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POLICY

BRIEF



Mainstreaming Gender and Inclusive principles
in the National Energy Policy in Malawi



CONTEXT OF THE ENERGY SECTOR IN MALAWI

The Energy sector is guided by policies, strategies and laws including the Energy Policy, 2018; National Renewable Energy Strategy (2018); Malawi Electrification Strategy (2019); National Charcoal Strategy, 2017-2027; Bio-Mass Energy Strategy (2009) and Amended Electricity Act (2016) among others. The main sources of energy are hydro-power, biomass, wind energy, solar energy, oil and gas. Biomass (firewood, charcoal, agricultural and industrial wastes) dominates Malawi's energy supply. It accounts for 84% of the total primary energy supply. Nearly every Malawian household (97%) relies on firewood or charcoal as their primary source of cooking and heating fuel. Firewood remains the most used cooking fuel (88% of households) in rural areas. Charcoal is a predominant source of energy in urban areas (54%). Women play a central role in the usage and meeting energy demands at household level, yet they are mostly excluded by the sector.

Key Highlights



- Women and men have distinct energy needs. The domestic energy needs put an extra burden on women and girls
- Women have low access to clean energy sources. The biomass sources are a leading cause of respiratory health complications for women and girls
- The inclusion of women in the energy sector is undervalued despite its numerous benefits for business
- The energy sector has a glass ceiling that limits the growth of women in the sector
- Men are the main contributors of deforestation, yet women bear the burden
- The new National Energy Policy is a window of opportunity to promote gender equality and social inclusion in the energy sector



Introduction:

Malawi is one of the selected countries to undertake a one-year pilot project called 'Powering Gender Equality' which seeks to accelerate gender equality and women economic empowerment through clean energy investments. It is complementing the Africa mini-grids programme (AMP) and the Access to Clean and Renewable Energy (ACRE) projects, which are being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy. The Powering Gender Equality Project has three main objectives: Improved Women's economic empowerment; Gender-responsive governance and Policy frameworks that power equality. A Gender Analysis was therefore developed by the Malawi Government and UNDP to provide evidence-based decision for gender planning in the energy sector, particularly the development of new National Energy Policy.

Objectives of the study:

The main purpose of the gender analysis was to identify gender equality priorities and mainstream gender equality in the new Malawi National Energy Policy. Specially, the objectives of the analysis included the following:

The specific objectives were to:

- a. Examine access to energy Services and new technologies by women and men
- b. Identify distinct needs and usage of energy services by men and women
- c. Explore the
- d. Analyse the participation and representation of women in the energy sector leadership
- e. Identify gaps related to gender equality and inclusion in the sector's policies and strategies
- f. Identify gender equality concerns in skills and training opportunities
- g. Examine access to finances and markets for women entrepreneurs in the energy sector
- h. Identify gender gaps in monitoring and evaluation and data management in the sector
- i. Highlight the gender gaps in the organisational culture of the energy sector
- j. Examine the role of regulators in entrenching equality and social inclusion
- k. Make recommendations and policy brief to guide the Ministry of Energy to integrate gender equality in the new National Energy Policy.



Methodology:

The data was collected through consultations and review of various legal and policy frameworks, international, national, and sector strategic documents, and project monitoring and evaluation reports. To ensure accuracy, the secondary data was triangulated with insights gathered from regional-level stakeholder consultations.

Limitations of the study:

The study did not collect primary data at household level. This means that the study could not provide specific details of energy utilisation at household level.

Study Findings

5.1 Case for Integrating Gender Equality in the Energy Sector

In the implementation plan of Malawi 2063, energy is identified as a backbone of economic growth, climate change mitigation, poverty reduction, and bridge for gender and inequality gaps. In Malawi, these aspirations are feasible only if women and girls, who are major consumers of energy at household level have a voice at various levels of the energy sector.

5.2. Women's and Men's Energy Needs, vulnerable situations of women and girls

Women bear the brunt of insufficient clean cooking energy sources. They dedicate much of their time to fetching firewood and other biomass fuel for household use. They also suffer from various respiratory diseases due to smoke

inhalation. Energy supply in Malawi is dominated by biomass (firewood, charcoal, agricultural and industrial wastes) accounting for 84% of the total primary energy supply

5.3. Women's Participation in Energy Sector Leadership

The energy sector has a history of male dominance, and the root cause is found in low numbers of girls and women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. This is coupled with the shared belief that women are not good in STEM courses hence cannot be leaders in the energy sector. The other challenge is failure by the energy sector to implement the Gender Equality Act, 2013, gender quota of 40:60/60:40 in their recruitment.

5.4. Policies and Strategies

Malawi has not adequately mainstreamed gender in the energy laws and policies. The Energy Policy of 2018 is the overarching policy that governs the energy sector. The policy did not have gender and social inclusion as a standalone objective of the policy but it integrated aspects of gender and social inclusion across the policy areas and their strategies.

