

FS-TIP Brief Malawi

Food Systems Transformative Integrated Policy

Assessment of Gender in Malawi's Agricultural and Food Policy

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1. Introduction

Food systems encompass the whole range of actors and their interconnected, value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries (FAO, 2018, FS-TIP, 2021). In addition, sections of the broader economic, societal and natural environments within which these actors operate, and in which value addition occurs, are also considered part of the food systems (FAO, 2018). Food systems are considered ‘sustainable’ when there is equitable distribution of the economic value added, i.e., among women, youth, the elderly and other marginalized social groups (FAO, 2018). Existing evidence however shows that differing access to resources and pre-existing socio-economic bottlenecks and norms, reduce the potential of some of the actors to be fully productive in certain activities along the food system, resulting in an inequitable food system. For example, in many rural, agrarian societies such as in Malawi, women have unequal and lower access to opportunities, technologies, finance and resources used in production, such as land, water, inputs and agricultural advisory services (Njuki et al., 2021). Other social groups such as the youth have less experience, knowledge and skills than adults, and so are in a subordinate position in terms of power (Glover and Sumberg, 2021). Other groups such as indigenous peoples participate in food systems from a position of little power for various reasons (Kuhnlein et al., 2009). In most cases these marginalized actors may be poorly engaged and represented in the policy making space, in sectoral investment plans and in program implementation. This underrepresentation further perpetuates inequalities in food systems.

In Malawi, vulnerabilities and inequalities in the food system arise due to various socio-economic factors which include but are not limited to spatial location (Mkusa & Hendriks, 2021), climate change (Hunter et al., 2020), gender (Katoka et al., 2013), educational attainment (Fisher & Lewin, 2013), natural disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic (Matita & Chimombo, 2020; FAO, 2020) as well as wealth and economic status (Katoka et al., 2013). The food system is key to national development as the country’s economy is mostly dependent on smallholder, low-input, subsistence farmers whose production determines the nation’s food security (Benson, 2021). This results in a fragile food system as most rural households live from harvest-to-harvest and are often unable to produce enough foods to generate a surplus. In addition, farming in Malawi is labor-intensive and is done mostly with rudimentary implements. Women work on farms alongside other family members but they are also burdened with domestic work including walking long distances to fetch water and firewood, preparing family meals and sometimes almost exclusively providing care for children, the elderly and sick family members. This leaves little room for leisure or rest. Female-headed households (FHH) are worse-off than their male counterparts in terms of the social and economic factors that positively influence agricultural outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1: Factors influencing agricultural outcomes in Malawi – Female vs Male-headed households

Social and political factors	Influence of factor on agricultural outcomes	FHH	MHH
% engaged in agriculture	NA	89%	83%
% receiving FISP subsidies	+	54%	49%
% of HHs owning livestock	+	38%	46%
% operating a non-farm enterprise	+	31%	42%
Literacy rates	+	57%	74%
Average farm size (Acres)	+	0.9	1.5
Dependency ratio	-	1.6	1.1
Number of meals eaten per day	+	<3	>3

Source: Author compilation from various sources¹; HH – Household; FHH – Female Headed Households; MHH – Male Headed Households, FISP – Farm Input Subsidy Programme

Most female-headed households are likely to be living below the poverty line and poverty rates for households headed by women are nearly 5% higher than for male-headed households. This might explain why a larger proportion of female-led households receive more Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) subsidies than male-led households, as the program targets poorer rural households. It is also clear from Table 1 that male-headed households display the indicators that are associated with ‘wealth’ in Malawi, i.e., being able to eat three or more meals daily, owning livestock, operating a non-farm enterprise, and having larger farm holdings. Furthermore, female-headed households in Malawi own less farm and household assets, factors which both limit production. This is worsened by a high dependency ratio and low levels of access to credit with only 12% of women engaged in agriculture having access to micro-credit. Finally, although women have equal property ownership and inheritance rights, they have limited control over resources and decision making in households and communities, especially in rural areas.

Public policies can contribute to transforming food systems so that they are equitable and gender sensitive. This can be done by ensuring that gender and equity considerations are included during policy design processes, sectoral investment strategies and implementation plans, in addition to being mainstreamed in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks. Understanding how gender and equity issues have been considered in national policy documents and tracking mechanisms is the first step in ensuring that policies and strategies are transformative and equitable. This type of work has not been done in Malawi and this brief aims to fill this gap and contribute to the on-going efforts to transform Malawi’s food system.

