

Report of the field visit of the UN-Women Executive Board Bureau to Malawi

Introduction

1. The annual UN-Women field visit took place in Malawi from 5 to 10 May 2018. This field visit was mandated by the Executive Board decision 2017/8. The delegation comprised the President and four Vice-Presidents of the UN-Women Executive Board and two Executive Board Member States representatives from the Western Europe and Others Group.
2. The purpose of the visit was to observe how UN-Women Malawi fulfils the mandate of UN-Women to support nationally identified development priorities and contributes to the implementation of the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The objective was also to understand how UN-Women works collaboratively with the members of the UN Country Team in Malawi to support and contribute to the implementation of the UNDAF, to Malawi's national development priorities and plans and to the 2030 Agenda.
3. The delegation expresses its gratitude to the Government of Malawi for their hospitality, for facilitating the visit and for the opportunity to engage in fruitful discussion on gender equality and women's empowerment with Ministers and high-level Government representatives. Particularly, the delegation would like to thank the President of the Republic of Malawi, His Excellency Peter Mutharika, for in an open discussion with the President of the Executive Board and other members of the delegation. The delegation expresses its appreciation to His Excellency for engagement with UN-Women and advancing gender equality as a HeForShe Impact Champion.
4. The delegation would also like to express its appreciation to the UN-Women Country Representative and the whole UN-Women team in Malawi for preparing a comprehensive agenda for the visit and ensuring a smooth trip. The delegation would like to thank the Executive Board Secretary and his team for ensuring a well-organized and interesting visit.

Visit details

5. In Malawi, UN-Women focuses on three thematic priorities: elimination of violence against women and girls, gender-based governance and women's economic empowerment. The delegation conducted meetings and visits related to all thematic areas.
6. The delegation met with the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Malawi and the UN Country Team (UNCT) to discuss the implementation of the United Nations Development Agreement Framework (UNDAF) in Malawi, key priorities and interventions of the UNCT regarding gender equality and women's empowerment and their collaboration with UN-Women. The delegation also met with UN-Women's development partners including bilateral donors and the World Bank. The delegation participated in a dinner meeting organized by the UN Resident Coordinator with the Parliamentary Women's Caucus and NGOs working on gender equality and collaborating with UN-Women in its programmes. In parallel, the President of the Executive Board met with the President of the Republic of Malawi His Excellency Peter Mutharika and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Emmanuel Fabiano. The delegation also met with senior officials at the Ministry for Gender Equality. On the last day of the visit, the delegation met with the press to brief them on the visit.
7. The delegation travelled to three areas outside of the capital Lilongwe to learn about UN-Women's work on women's economic empowerment, ending child marriage, and promoting and protecting persons with albinism. These trips are described in further detail in this report. The delegation also had informal discussions with bilateral missions and civil society respondents in the margins of the official trip.

Current situation and key challenges

8. Malawi is a landlocked, densely populated, low-income country in south-eastern Africa with a population of 18.06 million. It faces significant development challenges. Poverty is widespread with 72% of the population

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living on less than USD 1.25 per day. The economy is dependent on agriculture and therefore vulnerable to economic shocks created by extreme weather and climate change. The population is most likely to double to 30 million by 2030. Reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend will be a challenge: the private sector is still developing, and the formal labour market provides too few jobs for Malawi's youth and women. Malawi's democratic nation-state is emerging, and must govern alongside influential traditional governance structures. Malawi has conducted five peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections since 1993. Currently, 16% of parliamentarians and 11% of local councillors are women.

9. Whilst the country is mostly peaceful, respondents were concerned that conditions for instability were ripening given recent crises in food insecurity, floods, famine and internal displacement. The delegation heard that civil society space is narrowing, and some vulnerable groups, notably the LGBTIQ community, said they felt increasingly marginalized and excluded. The upcoming 2019 national election will be key to testing how peaceable Malawi can remain, whether the electoral system can deliver more women leaders, and if the young democracy can hold firm.

