

Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme

GIPP Research Report

June – September 2020

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About Tithetse Nkhanza

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)-funded Malawi Violence against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme, known as *Tithetse Nkhanza*, aims to reduce the prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence, domestic violence and harmful traditional practices in three districts in Malawi. It also aims to improve the justice system for women and girl survivors of violence. The programme runs over a period of six-years (2018-2025) split into a first and second phase. It is implemented in Karonga in the northern region, Lilongwe in the central region, and Mangochi in the southern region, with a possible scale up to other districts in the second phase of the programme.

The programme combines evidence-based VAWG prevention interventions with strengthening formal and informal response. Interventions are continuously monitored and evaluated to generate lessons on what works to prevent VAWG and improve response services in Malawi. Packages of interventions will be piloted and evaluated, and successful interventions will be scaled up in phase two of the programme (year 4-6)

Acronyms

| | |
|----------------|--|
| ADC | Area Development Committee |
| AEC | Area Executive Committee |
| CCJP | Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CEWAG | Coalition for the Empowerment of Women |
| CHRR | Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| CVSU | Community Victim Support Units |
| DPO | Disabled Persons Organisation |
| EU | European Union |
| FCDO | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office |
| FEDOMA | Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| GIPP | Gender, Inclusion Power and Politics |
| HRDC | Human Rights Defenders Coalition |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IDTCs | Infectious Disease Treatment Centres |
| IEC | Information, Education and Communication |
| IPV | Intimate Partner Violence |
| KII | Key Informant Interviews |
| LBT | Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender |
| LGBTI | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex |
| MHRC | Malawi Human Rights Commission |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NACOD | National Coordination Committee on Disability Affairs |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| OHCHR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| PACENET | Pan African Civic Educators Network |
| PPE | Personal Protective Equipment |
| PS | Principal Secretary |
| SRHR | Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights |

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|---------------|------------------------------------|
| SSF | Survivor Support Fund |
| STI | Sexually Transmitted Infection |
| TA | Traditional Authority |
| TLA | Technical Legal Adviser |
| UN | United Nations |
| VAWG | Violence Against Women and Girls |
| VSU | Victim Support Unit |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WOJAM | Women Judges Association of Malawi |
| WORLEC | Women's Resources and Legal Centre |
| WRO | Women Rights Organisation |
| YONECO | Youth Net and Counselling |

1. Summary

Methodology

This Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics (GIPP) analysis report examines the impact of the 2020 fresh presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic on the operating environment in Malawi for the *Tithetse Nkhanza* Programme's work on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) prevention and response. The report is based on a rapid literature review and key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant stakeholders conducted by *Tithetse Nkhanza*. It examines the impact of the 2020 election on the likely support and potential resistance among government and other duty bearers to VAWG prevention and response programming. It also examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on VAWG, the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to VAWG programming, and the potential opportunities for collaboration with actors involved in the COVID-19 response to address VAWG.

Background to the 2020 election and COVID-19

In May 2019, the constitutional court of Malawi annulled the results of the 2019 presidential election due to concerns regarding irregularities. The fresh election in June 2020 saw the election of opposition leader Lazarus Chakwera. The shift in the political landscape offers potential opportunities for the *Tithetse Nkhanza* Programme, since it has resulted in the opportunity to influence duty bearers in new roles on the VAWG agenda. President Chakwera was also elected on a ballot that promised to further gender equality within Malawi. However, some women's rights campaigners are concerned that this commitment is tokenistic (*Tithetse Nkhanza*, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Prior to the 2020 fresh elections, Malawi was also hit by the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in 5,824 documented cases and 180 deaths as of October 13th 2020 (MOH Malawi, 2020). In March 2020, the then President of Malawi declared a state of disaster and imposed restrictions on movement such as the closure of schools. However, he was unable to implement a full lockdown due to a legal challenge (Chakwana et al., 2020). Malawi has developed a National Preparedness and Response Plan aimed at preventing, detecting and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic across the country. The plan consists of four pillars: Emergency Preparedness and Capacity-Building, Spread Prevention and Control, Response, and Early Recovery. The plan has been reviewed and the revised version is being implemented by multiple organisations under the leadership of Government, including to local and international NGOs, the police, health workers, and donors.

Key findings

Key findings linked to the 2020 Election:

The 2020 election has led to a change in the duty bearers linked to VAWG prevention and response. Evidence of commitment to VAWG prevention and response among key duty bearers suggests there is an opportunity to engage with these individuals to improve VAWG prevention and response programmes and policies across Malawi.

Despite improvement, women remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies. Male-dominated decision-making structures regarding VAWG prevention and response may pose a barrier to work in this area, given that a lack of female voices may lead to a lack of understanding on the unique experiences and needs of women on these issues.

The judicial reforms linked to the 2020 election may have increased trust in the legal system. Increased trust and scrutiny of the legal system may improve the likelihood that survivors of VAWG seek help through these mechanisms. However, KIIs also cited challenges with the courts and police as potential barriers to VAWG prevention and response.

Key findings linked to the COVID-19 pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities to VAWG: The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated risks of VAWG cited in the Rapid Gender Analysis (Chakwana et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to fewer health workers being available to provide VAWG response support: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the reallocation of sexual and reproductive health workers to the COVID-19

response, resulting in fewer health workers being available to provide VAWG prevention and response services. This is likely to increase if the burden of COVID-19 cases increases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the capacity of courts: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduction in the capacity of legal courts to process criminal cases of VAWG due to changes in operational protocols requiring staff to work in shifts with fewer staff reporting to work at a given time. This increases the barriers faced by survivors to accessing justice and the cultures of impunity that contribute to the perpetration of VAWG.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the capacity of police: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduction in the capacity of police to respond to cases of VAWG in part due to an inadequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), leading to a reluctance to respond to reports of VAWG, and Victim Support Unit (VSU) staff working in shifts, creating a barrier to victims of VAWG from seeking help and protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to travel restrictions: Travel restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic pose a barrier to women accessing VAWG prevention and response services. For women with disabilities and women in rural areas these restrictions pose a particularly significant barrier.

Limited PPE poses a barrier to VAWG response: Public health policies related to the COVID-19 response, which require individuals and frontline workers wear PPE such as masks when accessing or providing VAWG prevention and response services, poses a barrier to access for survivors. Limited access to PPE for frontline workers limits the services frontline workers can provide, while the requirement that those using these services wear masks risks excluding those without the financial capacity to buy one.

Limited access to accurate information poses a barrier to help-seeking among survivors of VAWG: Restrictions on movement and the closure of communal spaces such as markets or youth-friendly centres has closed key spaces where women would ordinarily receive information about VAWG prevention and response services and COVID-19. Information campaigns are not always inclusive of people with disabilities, posing a further barrier to women with visual or other impairments from accessing accurate information about relevant services.

Recommendations

Build alliances with new duty bearers in key roles, especially those with a commitment to human rights and gender equality, to increase commitment to addressing VAWG. This could involve offering them roles as VAWG prevention and response advocates within government and in their respective organisations. It could also be done through support to key duty bearers with gender equality training and guidance for crafting advocacy messages. For example, working with male allies to craft messaging that encourages men who are potentially resistant to support the VAWG prevention and response agenda.

Support coalition building between VAWG and COVID-19 response actors to integrate VAWG prevention and response into COVID response plans. This could include working with government, UN agencies, NGOs and donors to identify the pressures that limit coalition building at present and find ways to collaborate.

Build on increased trust in the judiciary to generate greater momentum for reform. Consider mechanisms for citizen engagement to reflect on the judiciary's handling of VAWG cases.