We present an assessment of Malawi’s food system by analyzing how gender and equity considerations have been mainstreamed in key agriculture policies and food strategies. This is followed by an analysis of the performance of Malawi’s food system over time through the lens of gender and equity. We conclude with key lessons and policy recommendations.

¹ Various sources including the [National Statistical System](#) (NSO), Benson, 2021: [Disentangling Food Security from Subsistence Agriculture in Malawi](#); [FAO Country Profile: Malawi](#)

2. Analysis of Malawi's food system

The gender and equity analysis of the food system in Malawi is divided into three stages. The first stage analyzes the choice of indicators in the country's food systems dashboard and the second examines the system's performance. This is followed by a final stage that aims to understand how gender and equity considerations are incorporated within and across current agricultural and food policies. Only policies from 2017 going forward are included in this analysis.

Use of disaggregated indicators – Gender and inclusivity

Table 2 provides a summary of all the indicators that are reported and captured in the Malawi food system dashboard² based on the type of population sub-group that they target. The food system dashboard for Malawi currently reports ninety-one indicators, a large number of which (75 indicators or 82%) report data for a sub-group of the population (Table 2). This means that they can be further disaggregated by gender. However, only a few of these indicators (6 or 7%) have been included in a gender disaggregated manner³ (Figure 2).

Table 2: Mapping of indicators - Gender and inclusivity issues

Population sub-group captured by indicators	Total Indicators	
	Number of indicators capturing data on sub-group	%
Children (< 15yrs)	19	21
Adolescents (12 - 17 years)*	2	2
School-going adolescents (12-17 years)*	2	2
Youth (15-29 years)	1	1
Adults (25 years or more)*	19	21
Adults including the elderly (30-70yrs)	1	1
Individuals (15 years or more in poorest 40% of population)*	1	1%
Population	12	13
per person	3	3
per capita	3	3
Agricultural workers	3	3
Labor force (15-64 years)*	1	1
Farmers	1	1
Farm, pastoral, fisher households	1	1
Men and women	1	1
Rural women	1	1
Women	2	2
By 'age & sex'	1	1
Gender inequality index	1	1
Total number of indicators capturing sub-group populations	75	82%
All other indicators in dashboard (sub-grouping not relevant or possible)	16	18%
All indicators	91	100%

Legend: Indicators disaggregated by gender Not disaggregated by gender – but possible to do so NA – disaggregation not possible or relevant

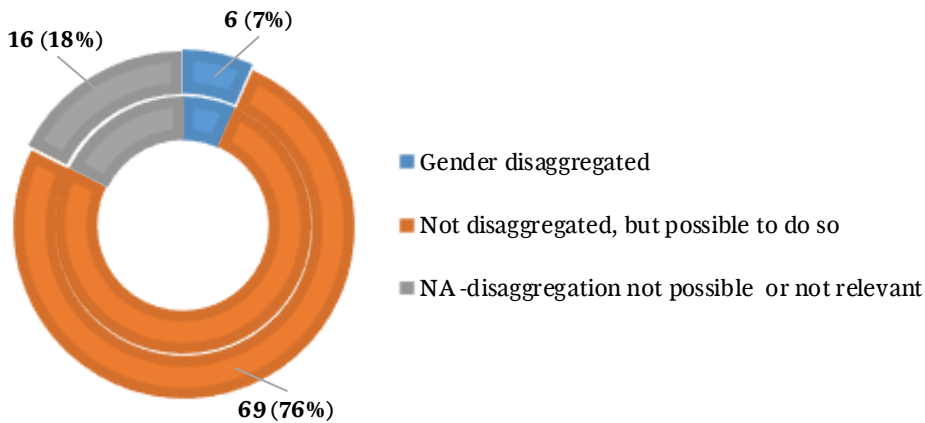
* Indicators that include the youth population.

Source: Author compilation from the Food Systems Dashboard

² <https://foodsystemsdashboard.org/countrydashboard>

³ This includes the Gender Inequality index, although not 'disaggregated' is explicitly focused on gender.

