

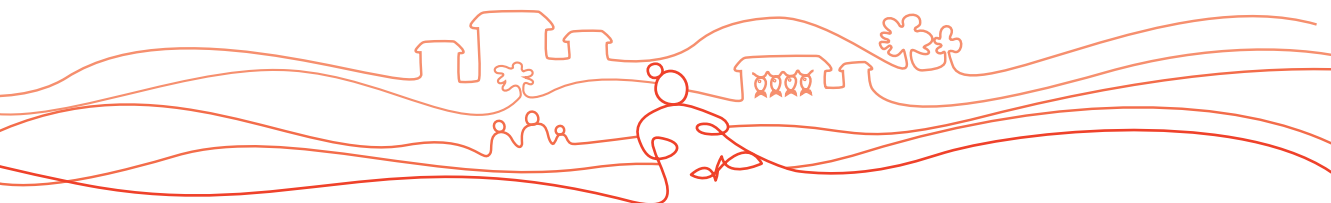


Food and Agriculture
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The contribution of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Malawi

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AWFISHNET

African Women Fish Processors and Traders network

BVC

Beach Village Committee

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

COVID-19

coronavirus disease 2019

FAO

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SSF GUIDELINES

Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

Acknowledgements

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1

Introduction

The small-scale fisheries sector has an essential role in transforming Malawi's food system by contributing to the goal of ending poverty and hunger through healthy and sustainable diets and equitable livelihoods.

Gender equality is a basic human right that is fundamental to achieving gender equitable small-scale fisheries in Malawi, as more than 70 000 women are estimated to depend on small-scale fisheries in the country (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023). Although

women are less present in the harvesting phase of the value chain because of restrictive gender norms, they are largely engaged in post-harvest activities such as processing and trading.

Beyond their involvement in fisheries value chains, women play an essential role in food and nutrition security through their responsibilities in the provision and preparation of food consumed at home. However, research indicates that, compared to men, they often bear a disproportionate work burden (Grassi,

FIGURE 1
Malawi



OVER **90% OF FISH PRODUCTION**

COMES FROM SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

OVER **60 000 PEOPLE** ARE FISHERS AND OVER **500 000** PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED IN THE POST-HARVEST SECTOR

LAKES IN MALAWI SUPPLY OVER

70%

OF THE COUNTRY'S ANIMAL PROTEIN AND

40%

OF THE COUNTRY'S TOTAL PROTEIN AVAILABLE FOR CONSUMPTION

“USIPA” IS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF ANIMAL PROTEIN AND MICRONUTRIENTS IN THE MALAWIAN DIET DUE TO ITS AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

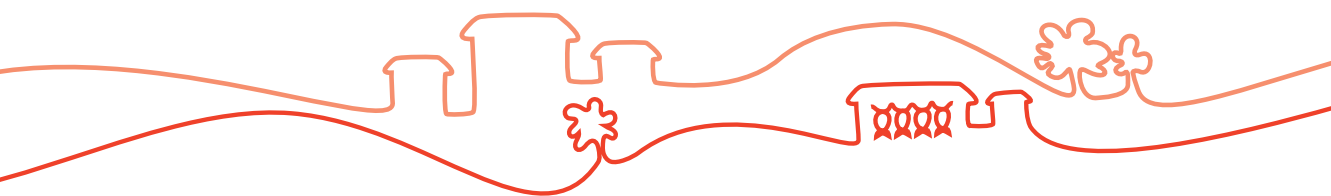
Source: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and Public Sector Reforms. 2021. *Annual Economic Report, 2021*. Government of Malawi: Lilongwe, Malawi.

Landberg and Huyer, 2015). The responsibility of unpaid domestic and care work is usually assigned to women based on gendered social norms. Combined with work within the community, this results in a triple work burden for women, whose income levels, livelihoods and food security are therefore impacted, and limits their opportunities for formal, full-time paid employment, training and career advancement (UN Women, 2020).

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) set out guidelines for action and policy to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries. In particular, Chapter 8 of the SSF Guidelines highlights the crucial need to integrate gender mainstreaming into small scale fisheries development strategies as a way to challenge practices that are detrimental to women (FAO, 2015). Indeed, this brief targets social and cultural constraints as crucial aspects to be tackled in the Malawian context through tailored interventions at the national level, specifically in small-scale fisheries.

Furthermore, the SSF Guidelines call for compliance with international instruments,

such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This brief will further examine these instruments in connection with national policies aimed at realizing gender equality. Recognizing this call, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) elaborated and published an in-depth handbook, *Towards Gender-Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries – In support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*. The handbook was developed to support gender-equitable small scale fisheries by enhancing the understanding of their gender dimensions, with a focus on the specific role and conditions of women in the small scale fisheries sector (Biswas, 2017). Strengthening commitment and implementation of the SSF Guidelines, particularly in relation to addressing gender equality – but also food loss and waste, and promoting equitable trade, governance and utilization of fish – can help safeguard and enhance the benefits of small-scale fisheries for sustainable development in Malawi.