Ensure COVID-19 response programming and service delivery is accessible and inclusive. This is key to ensuring programmes reflect and respond to the lived experiences of people with disabilities and other socially excluded categories who are particularly at an increased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Changes linked to the Presidential Election

2.1. National Level Duty Bearers

The 2020 election marks a critical juncture for the programme to work with new duty bearers and renew its engagement with pre-existing duty bearers. This is especially the case for those who have expressed an interest in gender equality, VAWG prevention and response to ensure that these issues are firmly on their agendas. Some KIIIs indicated that it will be important for the VAWG Prevention and Response sector to make these duty bearers champions, and to support them technically to formulate key messaging in a way that is accessible for the general populous. **Technical support to supportive duty bearers may be an entry point for the programme to leverage greater commitment to VAWG prevention and response.**

i. Evidence of Presidential commitment to gender equality and VAWG prevention and response:

This review found mixed evidence of President Chakwera’s commitment to gender equality and VAWG prevention and response. In 2020, President Chakwera was elected on a ticket that promised women’s empowerment. He committed to ensuring that at least 40% of the cabinet ministers were female but missed this, appointing 38.7% instead (four women as cabinet ministers and eight as deputy cabinet ministers) (Kayira, 2020). However, KIIIs reported encouraging words from the President. For example, during a meeting with the Women’s Manifesto Group President Chakwera voiced his support for women’s rights and encouraged the group to voice any concerns they may have about his administration (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). He also committed to increasing representation of women throughout his government (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

ii. Evidence of Ministerial and wider political commitment to gender equality and VAWG prevention and response:

This review found evidence of commitment to gender equality and VAWG prevention and response among the following Cabinet Ministers:

- **Minister for Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, Patricia Kaliati:** Prior to her appointment in 2020, Kaliati has taken progressive positions regarding the importance of preventing and responding to VAWG. For example, Kaliati made a statement at the 62nd session of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) committee which references the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (Government of the Republic of Malawi, n.d.) and made other statements during which she urged survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to take forward their cases (Kandodo, 2015). Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kaliati has spoken out against the increase in VAWG and child abuse and the discrimination faced by people with disabilities and especially those with albinism across Malawi (Kampani, 2020). More recently, Kaliati has spoken out during the Nsundwe case (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Minister of Civil Education and National Unity, Timothy Mtambo:** Mtambo is a renowned human rights defender who has spoken out against violence against women in political parties (Sangala, 2019). He was formerly the chairperson of the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC).
- **Minister for Education, Agnes Nyalonje:** Nyalonje has previously spoken out in favour of improving access to justice for survivors of gender based violence (Sangala, 2016). She has also spoken out against compulsory testing of women for HIV, citing it as a potential trigger for domestic violence (Dodsworth and Cheeseman, 2019).
- **Minister of Land, Kezzie Msukwa:** Msukwa has previously spoken out about the need to improve law enforcement to stop human trafficking in Malawi (UNODC, n.d.).
- **Minister of Youth and Sport, Ulemu Msungama:** Since the 2020 elections, Msungama has voiced his support for women and youth empowerment programmes (Kapatuka, 2020).
- **Minister of Information, Gospel Kazako:** Kazako has the potential for influence through his links to Zodiak radio, which has supported women’s rights and education messaging (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

- **Minister of Homeland Security Richard Chimwendo Banda:** **Chimwendo Banda** was previously the chairperson for the Parliamentary Committee on Community and Social Welfare. He also has a background working with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). KIIIs understand that Kamwendo is likely to be receptive to engagement with the programme on issues linked to gender equality and women's rights (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Minister of Forestry and Natural Resources, Nancy Tembo:** Tembo is understood to be a supporter of women's rights and gender equality (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

iii. Evidence of wider political commitment to gender equality, VAWG prevention and response:

This review found evidence of commitment to gender equality, VAWG prevention and response among the following two non-Ministerial positions:

- **Chief Advisor on Sustainable Development Goals and International Relations, Colleen Zamba:** Co-launched the Fast Track court on GBV with Lady Justice Elizabeth (Zamba, 2018).
- **Deputy Chief Secretary to the Government and Cabinet, Janet Banda:** Banda has spoken of her commitment to human rights in Malawi, with particular reference to abolishing harmful practices that women are subjected to (OHCHR, 2014).

KIIIs highlighted the importance of focused advocacy to influence duty bearers who have already expressed an interest in equality and inclusion to ensure key members of government are allies for the VAWG prevention and response agenda (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). **Addressing violence against women in politics may be an entry point for discussions at the cabinet level.**

2.2. District Level Duty Bearers

KIIIs highlighted that across districts there were concerns that some institutions would potentially inhibit progressive work on VAWG. KIIIs also suggested that religious leaders remain quite influential informal actors across districts. It is unclear whether this situation has changed recently and, indeed, the centrality of these leaders' influence within the VAWG arena. **Further research is required in relation to political shifts at district level as a result of the presidential elections.**

Specific duty bearers in the *Tithetse Nkhanza* target districts include:

Lilongwe

- **The Mayor, Juliana Kaduya** is a supporter of women's rights (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Parliamentarians, Jean Sendeza and Esther Kathumba** are also understood to be supporters of women's rights (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). It is worth mentioning that Honourable Jean Sendeza is also Deputy Minister of Defence and may therefore play a critical role in cabinet decision-making processes with respect to women and girls' rights issues.
- **Informal duty bearers, TA Kalumbu and TA Chadza** are understood to be influential and supportive of VAWG prevention and response work.

Karonga

- **District Council Chairperson, Councillor Ethel Mwanza and Councillor Belliam Msukwa** are supporters of women and girls' rights (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Parliamentarian Kenneth Ndovie** is also known as a strong supporter of women's rights in the district (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Informal Duty Bearers, TA Wasambo, TA Kilipula, TA Kyungu** are understood to be supportive of women's rights. TA Kyungu has in the past spoken against child marriages and teenage pregnancies (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Mangochi

- **Councillors Ivy Sande and Charles Chilambo** have spoken strongly against child marriages and other women's rights issues in the past (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Parliamentarians, Victoria Kingston, Lilian Patel, Aisha Mambo and Benedicto Chambo** have all been identified as being supportive of women's rights. Lilian Patel is a former minister of Women's and Children's Affairs, Community development and Social Welfare (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Informal Duty Bearers, TA Chowe and TA Bwananyambi** are respectable champions of women's rights in the district (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Support for certain Chiefs may have changed with the 2020 shift in government. Further research is needed to ascertain whether this is the case.

2.3. Political participation of women and socially excluded groups

Participation in formal political structures

Despite progress at the national level, women remain under-represented in formal decision-making roles. The number of women in ministerial roles has risen from 20% in the previous government to 37.8% in the current government (Pensulo, 2020). However, this falls short of the legal 40:60 gender ratio requirement. Women also predominantly hold Deputy Ministerial rather than in full Ministerial positions (Kayira, 2020). Five of the nine Human Rights Commissioners in Malawi who were sworn in in 2020 are women (Malawi Human Rights Commission, 2020). Malawi has appointed a female speaker of the house for the first time in history (Chakwana et al., 2020).

There has still been an outcry on limited political will to address ongoing issues with respect to other appointments that have fallen short of the expected legal minimum, most notably for the 67 parastatal boards appointed on 23rd September 2020. In most cases, the gender composition of the reconstituted boards does not comply with the Gender Equality Act. Five boards do not have any female representation, 11 have female representation of less than 40%, and only seven of 76 boards have female chairpersons. At the time of writing, the Human Rights Defenders Coalition, Women Lawyers Association, Youth and Society, and the NGO Gender Coordination Network had issued a notice of intended legal action against the appointing authorities for failure to comply with the law.