Figure 2: Indicators in the Malawi food system dashboard



Source: Author compilation from the food systems dashboard

Some of the non-gender disaggregated indicators are key to tracking progress in overcoming the known drivers of vulnerability within the Malawian food system. Examples of these include:

- Proportion of adult agricultural population with ownership or secure land rights over agricultural land
- Percentage of farm, pastoral, and fisher households that are resilient to climate and weather-related shocks
- Proportion of farmers having access to Agricultural Advisory Services
- Employment rate (proportion of labor force that falls within 15-64 years)
- Employment rate (proportion of population that is 15 years or older)
- Proportion of population with an account in a financial institution

Without disaggregation of these indicators, agricultural and food policies and strategies will not be able to adequately address the factors that drive vulnerability. Evidence shows that policy responses are most effective when they are targeted and gender-aligned, therefore efforts must be taken to make Malawi's food system dashboard gender-inclusive. Improvements in targeting and gender-inclusivity is likely to result in more efficient utilization of limited public resources.

Of the indicators that are gender disaggregated (Table 3), only one explicitly captures data for rural women. This is key as rural women are highly vulnerable and require specialized services to address their unique needs and help them overcome deeply entrenched socio-economic bottlenecks and gender-biased norms.

Inclusivity considerations in Malawi's food system dashboard

Turning to indicators related to the youth, the elderly and the disabled, only one indicator specifically captures issues related to youth (population between the ages of 15 to 29 years) (Table 2). Twenty-five other indicators include some aspects of the youth but not the entire young population. These include indicators on adolescents (12 to 17 years old), adults (25 years and above), individuals (15 years and above) and the labor force (15 to 64 years old). The elderly (65 years and above) represent 2.7% of the Malawian population but there is no specific indicator for them. There are however several indicators that include the elderly within a wider age-range (i.e. indicators capturing data for populations between 30 and 70 years of age, individuals that are 15 years or more, Adults from 25 years and above). There are no indicators that capture issues related to people living with disabilities, whether physical or mental. It is likely that other indicators on farmers, households, population, persons etc., will include information about the youth, elderly and the disabled, but the lack of specificity in the current dashboard means that the specific needs of the youth, elderly and the disabled will most likely not be adequately addressed.

Some efforts have been made to track inclusivity of different sub-groups in national public policy processes and budgets, institutional accountability mechanisms and employment indicators on:

- Social protection: Budget lines on social protection as percentage of the total resource requirements for coverage of the vulnerable social groups
- Inclusive institutional mechanisms: Existence of inclusive institutionalized mechanisms and platforms for mutual accountability
- Inclusive employment: Activity and inclusive employment in industries related to agricultural value chains
- Inclusive and participatory agricultural policies: Existence of a new National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP)/National Agriculture and Food Security Investment Plan (NAFSIP) developed through an inclusive and participatory process

Indicators on children, which are captured extensively in the dashboard (19 indicators or 21% of all the indicators in the dashboard) are all related to nutrition and diets, and they fall under either Action Track 1, Action Track 2 or Action Track 4. The analysis of the use and performance of indicators related to health, nutrition and diets of the Malawi population, including children, are outside the scope of this brief. This information can be found in the FS-TIP Malawi policy brief on Healthy and sustainable diets for all from a food systems perspective.

Table 3: Gender and inclusivity considerations by Action Track

Indicator	Category of disaggregation	Component/ drivers	Action Tracks*					
			AT 1	AT 2	AT 3	AT 4	AT 5	
1	Proportion of men and women engaged in agriculture with access to financial services	Men and Women						
2	Proportion of rural women who are empowered in agriculture	Rural women						
3	Growth rate of the proportion of minimum dietary diversity-women	Women						
4	Anemia in women 15-49 years							
5	Gender inequality index	Gender						
6	Number of jobs created per annum by age category and sex	Age and Sex						
7	% of youth that is engaged in new job opportunities in agriculture value chains	Youth						
8	Prevalence of less than daily fruit consumption among school-going adolescents (%)	School going adolescents						
9	Prevalence of less than daily vegetable consumption among school-going adolescents (%)							
10	Adolescents (age 12-17 years): average daily frequency of fruit consumption (times per day)	Adolescents						
11	Adolescents (age 12-17 years): average daily frequency of vegetable consumption (times per day)							
12	Probability of dying between 30-70 years from CVD, cancer, diabetes, and CRD	Adults that include the elderly						

Action Track 1: Access to safe and nutritious food for all
 Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
 Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
 Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
 Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