2

National context

2.1 Legal framework, policies and regulations on gender equality and women's empowerment in Malawi

At the international level, Malawi has ratified all the major conventions on gender equality, including CEDAW in 1987 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995. In 2005, Malawi also ratified the Maputo Protocol, requiring states to combat all forms of discrimination against women. The

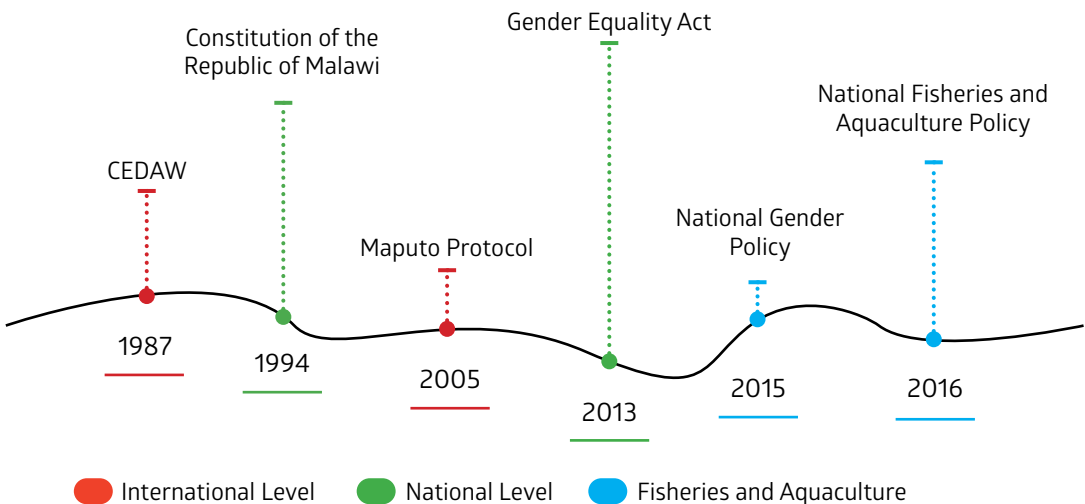
country is also a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include strong gender equality and women's empowerment components throughout, both in the form of a standalone goal (Goal 5) and as a crosscutting theme, with more than 30 gender-related targets across the other SDGs (FAO, 2020).

At the national level, Malawi's Constitution recognizes women's rights to full and equal



FIGURE 2

A timeline for gender in the legal framework and policies of Malawi



Source: FAO, n.d. FAOLEX database: legislative database of national laws and regulations on food, agriculture and renewable natural resources. Rome, FAO.

protection under the law and freedom from discrimination. Additional policies have been implemented to further promote equality and prevent gender-based violence and sexual harassment. These include the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (Government of Malawi, 2006), which provides a legal framework to address various forms of domestic violence, and the Gender Equality Act (2013), which promotes gender equality and empowerment throughout society, addresses discrimination and sexual harassment, and promotes public awareness for gender equality. With support from the United Nations Population Fund and the European Union, the Gender Equality Act was followed, in 2016, by the Gender Equality Act Implementation and Monitoring Plan (2016–2020) to promote gender equality throughout all parts of society.

Legally, women have equal rights and authority over assets during marriage under the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act and rights to inheritance under the Deceased Estates (Wills, Inheritance and Protection) Act of 2011. However, these laws are often overridden by customary laws, social norms and lack of access to information (Ministry of Gender, Children, Disabilities and Social Welfare, 2019).

Many strategies in Malawi are guided by the National Gender Policy (Government of Malawi, 2015), which aims to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2018, the Government of Malawi launched the National Strategy for Adolescent Girls and Young Women (2018–2022; Government of Malawi, 2018) to protect adolescent girls and young women from all forms of violence and discrimination. Other recent strategies relevant to gender equality include the National Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2014–2020), the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages (2018–2022), the National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy (2017–2023), and the National Action Plan on

Women, Peace and Security (Government of Malawi, 2022).

The National Gender Policy (2015) recognizes the gendered barriers women face in the environmental and natural resources sector. Policy priority area 4 is Gender in Natural Resource, Environment, and Climate Change Management. Its main objective is “to ensure equal participation and involvement of women, men, girls, boys and vulnerable groups in the management of natural resources, environment and climate change” (Government of Malawi, 2015, p. 31). The strategies include promoting the participation of women and other vulnerable groups in “the planning, design and management of natural resources, environment and climate change interventions,” advocating for gender mainstreaming in environmental impact assessments, promoting research on gender-responsive natural resource management, and supporting gender analysis in natural resource and climate change policies and programmes. This policy therefore supports an enabling framework to mainstream gender throughout fisheries and aquaculture and to expand the participation of women, girls and other marginalized groups in resource management processes.

The National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, 2016) explicitly recognizes gender inequality as a key issue in the sector and calls for gender mainstreaming in fisheries sector strategies and programmes. However, while gender is called out in the policy statements under Priority Areas 5 (Social Development and Decent Employment), 6 (Research and Information), and 7 (Capacity Development), it is not mentioned in Priority Areas 1 to 4. Priority Area 4 is Governance, so the omission of gender is particularly concerning as it reinforces women's exclusion from decision-making and resource management spaces. Similarly, the Fisheries



Conservation and Management Act of 1997 does not provide explicit guidance on mainstreaming gender in fisheries governance.

The Government of Malawi, however, is taking meaningful steps to mainstream gender in fisheries policy. In collaboration with FAO, the Department of Fisheries is in the process of finalizing a Gender, HIV and AIDS Strategy for the fisheries sector. This strategy recognizes the linkages between gender relations and the risk factors for HIV/AIDS in fishing and fish farming communities, and suggests interventions and gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring and evaluation to strengthen HIV/AIDS programmes in the sector. As analysis of the previous HIV/AIDS strategy shows, to be successful, the strategy will need to be well funded, clear and concise, tailored to the implementation capacity at the district and local levels, and easily monitored (Sibale and Shaba, 2021).

