

## How gender is embedded in the national ICT policy of Malawi

African countries have adopted national ICT policies to support their development agendas. National ICT policies are meant to ensure that ICT investments contribute towards equitable and sustainable well-being of all members of the society. However, there are unintended consequences of in the national ICT policy process which may lead to exclusion and alienation of some members of the society. Conversely, those involved in national ICT policy process should consider gender equality to ensure that the interests of all members of society are incorporated in the policy.

Policy Brief

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Gender equality themes in National ICT policy  
Themes for gender equality were embedded in the first and second drafts but not in the final draft of the National ICT policy.

Extent of supporting gender equality in national ICT policy  
Gender equality concerns have not been explicitly dealt with the final version of the national ICT policy.

Suggested gender equality approach in national ICT policy  
National ICT policies should be streamlined to gender equality by advocacy among stakeholders and conducting gender equality analysis and evaluation

### Introduction

Over the past two decades most African countries have developed national ICT policies to support their national development agendas. National policies are meant to ensure that ICT investments contribute towards equitable and sustainable development; and the well-being of all members of the society. However, there are unintended consequences of the process for national ICT policies which may lead to domination and alienation of some members of the society. This has implications for both men and women areas of social economic development such as employment, education, health, environmental sustainability and community development.

Although women form the large part of the population in most developing countries and carry most of the economic burden, they have been marginalised in access to resources and decision-making roles. There are few women holding positions that may influence decisions at the policy making level in African governments. Consequently, the opportunities for women to advance their basic needs and strategic interests are curtailed.

National ICT policies act as government plans and through their process they influence and guide actions. The benefits accrued from the national ICT policies are not gained equally between men and women; women are on the receiving end. ICT policies need to be streamlined with gender to ensure that they promote equality and the potential of women to be realised in socio-economic development. It is important to explore the deliberate intentions of governments in using the national ICT policy to address gender inequality.

### Context of Malawi

Malawi has a population of 15.3 Million people. Women form a large part of the populations (about 51%). The country experiences many challenges such high levels of unemployment, low income for households, low literacy levels and high impact of HIV/AIDS. The country is classified as low income economy. Women play a critical role in social economic growth of Malawi. However their role is curtailed by unequal opportunities in access to education, healthcare, employment and other important services. The government of Malawi introduced the national Gender policy in 2000 and national ICT policy in 2003 to mitigate some of the social challenges.

Table 1: Demographic profile of Malawi (ITU, 2012; UNDP, 2012)

Index	Value
Population	15.3 Million people (51% female & 49% male)
Life expectancy	54.3 years
Literacy levels	74.5%
GDP per capita (PPP)	US\$ 794
Fixed line teledensity	1.3%
Mobile phones teledensity	25.7%
Internet teledensity	3.3%

Although Malawi has improved on gender equality as noted in the Human Development Report (Genders Inequality Index), it reported in the progress reports for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) that the country is unlikely to meet the 2015 deadline. The study critically analysed how the national ICT policy was promoting gender equality since ICT is perceived as an enabler for socio-economic development.

### National Policies

Table 2: Summary of Policy documents

ID	Policy document	Description
PDC1	Malawi Information and Communication (ICT) Policy	First national ICT Policy document released in June, 2003
PDC2	Malawi National ICT for Development (ICT4D) Policy	Second national ICT Policy document released in July, 2006
PDC3	National ICT Policy: An ICT-led Malawi	Third national ICT Policy document released in February, 2009

Table 3: Summary of themes in the policy documents

PDC1 Policy themes	PDC2 Policy themes	PDC3 Policy themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT human resource</li> <li>• Enabling environment for ICT</li> <li>• Export oriented ICT industry</li> <li>• Private sector support</li> <li>• Investment in technologies</li> <li>• Information security and law</li> <li>• Institutional and legal frameworks</li> <li>• ICT standards and best practices</li> <li>• Implementation institutions and plans</li> <li>• Promoting Access to ICT</li> <li>• Gender in development and use of ICT</li> <li>• Partnerships in implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT leadership</li> <li>• Human capital</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Human resources development</li> <li>• Governance</li> <li>• ICT industry</li> <li>• ICT infrastructure development</li> <li>• ICT in growth sectors</li> <li>• ICT in Communities</li> <li>• Legal and regulatory frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT leadership</li> <li>• Human resource development</li> <li>• Governance</li> <li>• ICT in industries</li> <li>• ICT infrastructure development</li> <li>• ICT in growth sectors</li> <li>• ICT in communities</li> <li>• Legal &amp; regulatory frameworks</li> <li>• International Cooperation</li> <li>• Universal access of ICTs</li> </ul>