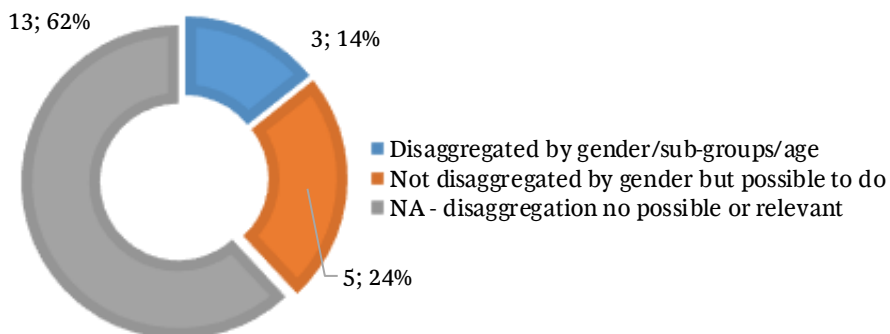
CVD – Cardiovascular disease; CRD – chronic renal disease

Source: Author Compilation from the Food Systems Dashboard

Supra-indicator level and Action Tracks - Gender and inclusivity indicators

At the supra-indicator level, only 14% of the indicators in use are disaggregated in some way, that is, either capturing gender dynamics or inclusive of population sub-groups (Figure 3 and Table 4). There are however, five other indicators that can be disaggregated either by gender, age or sub-group (Table 4). If disaggregated, it would mean at least a third of all indicators at the supra-indicator level for Malawi's food system would be capable of providing insights on gender and inclusivity. This would enable policy makers to better address the needs of women and other vulnerable populations.

Figure 3: Malawi supra-indicators – Gender and inclusivity mapping






Source: Author compilation from the food systems dashboard

With respect to the action tracks, we find that Action Track 2 and Action Track 3 do not have any indicators that are disaggregated by gender (Table 3). At the supra-indicator level, this trend continues with gender disaggregation and/or inclusivity indicators in use only for Action Tracks 4 and 5 (Table 4). As with the general indicators (Table 2), there are however indicators at the supra-indicator level that are not disaggregated by gender which can be. This applies for a few indicators under Action Tracks 1 and 2. Action Track 5 can be further gendered by differentiating the indices for household resilience and production diversity by male-headed and female-headed households.

Table 4: Supra-indicators for the Malawi food system – Gender and inclusivity mapping

Action Track	No.	Supra-indicators	Gender and inclusivity mapping
Action Track 1	1	Diet quality: Food Consumption Score (FCS)	NA
	2	Nutrient supply: Net supply in country of key macro- and micro-nutrients as a share of total consumption requirements for a healthy diet	
	3	Undernourishment: % of population undernourished	
	4	Overweight & obesity: % of population overweight or obese (adult population)	
	5	Food safety: Food Systems Safety Index	
Action Track 2	6	Affordability: Cost of a healthy diet as a percentage of household food expenditure (%)	NA
	7	Sustainability of diets: Per capita Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions of food consumption (KgCO ₂ eq./person)	
	8	Food waste: Food waste index (kg/capita/year)	
Action Track 3	9	Food environment: Composite index combining food environment policies (under development)	NA
	10	Emissions: GHG emissions from agriculture (MtCO ₂ e)	
	11	Land: Average % forest land being deforested for agriculture use over past 3 years	
	12	Food loss: % food loss across supply chain	
Action Track 4	13	Regeneration: Biodiversity and habitat index	NA
	14	Income: Gini coefficient (specific) based on incomes across the food system (under development)	
	15	Income: Gap between farmgate price and retail price	
Action Track 5	16	Gender equity: Women empowerment in agriculture index	NA
	17	Economic: Household Resilience Capacity Index	
	18	Risk distribution: Proportion of men and women engaged in agriculture with access to macro- and micro-credit financial services	
	19	Social: Government social security budget as % of total requirements to cover vulnerable social groups	
	20	Environmental: ND-GAIN (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative) Country Index	
	21	Production diversity: % production from top five crops	NA

Legend  Indicators disaggregated by gender  Not disaggregated by gender – but possible to do so  NA – disaggregation not possible or relevant

Action Track 1: Access to safe and nutritious food for all
 Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
 Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
 Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
 Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

Source: Author compilation from the food systems dashboard

3. Gender and equity performance of Malawi's food system

We analyze Malawi's performance from a gender equality lens by looking at the Gender Inequality Index (GII) based on the Human Development Index (HDI). In addition, we provide insights on the empowerment of women in Malawi's agricultural sector based on various studies of women's empowerment.