This research found limited reference to people with disabilities holding formal or informal positions in government. However, among the recently sworn in human rights commissioners, Bonface Massah has albinism and a history of working to promote the rights of people with disabilities (Hay, 2015). In 2016 he was the President of the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (Hay, 2015). Similarly, Scaldar Lewis has a mobility impairment and has a history of working to promote the rights of people with disabilities (The Nation, 2016). A Special Advisor to the President on Disability Issues, Overstone Kondowe, has also been appointed for the first time (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). The KII's noted that during the election campaign, both of the key political parties had signed an agreement relating to commitments on persons with disabilities, but there have not yet been meaningful changes evidenced (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). The Department for Disability and Elderly Affairs has developed a mainstreaming strategy for disability inclusion, encouraging policies and programmes to be inclusive (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). The National Coordination Committee on Disability Affairs (NACOD) works to ensure disability issues are mainstreamed in all public and private service provision (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

This research found no representation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Intersex (LGBTI) persons within the new government.

At the local level, findings from the literature review show that women represent more than 30% of individuals in local governance structures such as village development and area development committees (Chakwana et al., 2020). This suggests that decentralised levels of government provide potential entry points for women's political advancement (Chakwana et al., 2020). Globally, it is at the local governance decision-making level where women are often most active and potentially have the greatest influence (Gender and Development Network, 2015). **Local governance structures may be another entry point for the programme to engage with representatives to increase support for the VAWG prevention and response agenda.**

Participation in informal political structures

The Humanitarian Sector Clusters are headed by Principal Secretaries (PS). Since 29% of PS positions are held by women, this suggests low female representation at the decision-making level of the Humanitarian Sector Clusters (Chakwana et al., 2020).

Parastatal boards have been recently reconstituted in late September 2020. Of the 67 parastatal boards appointed, five boards do not have any female representation, and 11 have female representation of less than 40%. Only seven boards have female chairpersons.

Religious leaders are predominantly male. KIIs raised concerns that they could inhibit progress on VAWG prevention and response within communities (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Existing political and social barriers to the political participation of women and socially excluded groups

Social norms around gender, which set out socially acceptable and appropriate roles of men and women (including leadership traits), are key barriers to women's engagement in political parties (Kamlongera, 2008). While women are often engaged in politics through rallies and voting, the social perception of them as supporters and followers rather than leaders prevents them from standing and being elected to decision-making positions (Kamlongera, 2008). Even women in formal positions of authority often have less power and influence than their male counterparts and are often exposed to undue criticism and scrutiny due to these norms (Chakwana et al., 2020). These gendered norms result in discrimination, sexism and violence during campaign periods and once in office, increasing the risk of women withdrawing from public life (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Disproportionate scrutiny of women leaders poses another barrier to their engagement in politics. This was exacerbated by the 'Cashgate' scandal in 2013 under Joyce Banda's presidency (O'Neil et al., 2016). This increased level of scrutiny affects women throughout their political journey, as candidates and once they are elected, penalising them in contexts where their male counterparts would not be.

Political parties remain resistant to women's equal inclusion, often refusing to put female candidates forward for election and disproportionately nominating women in marginal seats where the likelihood of election is lower. Electoral rules, party systems and prejudice against women's leadership, provide limited incentives for parties to promote women candidates or place them in safe seats (O'Neil et al., 2016). As a result, in 2016, fewer than 20% of candidates were women. In the 2014 elections, 17% of Presidential candidates and two running mates were female (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).

Further, once elected, female representatives also face discrimination. KIIs noted that women perceived as being "progressive" were often resented by male and some female MPs because their ideas were considered threatening (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Women who are appointed to ministerial positions are rarely given enough support to continue representing their constituents as well as fulfilling their ministerial roles. This causes them to become disconnected from their constituents and can lead to them losing their positions in future election cycles (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Equally, some political parties reportedly refuse to re-nominate previously successful female candidates in preference for male ones (Amundsen and Kayuni, 2016). The lack of support for female candidates from within political parties leads some women to run as independent candidates, excluding them from financial or moral support from political parties during elections (Amundsen and Kayuni, 2016).

The lower numbers of women in politics is understood to be more closely linked to parties fielding and supporting fewer female candidates than their being low voter support for female representatives (O'Neil et al., 2016). Campaigners for equal representation should meaningfully engage political parties to encourage them to make, and follow through on, commitments regarding women's participation and representation of other socially excluded groups. In addition, political parties need to address the issue of violence and abuse against women standing for election.

Violence and abuse during election campaigns and in political office is a risk factor for women engaging in politics at national and local levels. Female MPs face multiple risks including verbal abuse, violence, unfair criticism, intimate partner violence, and breakdown in personal and familial relationships due to a refusal to conform to conventional norms around what it means to be a "woman" (Amundsen and Kayuni, 2016). In 2019, women from political parties took to the streets to protest violence they were experiencing during campaign meetings (Sangala, 2019). Timothy Mtambo, the new Minister of Civil Education and National Unity, has previously been vocal about preventing violence against women in politics.

Women’s economic rights in Malawi give women less access to productive resources (land, property, livestock, paid work) and clientelist networks than men. This makes it much harder for them to engage in a political and electoral system which is patronage-based and where there are no controls on party finance (O’Neil et al., 2016). Limited autonomy over economic resources is also likely to pose a barrier to funding the political campaigns necessary to run and win elections.

Social norms and stigma around people with disabilities intersect with sexism and misogyny to prevent women with disabilities from holding positions of power and decision-making. Inaccurate assumptions about the capacity of people with disabilities to hold positions of power cause them to be widely excluded from standing for election (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). However, prior to the 2018 elections at a press briefing hosted by the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), the leading Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) in Malawi, multiple people with disabilities expressed an interest in standing for election (Kamwendo, 2018). Women with disabilities often experience lower self-esteem than their male counterparts, posing a further barrier to their engagement in politics (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). There is a need for strategic engagement with DPOs to challenge stigma and encourage their engagement in public life (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Social norms and stigma around the LGBTI community There is still a widespread societal rejection and ostracization of LGBTI persons, leading them to be excluded from representative roles (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Most of the key informants suggested that targeted activism from civil society is needed to promote and support excluded groups to be able to access roles as key duty bearers. This might involve supporting resource mobilisation and lobbying political parties to make commitments for their inclusion (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Whilst this is beyond the scope of *Tithetse Nkhanza*, the programme does have a role to play in national level conversations about the role of women and socially excluded groups in politics, and the unacceptability of VAWG in politics.

2.4. The impact of judicial reforms on VAWG response

Increased trust in the judicial system may encourage more VAWG survivors to utilise the justice system, potentially increasing demand for services and raising the public profile of VAWG cases. Most KIIs shared the view that the elections court case has resulted in increased public attention to and trust of the Judiciary as an independent body (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). They also report increased legal literacy within Malawi among people following the case closely. As such, there is an increasing awareness of what the courts do, how they function, and how they serve the population. Key informants noted that increased public demand and scrutiny of the Judiciary is likely to affect case management and, specifically, the amount of time taken to respond to cases (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). It is also encouraging the Judiciary to make information on access to justice more accessible (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). KIIs predicted that these factors may increase VAWG survivors’ confidence in reporting cases and using the judicial system to see their cases through.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a backlog of VAWG cases, which may force survivors to wait longer for an outcome and consequently discourage reporting. Key informants from within the Judiciary noted that there appears to have been different directives shared by various courts in relation to access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic, with most courts tending to focus on criminal cases rather than civil cases (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). However, those who were aware of the work being done by *Tithetse Nkhanza*’s Technical Legal Adviser on the classification of VAWG cases as ‘urgent’ amid the COVID-19 pandemic expressed a hope that once this guidance has been made more widely available, attention on VAWG cases will improve (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Informants from outside of the Judiciary noted that there appears to be a more proactive approach to reaching justice for VAWG survivors and that more VAWG cases are being prioritised than before (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). One informant also noted that more VAWG cases were being dealt with more publicly, which was helping to increase awareness (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). The reasons for these positive developments were attributed to awareness-raising and training within the Judiciary on handling VAWG cases, as well as to the political will from the new government.

