of development planning. The evaluations of what happened to growth and development during this period have been mostly negative. One important criticism was that the policies and programs that were focused on macroeconomic programming and economic liberalization did not contribute to poverty reduction. This was partly because they ignored the gender roles and what happened on the home front following expenditure cutting programs, and poorly planned economic deregulation.

PRSPs were supposed to refocus development efforts on poverty reduction even if the core principles of structural adjustment did not change in most countries. The PRSPs were in fact used as a trigger for qualifying for IMF/World Bank funding and thereby also non humanitarian bilateral Aid. During the formulation stage of the PRSP specific efforts were made to include mainstream gender (Ngwira et al, 2002). Most of the efforts were no fruitful as gender was invisibilised or evaporated during the final stages of making the PRSP and also during implementation. So even where engendered programs were being implemented they were not being reported and monitored adequately. *For all the political visibility and advocacy for gender, there was little progress to implement the core strategic approach of the Beijing conference: 'mainstreaming'.*

A new development strategy, the Malawi growth and development strategy (MGDS) was formulated in 2006 with the overriding philosophy of accelerating economic growth through infrastructure development as a means to sustainable poverty reduction. The goal of the MGDS is to transform Malawi from being a consuming and importing country to a producing and exporting country. The MGDS prioritizes 10 areas and gender is not among them. Gender has been included as a subtheme under the Social development theme, one of its 5 themes¹.

The MGDs states at p74 that

Gender issues are an integral part of the overall national development agenda. Gender inequalities in accessing productive resources, development opportunities and decision making affect economic growth and development. Gender being a cross cutting issue of development concern must be mainstreamed in the national growth and development strategies. This is to address the existing gender imbalances for gender equality and sustainable socio-economic development. The key areas of concern in gender mainstreaming are education and training;

¹ Sustainable Economic Growth; Social Protection, Infrastructure Development; Good Governance

reproductive health; HIV and AIDS, food and nutrition security; natural resources and environmental; human rights; and economic empowerment.

The goal for this sub-theme is to mainstream gender in the national development process to enhance the participation of women and men, girls and boys for sustainable and equitable development. The strategies for achieving this are:

- Strengthen the institutional capacity for effective co-ordination of gender policy implementation;
- Affirmative action to increase women and children decision makers in high levels of the public and private sectors;
- Advocacy to include gender equality provisions in the Malawi Constitution; and
- Break the cultural/traditional factors which create and perpetuate gender inequalities.

However there has been little success in bringing systemic treatment (mainstreaming) of gender, in GoM planning and program implementation. A review done by the Sector Working Group on Gender in June 2010 observes that:

Gender does not have sufficient presence within the Ministries at Central and district level. While project oriented activities are being conducted in the area of Gender Based Violence and the 50/50 Campaign², little is done to develop a broad ranging network and an advocacy campaign and an M&E system to ensure the capacity building and mainstreaming of gender across all sectors. The present focal gender-point approach does not have a face at the political and decision making level (GoM, MGC&CD, 2010 p25).

Much of the reason for this failure can be attributed to lack of will to move the gender agenda forward especially at the top policy making and planning levels. This has much also to do with the cohort of the top policy makers that were brought up in the domestic science school of dealing with women's issues, and most of them (90% of the P4 positions and above) are men. There are also very weak incentives for formulating and reporting on, let alone achieving targets of, gender responsive programs.

2. The state of gender and poverty in Malawi

Because of this lack of or failure to mainstream gender the results on gender and poverty are not satisfactory. Women still lag behind in many areas of development and men's contribution to changing the situation is not being fully harnessed. The main development areas where women's participation has greater poverty reduction returns are education, economy, health, decision making, social protection, human rights protection, and legal reform to support the other areas. It is possible to estimate the costs of implementing gender blind development programs in these areas in terms of forgone economic growth (wealth creation) and poverty reduction. Semu et al, 2004, estimated, depending on sector of theme, that up to 2% economic growth is foregone due to implementing gender unresponsive programs.

The paper provides a review of the gendered situation in some of these areas.

Gender, employment, and income

² 50/50 is the campaign of the Gender Network to elect women to 50% of the seats in national and local government elections according to the SADC protocol on Gender.