The national Gender policy was introduced in 2000 and later updated in 2008. The policy promotes gender equality in eradication of poverty among women, men, boys and girls. The policy has eight themes namely: education, health, food security, environment management, governance, economic empowerment, HIV/AIDS and gender based violence. ICT may be applied in supporting addressing some of the issues in the eight themes of the national gender policy. This may be achieved through gender mainstreaming.

The national ICT policy development process began in 2001 with country wide consultative meetings of key stakeholders. The first draft of the national ICT policy was released and endorsed by the Cabinet of Government of Malawi in 2003. The policy was revised in 2006 and the final version of the policy was released in 2009. The national ICT Working group was formed to support the development of the policy. It was composed of members from government department, academia, private sector organisations and NGOs.

The three national ICT policy documents were compared to identify changes in the themes of the policy. The themes in the national ICT policy documents were related and the first document was used as the basis for the subsequent policy documents. There were more themes in the first policy document compared to the other two policy documents (PDC2 and PDC3). The main differences were omissions of themes for Information security and law, ICT standards and best practices, Gender in development and use of ICT and Partnership in implementation of policy. The differences in themes for second and third policy documents were omission of themes for health and education in the final policy documents (See Table 2).

Themes for gender equality were embedded in the first and second policy documents. The gender equality themes were tallied and the results of content analysis showed that gender issues were included in the earlier versions of policy document (PDC1), partially addressed in the second policy document (PDC2) and omitted in the third policy document (PDC3). Three themes emerged related to gender equality in the corpus and these were commitment to gender, community participation and capacity building. The three themes are summarised as follows:

- **Commitment to gender:** Government claimed that it was committed to promoting gender through support of equal participation of men, women, girls and boys in implementation of ICT to ensure equitable access and use of ICT services.
- **Community participation:** The government recognised the role of communities which comprise of people of different gender and ages in ICT initiatives. Equal participation of members of the communities was important in achieving gender equality because each member of the society play a specific role in

attaining equitable and sustainable development; achievement of freedom and accessing opportunities.

- **Capacity building:** It was claimed that one way of empowering communities in equitable access and use of ICT was through capacity building. This would involve a range of actions for human, institutional and organisational skills development and arrangements at all structures of the society to improve people's lives.

## Conclusions

The evidence on claims for gender equality commitment in the policy declarations were addressing issues for low literacy levels, access to ICT and participation of marginalised communities in ICT initiatives. Community participation claim was noted in stakeholders listed in the policy document and these included government departments, civil society organisations, academic institutions and donors. The policy beneficiaries were women, men, boys and girls. The motives for capacity building were promoting transfer of ICT knowledge and skills to all members of the society.

Although there was inclusion of diverse policy stakeholders and beneficiaries, it was observed that lack of tenets of gender in the final draft of the national ICT policy may lead to limited consideration of gender equality practices in the implementation of the policy.

## Policy implications

The analysis of how gender equality is embedded in the national ICT policy showed that gender equality concerns have not been explicitly dealt with in the final version of the national ICT Policy. The study makes the following recommendations:

- Strengthening of gender mainstreaming to ensure that gender quality goals are included in the national ICT policy.
- Advocacy of gender among policy stakeholders such as policy makers, ICT policy experts, NGOs and CSO through multi-disciplinary approach where ICT policy experts will share knowledge on the role ICT policies and Gender experts will share knowledge of gender issues in policies.
- Gender analysis or evaluation of gender in the national ICT Policy as a mechanism of assessing progress on gender in policies as part of policy process. In this way practical and strategic gender needs may be addressed.

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