In addition, increased awareness-raising on VAWG amid the COVID-19 pandemic and associated ‘active citizenry’ was cited by a number of key informants as being a key contributing factor to improved VAWG

prevention and response. Further, KIIs recognised that digital platforms make it more difficult for institutions to work out of the public view, incentivising a more proactive approach to reforms (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Taken together, these developments provide an opportunity for the VAWG sector to capitalise on this increased awareness to institutionalise improvements in handling VAWG cases within the Judiciary.

3. Changes linked to the COVID-19 pandemic

3.1. At risk groups

This section provides an overview of the factors associated with increased risk of VAWG across Malawi that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More local social exclusion and gender analysis is needed to further understand who is excluded, where, why and how in specific parts of Malawi. Whilst these risk factors pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic, KIIs highlighted that factors associated with risk of VAWG have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, child marriage, child pregnancy, transactional sex and domestic violence are understood to have increased due to more time spent at home and increased economic pressures (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Adolescent girls and children: 45% of girls aged 15-19 in Malawi have experienced physical or sexual violence (DHS Program, 2016). Malawi also has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally, with 50% of girls married by 18 years old and 12% married by 15 years old (UNICEF, 2015). Young women are at particular risk of sex and labour trafficking to South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There have been recent reports of brothels in Northern and Central Malawi luring girls in primary school from rural areas into debt-bonded prostitution (Chakwana et al., 2020).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: KIIs suggest that cases of child marriage have increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). They also suggest that, due to the reduced capacity of legal courts, instances of child marriage are more likely to be resolved within families rather than treated as criminal cases in the legal system (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Evidence from other contexts suggests that school closures are also likely to increase adolescent girls and children's exposure to domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse (Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, 2020). Given global trends, it is expected that this risk is increasing in Malawi due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

Women and girls with disabilities: Globally, gender inequality and discrimination against people with disabilities intersect to expose women and girls with disabilities to a higher risk of VAWG (Lee and Massah, 2020). Women and girls with disabilities are exposed to a wider range of perpetrators (intimate partners, family members, healthcare providers, teachers, carers, neighbours), many of whom they are dependent on. They may also be confined to their home or live in institutional settings such as group homes, presenting a barrier to accessing support. They may also experience disability-specific forms of violence such as the withholding of medication. This places women and girls with disabilities between two and four times more at risk of intimate partner violence and also at greater risk of non-partner sexual violence (Dunkle et al., 2018). In Malawi, in line with global findings, girls with disabilities are more likely to report intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual IPV (Tetra Tech International Development, 2020). KIIs highlighted the importance of reaching out to people with disabilities and working with them to design programmes that are tailored to their experiences (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Women and girls with disabilities face multiple barriers to accessing justice including:

- Their abuser is their caregiver or someone on whom they are dependent, and/or reliant on for personal care or mobility;
- The justice system is physically inaccessible;
- They face barriers to accessing legal representation;
- Law enforcement officials are ill-equipped to address violence against people with disabilities;
- The judiciary dismiss the testimonies of people with disabilities and often perceive them to be unreliable witnesses;

- People with disabilities face barriers to accessing information about litigation (Southern Africa Litigation Centre, 2017).
- Women with disabilities may be perceived as asexual, preventing courts from taking cases of sexual abuse seriously (VAWG, 2019).
- Stigma and harmful attitudes about the sexuality of women with disabilities makes it harder for them to access the vital Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services that they need. The type of disability women have also affects the level of discrimination and violence they face. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Malawi has reported that since 2014, at least 150 crimes have been reported against people with albinism, including killings, abductions, grave exhumations and threats (OHCHR, n.d.).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: Research from other contexts finds that the COVID-19 pandemic increases the risk of violence, abuse and abandonment against people with disabilities, as well as reducing the opportunities for people with disabilities to seek help. For example, during the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, nearly a fifth of people with disabilities were evicted from their homes, while in Kenya people with albinism have been falsely associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to increased discrimination and abuse against them (Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, 2020). Given global trends, it is expected that this risk is increasing in Malawi due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

Sex workers: Because sex work is not recognised as work there are no laws to protect sex workers from violence and abuse (UNAIDS, 2019). Consequently, sex workers are at higher risk of violence from clients, bar owners and partners, with multiple barriers to accessing justice (MSF, 2019).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: Limited social protection and increasing unemployment may lead to an increase in the number of women turning to sex work as a survival mechanism. Simultaneously, globally, violence against sex workers has increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is due to laws restricting movement and gatherings which mean sex workers must break guidance around public health in order to conduct their work (Kyomya, 2020). Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LBT) sex workers are likely to be at particular risk of violence in these contexts.

LBT women: Human rights organisations have highlighted the widespread violence and discrimination against the LGBTI community in Malawi, including an increase in hate speech in recent years (OHCHR, n.d.). There are reports that lesbian and bisexual women are at risk of “corrective rape” and other violence by their families, including forced marriage (Canavera, 2011). Laws criminalising homosexuality pose a barrier to lesbian and bisexual women accessing support or justice in cases where they experience intimate partner violence within a same-sex relationship, due to fear of potential arrest and legal action against them. Transgender women are also at high risk of violence due to harmful social norms and legal frameworks that criminalise same-sex relationships. These act as a barrier to accessing justice, since transgender women who have experienced violence are at risk of arrest if they report this to the police (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from other contexts finds that the risks faced by LBT women have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, because safe spaces for these groups have been targeted under the guise of COVID-19 restrictions and often closed, forcing members of the LGBTI community to move back in with homophobic and transphobic relatives (Rowlands, 2020). In some cases, members of the LGBTI community have also been blamed for the spread of COVID-19, leading to increased discrimination (Rowlands, 2020). Increased fear of discrimination and abuse may reduce the likelihood that LBT women will seek help regarding COVID-19. Reports find that LGBTI refugees from Malawi have been excluded from the COVID-19 response, limiting their access to support (Rowlands, 2020).

Women and girls with unequal economic status: Across Malawi, most women and girls face unequal economic status to their male counterparts and are often dependent on male partners or care givers (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). This increases the risk of VAWG perpetration and poses a barrier to reporting, especially if the violence is perpetrated by someone the woman or girl is dependent upon (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). Unequal economic status also increases the risk that women will engage in transactional sex, which further increases their risk to VAWG (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: The closure of markets linked to the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase the economic insecurity faced by women in Malawi. This may contribute to increases in intimate partner violence, child marriage, sex work, and exploitation and abuse by frontline workers or humanitarian responders. KILs report that the

reduction in migrant work in South Africa due to COVID-19 restrictions has resulted in additional economic hardship for families who relied on migrant support, which increases the vulnerability to VAWG for women within these households (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Female headed households: Female headed households are at high risk of abuse and exploitation by family members and strangers due to social norms and financial precarity.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic has reportedly led to an increase in divorce rates in districts such as Karonga, leaving women at risk of increased childcare burdens and fewer financial and social resources, increasing the risk of their exposure to VAWG (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Increased use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) due to the COVID-19 pandemic: UN Women warns of the dangers of online or “ICT facilitated violence” in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women, 2020). This is likely to rise as internet use increases for work, school and social activities. The UN Women report (UN Women, 2020) highlights the increase in online violence and abuse against women and girls, the impact this has on them and promising practices for responding to this. This rapid review could not find Malawi-specific evidence on increases in online violence but, given global trends, it is expected that this risk is increasing in Malawi due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

