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Features

Gender Issues in Malawi: Selected findings from the 2016 Malawi Local Government Perception Index

Tom Sangala • March 13, 2018 1,307 4 minutes read

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CONSISTENT VOTERS— Women

In February 2017, the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in Malawi: Selected Findings on Gender report was released.

This is the fruit of a project that reflects fruitful collaboration of researchers at the Chr. Michelsen Institute, the Institute of Public Opinion and Research and the Programme on Governance and Local Development.

The project was made possible with the financial support of the Moulay Hicham Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the World Bank and Yale University, which funded development of the Local Governance Performance Index, and the Swedish Research Council and the Research Council of Norway, which funded implementation in Malawi.



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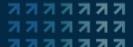
Executive summary

Malawi's context raises a number of challenges that the government, traditional leaders, civil society and the development community are working to address. One area of particular focus is gender equality and women's empowerment.

The LGPI supports this effort by providing evidence-based research to inform the extent to which gender inequalities exist across sectors, cultural contexts and localities. Drawing on the Malawi LGPI, this report assesses the extent to which women and men across different regions of the country, matrilineal and patrilineal cultural groups, and socioeconomic statuses access health and education services equally, experience more or less secure environments and participate politically.

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Political representation, participation

Women consider the low number of women holding political office in Malawi a more important

issue than men. The difference between men's and women's views on this is small, but statistically significant.

Men and women do not differ significantly in their support for electoral gender quotas. Despite the resistance in Parliament to passing a law containing provisions for gender quotas in politics, 76 percent of Malawian men and 78 percent of women support such initiatives to increase gender balance in decision-making.

Malawians also report voting in high numbers, and men and women reported to have voted equally in the last election in 2014. Overall, 87 percent of men and 84 percent of women have ever voted in an election.



When taking the national sample as a whole and excluding those who were too young to vote at the time of the election or ineligible for some other reason, 84.8 percent reported having voted in the most recent general parliamentary election.

But reported voting levels vary by education level and are highest at the lowest education level [no

Schooling]. Surprisingly, among those with no schooling, 92 percent of men and 88 percent of women reported that they had voted in the last elections.

This finding suggests over reporting in terms of who actually cast their ballot on the election day, with figures from the Malawi Electoral Commission showing a voter turnout of 71 percent in the 2014 elections.

In other forms of formal and informal participation, our data show significant gender differences. Men participated more in the national tree-planting campaign and in neighborhoodwatch activities while more women than men contributed to a village bank.

Men are significantly more likely than women to engage with community and political groups to discuss potential solutions to community problems and to be members of a political party. The patterns of community involvement are, to some extent, gendered.

Health, antenatal care

Malawian women perceive themselves to be in better health than men. The poor also rate their health more positively than the wealthy, possibly because the wealthy have more resources to access doctors and be diagnosed with illnesses.

However, women report higher incidence of most physical diseases and are more likely to suffer from mental-health problems than are men.

Women are more likely to visit a clinic than men. This may be due to cultural traditions that emphasise macho characteristics in men, and also, in part, to childbearing.



Nationally, 33 percent of the female population has given birth in the past three years, and 89 percent received antenatal care. But wealthier women have better access to antenatal care.

There were no significant differences in the location of birth across wealth or education levels. Where health is concerned, the Northern Region of Malawi seems to do better than the Southern and Central regions.

The tendency to see a doctor before giving birth varies by district. In Mulanje in the Southern Region, about 79 percent of pregnant women reported to have received care from a doctor, compared to about 96 percent of pregnant women in Kasungu, [in the] Central Region.

Education quality, dropouts

Our data suggest that, for the Malawian population as a whole, women do not have equal access to education and gender gaps in attainment are larger for older Malawians than for younger ones.

But the size of the gender gap does not differ significantly across matrilineal and patrilineal respondents. Despite substantial inequities between rural and urban areas and between richer and poorer citizens, we find no substantive differences in enrollment with regard to gender.

Dropout rates do not differ by gender but the timing and the reasons for dropping out do.

Girls are twice as likely as boys to drop out of school because they need to help with household work. Girls also drop out later than do boys.

Access to land

Women are less likely than men to buy or rent land. Land owned by households with a female head is generally smaller, produces less maize, and possesses fewer livestock.

Consistent with land ownership patterns by kinship systems, our findings show that men in matrilineal villages, women in patrilineal villages, and orphans suffer the most from tenure insecurity.



A majority of Malawians see fertiliser subsidies as being unequally distributed, and there is no gender difference in this sentiment. Men and women did not differ significantly in terms of whether they see unequal access to land as a very serious issue when considering support for new laws that would ensure gender equality in land access.

Security issues, community conflicts

There is no significant difference in terms of whether men and women feel safe in their home and neighbourhood or village, except for walking in their neighborhood at night.

We find that women are more susceptible to assault inside the home (that is, domestic violence). Whereas roughly 3 percent of men and women have been beaten by someone outside the home in the past year (2.9 percent of men and 3.2 percent of women, a nonsignificant difference), only 1 percent of men and 4 percent of women said they were hit or assaulted by someone living in their house.

This finding underscores the need to address issues of domestic violence, which are also likely to go underreported.

One explanation for underreporting is that individuals tend to use a more strict definition of domestic violence when it comes to their own experiences than what the law identifies as domestic violence.

An identical proportion (91 percent) of boys and girls identified in the survey felt safe while going to school. Girls are more likely to be perceived to be threatened by rape when going to school.

Men and women also differ in their perceptions of the issue that causes most conflict in their area, with men more often than women citing land as the primary issue, but women citing concerns such as nonviolent domestic disputes more often than men.



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