Gender, women and girls

10. Gender inequality is a major development concern for Malawi that significantly impacts education, employment, governance, health, and safety and security outcomes for women and girls.

- According to UN-Women, only 39% of women have completed primary school compared to 58.2% of men, and only 45% of girls stay in school after grade eight.
- Poverty is gendered. Rural women and female-headed households experience poverty most acutely. They face significant barriers to land rights, paid work, financing and credit.
- More than 70% of small farmers are women who are the most vulnerable to climate change or extreme weather, which affects their ability to secure income and food.
- Whilst women's political participation has improved in recent years, progress has been reversing in part due to a weak gender machinery and few effective structures to promote women into leadership roles.
- Women have a higher HIV prevalence rate (13%) than men (8%).
- Maternal mortality rates are some of the highest in the world. The adolescent birth rate is the third highest in the Southern Africa region. The delegation heard that recent progress in lowering teen pregnancy rates has reversed, with rates climbing again.
- Respondents said that child marriage prevalence is very high, and worsens during times of financial stress and food insecurity.
- Women with disabilities face intensified and more pronounced forms of violence, social stigma and discrimination. The group learned about the specific human rights challenges for LGBTIQ communities and other marginalized groups, such as persons with albinism.

11. Malawi has some very good gender laws and policies but implementation is a challenge. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare (MoGCSW) is the responsible gender ministry mandated to implement on the gender agenda. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, the Malawi Human Rights and Law Commission as well as the Office of the President and Cabinet and Planning and Development also play an important role. The Constitution enshrines equality and women's rights, and includes a specified statute on gender equality. Malawi has also established a suite of gender-related laws and frameworks that align with CEDAW, including the Gender Equality Act; Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act, and the Trafficking in Persons Act. Malawi recently made a constitutional amendment that raises the age of marriage from 16 to 18 years. At the subnational level, work is being done to formulate a Chief bylaws framework on gender, including raising the legal age for marriage.

Cooperation between the Government of Malawi and UN-Women

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12. The UN shares a joint work plan with the Ministry of Gender (MoG) to help it coordinate activities. Overall, the cooperation of UN-Women with the Government of Malawi works well. The key point of contact for the work of UN-Women is the MoG. Focal areas of UN-Women's work show in the cooperation. The goal to end child marriage is high on the agenda and the MoG is involved in the work to implement the recent changes in the legislation. The "HeforShe" campaign helps to mobilize the Chiefs at village level and the Government is supporting the campaign. School fees are a single key issue that needs attention. Another important area of cooperation between the UN-Women and the government is the rise in teenage pregnancies. Recent numbers of increasing teenage pregnancies are worrying.

13. The Government of Malawi supports the 50:50 campaign aimed at gender parity in political representation. The government is collaborating with civil society organizations. The next election cycle will be an important test of women's political participation. According to members of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, the parties should work hard to enable participation of women in all stages of the election, especially in the primaries.

14. The Government is committed to increasing funding allocated to the MoG. The current budget of the MoG is MWK 15,800,000,000, or approximately USD 21,800,000, which amounts to 1.05% of the Government budget.

Key focus issues

Child marriage

14. UN-Women reported that Malawi has one of the world's highest rates of child marriage, with one in two girls married by the age of 18. The drivers of child marriage are complex. One reason cited by development cooperation respondents and district-level representatives was deep-seated beliefs in the traditional role of women, and the high social value placed on having big families. The delegation was also told that school fees can be too high for parents, pushing girls out of school to enter into early marriage.

15. The delegation heard how child marriage is crippling to the human rights and capabilities of Malawian women and girls. Girls married at an early age are at heightened risk of domestic violence. They have fewer chances to be educated and consequently a reduced potential to earn a stable income. They will have less access to networks and structures that promote women's leadership skills and political participation, reinforcing unequal power relations and male-dominated decision-making structures. When forced to bear children too young, girls are at heightened risk of dying in childbirth. According to UN-Women, teen pregnancies contribute to about 20-30% of maternal deaths in the country. Child marriage cuts short girls and women's contribution to Malawi's economy, political life, and labour market, and is a barrier to national development.