3.2. Key Actors engaged in COVID-19 and VAWG prevention and response

Key actors responsible for preventing and responding to COVID-19

| Who | Role in COVID-19 |
|--|--|
| The COVID-19 response committees | The COVID-19 response committees of both the Cabinet Committee and the Presidential Taskforce are the peak bodies for overseeing the COVID-19 response in Malawi. They have appointed far below the number of women required based on ratio stipulations (40:60) in the Gender Equality Act (Chakwana et al., 2020). Initially there was no representation of women on the COVID-19 Cabinet Committee and the Minister for Gender was added at a later date (Chakwana et al., 2020). |
| Infectious disease treatment centres (IDTCs) | Infectious disease treatment centres (IDTCs) set up during Ebola and health professionals trained during Ebola will be utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Emergency response taskforces | Emergency response taskforces in humanitarian action are overwhelmingly male-dominated, creating a gap in representation that leads to the needs of women being systematically overlooked in decision-making (Chakwana et al., 2020). This inequality of representation increases the likelihood of a gender-blind COVID-19 response. |
| Public Communication Cluster | The Public Communication Cluster’s objective is to enhance information flow on COVID-19 among stakeholders and the general public (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020) |
| Health Cluster | The Health Cluster’s objective is to prevent, rapidly detect and effectively respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in order to reduce morbidity and mortality in Malawi (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster | The WASH Cluster’s objective is to provide preventative and responsive WASH services and activities in districts affected by and at risk of COVID-19 (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Protection Cluster | The Protection Cluster’s objective is to reduce protection threats for affected populations and to protect vulnerable groups from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect during disasters and ensure human rights are protected (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Employment and Labour Force Protection Cluster | The Employment and Labour Force Protection Cluster’s objective is to develop and protect the labour force in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as it impacts the workplace (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Education Cluster | The Education Cluster’s objective is to ensure that teaching and learning continues throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, even as schools remain closed. They will focus particular attention on orphans and vulnerable children in the school-going age groups. Interventions will focus on reaching learners at home and preparing for the reopening of schools (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services | The Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services’ objective is to manage people entering and exiting the country with a focus on preventing the transmission of COVID-19 (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |

| Who | Role in COVID-19 |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Malawi Police Service | The Malawi Police Service's objective is to enhance the Malawi Police Service Preparedness to COVID-19 through resource and knowledge mobilisation to enable the comprehensive response to the pandemic (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Food Security Cluster | The Food Security Cluster's objective is to provide life-saving food assistance to food insecure, urban, semi-urban and rural households affected by COVID-19 (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| Transport and Logistics Cluster | The Transport and Logistics Cluster's objective is to provide relevant logistics and operational support to the humanitarian community and relevant stakeholders involved in the COVID-19 preparedness and response activities (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). |
| OHCHR Regional Office | The OHCHR Regional Office has a mandate in Malawi and has identified the following priorities in its work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening rule of law and accountability for human rights violations; • Increasing implementation of the international human rights mechanisms' outcomes; • Enhancing and Protecting Civic Space and People's Participation; • Early warning, prevention and protection of human rights in situations of conflict and insecurity; • Integrating human rights in sustainable development; • Enhancing equality and countering discrimination. |
| NGOs | KIIs report that NGOs such as YONECO and WOLREC are key distributors of information on COVID-19 to communities (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). |

Key VAWG actors and how they are involved in the COVID-19 response

| Who | Role on VAWG | Role in COVID-19 |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Community level actors | | |
| Traditional authorities | Wield significant influence over social norms and gendered power relations. When social norms promote or condone violence against women, this increases the likely prevalence of VAWG within communities. They are therefore uniquely positioned to alter cultural rules that contribute to VAWG. While these individuals are expected to be actively involved in preventing VAWG and punishing perpetrators, in some instances when this responsibility is at odds with the responsibility to preserve cultural heritage, the latter is given priority (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | Chiefs are key agents in the distribution of accurate information to communities. They also provide leadership to motivate individuals to adhere to COVID-19 response measures. Some have reportedly engaged in communication campaigns and conducted trips to sites within their areas of responsibility to impress the importance of adhering to relevant COVID-19 prevention and response guidance (Tembo, 2020). |
| Traditional Initiators | In Mangochi among the Yao people, traditional initiators are regarded as custodians of cultural values and practices (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). They wield significant influence over understandings of masculinity and femininity, adulthood and sexuality, uniquely positioning them to condone or challenge VAWG within their communities (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | No information found |
| Religious Leaders | Religious leaders are granted moral authority by their congregations, who may come to them for guidance, and are uniquely positioned to condone or challenge VAWG. However, their responsibility to promote reconciliation often undermines opportunities for survivors of VAWG to seek redress through the criminal justice system, especially when VAWG takes the form of intimate partner violence (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | Although religious leaders have been excluded from decision-making regarding COVID-19 prevention and response measures to date, the Malawian Government has resolved to engage religious leaders in decisions moving forward (APANEWS, 2020). They are recognised as key agents in encouraging their congregations to abide by COVID-19 response measures (APANEWS, 2020). |
| Community and School Structures | These structures exist in all communities. For example, Community Victim Support Units (CVSUs) and primary justice structures are the earliest mechanisms for responding to VAWG along with Civil Protection Committees and Community Policing Forums (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). Community and school structures are inadequately resourced and often suffer from a lack of adequately engaged personnel (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). This often leads VAWG survivors to withdraw cases. If these structures were better funded and received more comprehensive training, they could act as | Schools have been closed as part of the COVID-19 response. Many school health and nutrition interventions have been modified to the COVID-19 pandemic context, with school platforms being used to distribute food and cash transfers to household levels (United Nations Malawi, 2020). |

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| Who | Role on VAWG | Role in COVID-19 |
|--|---|---|
| | key contributors in VAWG prevention and response efforts (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | |
| Parents, families and households | Parents, families and households are key agents in the reproduction of social norms and may prioritise extrajudicial processes over judicial processes in response to VAWG. This increases the risk of VAWG cases going unreported, especially if they involve family members. The ability of all other VAWG prevention and response processes to function relies on the cooperation of households, making them key stakeholders in (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | Families are key to ensuring COVID-19 measures are adhered to among the population. Women are likely to be primary caregivers for relatives who become ill due to COVID-19 (OECD, 2020). |
| Community Victim Support Units (CVSUs) | Save the Children mapped and reconstituted 34 CVSUs to support survivors of violence in six districts. In 2019, <i>Tithetse Nkhanza</i> carried out a needs assessment of 12 CVSUs across its three impact districts of Karonga, Lilongwe and Mangochi. It has since revamped the work of those structures by reconstituting some of them and providing trainings to seven out of the 12 CVSUs on survivor centred approaches, case management, social inclusion and gender related laws, among others. | <i>Tithetse Nkhanza</i> facilitated the development of CVSU protocols for the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period that have since been adopted by the national protection cluster and rolled out to CVSUs, supported by TN, in its impact districts. These protocols provide guidance for CVSUs to execute their mandate with safety consideration to both survivors and the CVSU members. During the COVID-19 pandemic these CVSUs have been equipped with PPE and handled a number of cases. Some of these have been referred to relevant key institutions such as the police, while most civil cases have been concluded through mediation. |
| District Level actors | | |
| Chairpersons for the Area Development Committee (ADC) and Area Executive Committee (AEC) | These individuals have a formal mandate to plan and execute all social development programmes including those addressing VAWG at community level in the programme areas (Baloyi et al., 2018). | Members of the Area Development Committees and care group members in Lilongwe, Dawa and Nkhata Bay districts have been sensitised on COVID-19 preventative measures (United Nations Malawi, 2020). |
| Chairpersons for District Councils, District Directors of Planning, and District Gender Officers | In Lilongwe, Mangochi, and Karonga these individuals are key district level influencers who lead the planning and development of VAWG response activities (Baloyi et al., 2018). | District Councils have engaged in communication campaigns such as distributing posters with information relevant to COVID-19 prevention and response (Khonje, 2020). |
| Police Victim Support Units (VSU) | These units are mandated to coordinate with the health sector to support victims of VAWG, protect survivors, and investigate and prosecute perpetrators (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). These units also provide referral and mediation services. They do not have strong accountability mechanisms and do not always follow best practice, instead referring VAWG cases to heads of families and in some cases abandoning investigations or prosecutions as a result of bribes (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). They have the capacity to both enhance and undermine VAWG response processes and are thus key stakeholders in these cases (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | Oxfam in Malawi and its partners GENET and CAVWOC conducted trainings on GBV-response during the COVID-19 pandemic with police VSUs (Oxfam In Malawi, 2020). Due to inadequate provision of PPE, some police forces are increasingly reluctant to respond to cases of VAWG in person, placing victims at higher risk (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). |
| Social Welfare Office | The Social Welfare Office provides survivors of VAWG with counselling, therapy, protection, monitoring and referrals. They have strong mandates to engage in VAWG prevention and response but limited resources and personnel prohibit the extent of their influence (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | Social Welfare offices continued to provide counselling, referrals and monitoring of survivors of violence at a reduced capacity as they had to operate on shifts to ensure social distancing. In some districts such as Karonga and Lilongwe, they coordinated meetings of the district protection cluster. Their services were, however, hampered by limited PPE. |
| Magistrate Courts | These courts oversee the litigation of VAWG cases. They have the ability to influence VAWG prevention through their sentencing, which may act as a deterrent to future perpetration. They are also able to support and protect VAWG survivors through their sentences. | Many courts are working at reduced capacity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). The Malawi Judiciary released measures to adjust the operations and processes of the Judiciary with a view to minimising |