5.5. Lack of Skills and Training Opportunities for Women

Most women fail to enter and advance in the energy sector due to lack of training opportunities. The policies in the sector fail to prioritise the training needs of women through targeted scholarships, internships, vocational and tailor-made trainings. Those who enter do not stay longer due to gender biases, lack of adequate training and opportunities, inadequate policies to attract and retain women, workplace inflexibility, and unequal pay among other reasons



5.6. Limited Access to Finances and Markets for Women Entrepreneurs

Empowering women in the energy sector has the potential to boost economic growth and provide women with greater opportunities. In the energy sector, only 11% of start-up founders are women compared to nearly 20% in other industries. The sector is characterised by institutional barriers, intolerant tax regimes, and lack of access to financing and viable markets for women and vulnerable groups.

5.7. Gender Disaggregated Data

The Ministry of Energy and organisations in the energy sector lack gender responsive data sets, monitoring tools, budgeting and evaluation systems. There are serious obstacles to find data of women to formulate informed projects and interventions with realistic targets. The M&E sections in the energy sector organisations have no resources to plan, monitor, evaluate and communicate trends on gender equality integration and social inclusion. Monitoring and evaluation fail because gender and social inclusion issues are neither part of their results frameworks neither annual budget. There is no attention to gender, sex and social inclusion disaggregated data. There is also lack of technical expertise in the Planning Units to ensure gender responsive budgeting (GRB) for implementing the gender commitments. This affects the Ministry and organisations in the sector. As such, programmes and projects suffer gender blindness in their approach

As a result, there is no information showing how women and other groups are benefiting from energy interventions. The lack of this data has significantly affected service providers and contractors in the sector.

The challenges range from lack of prioritisation to resources for M&E sections to address inclusion issues.

5.8. Regulators for the Energy Sector

The Energy Regulatory Act 2004 establishes the Malawi Energy Regulatory Authority as the main regulator of Energy Sources and service provision in Malawi. The regional consultations revealed that the sector lacks the regulator to enforce gender and social inclusion related policies. The Ministry of Energy and the Malawi Energy Regulatory Authority should strive to provide oversight on the implementation of gender aspects of the new National Energy Policy and other national policies and legislations. The aim is to ensure that the actors in the sector comply with the gender and social inclusion recommendations to



promote inclusivity and equitable access to clean energy and services.

6. Key Recommendations for the National Energy Policy

- I. **Conduct Gender Audits for Organizations in the Energy Sector:** Conduct gender audits to highlight gaps and develop strategies for mainstreaming gender equality into energy policies and programs.
- II. **Integrate Gender in Energy Access Programs:** Ensure that all energy access initiatives consider gender equality and social inclusion objectives, aligning with national development priorities and addressing the unique energy needs of women and marginalized groups.
- III. **Expand Hydro Mini-Grids and Solar Off-Grid Energy Sources:** Promote the development of renewable energy sources, particularly mini-grids and solar solutions, to enhance energy access in under-served communities, with a focus on benefiting women and promoting local entrepreneurship.
- IV. **Reduce Tax Charges on Off-Grid Appliances:** Implement tax reductions for off-grid appliances to stimulate investments in off-grid energy access, making sustainable energy solutions more affordable for low-income households, particularly those led by women.
- V. **Foster a Low-Carbon Energy Transition:** Encourage the adoption of clean, sustainable energy sources and technologies, including clean cooking solutions, to

mitigate energy-related emissions and improve health outcomes for women and children.

- VI. **Establish Gender Equality Quotas in Bidding Processes:** Require bidders in energy sector projects to include gender equality clauses in their proposals, ensuring that gender quotas are met in hiring, training, and addressing issues like sexual exploitation and abuse.
- VII. **Promote Skills Development for Women and Girls in STEM:** Invest in training programs tailored for women and girls in STEM fields, particularly in areas related to energy, such as solar system maintenance and renewable energy technologies.
- VIII. **Encourage Business Skills and Gender Inclusion:** Support initiatives that promote business skills and gender inclusion in energy-related enterprises, leveraging successful models like the Powering Gender Equality approach, which fosters collaboration among various stakeholders.
- IX. **Implement Gender Quotas in Recruitment Processes:** Adopt gender quotas (e.g., 40:60 or 60:40) in recruitment strategies within energy sector organizations to ensure balanced representation and promote gender equality in decision-making roles.
- X. **Create Women-Friendly Workplace Policies:** Develop and implement policies that support the recruitment and retention of female staff, such as flexible working hours and family-friendly work environments.
- XI. **Formulate Institutional Gender Equality Policies:** Energy organizations should create and enforce specific policies on gender equality, inclusion, and sexual harassment to foster a safe and equitable workplace.
- XII. **Track and Document Gender Statistics in the Workforce:** Establish systems to monitor the representation of women in the energy sector workforce and document their access to energy resources, training, and decision-making positions.
- XIII. **Consider Care Work in Work Schedules:** Design work schedules that consider the care work of women in order to balance professional, social, and community roles.
- XIV. **Oversee Implementation of National Energy Policy:** Ensure that the implementation of the new national energy policy includes gender-sensitive approaches and is monitored for effectiveness.

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