Recently, Malawi has also committed to working towards the development of a National Plan of Action (NPOA) to implement the SSF Guidelines (NPOA-SSF). This plan will support the Government of Malawi to improve the livelihoods of small-scale fishers and facilitate the sustainable management of fishery resources. Given that gender equality is a key pillar of the SSF Guidelines, it will be important for the NPOA-SSF to implement gender equitable strategies to support small-scale fisheries.

2.2 Sociocultural and economic context

A significant portion of Malawi's population lives in poverty. Malawi ranks 169th out of 188 countries on the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index (UNDP, 2022). According to the most recent Malawi Poverty Report covering the period from April 2019 to April 2020, 50.8 percent of the population lives in poverty and 20.5 percent

Socioeconomic statistics

MALAWI ranked 115th out of **156 countries** on the **GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX** (World Economic Forum, 2021)

Women and girls over 15 years of age spent **8.7 percent** of their time in **UNPAID CARE WORK** compared to **1.3 percent** for men (UN Women, n.d.)

13 000 CHILD MARRIAGES and **40 000 TEENAGE PREGNANCIES** have been recorded between April and September 2020 (Spotlight Initiative, 2020)

Rural populations experience **DEEPER POVERTY** at an average rate of **19.3 percent** of people below the poverty line compared to **4.4 percent** in urban areas (National Statistics Office, 2021)

of the population lives in extreme poverty, an increase from 20.1 percent in 2016/2017 (National Statistical Office, 2021). Research has also shown that women-headed households are more likely to be poor than male counterparts (Ministry of Finance, 2017; FISH, 2015).

Despite numerous laws, policies and strategies to combat discrimination, gender inequality in the country is high; Malawi scores a 0.554 on the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2021).

Gender-based violence against women and girls is a significant problem in Malawi (Torell *et al.*, 2021; Spotlight Initiative, 2020; Ministry of Gender, Children, Disabilities and



BOX 1

Gender-based discrimination and violence against women

- Gender-based violence in Malawi is perpetrated through culturally accepted practices, such as early and forced marriage, sexual assault and domestic violence.
- Over 40 percent of ever-married women in Malawi have experienced some form of spousal violence.*
- 34 percent of women aged 15-49 in Malawi reported ever experiencing physical violence and 21 percent reported ever experiencing sexual violence.*
- Verbal abuse through name-calling is observed towards women who participate in the fisheries sector.
- Gender-based violence and discrimination are significant barriers to women's equitable participation in fisheries value chains in Malawi: Women reported that men would steal fish from them, which was exacerbated by the lack of security services and infrastructure at the landing sites.**
- Women may be forced to have sex with fishermen in exchange for fish ('Fish-for-sex'), either through coercion on the part of the fisherman and/or due to heightened competition at the landing sites.***

Notes: *National Statistical Office & ICF Macro. 2017. Malawi demographic and health survey 2015-2016. Zomba, Malawi: NSO; **FAO. 2023. *Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries for Sustainable Food Systems - Consolidated Baseline Report: Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome, FAO; ***Torell, E. *et al.*, 2021. Assessing and Advancing Gender Equity in Lake Malawi's Small-Scale Fisheries Sector. Sustainability, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313001>; FISH. 2015. *Fisheries Gender and Youth Analysis in Four Major Lakes in Malawi*. USAID/FISH Project, Pact Publication, Lilongwe, Malawi: 32 pp.

Social Welfare, 2019). Particularly at risk are marginalized women and girls and other vulnerable groups, including refugees, the elderly and people with disabilities (Ministry of Gender, Children, Disabilities and Social Welfare, 2019).

Similarly, child marriages are also common, particularly for girls; in fact, over 40 percent of girls are married before the age of 18, and 9 percent are married before the age of 15 (University of Zurich *et al.*, 2019). Several risks are associated with early marriage, including lower education level and increased risk of infant mortality. While the implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in 2018 was promising, the COVID-19 pandemic

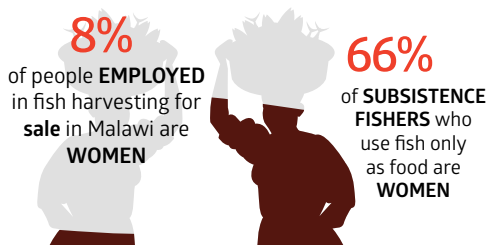
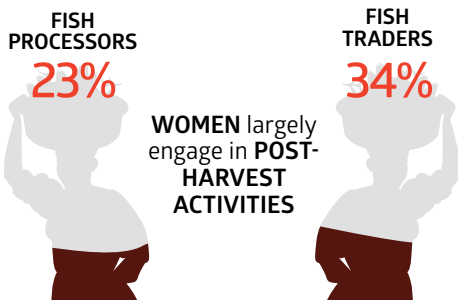
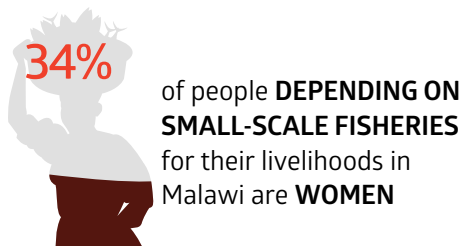
and the associated economic impacts have worsened this practice.