Gender inequality based on the Human Development Index (HDI)

In 2019, the HDI score for Malawi was 0.483, placing the country in the low human development category (ranked 174 out of 189 countries). This means that Malawians in general have lower life expectancy, lower educational attainment and lower gross national income (GNI) per capita in comparison to other countries in the world. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) follows the HDI approach. It is a composite measure reflecting gender-based inequalities in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity.⁴ Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates. Empowerment in the GII is measured as a share of the parliamentary seats held by women as well as attainment in secondary and tertiary education by each gender. Economic activity focuses on the labor market participation rate for men and women. The GII ranges between 0 and 1 with higher GII values indicating higher inequalities between women and men and thus higher loss to human development.⁵

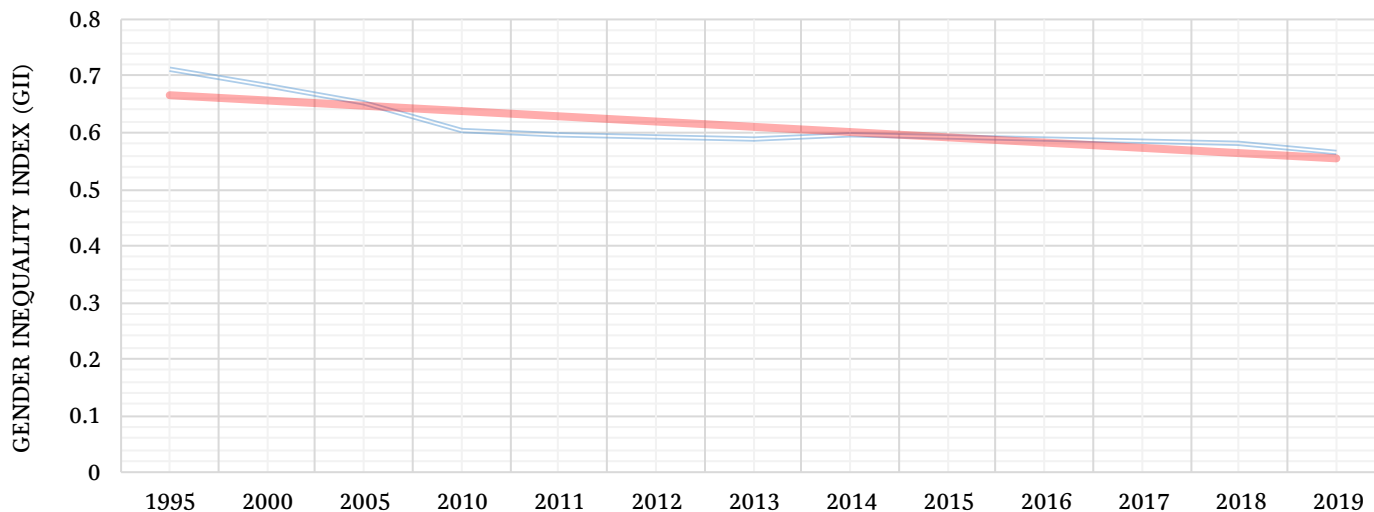
According to the Human Development Report (2020), in 2019, Malawi had a GII value of 0.565, ranking it 142 out of 162 countries and placing Malawi at the bottom globally in terms of gender equality. The country had high gender inequality with women being under-represented in the highest decision-making spaces (just under 23% of parliamentary seats were held by women in 2019) and participating less in the labor market (approximately 73% participation by women vs. just over 81% participation by men). This means that women's voices are less likely to be heard in key processes related to food system transformation. In addition, more of the adult male population in the country are more likely to reach and complete at least secondary school and enter tertiary education compared to the adult female population.

Over time however, the GII for Malawi has a decreasing trend i.e., there is an improvement with gender inequalities lessening in the country. This implies that although the country ranks low in term of gender equality as compared to other countries, the gap between men and women in the country over time (between 1995 and 2019), has narrowed (Figure 1).

⁴ Same as above

⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/faq-page/gender-inequality-index-gii#t294n2918>

Figure 4: Trends in Malawi's Gender Inequality Index, 1995 – 2019



Source: Data from UNDP's Human Development Index for Malawi

Deliberate policy efforts are however still needed to tackle gender inequality. This is because improvements have not been in all dimensions, with some areas exhibiting worsening gender inequalities. For example, improvements have been observed in terms of empowerment and reproductive health:

- **Empowerment:** Women in Malawi are still under-represented in key decision-making spaces. However, in 2019 women held 22.92% of parliamentary seats as compared to only 5.60% in 1997.⁶ In addition, women are less likely to reach, and complete higher education as compared to men. However, between 1980 and 2011, enrollment in tertiary education for females has improved from 25% to 63% of the total population of females that have completed secondary school i.e., those eligible to go for tertiary education.⁷
- **Reproductive health:** Maternal mortality rates for Malawi dropped from 749 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 349 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2017.⁸ Adolescent birth rates dropped from 186 births per 1,000 women aged between 15 -19 to 132 per 1,000 women aged 15 – 19.⁹

