

MALAWI GENDER STRATEGY:

Building Equitable Climate-Resilient African Bean & Insect Sectors



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CITATIONS:

Hilda Kabuli, Fredrick Ouya, Virginia Chisale, Kachigamba Donald, Chakhumbira Feston, Botha Sara, Cosmas Lutomia, Dessalegn Ketema and Eileen Nchanji (2025). *Malawi Gender Strategy. Building Equitable Climate-Resilient African Bean and Insect Sectors*. The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, Nairobi, Kenya.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Content and Background

The Building Equitable Climate-Resilient African Bean and Insect Sectors (BRAINS) project is a multi-country initiative that aims to create low-carbon, climate-resilient, and inclusive agricultural systems across 15 nations in sub-Saharan Africa. In Malawi, BRAINS focuses on strengthening the bean, fruit-tree (mango and avocado), beekeeping and insects-for-food-and-feed value chains while mainstreaming gender equality so that women, youth and other marginalised groups both participate in and benefit from climate-resilient agricultural transformation (Kabuli et al., 2025).

Malawi's agricultural sector remains the backbone of rural lives and national food security but is highly exposed to climate variability, reflected in periodic droughts, floods and pest outbreaks that impair smallholder production and incomes (Government of Malawi, 2016a; 2016b). These climatic challenges reinforce longstanding gender inequalities: women undertake a major share of agricultural labour but generally have less access than men to land, finance, extension, improved inputs, and high-value market outlets (World Bank, 2024; UN Women/AfDB, 2020). The BRAINS baseline quantitative analysis conducted in Nkhoswezi and Mwanza districts of Malawi documents these patterns in detail. Men have bigger landholdings and have more access to extension services and formal market channels, whereas women are disproportionately involved in subsistence production, free labour, local markets, and have lower digital access for agro-weather information services, limiting their capacity to adopt climate-smart technologies and to control benefits from these value chains (Kabuli et al., 2025).

Female-headed rural households often lose comparatively more income during catastrophic weather events and face systemic impediments in obtaining adaptive finance, technologies and information (FAO, 2024). Gender disparities in land rights and asset ownership also impede women's ability to invest in long-term, climate-resilient assets such as perennial fruit trees and beekeeping infrastructure (FAO, 2011; World Bank, 2024). This Malawi Gender Strategy responds to these challenges by establishing a structured and evidence-based framework for mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion throughout all BRAINS activities. It builds on the reach, benefit, empower, and transform framework to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups including women, youth, persons with disabilities are not only reached by project activities, but also benefit equitably, gain agency, and contribute to transforming the norms, systems, and institutions that perpetuate inequality.

1.2. Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the Malawi Gender Strategy is to systematically address gender inequalities in the common bean, fruit tree, and insects for food and feed value chains, while strengthening climate resilience, food and nutrition security, and inclusive economic growth. The strategy seeks to ensure that women, men, youth, and other marginalised groups participate meaningfully in BRAINS initiatives and reap fair benefits across production, processing, marketing, and governance nodes.

The Malawi Gender Strategy ensure that BRAINS interventions:

- Reduce systemic and structural gender disparities by improving women's, youths', and marginalised groups' access to land, productive resources, climate-smart agricultural technologies, agro-weather information services, and tailored financial products by at least 50 percent.
- Increase women's and youth's representation and influence in household, community, and institutional decision-making processes related to agricultural production, marketing, and income use.
- Ensure equitable distribution of benefits, including income, nutrition outcomes, resilience capacities, and knowledge gains, arising from participation in BRAINS-supported value chains.
- Strengthen women's and youth entrepreneurship in higher-value and climate-resilient nodes of the bean, fruit tree, and insect value chains.
- Leverage gender-transformative socio-technical innovation bundles to address intersecting constraints related to technology access, labour burdens, social norms, and institutional exclusion.
- Institutionalise gender mainstreaming within BRAINS implementation structures, partner organizations, and policy engagement processes to ensure sustainability beyond the project lifespan.

1.3. Link to the broader goals

The Malawi Gender Strategy aligns with national, regional and global development frameworks. The BRAINS project is strategically aligned with the national policies and strategies that supports Malawi's National Agriculture Policy, which emphasises increased engagement of women and youth in agriculture and improved productivity of staple and legume crops; the National Climate Change Management Policy which prioritises community resilience and climate-smart livelihoods; and the National Gender Policy which mandates integration of gender across sectors and calls for proactive measures to reduce women's resource and participation gaps. These instruments provide legal and policy entry points for embedding gender-responsive programming in agricultural and climate investments. The Strategy contributes to Malawi's long-term development agenda, Vision 2063 and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy priorities by strengthening inclusive agricultural growth, reducing poverty, and building resilience among smallholder households.

At the regional and continental levels, the strategy is aligned with the African Union Gender and Development Policy, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) objectives for agricultural transformation and the African Union's gender commitments. Globally, the strategy contributes directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 17 (Partnerships) by mainstreaming gender in climate-resilient value chain development. Through embedding gender equality within climate-resilient agricultural value chains, the Malawi Gender Strategy positions gender transformation not as a standalone objective, but as a fundamental driver of sustainable development, resilience, and inclusive economic growth under the BRAINS project.

