

## **Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme**

Towards More Inclusive and Gender Transformative  
Programming to Address Violence Against Women  
and Girls

April 2021

# Towards More Inclusive and Gender Transformative Programming to Address Violence Against Women and Girls

## Emerging lessons from Tithetse Nkhanza

In February 2021, the Tithetse Nkhanza (TN) team came together (virtually) to review the programme's gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) strategy and embark upon the journey of turning what is on paper into practice. In this blog, members of the Tithetse Nkhanza team reflect on the process of integrating GESI into the programme and why it has been important, unpacking the difference it has made and reflecting on what we have learnt so far.

These lessons will be relevant to standalone programmes addressing VAWG, women's rights, and gender equality, but also to any sectoral programmes committed to ensuring impact for socially excluded groups and addressing the root causes of social issues by tackling unequal distribution of power.

## Why does GESI matter in VAWG programming?

We know by now that violence against women and girls (VAWG) cuts through all segments of society and can affect women and girls from all groups and diverse backgrounds. However, we know from [global evidence](#) as well as [research we have conducted in Malawi](#), that women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination are at increased risk of violence and have differing experiences of violence. For example, our baseline research in three districts found that **66% of women with disabilities experienced some type of intimate partner violence (IPV)** in the last year, compared to 57% of women without disabilities. **Adolescent girls with disabilities were up to twice as likely to experience some form of sexual IPV** than peers without disabilities and **out-of-school girls experience higher levels of all forms of IPV** than in-school girls. Tithetse Nkhanza applies a social inclusion lens to all our work – realising that if we do not pay attention to how VAWG affects women and girls in their diversity, we will risk failing to address the needs of those who are most affected. Similarly, if we do not understand and tackle the structural root causes of VAWG – gender inequality – and aim to transform gendered power, we will not be able to contribute to lasting change in the lives of women and girls.

*It is important to pay attention to the GESI approach as it will not just promote inclusive programming, but also meaningful change in the lives of women and girls with disabilities, aiming to ensure that their rights are promoted and protected, and that the programme contributes to equal opportunities for marginalised groups.*

- Bonface Tafikah Massah, Human Rights Activist and Advisor to Tithetse Nkhanza on Disability Inclusion

## Our GESI Strategy

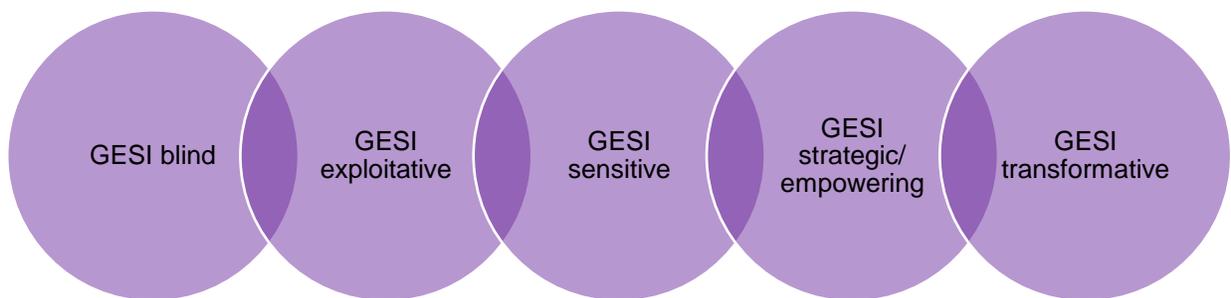
Our [Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy](#) sets out the overall vision for integrating GESI into the programme - aiming to operate in empowering and gender transformative ways, and strategically engage on various forms of social exclusion. These are central aspects of the programme mission, as combatting VAWG effectively and sustainably requires us to address unequal power relationships and gendered social norms that drive and justify men's use of violence. While our research brought out multiple layers of inequalities and highlighted several groups that experience high levels of discrimination and exclusion, a broad inclusion approach that does not focus on any particular group risks failing to make significant changes to participation for any excluded group given their different experiences. The GESI Strategy sets out an explicit focus on disability inclusion as the programme's first social inclusion priority, which may be followed by focus on other groups in later stages of the programme. This decision was based on evidence of the

## TOWARDS MORE INCLUSIVE AND GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

heightened risk of violence for women and girls with disabilities<sup>1</sup> and builds on thorough programme analysis of baseline data and a review of approaches to disability inclusion in VAWG programming<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, we are taking a broader social inclusion approach in relation to our do no harm commitments as this must be inclusive of people from all groups, regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE), disability status, mental health, and other factors that can put people at increased risk of harm.

### Putting strategy into practice

The TN team have developed a GESI Matrix as a tool to operationalise the GESI Strategy, and to assess progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the strategy thereby providing a method for internal accountability. The tool identifies a set of 'GESI markers', which are essentially indicators along a continuum of five levels from 'GESI blind' to 'GESI transformative'<sup>3</sup>. The markers define what it means to be 'GESI blind' on one end of the spectrum, to what 'GESI transformative' would look like on the other end of the spectrum. This is applied for various programmatic areas and approaches used in the programme, which are both looking inward at internal policies and practices, and outward at our work with partners, in communities, and external engagements.



