



Policy Brief

KEY GENDER ISSUES IN DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN MALAWI

2022



Malawi is highly vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather events. Over the past 5 decades, Malawi has experienced more than 19 major floods and 7 droughts¹. The impact, frequency, and spread of the natural disasters in the country have intensified in the recent past and are likely to worsen with climate change, compounded by other factors, such as population growth and environmental degradation¹.

These disaster events have had a significant impact on people's lives, livelihoods, and socioeconomic infrastructure in the affected areas, pushing many people into poverty and food insecurity. In 2022, Tropical Ana affected more than 947,000 people resulting in 38 deaths, and 158 injuries¹. In addition, 190,000 people were displaced and 18 were reported missing¹. Women, men, girls, and boys are affected differently due to gender norms, roles, and power imbalances. The gender-based vulnerabilities to disasters reflect historical and culturally specific patterns of discriminatory social institutions, culture, and personal lives¹. These discriminatory structures and systems limit women's equal access to education and information, economic and productive resources, skills, and employment thereby affecting their capacities to prepare, respond and recover from disasters. These same obstacles also prevent women from being able to actively contribute to decision-making. On the other hand, women and the youth play a key role in preparing for and responding to disasters often as frontline responders making it essential to ensure their meaningful participation and leadership in DRM processes and decision making. Unfortunately, while evidently gender is a major factor to consider in DRM, very little is being done to mainstream gender in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery in Malawi. Effective disaster risk management must consider the ways in which gender dynamics influence disaster impacts, adaptation, and resilience¹.

KEY POINTS

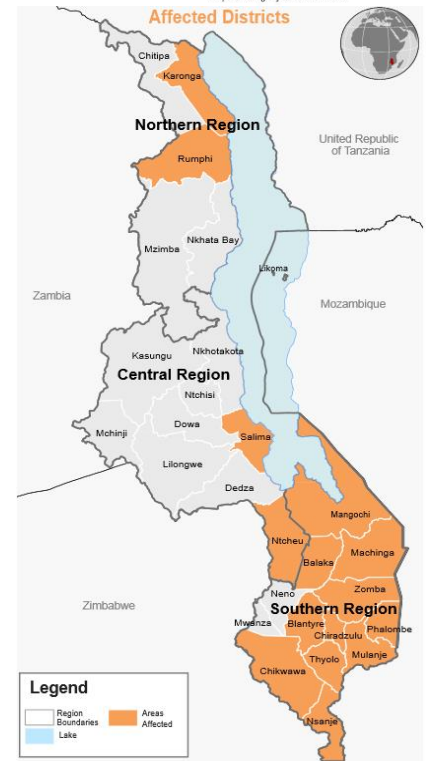
- Women, men, girls, and boys are being affected differently due to gender norms, roles, and power imbalances
- The Constitution of Malawi outlines the country's aspirations for a gender equitable society by upholding the principle of equal rights and prohibit any form of discrimination. The National Gender Policy states that gender should be mainstreamed in natural resources and the environment.
- Key DRM policies and laws in Malawi are gender blind and not aligned to the National Gender Policy, and international frameworks that aim to mainstream gender in DRM such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (2011-2015), the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Management (2015–2030) among others.



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of mainstreaming gender equality for the realization of human rights, sustainable development, and disaster reduction. The Sendai Framework (2015 – 2030) recommends empowering women to publicly lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) ensures that women are involved in environmental decision making at all levels, their concerns are integrated in policies and programmes, and establishing ways to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

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- ¹ Malawi 2019 Floods Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report
- ¹ National Disaster Recovery Framework (2017)
- ¹ Department of Disaster Management Affairs (February 2022). Tropical Storm Ana Malawi Situation Report
- ¹ Tropical Storm ANA Rapid Gender Analysis-March 2022
- ¹ African Risk Capacity Gender Strategy and Action Plan (2019).
- ¹ UNDRR Policy Brief No. 3, March 2022



The National Gender Policy states that gender should be mainstreamed in natural resources and the environment. The Malawi vision 2063 recognises the existence of inequalities amongst the various gender groups including their resilience to shocks and commits to address these with proper interventions to close the existing gap.

KEY GENDER ISSUES IN DRM IN MALAWI

Minimal Integration of Gender Considerations in DRM Policies and Laws

Key DRM policies and laws in Malawi are gender blind and not aligned to the National Gender Policy, and international frameworks that aim to mainstream gender in DRM such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (2011-2015), the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Management (2015–2030) among others.

The Disaster Preparedness and Relief Act (1991), the National Disaster Risk Management Policy (2015 – 2020), and the Disaster Risk Financing Strategy (2019) are gender blind. The National Resilience Strategy (2018 – 2030) lack clear approaches of how gender equity and inclusion will be achieved, monitored, and reported. A gender sensitive DRM bill was drafted in 2015 but is yet to be enacted. Overall, limited gender sensitivity in the existing DRM policy infrastructure has affected the extent to which women and youth participation is prioritised, women and youth are supported and empowered in disaster prevention and preparedness, and their capacities are built to ensure resilience and adaptation.

Limited Collection and Utilisation of Disaggregated Data

The lack of robust gender analysis to understand the gendered nature of disaster risk pose key challenges to progressive and inclusive DRM in the country. As a result of limited gender analysis, there is lack of collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, marital status, and disability which is critical for designing inclusive and gender responsive DRM policies and interventions. Unavailability of evidence on the specific needs, priorities, and capacities of women and youth affected by disasters reduces the possibility of designing and implementing appropriate DRM measures that responds to contextualised needs. In addition, there are no clear gender mainstreaming guidelines at both national and council level to inform gender responsive and transformative decision making. Investment in the building of capacity of DRM structures in gender mainstreaming and transformative actions is low which unintentionally exacerbates inequalities.



