

# A holistic GIZ approach to promoting gender equality and diversity in Malawi



## 1. Context – Gender and Diversity in Malawi

Malawi is among the world's poorest countries, where over 50.7% of the population of 19.3 million live below the poverty line. The female population is more often living in poverty with 56.8% of the women living below the poverty line in 2019/20 as compared to 48.5% of men. The country's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, although moderately improving, faces significant challenges. Malawi ranks 173 out of 188 countries on the Global Gender Inequality Index, showing significant disparities in reproductive health, women's empowerment, and economic participation. These challenges stem from discriminatory practices, low women's representation in politics and the workforce as well as high rates of violence against women and girls. Despite constituting 70% of the agricultural and tourism workforce, women face inequities in paid labour and fair wages, with 93% engaged in unpaid labour compared to 79% of men. Gender inequalities continue to exist because of negative gender norms, practices, and stereotypes that put women and girls at a disadvantage.

Minority groups such as sex workers, people with disabilities, HIV-positive individuals, the LGBTQIA+ community, and refugees encounter discrimination and limited access to essential services. The Constitution of Malawi prohibits discrimination, yet marginalized groups face routine violence and discrimination. In addition, there is limited technical capacity amongst civil society actors in movement building, policy influence, and advocacy to inform law-making and secure public service delivery.

GIZ Malawi as a unity of projects and country office is dedicated to work towards establishing a gender-inclusive work culture and environment, based on gender-diverse employment practices and awareness-raising measures targeted at management, human resource managers and employees. The objective is to change attitudes and mindsets, being role models for our partners.



## 2. Initiatives and impact

### 2.1 Recruitment, career advancement and grievance mechanisms

GIZ Malawi puts special emphasis on recruitment, selection and career progression support measures to ensure that women and men (GIZ Malawi is actively working towards including all genders in the future) get equal chances to develop and advance their careers. In line with this, GIZ Malawi revised its **recruitment guidelines**, including gender considerations in all processes of the application, selection and interview phases. In cases where both women and men qualify for a position, preference is given to equally qualified women over men. This has led to a 50-56% gender balance in leadership positions within national and international staff, which is especially noteworthy as only 44% of national staff members are female.

One example of how the recruitment guidelines are put into practice is the recent recruitment process for an ISO certification officer. From 154 applicants, six interview candidates with a 50-50 gender balance were invited for interviews. One male and two female candidates proceeded to the final recruitment round.

In the end, one of the female candidates was hired for the ISO certification position, beating gender stereotypes in male dominated sectors in Malawi.



To support the career progression of female national colleagues, GIZ Malawi established a continuous **Band 4 leadership exchange format**, which aims at sensitizing and providing female Band 4 staff with all necessary capacities and the mindset to grow into Band 5 roles. In addition, a two-year coaching programme was implemented for female national Band 5 colleagues to support them in their leadership skills. Female national Band 5 colleagues have been nominated for the **GIZ Talent Development Program** of the Africa Department twice.

Persistent gender gaps across several economic dimensions are slowing progress towards gender equality in the country. GIZ Malawi is actively **working towards eliminating gender pay gaps** with women's entry salaries often averaging slightly higher than those of their male counterparts.

To ensure a safe work environment, GIZ Malawi published its own **anti-harrassment policy** and put into place an **anti-harassment working group** to support with the topic, the organisation of various and continuous awareness raising events and reinforcement of measures.

## 2.2 Inclusion of marginalised groups

### *Persons with disabilities*

To ensure that GIZ Malawi offers a barrier-free and inclusive environment for active participation of persons with disabilities, the country office was **reconstructed in a wheelchair-friendly way**. The same approach was applied to a project office and the cluster office building. Creating barrier-free environments is only a first step, but it has led to valuable discussions, changing the perspectives and attitudes of colleagues, and creating a positive and inclusive work atmosphere.



### *LGBTQIA+ community*

People who identify as LGBTQIA+ in Malawi face routine violence and discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation in almost all aspects of their daily lives. GIZ Malawi decided to create a **safe space for community members, allies and interested listeners** during pride month 2023. During a panel discussion, activists, law practitioners, religious and traditional leaders discussed the thoughts, fears, ambitions and prospects of the LGBTQIA+ community in Malawi, and how to raise awareness and change mindsets.

