



Event Report

Mitigating the Gendered Impacts of the Rising Cost of Living in Malawi

Overview

Disruption to global supply chains and rising food, fuel and fertiliser prices, resulting in part from the Ukraine Crisis, has caused global and national analysts to warn of significant economic challenges that will severely impact vulnerable populations.

The growing economic pressure is a serious impediment to joint policy and programme efforts to combat poverty, food insecurity and gender inequality. Women and girls will be particularly impacted. The effects will be further compounded by any adverse weather events in the coming year.

In view of this, Action Aid, Concern Worldwide, For Equality and the NGO Gender Coordination Network, held a collaborative Panel Discussion on “**Mitigating the Gendered Impacts of the Rising Costs of Living in Malawi Resulting from Ukraine Crisis**” to discuss the challenges in the Malawi context, and identify opportunities to mitigate their impact. The session focused on Malawian social protection and agro-ecology sectors, developing a strong foundation for Malawi to build back better.

Honourable Doctor Patricia Kaliati MP, Minister for Gender, Social Welfare and Community Development officially opened and resided as guest of honour at the event.

MEETING RESOURCES

- Short Video – Cost of Living Impacts on Small Businesses
<https://youtu.be/1tin-iO22Lw>
- Policy Paper – Mitigating the Gendered Impacts of the Rising Cost of Living in Malawi
- Report of Rapid Assessment finding on the Impacts of Food, Fuel, and Fertiliser price increases in the Malawi local context (Nsanje, Neno, Lilongwe Urban)

Panel Discussion 1: Agro-Ecology

Moderator: Pamela Kuwali (Executive Director Action Aid)

Panellists:

- Anderson Chikomola (Deputy Director- Department of Agriculture Extension Services)
- Lilian Saka (National Director – CISANET)
- Dr. Jan Duchoslav (Research Fellow- International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI))

Key Comments

- The coming lean season is expected to have a greater impact on women due to their limited access to finance, credit facilities and new technological resources. This will be further compounded by their restricted ability to make decisions in the household.
- The Ministry of Agriculture should intensify investment in climate smart agriculture, promotion of organic fertilisers, and conservation agriculture (minimum tillage and intercropping, crop and livestock diversification) to support low cost and sustainable food production.
- Analyse factors that affect vulnerabilities and reinforce gender inequality in food production – these will be further exacerbated by rising cost of living.
- Increase promotion of evidence-based farming techniques and encourage research and development in a Malawian context; investing in soil health and agricultural extension to improve food security in the country. Research is needed to make proven methods accessible to women across the country.
- Promote agro-forestry, in the medium to long term, for sustainability.
- Employ gender transformative approaches in the agriculture sector by promoting household engagement around decision making and the gender division of labour, so that households are able to work as a unit and enable mind-set change so households are more shock responsive.
- The efficiency of the Agricultural Investment Programme (AIP) has decreased over the past few years in terms of supporting food production due to degradation of soils and the productivity of farmers targeted. This calls for a relook at targeting criteria of the AIP. We should not subsidise fertiliser for all farmers but rather target farmers that can turn fertiliser into maize productively, while other households could be targeted with cash transfer support to smooth their consumption needs through social protection.
- Re-strategize agricultural policy approaches to focus on those farmers with productive capacity. Boosting agro-ecology would benefit all farmers (commercial and subsistence) as a long term and sustainable approach to support soil fertility.

- There is also opportunity in the crisis for potential scale of commercialisation and value addition of food production for national and international markets, both for small and large scale farmers:
 - Market-linkages should be supported for production of non-traditional crops such as sunflower, wheat and other in demand food stuffs.
 - Focus on areas where Malawi has a comparative advantage in value chains over other countries, to encourage farmers to produce for external markets while also promoting alternative non-farm livelihood sources.
 - Policy and regulation will be important for Malawi to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Ukraine crisis.
 - Internal challenges include the time required for certification of seeds. The implementation of the Seed Act recently passed into law should remedy this issue. Farmers should also be facilitated to access export licences.

