

# GENDER IN MALAWI

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, with the vast majority of people living below the international poverty line. It has a fast-growing and predominantly rural-based population that is heavily reliant on agriculture. The tea sector plays a vital role as one of the largest employers in the country. Women have an enormous impact on the well-being of their families and societies, but their potential is sometimes not realised because of discriminatory social norms and legal institutions. Although their status has improved in recent decades, gender inequalities persist<sup>1</sup>. We see this in the tea communities by the low percentage of women in leadership positions (on the estates and in the smallholder associations) as well as in teenage pregnancies and the burden of unpaid care work falling on women.

This factsheet aims to highlight the extent of these inequalities by pulling together references and key data points from third party sources. For a full list of references and further reading, please [visit our website](#).



**70%**  
POPULATION UNDER  
POVERTY LINE<sup>2</sup>



POPULATION TO  
**DOUBLE**  
BY 2038<sup>3</sup>



**142/189**  
UN GENDER  
INEQUALITY INDEX<sup>4</sup>



## COUNTRY OVERVIEW



**18.6m**  
POPULATION<sup>5</sup>

**83%**  
RURAL



**17%**  
URBAN<sup>6</sup>



**18 YEARS**  
MEDIAN AGE<sup>7</sup>



**64 YEARS**  
LIFE EXPECTANCY<sup>8</sup>

**70%**  
MEN



**55%**  
WOMEN

ADULT LITERACY<sup>9</sup>



**18%**  
ACCESS TO  
ELECTRICITY<sup>10</sup>



**80%**  
EMPLOYED IN  
AGRICULTURE<sup>11</sup>



**5.7%**  
UNEMPLOYMENT<sup>12</sup>

**27%**  
RURAL



**68%**  
URBAN

ACCESS TO BANKING<sup>13</sup>



## TEA

Tea is Malawi's biggest private sector employer, and most plantations are based in the south. There are more women farmers than men due to the matrilineal inheritance system in Southern Malawi. This tradition is not necessarily empowering to women. It generates a whole series of negative consequences, including male family members not feeling valued and not being vested in the stewardship of the farm land. Many men often end up leaving their wife and children and moving away<sup>14</sup>.



**50,000**  
EMPLOYED IN TEA<sup>15</sup>

WORKFORCE<sup>16</sup>



**65%** **35%**



**65%**  
OF THE 16,500 SMALL HOLDER  
FARMERS ARE WOMEN<sup>17</sup>



## ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN

Malawian women tend to be the household financial managers and savers, often prioritising how earned money is spent<sup>18</sup>.



**WOMEN FARMERS**  
HAVE LESS ACCESS TO  
SUBSIDIES, CREDIT, EXTENSIONS<sup>19</sup>

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS



**50%**

MORE LIKELY TO BE POOR<sup>20</sup>



**16%**  
WOMEN IN  
MANAGERIAL POSITIONS<sup>21</sup>



## CHILD MARRIAGE

Daughters are married off to reduce financial burden, resulting in increased rates of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies and school dropouts<sup>22</sup>.



**12<sup>TH</sup>**  
HIGHEST GLOBALLY<sup>23</sup>



**42%**  
MARRIED BY 18<sup>24</sup>



## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Each additional year a girl is in school is associated with a 10% increase in wages, increased life expectancy and better health outcomes. Barriers include poverty, school fees, safety and greater investment in boys<sup>25</sup>.



**5%**  
WOMEN PASSED  
FINAL EXAMINATIONS<sup>26</sup>

**<15%**  **<60%**  
RURAL URBAN

GIRLS ATTEND SECONDARY SCHOOL<sup>27</sup>



## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

High numbers of GBV in Malawi, particularly in rural communities. Traditional practices prevent women and girls from realising their human rights. Higher educational attainment has been shown to positively change perceptions of GBV and gender roles among both males and females<sup>28</sup>.



**OVER 1/3**  
WOMEN AGED 15-49  
EXPERIENCE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE<sup>29</sup>



**24%**  
CHILDREN 9-18<sup>30</sup>  
EXPERIENCE FORCED SEX