For example, at a **programmatic level**, there are GESI markers looking at training and capacity building, accessibility of activities, work with partners, safeguarding, and activity budgeting – outlining what it would mean to be GESI blind and what it would mean to be at the level of GESI transformative – and the stages of the continuum in between. For **internal policies and practices**, there are GESI markers related to duty of care and workplace policies. For the **engagement with external stakeholders**, there are markers for understanding where our networking and alliance building, as well as the programme's profile and leadership in VAWG spaces fall along the GESI continuum. The GESI tool supports team members to understand what these different levels mean in our respective areas of work, which then helps to set our ambitions, and make plans for how we can move towards these. In sum, the tool is useful for understanding where we currently are, and where we want to go.

*The continuum helps in practically marking out a pathway to becoming transformative, by identifying specific activities that can be done. For instance, in the prevention intervention, SASA! Together, where we conduct various community engagement activities, we will use the GESI markers on accessibility and participation to ensure that we adapt activities, practices and communication to be inclusive, acceptable and accessible for all people.*

- Lusungu Kalanga, VAWG Lead, Tithetse Nkhanza

<sup>1</sup> See for instance What Works evidence that women and girls with disabilities are two to four times more likely to experience VAWG than their non-disabled counterparts: <https://www.whatworks.co.za/resources/evidence-reviews/item/444-disability-and-violence-against-women-and-girls>

<sup>2</sup> See Tithetse Nkhanza's [Rapid Review](#) on Disability Inclusion in VAWG Programming and [Technical Briefing Note](#) on measuring attendance of people with Disabilities in the programme.

<sup>3</sup> This builds on a SDDirect original framework developed a few years back by Caroline Moser. The framework has been applied and adapted to programmes across different thematic areas, including governance, education, and now VAWG.

## TOWARDS MORE INCLUSIVE AND GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The GESI Matrix was finalised in a workshop with the whole programme team. The session included a combination of presentations, group work to review the markers, discussions to feed back on the tool, and break-out sessions for teams to start exploring the application of the GESI tool in their areas of work. Tithetse Nkhanza's work on gender equality and social inclusion is still a work in progress. The programme's strong emphasis on learning and adaptation makes it well suited to innovating and tracking progress in putting our ambition for GESI into practice.

### Key lessons

- **Understanding context is essential to develop effective strategies** – Gender inequality and social exclusion play out uniquely in different contexts. Application of the GESI Matrix to our programme activities builds on deep analysis and understanding of gender and social dynamics and norms in the programme districts through formative research conducted by the programme. This has been essential for tailoring our GESI approach and targeting groups of women and girls that are among the most marginalised in the context and therefore at high risk of experiencing VAWG.
- **Do no harm** – It is essential that the programme ensures the safety, health and security of staff and participants which is inclusive of all people regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, SOGIE, disability status, and other factors that can influence the risks that individuals and groups are exposed to.
- **An intentional focus can help create tangible progress** – The explicit focus on disability inclusion is allowing us to channel resources to address the specific barriers that women and girls with disabilities face and hopefully make tangible progress on their inclusion. If we are able to do so, later stages of the programme will be able to focus on additional excluded groups to address the particular barriers that they face.
- **Set realistic ambitions** – Not all aspects of the programme will operate at the gender transformative end of the spectrum. The TN team's own expectation is that, at a minimum, all aspects of the programme should be GESI sensitive i.e. meeting the practical needs of all groups and doing no harm. Some aspects of the programme, namely prevention work, aim to be empowering or transformative. Setting levels of ambition meant considering several factors such as team capacity, resources and the timeline. Being gender transformative can come with a risk of backlash against women and girls as it means confronting structural inequalities and challenging power imbalances. In taking such an approach we have carefully considered the risks involved and have strategies in place to navigate these.
- **Engaging the whole programme team** – The GESI Matrix tool is only useful if it is of value to the team. Including staff from the outset in the development and adaptation of GESI strategies and tools such as the matrix has increased their relevance to the programme, and the process has provided lessons which have fed into the learning and adaptation cycle within the programme. The GESI Strategy and tools will be revisited regularly and embedded in the programme's MEL framework.

#### **About Tithetse Nkhanza**

*The Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Prevention and Response Programme, also known as Tithetse Nkhanza, is a six-year programme which aims to reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls and progress towards the full realisation of women and children's human rights in Malawi. The programme is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and delivered by a consortium of Tetra Tech International Development (formerly known as Coffey), Social Development Direct and Plan International.*

*With a focus on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), family violence within the household, and harmful traditional practices such as early marriage, Tithetse Nkhanza implements a range of interventions to contribute towards reducing the prevalence of VAWG and improving response services for survivors.*