In Malawi poverty is feminized in some characteristic ways. Female headed households are a ubiquitous feature of the socio-economic milieu, making about 30% of all households. The proportion is higher in some areas. This is due to the impacts of the dominance of the matrilineal system of marriage, where the divorce rate is higher than in patrilineal marriages and women tend to be left to head households, as men move on; the breakdown of traditional family networks where widowed women were taken care of by male relatives, so that even in patrilineal communities an increasing number of women are heading households; but also due to the high death rate of the young owing to the impacts of AIDs that lead to older women taking in grand children and heading households.

Female headed households are poorer in terms of income and more often they have less means to move out of poverty. Most Malawians make their living from small scale agriculture. Women produce most of the food. But they tend to have less land, 0.8 hectares on average compared to 1.0 hectares for male farmers, in a context of agriculture based economy. They have less labor (due to absence of an adult male) but also less access to inputs, credit and extension. According to the National Agriculture and Livestock census [NACAL](2008), 54% of male farmers got fertilizer subsidy coupons compared to 49% of women farmers; the respective proportions are 56% and 45% for the actual use of fertilizer (Some farmers sell coupons to meet pressing needs, some purchase it with their own resources without coupons). A very small proportion of rural farmers got credit in 2008, but the proportion of male farmers who got it (4%) was twice that of women farmers. In the total population 10.7% of women compared to 14% of men had access to credit in 2008 (Malawi Gender and development Index). Women farmers are also less likely to have farming implements like slashers, axes, and more importantly treadle pumps for irrigation.

Unsurprisingly the productivity of women is low. The national maize yield was 1,384 kg/ha for male operators and 1,353 kg/ha for female operators. The average hybrid maize yield was 1,915kg/ha for male operators and 1,887kg/ha for female operators. The average local variety maize yield was 1,198 kg/ha for unfertilized maize plots and 1,379 kg/ha for plots where fertilizer was applied once, 1,622kg/ha for plots where fertilizer was applied twice. Average yield for hybrid maize was 1,740 kg/ha for plots where fertilizer was applied once and 2,342kg/ha for plots where fertilizer was applied twice. And women were less likely to apply fertilizer and even less likely to apply it twice.

Furthermore, for all maize varieties, plots weeded twice yielded higher than plots which were weeded once, and women farmers were less likely to weed twice as often they could not afford to hire labor, even as women headed households are typically short of one adult male labor. These results repeat for rice and all other food crops except sorghum. Women farmers also tend to participate less in value adding activities like association based marketing.

The low yields, low value adding and low incomes create a vicious circle of poverty for women farmers.

The newly published African Gender and Development Index for Malawi shows that there are still gender gaps in employment indicators. Although labor force participation is nearly the same for men and women, women make less money than men. In the informal economy and smallholder agriculture women make only 50% and 71% respectively of what men make. The reasons are low productivity on land, and also less engagement in value adding activities as discussed above.

Wages in the formal sector are not different between men and women of the same ranks/position: the economic power of women may be weakened by not rising to the more highly paid ranks. Women tend to be in the lower paying clerical and teaching and nursing jobs. In the civil service women are under-

represented in the higher ranks (only 10% of P4 and above positions). In the private sector (industry and NGOs) women are only about 20% of chief executives are women.

An important economic resource is time. Women spend the same amount of time as men in market and non market economic activities, but spend much more time in domestic, care and volunteer activities.

But apart from the income and food security dimensions of poverty, women bear the brunt of the psychological (difficult to measure) dimensions of poverty. It is mostly women who experience or live with the most undignifying consequences of poverty. This is due to their gender and biological roles. For example a woman who has difficult labor in rural Malawi has an ordeal to be transported to the poorly equipped district hospitals. Women are likely to be left to care for sick/malnourished children, watching as they slowly die. Since they are more likely to be illiterate than men, women also experience the most, the feelings of inferiority and lack of confidence to participate in community leadership that are associated with not being able to read. The statistics that quantify the summary results of poverty as maternal mortality, child mortality, or as low participation of women in leadership do not begin to quantify the depth of feelings of deprivation and suffering that people go through due to poverty. And most of these feelings are experienced more intensely by women.