| Who | Role on VAWG | Role in COVID-19 |
|---|---|--|
| | <p>However open court proceedings expose survivors to public shame and stigma (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>the health risks which COVID-19 poses to judicial officers, members of the staff and court users. Amongst other measures, the Judiciary has slowed down work on all “non-urgent” court matters in order to reduce the potential of overcrowding at the court premises, and thereby controlling the spread of COVID-19. However, though the classification of “urgent cases” would arguably include cases involving GBV, <i>Tithetse Nkhanza</i> noted that there was no standardised approach and practice across the various courts in the country on how they were responding to GBV. <i>Tithetse Nkhanza’s</i> Technical Legal Advisor (TLA) noted that there were reported incidences in which survivors of GBV were sent back from some courts without assistance. Thus, the TLA developed guidelines on the management of GBV during the pandemic which were adopted by the Chief Justice and circulated to all courts across the country. In a memo signed by the Registrar to all courts, emphasis was placed on the need to ensure that ‘those in need of protection as a result of gender-based violence are still able to access essential justice services for safety, protection and well-being.’ This means that the court’s role during the COVID-19 pandemic is to ensure that justice remains available for survivors of violence and that VAWG cases need to be treated with urgency.</p> |
| <p>Healthcare Personnel</p> | <p>These individuals are key to providing post-trauma healthcare to survivors of VAWG. They are also key witnesses in court proceedings and are able to influence the outcome of cases based on the information they provide. Many clinicians are not adequately trained in how to report on victims, tender evidence and participate in cross examinations in court (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>As part of the COVID-19 response, 800 health surveillance assistants and 26,000 care group volunteers in Lilongwe, Dowa, Nkhata Bay and Karonga were trained by UNICEF and the World Bank in maternal, infant and young child nutrition (United Nations Malawi, 2020).</p> |
| <p>One Stop Centres</p> | <p>There are one stop centres in almost all 28 districts, which provide medical, legal and psychosocial support to VAWG survivors (Chakwana et al., 2020; Mulambia et al., 2018). Those using these services tend to have higher satisfaction with the medical support provided than the police support, due to perceptions of corruption and negligence by law enforcement (Chakwana et al., 2020).</p> | <p>Multiple one stop centres have been repurposed as part of the COVID-19 response, limiting the number of services available to survivors of VAWG (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).</p> |
| National Level actors | | |
| <p>Ministry of Gender, Disability, Child Development and Social Welfare</p> | <p>This ministry determines policy on all matters related to gender. It has the authority to push specific policy positions to Cabinet for policy and legislation. It also determines which stakeholders are included in policy making processes and approves which NGOs carry out their interventions. The Ministry convenes the Committee of Permanent Secretaries of relevant cabinet portfolios, which examines and finalises policy drafts before they are put to government (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>This Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare have printed 1,000 braille booklets explaining COVID-19 measures but due to inadequate funding the remaining 9,000 needed have not been produced (United Nations Malawi, 2020). They also coordinate the Protection Cluster which have been responsible for the establishment of a soap production programme, that supports the poorest 37% of families in Dzaleka camp to prevent COVID-19 spread; 22 sensitisation meetings, 34 handwashing campaigns, and 64 door-to-door campaigns run by the Malawi Red Cross; 34 CVSUs were mapped and reopened across six districts by Save the Children, Spotlight Initiative and UNICEF (Machinga, Nsanje, Dowa, Ntchisi, Mzimba and Nkhata Bay); a Gender Response Plan has been developed (United Nations Malawi, 2020).</p> |
| <p>Ministry of Information</p> | <p>The Ministry of Information is understood to be a key player in distributing information around GBV (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).</p> | <p>The Ministry of Information is also understood to be a key player in distributing information around COVID-19 (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).</p> |
| <p>Helpline</p> | <p>Malawi has a toll-free Child Helpline and a Gender Based Violence Crisis Line (Chakwana et al., 2020).</p> | <p>The National Tithandizane Helpline and National Gender Based Violence Crisis lines managed by YONECO with</p> |

| Who | Role on VAWG | Role in COVID-19 |
|---|--|--|
| | <p>Many survivors will face barriers to accessing support through these helplines. The use of helplines requires that individuals have access to mobile phones and/or the internet. Men are more likely to own phones than women in Malawi, which means women survivors of abuse may only have access to a phone on the agreement of the individual abusing them (Marron et al., 2020). Globally, women are 17% less likely to use the Internet than men and this gap has been growing in Africa (ITU Publications, 2019).</p> | <p>25 counsellors, managed to respond to Gender Based Violence issues in relation to COVID-19, and further linked Gender Based Violence survivors to other support services. YONECO reported that there has been an increased number of people who are calling the toll-free lines to report on Gender Based Violence in relation to COVID-19 cases</p> |
| Survivor Support Fund (SSF) | <p>The Survivor Support Fund (SSF) (run by <i>Tithetse Nkhanza</i>) provides survivors of VAWG with financial support to access justice and other support services. It does not provide wider financial support for assessing services or food in cases where women have been abandoned by their partners (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).</p> | <p>Women Rights Organisations (WROs) and district partners that support them in the administration of the SSF have been engaged in community awareness processes including developing Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials with VAWG and COVID-19 prevention and response messages. WROs have provided accompaniment services to survivors who are unable to access services on their own, particularly during this time when services have limited.</p> |
| The Cabinet | <p>The Cabinet Committee on Social Services considers all policy and legislative proposals. It has the power to send back any proposals before passing them to the Cabinet. If the committee adopts the proposals these then go to the full Cabinet (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>The COVID-19 responses committees of both the Cabinet Committee and the Presidential Taskforce are the peak bodies presiding over the COVID-19 Response in Malawi. They have appointed far below number of women required based on ratio stipulations (40:60) in Gender Equality Act (Chakwana et al., 2020).</p> |
| National Assembly/ Parliament | <p>The National Assembly comprises of elected Members of Parliament and has constitutional authority over all legislation. The National Assembly has the power to block or amend laws and has political oversight of the implementation of laws through its committees (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>The National Assembly, through the parliamentary committee on Health, has been carrying out different activities in relation to its mandate. This year, the committee conducted an assessment of the country's preparedness to respond to the pandemic. Following the pandemic, the committee made a number of recommendations including the need to review the Public Health Act. The committee continues to play an oversight role by conducting monitoring visits to different strategic places and making recommendations. Parliament has also implemented activities aimed at raising awareness of the pandemic among its members to allow them to share this information with their constituents.</p> |
| The President | <p>The President has the power to veto any Government policy or legislation on gender and related issues such as VAWG (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>The Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 engages in weekly planning meetings (United Nations Malawi, 2020).</p> |
| Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) | <p>This commission has constitutional power to raise awareness of human rights and address human rights violations. It also has a mandate to implement the Gender Equality Act. It carries out formative and operational research on issues related to VAWG, giving it significant amounts of informal power. It is interested in improving performance and focused on its ranking with the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Commission has no veto power (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>During the pandemic, MHRC has worked to identify and strategize on responses to key human rights challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi. Efforts by the commission have focused on monitoring and advocacy around human rights standards.</p> |
| Donors (EU, FCDO, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Irish Aid) and UN Agencies (UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF) | <p>Donors have the power to fund and oversee the design and implementation of programmes. This gives them de-facto veto power over VAWG prevention and response interventions. Their funding capacity gives them high policy influence. They tend to focus on global development agendas, international conventions and protocols, propagate particular world views, and seek credit and recognition for the results achieved (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019).</p> | <p>Donors such as the World Bank are funding significant parts of the COVID-19 response (The World Bank, 2020). As a result, they have the power to influence measures and policies and interventions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> |