In order to provide further support, GIZ Malawi partnered with an activist group and organized an **LGBTQIA+ Safety and Security Training of Trainers** for 40 multipliers from all across Malawi, who will train further participants in their respective regions. The different sessions of the training focused on topics such as human rights, the anti-gender movement, cybersecurity and mental health. GIZ Malawi colleagues were given the opportunity to join an interactive discussion session.

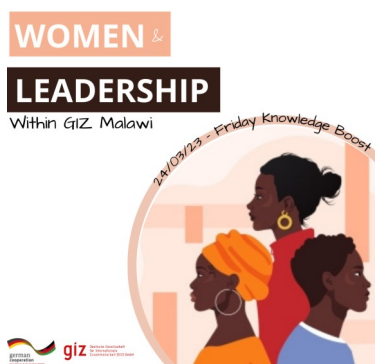




## 2.3 Regular awareness raising events

Gender equality is one of GIZ Malawi's guiding principles. The promotion of diversity and the strengthening of gender equality is a quality feature of our work. To enhance gender competence, gender responsiveness and gender-transformative approaches and impacts within the country office and all projects, GIZ Malawi regularly hosts sensitization, awareness raising and capacity building sessions on gender and diversity, and joins international campaigns and commemorations:

- **16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence:** Production of a staff video (2020); publication of awareness raising messages (2022, 2023); evening event at the country office (2022); workshop on gender-based violence with 60 gender activists through the Young Feminist Network (2023)
- **International Women's Day / GIZ Gender Week:** Panel discussion on COVID 19 and gender (2021); panel discussion on gender-responsive budgeting (2022); exchange format "Friday Knowledge Boost" on selected gender and diversity topics (2023)
- **Diversity Day:** In 2022, the Gender and Diversity Working Group brought together all of GIZ Malawi for a Diversity Day to celebrate diversity and its dimensions, to discuss, share and exchange on topics of diversity within GIZ and beyond, to promote inclusiveness and build team spirit within GIZ Malawi, and to promote diversity through Malawian art and activism. One of the sessions focussed on the challenges people with albinism still face in the country. Human Rights Commissioner and former president of the Association of Persons with Albinism, Boniface Massah, shared his experiences and how institutions such as GIZ Malawi can meaningfully include persons with disabilities in the workplace.
- **Gender Network Meeting:** In 2022, GIZ Malawi hosted the Africa Gender Network Meeting.
- **World AIDS Day:** To commemorate World AIDS Day 2022, the gender and diversity working group invited the UNAIDS Malawi country director to share insights into the HIV/AIDS situation in Malawi and the struggles people living with HIV/AIDS are facing to this day.
- **Single information/discussion events** in 2023 with invited experts:



## 2.4 Menstrual health and hygiene

With respect to Malawian socio-cultural life, menstruation is linked to shame, stigmatisation, and contempt from men and boys. **Investing in menstrual health and hygiene (MHH)** means an investment in women's empowerment. To address this topic, GIZ Malawi entered into a pilot cooperation with a Malawian NGO, sensitizing women and girls across Malawi as well as female GIZ Malawi staff members on MHH, and **disseminating menstrual cups** to women in rural Malawi. In separate groups, men learn how to be supportive in their communities to ensure the topic is not perceived as a taboo anymore. So far, more than 700 women have received training and menstrual cup kits via the different GIZ Malawi projects.

## 3. Outlook

In order to better anchor a gender-transformative perspective in the German technical and financial cooperation portfolio, GIZ and KfW (making Malawi the only country where this is being done jointly across both portfolios) have commissioned a **portfolio-wide gender analysis**. In line with Germany's Feminist Development Policy, the interdisciplinary gender analysis will provide recommendations for a strategic orientation of the technical and financial cooperation portfolios, applying a human rights-based approach towards gender equality. The ultimate goal is to **reduce unequal power dynamics** through cross-sectoral and cross-portfolio strategies and the **implementation of gender-transformative approaches**. In a first step, GIZ Malawi is moving away from GG0 projects and towards more GG2 projects.