This continued gender disparities are a result of poor planning and implementation of development programs: they are not (adequately) gender responsive. Most of the sector plans and documents are not clear what will be done to address the gender disparities described above. In the documents on mining, tourism and manufacturing gender is not even mentioned. The emphasis has been on investment in infrastructure and utilities to support economic production, and trade facilitation along borders and improving the climate for doing business so as to attract investments and to reduce costs along the value chain. This is all done without unpacking who will be involved in the sector and how they will be impacted and how any foreseen negative impacts could be dealt with. Often single project appraisals cover gender analysis as required by the procedures of the financing donor. But government has not documents that treat this issue systematically. These are traditionally also the sectors that do not employ gender analysts.

Mainstreaming Gender in the agriculture Sector

The backbone of the Malawi economy is agriculture. It employs 80% of the labor, and generates the same proportion of export earnings. Its contribution to GDP is around 35%. Mining is a small but soon to expand sector. The growth of manufacturing has been sluggish. Consequently the GoM has plans to regenerate the agriculture sector and has recently completed preparing its agriculture sector SWAp (ASWAP).

Since agriculture is the mainstay of the economic, it is important that gender is properly incorporated in the plans for the sector. The ASWAp has identified several constraints to agricultural growth including low productivity owing to small degraded plots, and low inputs use due to unfavorable input output ratios; declining investment in the agriculture sector; deteriorating agriculture services; low value addition, inefficient use of subsidies, and poor institutional and human capacities. As shown earlier, in all these areas women have greater disadvantage. Women farmers have smaller land holdings, use less inputs and less likely to access credit, are less likely to access subsidized inputs, they participate less in

producing high value cash and export crops, the extension system is less capable of or amenable to dealing with gender issues.

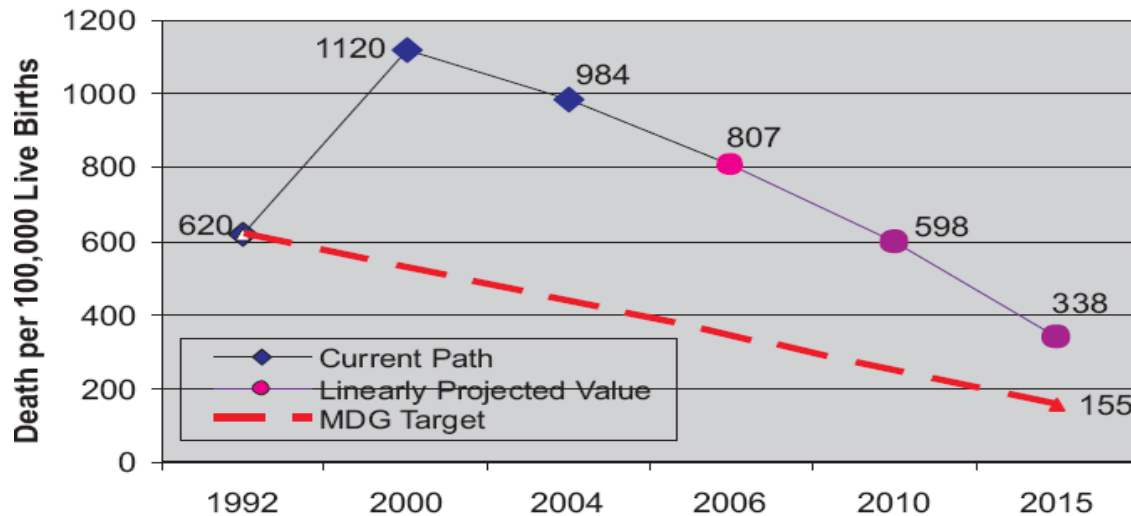
The ASWAP document identifies 4 focus areas. In focus area IV, Institutional and human capacity building, mainstreaming gender and HIV/AIDS are subthemes. In the other 3 focal areas, Food security and risk management, commercial agriculture and market development, and sustainable agricultural land and water management gender is not mentioned. Yet it is in these areas that gender disparities are experienced not in capacity building. So that one would want to know what will be done to reach out to women and also what will be the gendered targets. The targets in the capacity building focal area are set in terms of meetings, trainings and reports produced. It is curious that a gender TWG was operating during the time that the ASWAp was being formulated.