The delegation visited Dedza, about a two-hour drive outside of the capital Lilongwe. Dedza is home to Senior Chief Kachindamoto, who is leading the fight against child marriage in Malawi. Chief Kachindamoto works closely with her community, including mother groups, father groups, education peers, members of the Village Development Committees, faith-based leaders, and NGOs, to change attitudes and behaviours. This network also helps the Chief to report cases and monitor children at risk. The Chief has gone door-to-door to educate community members of the dangers of child marriage and to advocate for girls' education. She has also negotiated the release of girls from marriage, and helped contribute to girls' school fees so they can continue their education. Chief Kachindamoto has reached out to other Senior Chiefs across Malawi to encourage them to adopt similar practices. This is key given the importance traditional structures of authority have in Malawian lives, often over national laws.

16. Respondents were clear that the strong results achieved by Chief Kachindamoto need to be on a national scale. UN-Women has assisted by hosting a workshop for about 50 female Chiefs and their spouses across the country.

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17. UN-Women can do more to help deliver reductions in child marriage rates nationally. The delegation encourages UN-Women to develop strategic interventions in coordination with UNFPA and UNICEF and other relevant UN actors. These interventions could focus on strengthening the capacity of the government to work with traditional structures to embed laws and change attitudes and behaviours. UN-Women can also play a stronger leadership and coordination role for civil society, whose role is vital for pushing national and subnational structures to find long-term solutions.

Women's Economic Empowerment

18. According to UN-Women, closing the gender gap in Malawi would see a USD 100 million GDP increase, 238,000 people lifted out of poverty, and a 7.3% increase in agricultural production. UN-Women has targeted women in the agricultural sector to help close the gap and deliver women's economic empowerment. Agriculture is a key engine of Malawi's economy and a source of income, food and nutrition for women and their families. But the agricultural sector is also beset with gender inequality structures, which disadvantage women in terms of accessing productive and financial resources.

The delegation visited the Mwaiwathu Women Fruit Juice Producer Group in the Salima district, about two hours' drive from Lilongwe. This women-led cooperative enterprise currently has 10 women making juice from baobab, tamarind, tomatoes, pawpaw and guava to sell at the local markets. The factory was first set up in 2009 with assistance from World Vision, who acquired the juicing machines. UN-Women has provided occasional training to the group on business management and gender governance.

To join the group, women must pay a joining fee and share a similar work ethic and values. The delegation learned that the juice factory has been transformative for some its members, who made enough income to improve their house, build a second house, and support their children's education.

However, challenges and barriers remain. To increase production, the group would need more water, but the nearest well is miles away and the water supply can be uncertain due to climate change. To increase their access to markets, the group would also need to travel beyond the local area, but do not have access to transport. They also have to make further improvements to the factory building in order to be certified by government regulators and attain approval to sell in formal markets. The membership of the cooperative had also decreased from 30 down to 10. Members also tended to be older, posing questions on what local economic opportunities younger women can avail of whilst taking care of children.

19. This was an interesting trip that afforded the delegation an opportunity to observe a women-led enterprise and speak to its members whose lives have been transformed. However, it was not clear if UN-Women's engagement with the project aligns with a strategic approach. The delegation observes that UN-Women's added value rests in achieving policy change rather than supporting or running small projects. For example, it is not feasible for UN-Women to replicate smaller-scale projects across the country. In the future, UN-Women could consider building upon existing strategic level interventions with, for example, business associations and chambers of commerce, rather than assisting small-scale projects.