In terms of economic activity, gender inequality has worsened with fewer women (aged 15 years and above) engaging in economic activity in 2019 (72.53%) as compared to 1990 (76.69%).¹⁰

In rural areas of Malawi, gender inequalities are more pervasive, as rural women are more likely to be poorer and less engaged than women in urban areas, with their livelihoods centered in the agricultural sector. In addition, many rural women have little or no voice within their households, let alone in policy making spaces. The Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)¹¹ provides specific insights on sources of disempowerment for women in rural areas engaged in agriculture, and whose livelihoods are centered in production components of the food system. The WEAI was specifically developed to measure the

⁶ [Malawi - Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments \(%\)](#)

⁷ [World Bank Data - School enrollment, tertiary, female](#)

⁸ [World Bank Data - Maternal mortality ratio - Malawi](#)

⁹ [World Bank Data - Adolescent fertility rate \(births per 1,000 women ages 15-19\) - Malawi](#)

¹⁰ [World Bank Data - Labor force participation rate](#) (International Labor Organization estimate) – Malawi

¹¹ [World Bank Data - Labor force participation rate](#) (International Labor Organization estimate) – Malawi

empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector, as a way to understand the constraints facing women and develop gender-sensitive solutions.¹²

Empowerment of women in agriculture in Malawi

National level analyses of Malawi's agricultural sector using the WEAI has not been conducted. However, several studies have used the WEAI approach to understand the sources of (dis)empowerment for women in agriculture in the country. In addition to these studies, there are many other studies that have used different analytical approaches to understand the gender dynamics in the agricultural production components of Malawi's food system.

The sources of disempowerment for producers in the agricultural production component of the Malawi's food system are numerous and varied (Table 5). Different studies reviewed all concur that women in the agricultural sector in Malawi, are in general more disempowered than their male counterparts. The main source of disempowerment can be summed up as 'pre-existing gender norms' which essentially lead to women's time, income and participation in development activities (i.e., farmer groups, extension meetings) being controlled by male family members. Various interventions that deliberately work to overcome the disempowering factors have been found to improve women's empowerment.

¹² <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/womens-empowerment-agriculture-index>

Table 5: Women’s economic empowerment studies - Malawi

Study	Main source of (dis)empowerment	Summary findings
Mudege et al., 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing gender norms Division of household labor Participation in farmer groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative stereotypical perceptions about women by their husbands and extension workers militate against women’s access to training and information. Institutional biases within extension systems reproduce gender inequality by reinforcing stereotypical gender norms. Women’s access to knowledge and collective action improved their empowerment
Mudege et al., 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to extension services and agricultural information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women viewed as ignorant, passive, illiterate and a source of cheap labor. These perceptions limit women’s access to training and agricultural information. This is worsened by the prevailing extension workers’ belief that if the husband is trained, then information will be cascaded to wives and other household members, a situation that is not always guaranteed.
Ragasa et al., 2020*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of access to credit Weak group membership Workload Decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male youth are the least empowered in Malawi, followed by female youth and older women. For both women and men, a lack of access to credit and weak group membership are the major sources of disempowerment. Empowerment of both men and women is associated with access to interactive radio programming.
Chiwaula et al., 2020 (unpublished project report)*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input into productive decisions Work balance Autonomy in decision making Group membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women are less empowered than men in project areas. The factors contributing most to the disempowerment of both men and women are: input into productive decisions; work balance; autonomy in decision making; group membership and membership in influential groups. The factors contributing most to the disempowerment of women are: work balance; input in productive decisions; membership in influential groups and autonomy in decision making.
Ragasa et al., 2021*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of work balance Lack of autonomy in decision making Lack of respect among family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women are more likely to experience a higher proportion of and depth of disempowerment than men.
Eissler et al., 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time-use agency: gendered dynamics around time use and control of one’s own time to advance personal strategic goals and address attendant barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women often make tradeoffs throughout any given day with respect to their time, balancing their expected priorities with the barriers or limitations they face in allocating time to tasks or activities which further their own strategic goals. Men are seen within communities as the household decision-maker and leader, therefore having the final say on how household members should use their time, including their wives. Women face disproportionate time burdens in fulfilling their expected roles and responsibilities, primarily in relation to household chores such as cleaning, childcare, and food preparation.