Safe motherhood

The high maternal mortality rate(MMR) in Malawi (807/100,000) is largely attributed to low education and literacy levels among women of child bearing age to understand the cause and effect of factors contributing to maternal morbidity and mortality, early and unwanted pregnancies, and physical immaturity of women at first pregnancy, poor child spacing due to inadequate access to comprehensive FP-services access to family planning services, limited access to focused antenatal and postnatal care, unsafe abortions, deteriorating quality of basic health care services, unsanitary conditions during pregnancy, high maternal morbidity rates related to HIV/AIDS, malaria, haemorrhage, sepsis, pre-eclampsia, negative cultural practices among other factors. Further, inability to address the three delays in addressing pregnancy related complications, i.e. delay to make a decision to seek care, delay in getting to the health facility and delay in accessing the services when at the hospital also contribute to high maternal mortality.

The Malawi Millennium Development Goals Report (2009) indicates that the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 55% to 66% in 2010. It is projected that by 2015, 72% of births will be attended by skilled health workers. This projection is less than the MDG target of 100%. There however exist urban-rural disparities in the proportion of pregnant women attended by skilled health personnel. For instance, 2006 MICS indicates that 83.8% of births in the urban areas were delivered by skilled birth attendants compared to 50.4% in rural areas. There is therefore need for training more health workers that can be deployed in rural areas.

Trends in maternal Mortality



Source: Malawi Millennium Development Goals Report (2009)

The mainstreaming of gender has not always been successful in this clearly pro women issue. The main problem is that women are under the influence of various social and economic factors that make them fail to adopt safe motherhood practices. Men who are a main determinant of the adoption of these practices are not always easily brought into the picture. Going forward, apart from improving service provision, service utilization could be spurred by the careful use of conditional cash/food transfers. Development partners could help in piloting ways of doing this.

Gender and HIV/AIDS

The 2007/2008 sentinel surveillance survey estimated HIV prevalence rate among pregnant women aged 15-24 to be at 12.3%. The decline in prevalence rate is declining as it is projected that by 2015 HIV and AIDS prevalence rate will be 2.9% hence the MDG target of 0% will not be achieved. Chief among the socio-economic factors that have contributed to the severity of epidemic in Malawi are a) prevalence of multiple sexual relationships b) poverty and poor overall health c) low status of women which affects their right to say no to unsafe sex c) cultural practices such as wife inheritance and b) urbanization and mobility.

There are spatial disparities in the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. The HIV sero-prevalence in urban areas is 21.6% and for rural areas it is 12.1%. In 2007, the southern region HIV sero-prevalence among antenatal women in urban areas was estimated at 21.7% while the central and northern regions were around 14% (Government of Malawi, 2007).

The epidemiology of HIV/AIDS has decidedly gender dimensions. More women are infected than men and more girls are infected than boys. Girls between the ages of 15-24 years are twice more susceptible to HIV infection than are boys in the same age category. In 2000, HIV and AIDS prevalence among 15-24 year olds was estimated at 15.3% for females whereas the male's estimate staggered at 7% (United Nations Secretary General's HIV/AIDS Country Report).

The gender differences in the susceptibility to HIV infection are largely attributed to the weak economic status of women and girls due to economic, cultural and social factors (Government of Malawi, 2004).

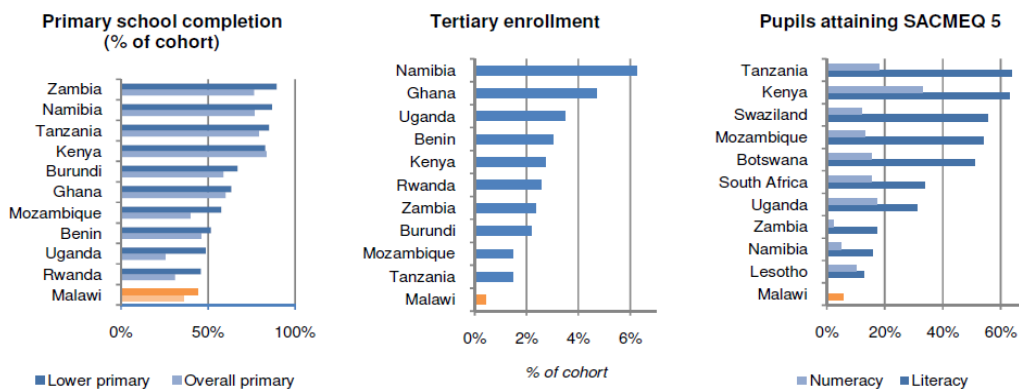
Many women are unable to negotiate the timing and the condition under which sex occurs, especially the use of condoms. Gender dynamics in Malawi society confers major decision-making powers in the hands of men. There are also biological reasons that make women more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. Women and girls are also more likely to bear the burden of consequences and the mitigation and care functions at the household level.