20. The delegation encourages UN-Women to use the lessons and findings of small-scale projects and to package these up into a comprehensive advocacy strategy. UN-Women could help achieve longer-term change by working with the Government, UNDP and the IFIs to unlock structural barriers to women's economic empowerment. This would require focusing more on upstream interventions and less on small-scale projects to ensure that gender is at the centre of agricultural policy and development financing. The delegation understands that a new partnership is underway with the World Bank. This will be important to strengthening UN-Women's economic empowerment programme.

Human rights and leaving no one behind

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21. Persons with albinism have come under increasing attack in Malawi. The delegation heard that negative beliefs around albinism have migrated from neighbouring Tanzania to Malawi. People with albinism are vulnerable to violent attacks and trafficking. They have reduced access to employment and education opportunities because of social discrimination and stigma. They are also vulnerable to skin cancer and other health issues.

The delegation met with the Association of Persons with Albinism in Machinga to learn more about UN-Women's effort to protect and promote the rights of persons with albinism. Through the UN Human Rights Window, UN-Women have supported awareness and media campaigns, and provided sun lotion, eyeglasses, protective gear and security items. UN-Women have worked with local community groups to strengthen protective mechanisms. This has contributed to fewer attacks on people with albinism, and helped to open up access to education and employment.

22. UN-Women are to be commended for committing to "leaving no one behind" and tackling the human rights violations of one of the most vulnerable groups in Malawi.

23. The delegation understands that UN-Women stepped into this project in response to a government call for emergency support. As such, UN-Women's project interventions were short-term and not necessarily sustainable. The delegation questions if it is UN-Women's role to fill operational gaps that should otherwise be the responsibility of government or service providers. UN-Women's future efforts could focus on strengthening Malawi's disability policy and monitoring its implementation, such as continuing to offer support to the Disability Department's Action Plan 2018-2020. Other areas of focus could include working with relevant ministries and UN agencies to secure government budget lines for people with albinism to support their health and security needs.

24. The delegation met with strong leaders from the albinism community. There is continued opportunity for UN-Women to strengthen the capacity of civil society actors to coordinate on disability issues at local and national levels. UN-Women should also be adding a gender analysis to disability issues in Malawi to sensitize policy makers, decision makers and civil society actors.

24. Outside of the official schedule, the delegation informally met with a representative of the LGBTIQ community. The delegation heard that LGBTIQ individuals are socially discriminated by their families, at work, and at school. UN-Women in coordination with the UN Country Team could strengthen their advocacy and support for LGBTIQ issues, and help promote the opening of civil society space for LGBTIQ groups.

Normative and standards raising

25. Malawi's gender equality policy environment is quite well established. The delegation heard about UN-Women's strong partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture that resulted in the Ministry contributing to UN-Women's budget.

26. There remains an implementation gap between policy and practice. The delegation raised this in meetings with high-level officials and called for an increased budget allocation to the Ministry of Gender.

27. Development cooperation actors are very supportive of UN-Women. They called on the UN Country Team and UN-Women to increase visibility of gender issues, to advocate more boldly for the rights of women and girls, and to strengthen efforts to hold the government to account.

28. Whilst the delegation heard that civil society space is narrowing, UN-Women could strengthen their efforts to build the capacity of civil society actors and to reinforce the national gender machinery. There is an opportunity to foster more coordinated action across the country on gender equality.

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UN-Women's strong coordination of Malawi's contribution to the Commission on the Status of Women impressed the delegation. In addition to coordinating preparations in advance of CSW, UN-Women will also be holding follow-up meetings with key government and civil society stakeholders to monitor progress in the adoption of CSW's agreed conclusion. The delegation recommends that this comprehensive approach be adopted as a global practice.

29. The HeForShe campaign underpins much of UN-Women's messaging, including ending child marriage. The HeForShe commitments of the President of Malawi are also positive. The delegation was interested in whether the UN-Women HeForShe global campaign, based in New York, can allocate resources to help localize campaigns. UN-Women Malawi said they have access to English language HeForShe resources only. The effectiveness of the Malawi HeForShe campaign could be augmented if resources were made available by UN-Women HQ to further tailor the campaign to local contexts.

Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team: Putting UN reform into practice and opportunities for gender

30. UN Malawi delivers 20% of ODA. This is a sizeable amount but overshadowed by the World Bank (FACT CHECK) and bilateral donor programmes. It is therefore vital that UN interventions are catalytic, transformative and coordinated both within the UN as well as with other development actors. The delegation saw good examples of this happening as well as areas for strengthening.

31. The UN Country Team has made gender a key priority. However, the delegation suggests that more can be done to ensure the integration of gender into UN programming and advocacy. Doing a study on indicators and comprehensive national base line data would help with implementing SDG 5 in Malawi. The implementation of the Secretary-General's reform vision will be an opportunity to maximize the full capacity of the UNCT to accelerate progress on gender.

32. There are indications that the UNCT is already embracing the spirit of reform. For example, the UN Vision 2030 for Malawi reflects reform principles and gives prominence to gender issues:

"Supporting the government and population of Malawi to achieve the SDGs through inclusive, sustainable and resilient growth, by ensuring human rights, gender equity, accountable institutions, and reaching the unreached."

33. Members of the UNCT welcomed the de-linking of the RC as a good step towards pushing the UN to work together better and to mitigate competition. UN-Women also welcomed the "common chapter" of the funds and programmes strategic plans 2018-2021. It provides UN-Women with a platform to push for the integration of gender into UNCT programming.

33. The RC is overseeing an integrated response that links peace and security to humanitarian and development issues. Joint analysis, including conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction, will inform the next phase of the UN Development Agreement Framework (UNDAF). The RC is doing a good job championing UN-Women priorities on child marriage and women's political participation in particular.

34. Malawi's very rapid population growth is a "crisis" according to development cooperation actors. The delegation has concerns that the UNCT were not yet fully grasping the urgency. UN-Women should urgently seek strategic interventions with the UNFPA and/or WHO to address the population crisis and its gendered affects. The government has recommended that the UN assist in a study to investigate why rates of teen pregnancy are on the rise again.

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35. In the context of the Presidential elections coming up next year, focus should be given to increasing women's political participation. The RC and UNCT could assist UN-Women in highlighting this issue.

Recommendations

36. It would be useful to have briefing on ethical interactions with vulnerable groups and children before the visit. When people share their experiences the setup of the meeting should be planned in such a way that people, especially children, feel secure. It might also be useful to give participants in the trip guidance in advance on questions and comments that are made to people who have had traumatic experiences.

37. The press encounter was useful in bringing increased visibility to UN-Women's work in Malawi but the group would have benefitted from pre-briefings on expected media presence during trips. In addition, it would be good to have an assurance that media interacting with vulnerable groups were trained in ethics and that vulnerable groups' consent had been attained.

38. A general ToR for joint board visits across the boards would help implementation of the visits.

39. UN-Women in Malawi would benefit from strengthening its policy role in the women's economic empowerment programme and programme on vulnerable groups. UN-Women might also benefit from increasing partnerships in project implementation and focusing its own activities on the policy and normative work.

40. UN Malawi needs to ensure that SDG 5 is implemented across all UN entities and in the national development plan. Doing a comprehensive study on indicators and national base line data would help with implementing SDG 5 in Malawi. Women's political participation during the upcoming election cycle is also central to the implementation of SDG 5 in Malawi. Another big challenge for UN Malawi is the rapid population increase in the country. The Indicator on teenage pregnancies should be closely followed.

41. It was very useful to hear how the CSW makes a difference at country level. The experience of Malawi formulating a plan to implement CSW decisions is a best practice that should be considered in other countries as well.

42. The Board could have regular discussions on normative work being implemented on the ground through case studies like Malawi's CSW follow up.