2.3 Sex-disaggregated data – Employment

Malawi has responded to only 42 percent of the 122 gender-responsive indicators to monitor the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN Women, 2021). Similarly, gender-responsive data collection, using tools such as comprehensive gender-based violence prevalence surveys and time-use surveys, have not been conducted in any official capacity in the country (UN Women, 2021), so there are gaps in knowledge on the gender division of labour and time. Neither the National Statistics Act of 2013 nor the



FIGURE 3
Sex-disaggregated data



National Statistics Strategic Plan (2019–2023) includes gender provisions, although the Act lists gender as a statistic domain under the National Statistical System (UN Women, 2021). While some ministries and agencies collect gender data, there is insufficient capacity and infrastructure to support regular and standardized gender data collection and gender data sharing (UN Women, 2021).

According to the Malawian Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and Public Sector Reforms (2021), over 65 000 people are directly employed as fishers, over half a million people are indirectly employed in ancillary activities in the fisheries value chains, and the livelihoods of over 1.6 million people are supported by fishery value chains. Most people in Malawi are engaged in the informal sector, and women are more likely to be in informal employment than men (UN Women, 2021). However, while it is known that women play a substantial role in fishery value chains, official sex-disaggregated data are not available. This data gap ultimately impedes the recognition of women's hidden work as a vital contribution to the sector and prevents the development of policies that can more effectively contribute to the sustainable management of the industry (WorldFish, 2010).

Data estimates. Source: Adapted from FAO, Duke University & WorldFish. 2023. *Illuminating Hidden Harvests - The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development*. Rome, FAO.

3

Methodology

Information for this brief comes from a review of the available literature, as well as from primary data collected through gender-sensitive surveys conducted as part of an FAO small scale fisheries study.¹ Primary data were collected in Malawi between 16 November 2020 and 9 December 2020. The data collection methods included individual questionnaires (n = 306), focus group discussions (n = 11) and key informant interviews (n = 10). All respondents of the individual questionnaires were women. The study took place in three regions and three districts in the country: Southern (Mangochi

District), Central (Salima District) and Northern (Karonga District), with a focus on ten selected landing sites.

The literature review involved using electronic databases to identify journal articles as well as grey literature, national and international statistics reports, and national and international policies and regulations. The literature review served to validate data from the small-scale fisheries surveys, as well as to provide additional context to clarify gender dynamics in Malawian fisheries.

¹ The data for this brief were collected as part of a FAO small-scale fisheries study conducted under the Empowering women in small-scale fisheries for sustainable food systems (FGCP/GLO/645/NOR) project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, as well as through the continuation of this work under the project titled Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender-equitable and climate-resilient food systems and livelihoods (FMM/GLO/155/MUL), funded by the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism, now Flexible Volunteer Contributions (FVC) (FAO, 2023).

4

Gender in the small-scale fisheries value chains

4.1 Understanding gender and the role of women in small-scale fisheries in Malawi

The cultural belief that views men as linked to the waterscape and women as mostly belonging to land can explain the gendered division of roles found in many fishery sectors worldwide (Torell *et al.*, 2021; Alonso-Población and Niehof, 2019). Malawi is no exception: men represent the majority of fishers, while women dominate the post-harvest sphere by participating in buying, processing, marketing and retailing fish (FAO, 2023; FISH, 2015). However, although many fish processors are women, there is some evidence that men processors retain access to fish with a high economic value, leaving women to process the smaller, less economically valuable (but often nutritionally dense) species (Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019; Limuwa and Synnevåg, 2018).

Women's role in fisheries is limited by social norms that impose an inequitable division of household labour, limiting time spent on economic activities (Torell *et al.*, 2021; FISH, 2015). In fact, the Malawi Labour Force Participation Survey (2013) found that women spent six times longer on unpaid care work than did men (Mkandawire and Hendriks, 2019). According to the data collected under the FAO small-scale fisheries study, women reported spending over 2 hours per day on cooking (8 percent of the day) and 10 hours per week

on domestic work (6 percent of the week), while another 12 hours per week (7 percent of the week) were spent travelling to and from the home (FAO, 2023). Women also spent over 53 hours per week (31 percent) on fishery value chain-related activities, including processing, transporting and trading. In contrast, women only had 5 hours of leisure time per week (3 percent) (FAO, 2023). Women in Malawi reported having 8 hours for sleep and rest per day (33 percent), which is comparable to women in Ghana and Uganda, and significantly more than women in Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania (FAO, 2023). Future studies could compare these data with the time use of men, as well as between women user groups, to increase knowledge about the burden of women's unpaid care and domestic work.

In addition, some men in Malawi prevent their wives from participating in fisheries value chains (Manyungwa, Hara and Chimatiro, 2019); women who do participate in value chains may be subject to harassment and verbal abuse through name-calling (e.g. whores, prostitutes, loose women) (FAO, 2023; Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019). Women are told that they should be at home taking care of their families instead of working in the fishery (FAO, 2023). These social norms and the associated dynamics of control can impede women's participation in the fisheries by either preventing them from engaging altogether

or limiting their opportunities and creating a hostile environment.

While these gender differences are widespread, research has shown them to be subject to change as social norms shift and women gain greater access to assets. Whereas, previously, women represented only 1 percent of gear owners in Malawi fisheries (Department of Fisheries, 2014, as cited in FISH, 2015), more recent estimates cite women as representing 5 percent of gear owners (Department of Fisheries, 2017, as cited in Manyungwa, Hara and Chimatiro, 2019). Similarly, women are taking on roles in transportation to get fish to markets, an activity previously barred to them (Torell *et al.*, 2021). In the FAO small-scale fisheries study, women also demonstrated opinions inconsistent with current gender roles; in general, respondents disagreed that only women should market and trade fish. However, a small majority did agree that women should process fish and only men should fish (FAO, 2023), thus demonstrating that these roles are internalized and will likely be difficult to shift.