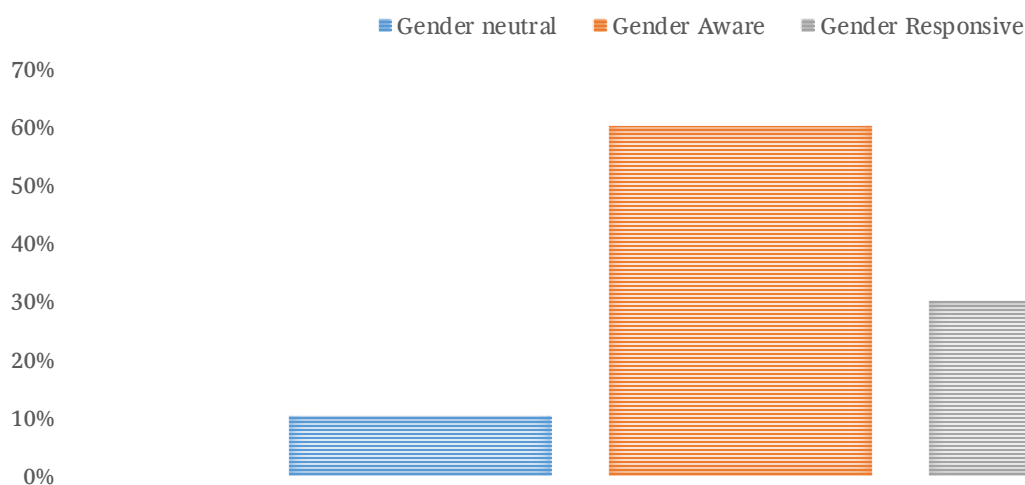
*studies that have used the WEAI approach

4. Gender and equity analysis of the main agricultural policies and strategies

We conduct a high-level assessment of how gender and inclusivity considerations have been integrated into the main agriculture policies and strategies in Malawi. The aim is to determine whether Malawi's agricultural policies and strategies are inclusive and whether they consider gender in their design, implementation plan and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks in order to overcome the existing biases that result in an inequitable food system.¹³

The two main cross-sectoral national level policies, Malawi's Vision 2063 and the third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III) 2017-2022, adequately integrate gender and equity considerations as they take into account issues to do with empowering women and the youth. In addition, they both include all vulnerable sub-groups. Turning to sectors, we find that of the ten sectoral policies reviewed¹⁴, the majority incorporate some aspects of gender and/or social inclusion in the policy design and formulation. However, only a third of the policies reviewed fully integrate gender and/or social inclusion in policy design, investment/implementation plans and sectoral M&E frameworks, and so can be considered gender responsive (Figure 5). This means that they have put in place mechanisms for increasing the reach of women, youth, the aged and disabled in various food system components in the country. These policies have the potential to go beyond mainstreaming of gender, if they would put in place mechanisms to address the underlying causes of inequality, gender or otherwise.

Figure 5: Gender classification of selected key sectoral policies in Malawi



Source: Author compilation based on review of selected national agriculture and food related policies

¹³ Classification of a policy was achieved by scoring policies against three indicators of different gender dimensions to assess the extent of gender and equity integration in policy design, implementation plan and M&E framework. Policies were scored on each of the three gender dimensions, based on the criteria: i) Gender and equity context – clear objectives for gender and equity included in the policy design; ii) Specific mechanisms for gendering the sector and ensuring inclusivity should be clearly articulated and go beyond current mechanisms; and iii) M&E framework should be gender and age-disaggregated and collecting data for different sub-groups within the food system. A score is given for each dimension with score 0 if the policy does not meet the basic position, score 1 if the policy fulfills the basic condition and score 2 for policies that have taken additional steps towards mainstreaming gender and equity. The gender dimension scores for each policy are then aggregated. Policies with an aggregate score of less than 2 are considered gender-blind. Policies with an aggregate score between 2-4 are categorized as gender-aware. Policies with an aggregate score above 5 are considered as gender-responsive meaning that they mainstream gender in the sectoral policy effectively.

¹⁴ <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/womens-empowerment-agriculture-index>

The remaining policies, which comprise the majority (60%) are gender aware (Figure 4). This implies that these policies/strategies pay modest attention to addressing gender and equity issues, via inclusion of some mechanisms to promote gender equality and engagement of vulnerable groups. Such policies in Malawi, articulate the gender context of the country well and align this to their respective sector. Most however lack disaggregation in the sectoral M&E framework by gender, sex or sub-group. In some cases, the M&E framework is not publicly available for review.