2. COUNTRY GENDER GAPS

Agriculture in Malawi is characterised by persistent gender inequalities that shape access to productive resources, participation in value chains, and the distribution of benefits from agricultural growth and climate-resilient innovations. These disparities are deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms, institutional arrangements, and market structures, and they are further exacerbated by climate variability and environmental stressors. Evidence from the Malawi Quantitative Gender Analysis conducted under the BRAINS project confirms that gender gaps are evident across all targeted value chains such as common beans, fruit trees (mango and avocado), and insects for food and feed, and across multiple dimensions of production, marketing, and governance. Some key gender gaps in agriculture in Malawi include:

- **Unequal access to and control over land and productive assets:** Land remains a critical constraint for women farmers in Malawi. Men own and cultivate significantly larger land areas than women, translating into higher production potential and greater capacity to adopt improved and climate-smart technologies. Women's smaller landholdings and limited tenure security reduce their incentives and ability to invest in perennial crops such as fruit trees or in capital-intensive enterprises such as beekeeping.
- **Gendered access to finance and agricultural inputs:** Women farmers face systematic barriers in accessing credit, quality seeds, fertilisers, and other productive inputs. Women rely more heavily on informal financial mechanisms and group-based savings arrangements, while men have relatively greater access to formal or semi-formal credit channels. These disparities limit women's ability to purchase improved bean seed varieties, invest in pest management, or scale up production for commercial markets.
- **Differential access to extension services, climate information, and digital tools:** Although overall awareness of agro-weather information services (Agro-WIS) is high in Malawi, gender gaps persist in access pathways and usage intensity. Men report higher mobile phone ownership, greater reliance on digital channels such as SMS, and more frequent receipt of agro-weather information than women. Women are more dependent on radio and informal networks, which may provide less timely or actionable information for climate risk management.
- **Gendered division of labour and time poverty:** Women bear a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic

and care work alongside agricultural labour. Quantitative evidence shows women's strong involvement in bean production, waste management, and household food provisioning, yet these responsibilities restrict their time and mobility for training, leadership roles, and participation in higher-value market activities.

- **Limited participation in and benefits from higher-value markets:** Across the bean and fruit tree value chains, women are more likely to sell produce at the farmgate or in local markets, while men dominate sales to traders, institutional buyers, and more distant markets. Men also capture a larger share of income from fruit and bean sales and exercise greater control over how that income is used. Women's concentration in low-value market nodes reduces their profitability and economic empowerment, even where their labour contributions are substantial.
- **Gender gaps in decision-making and leadership:** Household-level decision-making in Malawi remains predominantly male-dominated, particularly with respect to crop choice, marketing decisions, and the use of income from agricultural sales. While joint decision-making is reported in some domains, men retain disproportionate influence over strategic and financial decisions. Women's decision-making authority is more pronounced in female-headed households, but these households often face greater resource constraints.
- **Unequal participation in emerging and climate-resilient enterprises:** Participation in beekeeping and insect for food and feed enterprises remains relatively low overall, with clear gender differences. Men are more likely to engage in beekeeping and receive extension support, while women's involvement is limited by access to equipment, training, and land. Women's knowledge of the climate mitigation benefits of insects is also lower, reflecting gendered information gaps.

3. REACH, BENEFIT, EMPOWER AND TRANSFORM FRAMEWORK (RBET)

The Malawi Gender Strategy adopts the **Reach, Benefit, Empower and Transform (RBET)** framework as the core operational approach for addressing gender inequalities across the bean, fruit tree, and insects for food and feed value chains under the BRAINS project. Originally developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and later expanded within [CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems](#) to include a transformative dimension, the RBET framework distinguishes between interventions that merely include women and those that generate deeper, more sustainable gender equality outcomes (Nchanji et al., 2024).

The framework requires implementers to move sequentially and deliberately from **reaching** women, youth, and marginalised groups, to ensuring they **benefit** equitably from project activities, to **empowering** them through strengthened agency and decision-making power, and ultimately to **transforming** the social norms, institutional practices, and structural barriers that reproduce gender inequalities. In the Malawian context, where gender gaps persist in land access, market participation, extension services, digital inclusion, and income control, this progression is essential for ensuring that climate-resilient agricultural interventions translate into equitable and lasting outcomes.

The RBET framework will be applied across all BRAINS interventions in Malawi to ensure that women, youth, persons living with disabilities (PLWDs), and other vulnerable and marginalised groups such as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not only participants but also decision-makers and change agents in building inclusive, climate-resilient agricultural systems. The framework integrates an intersectional lens, recognising that gender interacts with age, marital status, disability, and socio-economic position to shape differentiated experiences and outcomes within agricultural value chains.