4.2 (Equal) voice and decision-making power

In some regions of Malawi, it is reported that though women play a large role in decision-making about fish buying, processing, storage, transportation and marketing, they have almost no voice in decisions regarding fishing (FAO, 2023). This mirrors the gender roles and relations in fisheries, in which women are involved in many post-harvest activities but are mostly absent from fishing. Other research gives some insight into these dynamics: for instance, Torell *et al.* (2021) found that, generally, whoever produced or owned the fish in the household had more say as to where to sell products and how to use the income from the sales. Similarly, Manyungwa, Hara and Chimatiro (2019) found that participating in fishery activities increased women's household

decision-making power, as women would contribute more to household decisions about finances, although the final decision still often rested with men.

Women in Malawi also participate in making decisions about the sale of assets. Women reported that they participated either solely or jointly in decisions about all fishing assets they owned (FAO, 2023), although the extent of women's decision-making power and the dynamics of decision-making is not yet known. Women's decision-making in household decisions about income and assets is crucial not only for women's empowerment, but also for food and livelihood security, as women often spend more money on food and household needs than men do (Manyungwa, Hara and Chimatiro, 2019; Simmance *et al.*, 2021a).

Beyond household-level decision-making, women must also be involved in fisheries and resource management bodies to ensure that their voices and needs are represented and valued. While it is vital that women participate in these spaces, social norms and other gender-based constraints can impact women's ability and comfort participating in these decision-making spaces. According to the FAO small-scale fisheries study, only 29 percent of women felt very satisfied with their comfort level when participating in decisions about the fishery value chain and projects. Similar percentages were also found in relation to women's comfort as they spoke up in protest against fishery activities or decisions. This suggests that women could benefit from support, such as training in public speaking and leadership skills, to increase their comfort level while participating in these processes.

However, even when women do participate in these engagements, most report feeling dissatisfied with the outcome (63 percent somewhat or not at all satisfied). Overall, women report that even when they do speak

up, the issues they raise are not addressed (FAO, 2023), thus discouraging women from further engagement. This aligns with results from previous studies, which found that while women participated in fishery groups and governance structures more than men did, they struggled to have their voices heard or to access leadership roles (Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019). To address this gap, decision-making bodies such as Beach Village Committees could foster a gender-sensitive environment in decision-making spaces and provide gender sensitization training for men so that management committees recognize the value of women's contributions and their leadership abilities.

4.3 (Equal) rights, access and control over resources

Women play a key role in household food security because they often invest more of their income on food and household needs (Manyungwa, Hara and Chimatiro, 2019). While fish is a significant source of animal protein in the country, data from central Malawi suggest that fishing households consume more fish on average per week than non-fishing households (Mlauzi and Mzengereza, 2017). All households in the FAO small-scale fisheries study reported consuming fish at least once a week, with the majority consuming fish between 5 and 7 times a week. The data show that fishing households generally consume small fish, as the medium and large fish are set aside to sell (FAO, 2023).

While most households have regular access to fish, most participants also indicated that they occasionally face challenges to buying fish. Price, limited availability because of weather conditions and seasonal production patterns were cited as primary barriers preventing households from accessing fish for home consumption (FAO, 2023). Nankwenya, Kaunda and Chimatiro (2017) found that demand for fish

is inelastic, meaning that people's consumption of fish does not reduce as prices increase, which likely stems from its importance in Malawian diets and the still higher prices of other animal proteins. This inelasticity may partly explain why, even as respondents in the small-scale fisheries study indicated that prices were a concern, they also reported consuming fish on a regular basis and having certain or usually certain access to fish (FAO, 2023). On the other side, Thakwalakwa *et al.* (2020) found that children, particularly in Malawi, ate more fish during the rainy season than in the dry season, which reflects the findings of seasonal variation in the FAO small-scale fisheries study.

Because of the importance of fish in Malawian diets, the demand for fish is so high that almost all fish is consumed locally (Nankwenya, Kaunda and Chimatiro, 2017). Most women in the small-scale fisheries study reported accessing fish primarily from either locally caught small-scale fisheries or locally caught commercial fisheries. While some buy fish from family members or wholesalers, others mostly purchase fish indiscriminately from any fisher or at fish auctions (FAO, 2023). Even in cases where women are married to fishers, their access to fish is not guaranteed, as fishers may sell to fish buyers through transactional sex relationships (Torell *et al.*, 2021).

Women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study most commonly reported owning assets relevant to fish processing and marketing, including cell phones and processing equipment. Women in Malawi also had significant access to transportation equipment to collect fish, particularly in comparison to women from other countries in the study (FAO, 2023). However, only approximately 4 percent of women surveyed owned fishing gear, even though most women reported disagreeing with the claim that only men should own gear (FAO, 2023).

Beyond physical assets, women in Malawi also report barriers to accessing financial capital, which reduces their uptake of new technologies or purchase of new assets (Torell *et al.*, 2021; Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019). Since men retain decision-making power over household income, women are often prevented from investing in new equipment because they lack the savings to directly purchase assets and are unable to access loans because of the low amounts or prohibitive conditions (Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019). Women in some communities have reported joining Village Savings and Loans Associations, which has a positive impact on women's access to finance (Manyungwa, Hara and Chimatiro, 2019); these could be connected with other organizations and programmes to increase coordination and strengthen women's economic positions.