Plenary Comments

- There is a need to assess market distribution, incentives and regular monitoring in light of pending food shortages. Government should open ADMARC markets to stabilise the market.
- Focus should be on long term, gender sensitive resilient livelihoods including irrigation and small livestock promotion, to avoid negative coping strategies of sale of livestock.
- Promotion of financial literacy and business skills coupled with skills in value chains, will boost resilience of small business.
- High-level policy dialogue is required to engage the relevant government offices who can respond to the impacts of the rising cost of living and challenges within the agricultural sector.
- Implement Malawi 2063 Vision, including the focus on greenbelt strategy

Panel Discussion 2: Social Protection

Moderator: Twapashagha Twea (Policy and Advocacy Manager- Concern Worldwide)

Panellists:

- Dalitso Kalimba (Deputy Director – Poverty Reduction and Social Protection Division)
- Laurent Kansinjiro (Deputy Director- Social Support Services Directorate)
- Jessie Ng'oma (Deputy Director MCTU, Board Member NGO Gender Coordination Network)

- Social protection is more than simply provision of cash transfers. Cash Plus resilience building programmes are important to support household livelihoods, incomes and resilience, as well as to target households beyond the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP).
- Coordination challenges were identified as one barrier for the implementation of effective shock sensitive social protection. A harmonised and coordinated approach amongst government, development partners and NGO will facilitate stronger resilience building. There is need for inclusive dialogues in all Social Protection structures to address existing gaps. NGOs should be represented at all levels to create synergies.
- A number of coordination platforms exist from national to district level, however leadership and guidance is lacking, especially in area of shock sensitive social protection.
- A systems approach to social protection should be considered, including use of the Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR) as a targeting tool in all districts to ensure timely identification of households in need of support.
- There is a recognised gap in approaches addressing urban poverty. A pilot project was implemented to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic which provides an example of potential approaches. A long term urban focused social protection programme should be developed. Advocacy is required for support and funding from duty bearers and development partners.
- Social protection is a human right and calls for inclusive planning and programming to answer the challenges that women and girls face and address the gap in order to reduce vulnerabilities. The Ministry of Gender should champion gender mainstreaming in all processes of social protection programming.
- Tracking coverage and ensuring access for poor households to Village Savings and Loans (VSLs) and Microfinance (MFIs) has been a challenge. The Ministry of Finance,

Reserve Bank and Malawi Microfinance Network (MAMN) mapping of MFIs could facilitate linkages.

- Investment in inbuilt monitoring mechanisms to track Cash Plus interventions coupled with independent mechanisms from NGOs (e.g. IFAD) can facilitate monitoring of the coverage and uptake of services.
- Government should promote equal access to social protection, by addressing targeting challenges, corruption and reviewing social protection packages and make adjustments to consider negative impacts of the economic crisis on women and girls.
- Financial commitment limits implementation of policies and questions sustainability of social protection policy. There is currently no clarity on percentage of national budget allocated to SP, as opposed to external funding.
- Social Protection structures are administrative in nature, whereas Disaster Response is guided by an Act, which creates confusion on which platforms to follow and lead, with social protection losing priority. There is need for subsidiary registration for social protection, which might create provisions to complement other legal provisions in the disaster domain.
- Strong Social Protection systems contribute to timely response mechanism in times of shocks. Recent crises (COVID19, Ukraine) will have global effects that impact the availability of foreign aid (meaning less resources available for poor countries).
- There is a need to manage expectations and work with internal responses by reassessing social protection packages. This could be achieved by building household resilience, promoting of mind-set change, enhancing financial literacy through VSLs and improving coordination.
- Need to improve vulnerability reporting (MVAC) to facilitate timely response.

Plenary Comments

- The impact of the crisis will be most keenly felt by vulnerable populations, especially women. There is a need to prioritize categorical targeting starting with women (particularly those who are pregnant and lactating).
- There is a need to undertake robust market analysis for appropriate response tools (cash or voucher) to avoid cash transfers triggering traders to further increase prices of commodities especially food.
- Mechanisms are in place to address the issue of ghost beneficiaries, through internal programme case management systems. As is the case for the SCTP, grievance and redress mechanisms for Public Works Programme (PWP) and more recently a harmonised Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), built into the Covid 19 Urban Cash Initiative (CUCI) call-centre.
- Social Protection programmes are intended to complement each other, however misconceptions of recipients double dipping support from multiple programmes is limiting benefits of a comprehensive social protection package through overlaid “Cash Plus” approaches (Nutrition, VSL etc.).

- There is need to build community awareness, as well as improve coordination, to ensure social cohesion and resilience building at both household and community level. A number of efforts are in place to promote coordination and harmonisation such as the VSL Best Practice Guidelines and consortium of NGO partners implementing the Cash Plus interventions among beneficiaries.
- A gendered lens must be applied to upcoming assessments of the rapidly changing impacts of rising cost of living. Women and girls will be most affected.
- Consideration should be given to public policy measures that can maximise in-country financing for lean season response.
- Consideration should be given to economic and market measures, such as changes to the minimum wage, that would be mitigate against the rising cost of living.
- For cash transfers, factors of age, gender and access need to be considered to apply the appropriate packages of unconditional cash transfers or cash/food for work.