| Who | Role on VAWG | Role in COVID-19 |
|--|--|--|
| International NGOs (Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid; Oxfam, Care International) | International NGOs have strong influence on policies related to VAWG due to their advocacy work. They have vested interests in testing models and theories of change, propagating specific world views and maintaining funding to sustain jobs (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). | Given their high power and influence, International NGOs are likely to be engaged in the development of the COVID-19 response and policy development. International NGOs also tend to be in a stronger position to access funding, enabling them to carry out large scale COVID-19 response work. |
| Local NGOs (Women's Resources and Legal Centre (WORLEC), NGO GCN, Pan African Civic Educators Network (PACENET), Coalition for the Empowerment of Women (CEWAG), Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice (CCJP), Fountain of Life; Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) | Local NGOs have high collective power and influence on policy and law related to VAWG through their advocacy work. | Local NGOs globally are often first responders in COVID-19, providing emergency relief in the form of food, medicine, hygiene supplies, and providing critical VAWG services such as shelters and hotlines. |
| Women Judges Association of Malawi (WOJAM) | WOJAM conducts research and aims to provide women and children with information that supports them to advance their rights and access to justice with regard to VAWG (Shauerhammer et al., 2019). | The Spotlight Initiative has supported WOJAM with funds to conduct mobile courts and legal literacy clinics to communities during the pandemic. These remain ongoing. |
| NICE | NICE is a public trust. They focus on community sensitisation and civil education around GBV issues. | NICE Trust has put pressure on the government to ensure its approach to the COVID-19 response is inclusive of different marginalised groups (Juma, 2020). It is also engaging with community radio stations to cascade accurate information about COVID-19 measures into communities (Kandodo, 2020). Lack of funding acts as a barrier to them conducting more substantial work within the COVID-19 response (Juma, 2020). |
| Protection Cluster | The Protection Cluster (which includes the GBV sub-cluster) has the objective of reducing protection threats for affected populations and protecting vulnerable groups from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect during disasters and ensure human rights are protected (Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events and Ministry of Health, 2020). | The Protection Cluster and GBV Sub-cluster work with health sector actors to ensure adequate access to health services in cases of GBV, including referral services, follow up and support (Osman, 2020). It has also been responsible for the establishment of a soap production programme, that supports the poorest 37% of families in Dzaleka camp to prevent COVID-19 spread; 22 sensitisation meetings, 34 handwashing campaigns, and 64 door-to-door campaigns run by the Malawi Red Cross; 34 CVSUs were mapped and reopened across six districts by Save the Children, Spotlight Initiative and UNICEF (Machinga, Nsanje, Dowa, Ntchisi, Mzimba and Nkhata Bay); A Gender Response Plan has been developed (United Nations Malawi, 2020). |

3.3. Opportunities for coalition building among key actors preventing and responding to VAWG and COVID-19

This report has identified the following potential opportunities for coalition building among key actors preventing and responding to VAWG and the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **The Protection Cluster** provides a key opportunity for actors working on both the COVID-19 pandemic response and VAWG to meet and share the work they are engaged in (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Women’s Manifesto Movement** is a group of organisations and individuals focused on promoting the rights of women. It has an online platform where actions can be shared (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **IPAS** are working with community-based organisations and community radio stations to share information about how women can get legal support if they experience GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic (IPAS, 2020).
- **The Parliamentary Women’s Caucus** was a mechanism in 2016 that enabled women MPs to network and build relationships. This research could not confirm whether the Parliamentary Women’s Caucus is still active (O’Neil et al., 2016).
- **The Karonga Woman’s Forum** works with DPOs and WROs such as the Association of Sex workers and mother’s groups to make sure information on VAWG prevention and response is distributed among communities (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

However, to date, the culture of coalition building has been limited in Malawi. KIIs identified poor coordination and pressures from donors that cause NGOs to focus heavily on their own projects, creating an atmosphere of competition and resistance to collaboration (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). They also highlighted that pressures from donors cause NGOs to focus how their organisations will benefit from the programmes they run rather than how their activities fit into the wider picture of COVID-19 and VAWG prevention and response (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

3.4. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on VAWG response services

Reduced capacity of legal courts: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused legal courts to scale down services and de-prioritise cases of VAWG (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). In Lilongwe and Karonga courts have only been hearing cases three times a week, and COVID-19 restrictions led to lower numbers of personnel within courts, which has caused longer waiting times and a backlog of cases (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). When cases are heard, delays in sentencing have sometimes led to perpetrators being released. WROs report that, in some districts, judges have stopped issuing protection orders and are sending women back to live with violent partners (Social Development Direct, 2020). This situation has led to increased reluctance among survivors to report and follow through with cases.

Impact on specific groups: Women with limited financial capacity, women with limited access to transport and children are at particular risk of VAWG and face particular barriers to justice due to the reduced capacity of legal courts. For example, the requirement to wear a mask in court has prohibited women without the financial capacity to buy a mask from accessing support, while court adjournments place higher financial burdens on women and may cause women without the financial capacity not to pursue cases or to drop them (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Women with limited access to transportation, including women from rural areas and women with disabilities, face further barriers to accessing justice, especially since magistrates have stopped travelling to rural communities (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Finally, the slowdown in hearing court cases have led to an increase in child marriage cases being settled among families, particularly in Karonga, rather than being treated as criminal cases in court (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). This increases the risk of girls being forced into child marriage and limits their capacity to seek legal protection.

Reduced capacity of police: The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the capacity of police forces to respond to VAWG cases, in part due to an inadequate supply of PPE, leading to a reluctance to respond to reports of VAWG (Social Development Direct, 2020; Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). KIIs raised concerns that COVID-19 restrictions have required VSU personnel to work in shifts, causing delays in responding and a lack of

adequate support for survivors (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Further, KIIs reported that police, social welfare officers and other frontline workers are in positions to exploit survivors rather than protect them (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Impact on specific groups: Women with limited financial capacity, women with disabilities, women from the LGBTI community and children are likely to be at greater risk of exploitation by police, social welfare officers and other frontline workers due to social norms and power dynamics that create barriers to justice and cultures of impunity.