Cultural practices and social norms can have a strong influence on women's participation on the supply chain, but also on their ownership of assets – whether these are physical or capital assets (Sibale and Shaba, 2021). Women can face exclusion from fishing activities because of the norms that depict them as weak and relegate them to perform onshore activities that are financially disadvantageous compared to offshore fishing. In a study conducted in Malawi, Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere (2019) found that certain types of gear were not considered appropriate for women since they required users to fish far from home and in unsuitable clothing, which may also inhibit women's ownership of these gear. This was echoed in Sibale and Shaba's research (2021), which found women were not allowed to engage in fishing because it was often done with none or minimal clothing. Similarly, Torell *et al.* (2021) found that it is considered bad luck for women to touch fishing nets. Women are also perceived to lack the skills required to maintain boats and fishing gear, demonstrating that access to technical knowledge may be an additional

factor disadvantaging women's asset ownership (Torell *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, women's access to assets may be restricted by their lack of control over household income, as some studies have shown that men and women have different priorities when purchasing assets and technologies, and that men may prevent their wives from buying new assets if it is perceived to threaten their leadership of the household (Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019; FISH, 2015). These barriers to owning fishing gear may restrict women's opportunities in fisheries since their access to fish is mediated through fishers and markets because they are not able to engage directly in capture activities. Fishing and gear ownership are the most profitable nodes of the supply chain (FISH, 2015), so the exclusion of women prevents them from equally benefiting from economic opportunities in the fishery sector. Economic disadvantage and poverty, coupled with high prices and competition for accessing fish, reduce women's opportunities and expose them to potentially exploitative arrangements, such as transactional sex, as a response to their vulnerable livelihoods and lack of secure access to assets and capitals (Sibale and Shaba, 2021).

4.4 (Equal) rights and access to services, markets and decent work

Extension services are key to sustainable and equitable fisheries, as they increase access to knowledge about best practices and techniques, equipment and networks, which can increase the productivity and income-generation of fishery activities. While the majority (56 percent) of women in the Malawi study reported meeting with an extension worker in the past 12 months, 44 percent had not. Women who met with extension workers noted that the majority of extension workers were male (FAO, 2023). Research from other sectors has shown that the sex of the extension worker may impact the information accessed by women (Netsayi *et al.*, 2017). Women in the study also reported



BOX 2

Gender Food Loss and Waste Methodology: reducing food loss and waste in Small-scale fisheries value chains

Reducing food losses remains a “multidimensional and complex challenge”.* In fact, overlooking the “underlying sociocultural, institutional and economic structures in which value chain actors operate” can be as relevant factors to be considered such as inadequate equipment and lack of infrastructure. “Losses constitute lost income to fishers, processors and traders but they also contribute to food insecurity because a loss of any fish means less fish available for the consumer.”**

Ninety-five percent of Malawian women have reported to have sold fish at a lower price to avoid losses, with price decreases of up to 62 percent.*** Choices such as these are driven by external factors hampering the quality of fish and favouring its deterioration, such as poor handling practices and increased microbial contamination. In this regard, improvement of management of fish processing and trading is crucial to support women working in the post-harvest sector to ensure that poor handling practices and sustained rain events do not impact significantly on their revenue.

Notes: *FAO. 2018. *Gender and food loss in sustainable food value chains – A guiding note*. Rome, FAO; **Randrianantoandro, A., Ward, A. & Safa Barraza, A. 2022. *Gender and food loss in sustainable fish value chains in Africa*. Sustainable Fish Value Chain Development Series No. 1. Rome, FAO; ***FAO. 2023. *Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries for Sustainable Food Systems - Consolidated Baseline Report: Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome, FAO.

that extension workers often lacked knowledge about women’s issues (FAO, 2023); this issue should be further investigated in the fisheries sector to understand and address the impacts of these gendered dynamics on women’s opportunities.

Despite having regular access to extension services, the majority of women had not received any training in fishing practices, fish processing, fish storage methods, fish marketing and trading, nor food safety and nutrition in the past 12 months (FAO, 2023). In the five-country comparison study, Malawian women reported rates of training (19 percent) far behind those of Ghana (43 percent) and Sierra Leone (48 percent), while they were comparable to Uganda (23 percent) and the United Republic of Tanzania (19 percent). Of the women who participated in training, the majority received this service from the Fisheries Department. They also reported that the training was useful, which

suggests that an increase in access to training and extension services could provide benefits to women.

Another barrier to women’s equitable participation in fisheries supply chains in Malawi is widespread gender-based violence and discrimination, which restricts women’s access to markets, creates a harmful work environment and increases the risk of contracting HIV. Women reported that men would steal fish from them, which was exacerbated by the lack of security services and infrastructure at landing sites (FAO, 2023). Similarly, women may be forced to have sex with fishermen in exchange for fish either through coercion on the part of the fisherman and/or owing to the heightened competition at landing sites (FAO, 2023; Torell *et al.*, 2021; FISH, 2015). Women believe that there are inadequate efforts by government offices to address this gender-based violence (FAO, 2023).

Women who participate in post-harvest processing and trading also experience post-harvest loss, which cuts into their profits. Women reported fish loss because of rain and inadequate sunlight to dry fish. Although women have identified solutions to the rain, such as covering fish with plastic or paper, more sophisticated processing and storage equipment is needed to address this considerable challenge.

4.5 Reduction of women's work burden and gender-based constraints

To reduce the disproportionately large work burden borne by women and to create opportunities that were formerly inaccessible to them, it is important to enhance women's access to technologies, practices and infrastructure.