We further analyzed District Development Plans (DDPs) which govern implementation of activities at the sub-national level¹⁵. We find that at the sub-national level, gender and equity considerations have not been significantly reflected in the local development planning process (2017-2020). This applies to many DDPs of that period which lack gender disaggregated M&E frameworks and rely mostly on the Minimum Data Requirement from the local government, which in the past had no disaggregated data in terms of gender or age. This finding held despite the country having a national gender policy and manual guiding the development of gender-sensitive District Development Plans. The mismatch therefore between these two guiding documents and the actual DDPs can be attributed to difficulties in translating their guidance into the development plans due to the lack of meaningful involvement by the lead agencies in the planning process. Currently, all District Development Plans (2022-2026) are under revision and gender and equity considerations are being mainstreamed with support from the Ministry of Gender. In addition, the DDP development manual has updated the minimum data requirements and now requires greater gender, age and sub-group disaggregation.

In terms of program implementation, we find that in all local governments there are non-state actors (i.e., international and local non-governmental organizations, Civil Society Organizations) implementing a wide variety of programs. Almost all of them, make efforts to mainstream gender as they have a gender specialist in place and have developed, or are developing, an organizational gender policy to guide their activities. Different NGOs and/or CSOs identify their own niche when addressing gender issues, based on their specific mission and funding prospects, with varying degrees of involvement by the Ministry of Gender, either at the local or national level. In some cases, this has resulted in conflicting gender priorities and strategies within local governments, and non-alignment with the national gender policy. A coordinated gender programming mechanism for local governments that involves the district level officers from the Ministry of Gender, other key government ministries, and all non-state actors operating in the local government is essential and should be put in place going forward.

5. Key Lessons

- **The Malawi food system dashboard is lagging behind in capturing gender and social inclusion dynamics.** The dashboard has few indicators, both at the general indicator level and the supra-indicator level, that are disaggregated by gender and/or age and/or sub-group. This makes it difficult to effectively track performance – in terms of gender and equity – of Malawi’s food system.
- **Efforts to determine the empowerment of women in agriculture in Malawi has only been at project level with different sources of (dis)empowerment being analyzed.** National level insights into women’s empowerment in the agricultural sector have not been put in place. This makes it difficult for national policy makers to account for the sources of disempowerment for women in the agricultural sector in national policies.
- **Most agriculture and food policies as well as sectoral strategic documents pay modest attention to addressing gender and inclusivity issues.** They do this via inclusion of some mechanisms to promote gender equality and engagement of vulnerable groups. However, most policies lack clear and specific mechanisms

¹⁵ We sampled district development plans for Nsanje, Machinga, Mzimba Boma (Mbelwa), Ntchisi, Dowa and Nkhatabay districts.

for achieving gender equality and often do not fully mainstream gender or equity considerations in sectoral investments, implementation plans and/or M&E frameworks.

- There is a mismatch between the national gender policy and district development plans (DDPs), with most local governments failing to integrate gender in local plans. Furthermore, the autonomous operation of many non-state actors at the local government level has resulted in conflicting gender priorities within local governments, and non-alignment with the national gender policy.

6. Next steps

- Efforts should be made to:
 - Update the Malawi Food System Dashboard to capture all indicators, where reasonably possible, in a disaggregated manner. This should be done for supra-indicators as well.
 - Establish a coordinated gender programming mechanism for local governments that involves district level officers from all key government ministries and all non-state actors operating in local government. The Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Gender should work together to put this in place.
 - Put in place mechanisms to collect annual data on women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. This could be led by the National Statistics Office (NSO) or the agricultural sector's statistical system. The first step of integrating WEAI into the national statistical system is to assess the additional data needs. This will help in identifying additional modules that should be added to already collected national surveys, such as the integrated household survey.
- Further research is required to determine whether the main agricultural and food policies in Malawi are gender exploitative, accommodating or transformative. This would enable determination of whether existing policies reinforce gender inequalities within the food systems or whether they are able to work around existing gender differences and inequalities. Furthermore, this analysis would enable policy makers and key stakeholders to determine whether existing policies and strategies foster critical examination of gender norms and dynamics, in order to strengthen and/or create (national and local institutional) systems that support gender equality, equitable gender norms and most importantly, alter gender norms and dynamics within the country's food system. This would facilitate the sustainable transformation of Malawi's food system.

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