Reduced capacity of VAWG response and support services: The COVID-19 response has reassigned sexual and reproductive health workers to COVID-19 cases, leaving women in need of these services at risk (IPAS, 2020). These services include contraception, maternal healthcare, VAWG services such as the clinical management of rape, and testing and treatment for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Many referral pathways have also closed down because organisations critical to VAWG response are experiencing reduced capacity or have been repurposed (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). For example, many one stop centres have been repurposed as COVID-19 response centres (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). In Lilongwe and Mangochi WROs and survivors do not have adequate access to PPE, posing a barrier to their work (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). While many support services such as counselling are offering remote services, this requires access to personal technology which many women do not have (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). KIIs highlighted the increased need for mobile clinics to support survivors who are unable to travel but explained that to date these have not been provided (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Impact on specific groups: Women with disabilities, women with limited financial capacity, women from rural areas and women with limited access to personal technology are likely to be particularly impacted by the reduced capacity of VAWG response and support services. This is because the reduction in the number of VAWG response and support services in areas that are accessible to these groups exacerbates pre-existing barriers to access. Further, women with limited financial capacity are less likely to be able to access services given new requirements to buy and wear PPE such as masks. Similarly, those without access to personal technology will face higher barriers to accessing remote services where in-person services have closed down.

3.5. COVID-19 pandemic impact on VAWG prevention programming

Social, economic and political barriers to VAWG prevention remain the same as those identified in the GIPP 2019 report (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2019). Many of these have been exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gendered social norms including women and girls being primarily responsible for domestic chores, childcare and nursing sick family members have been very visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, with current trends showing men being at higher risk of illness from COVID-19, extra labour demands in and out of households has been put on women and girls (Malawi RGA, 2020). Furthermore, there has been a notable increased risk of violence as a result of COVID-19 due to livelihoods losses coupled with restrictive gender norms and harmful cultural practices, including rising rates of child marriages.

As is the case during emergencies, there has been a shift of focus in VAWG prevention programming to focus more on VAWG response. Suffice to say, adapting VAWG prevention programming to COVID-19 has its own unique challenges including the inability to bring people together in reference groups for important conversations that trigger the long process required to begin changing harmful social norms that are linked to VAWG. In addition, following up on conversations with community members is almost impossible due to movement restrictions, particularly if adaptations have been made to use radio programming to adhere to social distancing measures. In some instances, prevention programming using some communication tools carries risk to women who are experiencing violence because of restrictions in movements and limited access to support services. However, with the gendered social norms above, maintaining VAWG prevention programming ideally should continue to be prioritised so that VAWG is not normalised, although its impact may not be immediate.

3.6. Barriers to help-seeking for VAWG

Limited access to information: 65% of people in Malawi believe that because civil society and government are focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, women will not be able to access help in cases of VAWG (Chakwana et al., 2020). 31% of people are unaware of the toll-free Child Helpline or the Gender Based Violence Crisis Line, likely leading to these resources being underutilised (Chakwana et al., 2020). The closure of youth-friendly centres is leaving adolescent girls in particular without access to reproductive health information or services (IPAS,

2020), while the closure of markets is likely to limit the opportunities for women who rely on word-of-mouth to access information on VAWG and COVID-19 prevention and response services. KIIs report increased resistance to reporting due to fears among survivors around how to stay safe against COVID-19 and how to seek help whilst complying with COVID-19 response requirements (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). KIIs also report that some NGOs such as Oxfam have distributed bicycles and phones to community actors to improve their capacity to distribute information, and have designed information packages in accessible formats to ensure they are accessible to people with visual impairments (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Information gaps are likely to disproportionately impact certain groups of women, including:

- Women with certain disabilities, if they do not have access to accessible information such as braille or to interpreters. KIIs highlighted that women with disabilities are often excluded from designing and disseminating messaging around VAWG and COVID-19 meaning information often fails to meet their needs (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts);
- Adolescent girls who are unable to access sexual and reproductive health information, particularly adolescent girls with disabilities;
- Women with low levels of literacy, including women with intellectual impairments;
- Women without access to personal technology devices through which information may be shared. This is particularly an issue for rural and poor women from low socio-economic backgrounds and potentially also older women;
- Women whose movement has been restricted and who are unable to meet with community members who may pass this information on;
- Women and girls in refugee camps;
- Migrant women.

Public transport restrictions: WROs and CVSUs are reportedly reluctant to use public transport to visit survivors due to fears around COVID-19 (Social Development Direct, 2020). In Mangochi, WROs are finding it difficult to reach out to wider communities due to COVID-19 restrictions, which limits the number of people who know about and can access the support they offer (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Public transport restrictions are likely to disproportionately affect women from rural areas who have to travel significant distances to access government district hospitals, which are reportedly COVID-19 hotspots (IPAS, 2020; Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

Economic shocks: Resource challenges at the survivor level have created greater barriers to reporting and accessing support (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). For the most economically marginalised women, the cost of PPE coupled with the requirement to wear PPE in order to access in-person support will prevent them from accessing essential VAWG response services (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts). Increased economic hardship due to the loss of livelihoods linked to the COVID-19 response increases the risk of women turning to sex work, girls being forced into early marriage, and increases in intimate partner violence (IPAS, 2020). It also increases the risk that workers at the frontline of the COVID-19 response will exploit their power to harass and abuse women and girls and other vulnerable groups (Chakwana et al., 2020). Limited economic resources, coupled with the climate of fear and barriers to survival may also lead to higher rates of people trafficking, with further barriers to accessing justice (Chakwana et al., 2020).

3.7. Implications for Tithetse Nkhanza programming

Key changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic that are likely to impact *Tithetse Nkhanza's* programming:

- **Pre-existing vulnerabilities to VAWG exacerbated:** The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated risks of VAWG cited in the Rapid Gender Analysis (Chakwana et al., 2020).
- **Fewer health workers available to provide VAWG response support:** The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the reallocation of sexual and reproductive health workers to the COVID-19 response, resulting in fewer health

workers available to provide VAWG prevention and response services. This is likely to increase if the burden of COVID-19 cases increases.

- **Reduced capacity of legal courts:** The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduction in the capacity of legal courts to process criminal cases of VAWG. This increases the barriers faced by survivors to accessing justice and the cultures of impunity that contribute to the perpetration of VAWG.
- **Reduced capacity of police:** The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduction in the capacity of police to respond to cases of VAWG, creating a barrier to victims of VAWG from seeking help and protection.
- **Travel restrictions:** Travel restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic pose a barrier to women accessing VAWG prevention and response services. For women with disabilities and women in rural areas these restrictions pose a particularly significant barrier.
- **Limited PPE poses a barrier to VAWG response:** Public health policies related to the COVID-19 response, which require individuals and frontline workers wear PPE such as masks when accessing or providing VAWG prevention and response services, poses a barrier to access for survivors. Limited access to PPE for frontline workers limits the services frontline workers can provide, while the requirement that those using these services wear masks, risks excluding those without the financial capacity to buy one.
- **Limited access to accurate information poses a barrier to help-seeking among survivors of VAWG:** Restrictions on movement and the closure of communal spaces such as markets or youth-friendly centres has closed key spaces where women would ordinarily receive information about VAWG prevention and response services and COVID-19. Information campaigns are not always inclusive of people with disabilities, posing a further barrier to women with visual or other impairments from accessing accurate information about relevant services.

Key players (both supporters and opposers) that have emerged as a result of the pandemic that Tithetse Nkhanza could work with to deliver its work

- **The Protection Cluster** provides a key opportunity for actors working on both COVID-19 and VAWG to meet and share the work they are engaged in (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **Women's Manifesto Movement** is a group of organisations and individuals focused on promoting the rights of women. It has an online platform where actions can be shared (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).
- **IPAS** are working with community-based organisations and community radio stations to share information about how women can get legal support if they experience GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic (IPAS, 2020).
- **The Parliamentary Women's Caucus** was a mechanism in 2016 that enabled women MPs to network and build relationships. This research could not confirm whether the Parliamentary Women's Caucus is still active (O'Neil et al., 2016).
- **The Karonga Woman's Forum** works with DPOs and WROs such as the Association of Sex workers and mother's groups to make sure information on VAWG prevention and response is distributed among communities (Tithetse Nkhanza, 2020, Key Informant Interview Transcripts).

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