In Malawi, women continue to rely on technologies such as drying racks and smoking kilns to process fish. While access to these

technologies is a positive sign, women could be further supported through enhanced access to gender- and climate-responsive technologies such as fuel-efficient kilns and solar tent dryers. Currently, the majority of women have not been trained on the use of fishing technologies (FAO, 2023), and thus training in combination with other programmes to support access to technology could reduce the time spent on fish processing while also reducing fish loss.

Women in Malawi also face a significant unpaid care and domestic work burden. Because women perform most care and domestic work, both their time and mobility are restricted, as they must spend most of their time at or near their home to fulfil these responsibilities. Very few women in Malawi fisheries report having access to child care at landing sites (FAO, 2023). To reduce this gender-based constraint, additional services such as affordable child care, elder care and health care facilities could be provided at or near landing sites or market stalls (and included



BOX 3

Gender Transformative Approaches: addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination

The influence of patriarchal customs on Malawian society weakens institutional capability to implement and enforce gender-responsive legislations, ultimately hindering the achievement of gender equality. To tackle the latter issue gender transformative approaches should be implemented. Such approaches aim to address the root causes of gender discrimination with methodologies targeted at both the household and community levels. Through the uprooting of long-lived societal gendered structures, gender transformative approaches deliver improved development outcomes, gains in the private sector, and improved project performance and sustainability. This is often possible given the propensity of such approaches to reach beyond the mere individual empowerment of women by tackling systemic constraints to gender equality, that is, by ensuring every individual owns the instruments to become an active agent of change for the advancement of gender equality.

Source: FAO, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) & WFP (World Food Programme). 2020. *Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices*. Rome, FAO, IFAD & WFP.

in the market fees) to reduce the unpaid burden on women's time and labour and mitigate the impact of gender norms on women's opportunities.

Indeed, technology, services and capacity development can be key drivers for women's empowerment by making their contribution to the value chain more effective. Gender transformative approaches can be a powerful tool to tackle these and other relevant issues in the small-scale fisheries value chain by addressing the root causes of discrimination affecting women (see Box 3).

4.6 Gendered effects of climate change and other shocks and disasters in small-scale fisheries

Climate change and the associated impacts, such as droughts, floods and fluctuating wind patterns, are recognized as major threats to Malawian fisheries because of their impact on fish catch (Simmance *et al.*, 2021b; Kamba, Maganga and Katengeza, 2020; Limuwa and Synnevåg, 2018). While the activities conducted by both men and women are likely to be impacted by climate change, research shows

that male fishers are more likely to engage in climate change adaptation than are their female counterparts (Kamba, Maganga and Katengeza, 2020), which is likely due to inequitable access to knowledge and resources.

Since women are often responsible for buying fish, they are significantly impacted by fish shortages and shocks, which affect fish availability. Women in Malawi reported that there were several months of the year where they faced difficulty accessing fish, often as a result of severe weather events such as strong winds, rainstorms and heat waves (FAO, 2023), which has negative implications for women's income as well as potential impacts on household food security and resilience.

To cope with variability in fish availability because of the changing environment, women reported increasing the prices of the fish they sell and processing fish to preserve them, among other strategies (FAO, 2023). The impact of these changes is not uniform – some women reported increased profits owing to less supply in markets or experienced no impact on their business, while others saw reduced revenues (FAO, 2023).

BOX 4

Effects of climate change

- Seasonal wind patterns on Lake Chilwa, the second largest lake in Malawi, impact fish availability during the months of May to July, as well as the safety of fishers.
- Drought and receding water levels have reduced the availability of desired species in Lake Chilwa.
- Varying fish availability resulting from weather patterns has immediate impacts on household food security as well as longer-term impacts on livelihoods and resilience to poverty.



Source: Simmance, F.A., Simmance, A.B., Kolding, J., Schreckenber, K., Tompkins, E., Poppy, G., & Nagoli, J., 2021b. *A photovoice assessment for illuminating the role of inland fisheries to livelihoods and the local challenges experienced through the lens of fishers in a climate-driven lake of Malawi*. *Ambio*. doi: 10.1007/s13280-021-01583-1

5

Gender and small-scale fisheries stakeholders

5.1 Women in small-scale fisheries organizations

Women's participation in both formal and informal organizations can provide a space for collective action that strengthens women's voice and opportunities in markets and decision-making spaces. In the FAO small-scale fisheries study in Malawi, the majority of women (60 percent) reported being a member of a local fisheries organization, and the data suggest that women's participation in these groups has been steadily increasing, which is an encouraging sign (FAO, 2023). In fact, women often outnumber men in community meetings (Nagoli, Binauli and Chijere, 2019). Although most women agreed that participation in these groups increased their voice in post-harvest activities, the overall consensus is that women's voices and the issues they raise continue to be ignored (FAO, 2023). Even as the women's seat at the table continues to grow, this must be accompanied by efforts to strengthen their voices so that women's constraints and challenges are addressed in the strategies of fisheries organizations.

Women's small-scale fishery organizations in Malawi are generally well organized, with leadership, constitutions, meeting records and membership lists in place (FAO, 2022). However, despite having these structural components in place, only 37 percent of the groups are formally registered (FAO, 2022), which can have implications for their access to financial institutions, government

programmes and other assistance. Women's group members reported many benefits and strengths of their organizations, including engaging in decisionmaking, improved access to fish, better market access, technical training, and social support and respect. Despite these benefits, women in these groups continue to face many of the barriers perpetuated by social gender inequality, including lack of access to equipment and to credit, insufficient landing site infrastructure, inconsistent government support and poor market access (FAO, 2022). Many of these barriers could be addressed through collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, financial institutions and other stakeholders while centring women's voices in planning and decisionmaking processes.