The government has implemented programs for the prevention of mother to child transmission, and also to provide universal access to ARV.

Gender and Education

Since the introduction of free primary education in 1994, enrolments have surged, and now stand at 82%. Girls and boy start primary school in equal numbers. But girls drop out faster and tend to have poorer results (Malawi Government, Ministry of education, 2009, National Education Sector Plan). The primary school dropout ratio is 2.3 for girls and 2.1 for boys. In the population 68% of women and 73% of men have completed primary education. The efficiency indicators for the sector are poor. For example it takes on average 23 years of schooling to produce a primary school graduate! And many of those who leave school early do so before gaining competences in reading and writing. The summary performance indicators of the sector are among the worst in Africa region.

Some indicators of education sector performance



SACMEQ5 is a test applied by a network on education testing and quality in Southern Africa to compare learning across countries of pupils in Standard five

Programs to keep girls in school have revolved around mitigating the problems in the household (demand) and the quantity and quality of services (supply). On the home front school participation is determined by among other things, labor needs, poverty and food insecurity, orphanhood due to the impacts of AIDS, and also early marriages. School meals programs aim partly to keep girls enrolments and attendance higher. These seem to be having an impact. On the supply side there are issues of relevance of curricula, pupil teacher ratios, physical infrastructure and the supply of teaching and learning materials.

In higher and tertiary education the disparities are more glaring. Boys are twice as likely to participate as women in what is already low average participation rate of 3%. In developed countries now more females enter college than males. A smaller pool from which to select women/girls, at Form 4 due to

low completion rates for secondary school and also lower scores; limited boarding facilities for women/girls; and also their lower performance in entrance exams help to explain this. Some of the differences in performance could be explained by the policy 9 now being changed) of using community day secondary school. Given the gender based division of labor on the home front, it is very difficult for girls from poor households to perform well if they stay at home. Boarding schools are more costly and previously when costs were the overriding consideration community day school were introduced. Government is now converting these to boarding schools. This shows that to implement programs that are gender responsive often requires more expenditure: a gender premium (World Bank 2000).

3. Concluding Remarks

The main constraint to advancing gender in development planning and implementation in Malawi is failure to mainstream it, whether this means making mainline programs gender responsive or making sure that each program has affirmative action for the disadvantaged gender in the area. To mainstream gender successfully in GoM programs and policies would require that:

1. Public policy makers and managers are continuously trained in gender issues and development. This may mean requiring them to pass a gender and development course within 12 months of taking up their positions to continue with their 3 year contracts; and these contracts should among others require them to meet gender(ed) targets;
2. Only those MDAs that have planned and budgeted for engendered programs should be funded by the Treasury, and reporting on gender targets should be required quarterly to release funding; Gender budgets should be done as part of submissions to parliament for the largest spending ministries, and be published for all to see;
3. Development partners should move beyond using gender targets more generally in the Performance Assessments Frameworks to actually use them as triggers and disbursement conditions. Often these triggers are about gender insensitive economic liberalization programs or gender blind public financial management (anti-corruption) practices;
4. Developing skills for doing gender analysis especially on macro-economic, economic and infrastructure sectors;
5. Conducting gender audits of the main spending ministries and the Gender machinery once every two years. This may mean doing gender audits in 2 MDAs every year as part of the public expenditure reviews;
6. Planning and implementing unmistakably/unapologetic gender sensitive programs, especially in education (should include reviewing curricula not just the participation of girls and women), and agriculture;
7. Reforming laws that still allow for discrimination, and change the penal code/provisions to punish offenders adequately.

If any of this does not sound new, that is testimony to the labyrinthine road to gender equality!

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