Lack of Funding for Gender Mainstreaming Activities in DRM

DoDMA and the Ministry of Gender does not have a specific budget line for mainstreaming gender in DRM. As a result, the Ministry is barely coordinating mainstreaming of gender in DRM. In addition, DRM structures specifically DCPCs and Protection Clusters are hardly funded to mainstream gender and implement their planned gender activities. The little progress that they have made is largely due to resources that are made available by Non-Governmental Organisations however these resources are usually not controlled by the DCPCs and Protection Clusters making strategic planning extremely difficult. The new DRM bill has proposed the creation of a special disaster fund, however an affirmative action to allocate a percentage of this fund to gender mainstreaming activities would help in addressing this gap. In addition, Gender Responsive Budgeting (GBR) should be an integral part of policy and programs implementation.

Systematic Gender Barriers in Disaster Risk Insurance affecting Uptake by women and other vulnerable groups

Disaster Risk Insurance presents opportunities for substantial resilience benefits however affordability is a barrier to rural women and other vulnerable groups. This is exacerbated by limited financial literacy and lack of awareness among the targeted beneficiaries. Together these factors have led to low uptake of disaster risk insurance. Using gender lens to redesign premium mechanisms, increase awareness, enhance financial literacy, and support innovate linkages with available Village Savings and Loans (VSL) approaches can help address the gap.

Limited Participation of Women in DRR systems and Processes

Women and the youth are inadequately represented in DRM structures as such leadership is male dominated. Structural gender inequalities that exist in our societies compound this challenge. The lack of gender training for the DRM structures further exacerbates the challenge implying that the specific needs and capacities of women, youth, the elderly, and people living with disabilities are rarely prioritised and considered. Strategic partnerships with community-based women's and youth organisations to support grassroots led advocacy for women inclusion in DRM decision making structures is critical for progress. In addition, funding the Department of Gender in the Ministry responsible for Gender and Social Welfare would ensure that DRM personnel and structures have required knowledge, guidance, and support required to address specific needs of women and other marginalised groups in DRM.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase Investment in Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Management

- Mobilize resources and create a gender transformative fund dedicated to financing of gender mainstreaming activities and addressing underlying structural inequalities in DRR. This fund should be aligned to the disaster fund (proposed in the DRM bill) but implemented independently with the joint coordination of the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) and the Ministry of Gender, Community Development, and Social Welfare.
- Allocate 5 percent of the disaster fund, proposed in the new DRM bill, to support dedicated investments in rural women's economic empowerment and access and control over productive resources that enables their engagement in sustainable food production and provides resilience against disaster risks.
- Ensure Disaster Risk Financing prioritise gender equality, with the participation of the Ministry of Gender in the development of national DRR strategies and reviews of risk informed public budgets and investment projects.



2. Promote and Support Women's Full and Equal Participation and Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction at all Levels

- Build innovative partnerships with community-based women's and youth groups/organizations to help raise awareness for gender equality and advocate for the inclusion of women and youth in ACPC and VCPC leadership structures. Ensure that their capacities in DRR are strengthened.
- Ensure affirmative action in the involvement of women and the youth in the design, management, resourcing, and implementation of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes.
- Integrate gender equality, intersectionality, and human rights perspectives in DRM, climate change, and environmental management interventions. This integration should adopt a differentiated and conscious approach depending on contextual realities.

3. Institutionalise the Collection and Use of Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregated Data to Address Continuing Barriers in Data Reporting

- Ensure women's and youth participation in the collection and use of disaggregated disaster and climate data. In addition, prioritise the training of women and the youth in the collection and use of disability, age, and sex disaggregated data while also improving transparency by making relevant and current data accessible and usable to inform policy and guide decision making and investments
- Develop and institutionalize gender mainstreaming guidelines and assessment tools to help carry out gender sensitive vulnerability, risk, and capacity assessments, collect gender specific data and statistics on the impact of disasters, and develop gender sensitive indicators to monitor and measure progress.
- Integrate Rapid Gender Analysis in recovery assessment. The recovery assessments should be inclusive, participatory, and rights based so that identified recovery needs and priorities reflect contextual gendered realities.
- Strengthen the capacity of all M&E personnel in gender mainstreaming and gender transformative approaches

4. Ensure Formulation of Gender-responsive Comprehensive Policy Frameworks

- Expedite the enactment of the Disaster Risk Management bill. The Ministry of Justice, the National Assembly, and the Presidential Delivery Unit respectively should be strategically engaged to prioritize the enactment of the bill to achieve harmonized policy clarity and direction in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Fast track the review of the National Disaster Risk Management Policy. Ensure alignment with the National Gender Policy and other related local and international frameworks that promote gender equality in DRM. In addition, particular attention should focus on the structural integration of the gender perspective across all focus areas of the policy.
- Ensure intersectoral coordination in DRM policy formulation and actions where the Ministry responsible for Gender, Women Rights Organisations, Feminist Networks, and individual women actively participate and contribute to outcomes.

5. Support Gender Responsive Disaster Risk Financing

- Institutionalize Gender Responsive Budgeting and ensure mechanisms for budget monitoring and accountability are strengthened
- Support innovative disaster risk finance linkages with Village Savings and Loans (VSL) methodologies and ensure enhanced financial literacy and awareness creation among women and the youth



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