Though many women participate in fishery organizations, far fewer women (15 percent) reported participating in local government meetings (FAO, 2023). There is thus a gap between women's involvement in fisheries groups, which offer social and economic benefits, and women's participation in fishery management and other relevant processes, which more directly contribute to governing the resources upon which men and women's livelihoods are based.

A national chapter of the African Women Fish Processors and Traders network (AWFishNet) was recently launched in Malawi; efforts to support women's organizations could connect with this network in order to strengthen women's linkages and their collective capacity.

6

Conclusions and recommendations – Gender needs and priorities

To achieve gender equality, ensure the full participation of women in the Malawian fishery sector and in order to create an enabling environment for women at local and national levels, targeted actions should be enforced.

Policy and legal frameworks

- **Develop and implement strategies to prevent, address and remediate gender-based violence**, including incorporating gender-based violence policies into local government agencies and Beach Village Committees (BVCs), strengthening women's access to legal mechanisms as well as confidential reporting mechanisms, and increasing awareness among both women and men about existing laws and services. **Increase funding for services and infrastructure to prevent gender-based violence**, such as adequate lighting in markets and processing facilities and gender-responsive security services.
- **Strengthen coordination at different levels** to enhance the synergy between the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disabilities and Social Welfare and the Department of Fisheries while reinforcing the linkage with decentralized offices and local institutions, including BVCs. Specifically, **the BVCs should foster women's inclusion**; gender polices should be integrated into BVC processes, and training and funding should be provided to create an enabling environment at the local level and to mainstream gender more efficiently through these committees in order

to strengthen women's voice in the fisheries sector.

- **Guarantee adequate budgeting and technical support in national budgeting processes and research** to ensure funding allocations are met to shed light on women's contribution in the fisheries sector and to tailor gender-responsive social protection programmes that can address women's economic vulnerability and support their empowerment within the value chain.

Knowledge generation and data collection systems

- **Develop consistent tools for the collection of gender data, specifically targeting gender-based violence**, such as prevalence surveys and time-use surveys with a specific focus on the small-scale fisheries sector, keeping in mind the gendered division of labour and gender-based constraints affecting the fisheries value chain in Malawi. In this regard, **increasing the capacity of ministries and agencies to collect sex-disaggregated data** targeting the fisheries sector is key to produce regular and standardized gender data collection and to increase data availability and accessibility. Data collection should include both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the multiple dimensions of gender inequality. Data should be shared among government, intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions to fill data gaps and scale up data collection.

- **Mandate the inclusion of gender provisions and concepts in national statistics** acts and plans aimed at supporting the development of the National Statistical System in Malawi. A more equitable framework for the production of statistics would be more likely to produce equitable and representative data and decision-making with a stronger gender perspective for the fisheries sector.

Behavioural change and gender transformative approaches

- **Implement gender transformative approaches (GTAs)** to engage women, men and youth within communities to **deconstruct gender norms and predefined gender roles and to address the gendered division of labour** in Malawi's small-scale fisheries in order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. These approaches could build on existing GTAs being implemented in the country, such as Dimitra clubs, to replicate and scale these programmes and their learnings. The GTAs could also draw on the National Male Engagement Strategy to increase men's engagement in GTAs and their commitment to gender equality.

Targeted interventions for women's empowerment

- **Increase women's access to services supporting survivors of gender-based violence** through the development of intersectional responses catering to the diverse needs of women and other vulnerable groups and building awareness of these services at national and local levels. The prevention of gender-based violence should be advocated through the work of women's organizations in the fisheries sector, such as AWFishNet, but also through the BVCs as the main actors within small-scale fisheries communities.
- Strengthen women's small-scale fishery organizations **by supporting the formal**

registration of existing groups and organizations actively working in the fisheries sector, thus enhancing these groups' potential for empowering women through increased access to financial assistance, governmental support and training. Coordination between these groups and other stakeholders, including the government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, should foster the achievement of gender equality by **utilizing participatory processes to design specific solutions** for women's access to appropriate equipment, safe infrastructure and remunerative markets. Extension workers should also receive training and a budget to address gender issues in order to increase women and women's groups' access to information and extension services.

- **Design and increase women's access to gender-responsive financial services and credit schemes** by supporting existing informal credit schemes and designing parallel formal credit sources to strengthen women's control over capital. These schemes should take into account the fluctuating and seasonal nature of fisheries work in their loan and repayment terms and provide avenues for group borrowing. Finance schemes could also be accompanied by training and educational materials on both fishery-related topics and financial literacy to increase their effectiveness, build goodwill among borrowers and reduce default rates.
- **Reduce women's work burden** by increasing access to and control over gender-responsive technologies in the value chain, but also by **investing in fishery infrastructure**, such as electricity, water and road networks, and **gender-responsive services**, such as affordable child care, elder care and health care facilities near markets and landing sites, to reduce women's work burden, support improved fish handling practices and increase women's access to markets.



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The Gender Brief is tailored to provide insight into the contributions of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Malawi.

Approximately 70 000 women in Malawi depend on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods, mostly in the post-harvest sector. Pervasive gender norms limit women's opportunities and decision-making power at household and community levels, as they face many gender-based constraints in fisheries value chains and they are more vulnerable to intersecting factors such as poverty and gender-based violence.

Targeted actions should be undertaken to address gender inequalities and support women's empowerment in the Malawian fisheries sector, including fostering women's participation into local government agencies, supporting the formalization of women's groups and organizations working in the fisheries sector and increasing women's access to gender-responsive financial services and credit schemes.