3.1. Reach (Expanding participation and access)

The Reach dimension focuses on ensuring that women, youth, and marginalised populations are consciously and effectively included in BRAINS activities. In Malawi, quantitative findings demonstrate that women's participation is hindered by time poverty, limited mobility, lesser access to digital tools, and fewer ties to extension and market institutions. To address these constraints, the BRAINS initiative in Malawi will implement inclusive outreach

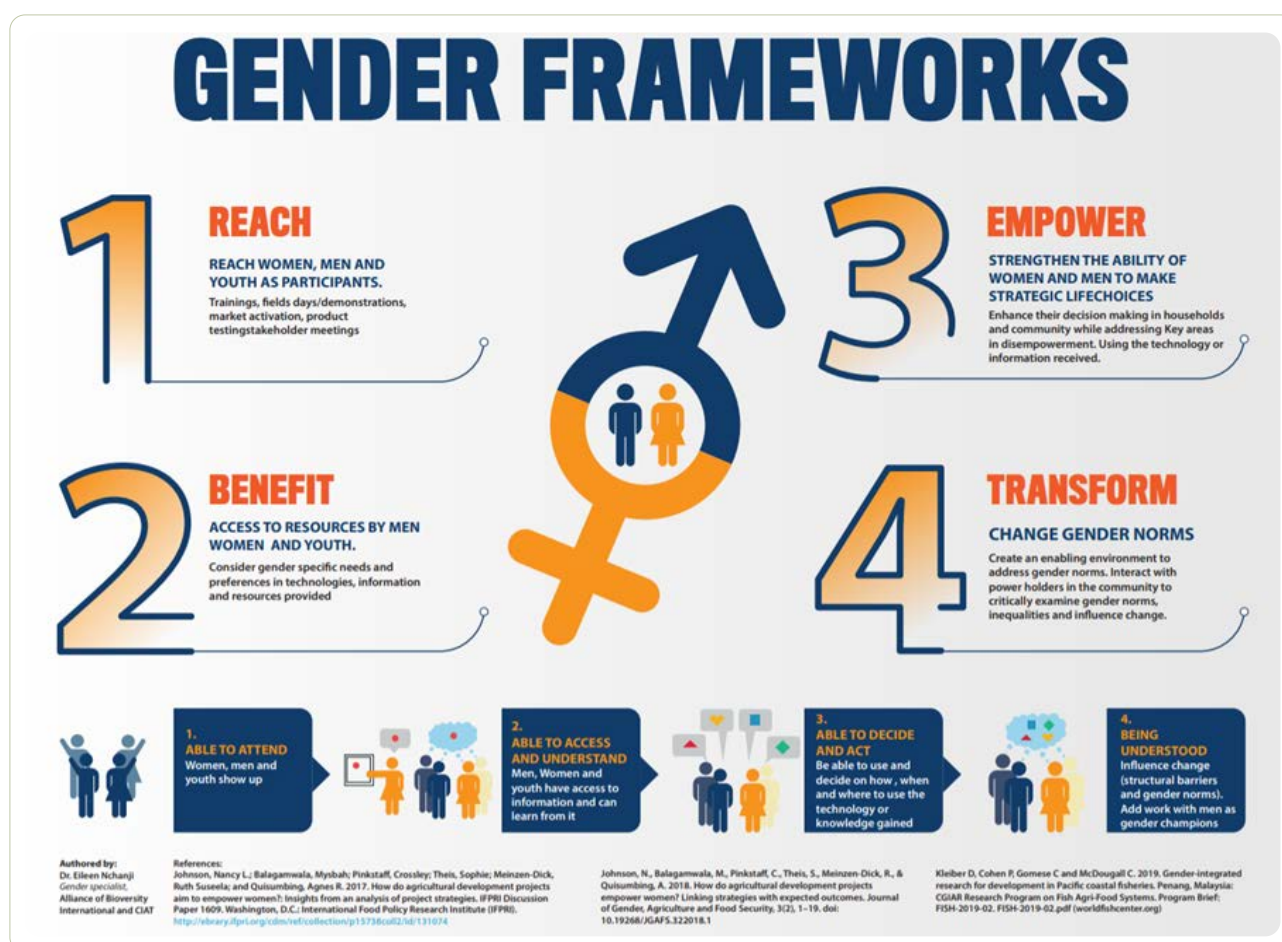


Figure 1: RBET framework (Nchanji, 2024)

techniques that emphasise women's and youths' access to training, information, and innovation platforms. Outreach and capacity-building activities will be implemented at community level and arranged at times that meet women's household and agricultural duties. Training locations will be chosen with the least amount of travel burden and accessibility for people with disabilities in mind.

The project will interact with local leaders, farmer organisations, faith-based organisations, and community structures to identify and actively involve disadvantaged people. Targeted communication tactics, including the use of radio, community meetings, and simplified materials, will be employed to reach women who have limited access to smartphones and digital services. Youth-focused outreach will underscore entrepreneurial potential across the bean, fruit tree, and insect value chains, utilizing mentorship and peer-learning methodologies to drive interest and engagement.

3.2. Benefit (Enhancing equitable access to resources and opportunities)

The **Benefit** dimension ensures that participation in BRAINS interventions translates into tangible improvements in livelihoods, resilience, and wellbeing for women and men alike. In Malawi, evidence shows that even where women participate in agricultural production, they often benefit less than men due to unequal access to quality inputs, extension services, credit, and higher-value markets, as well as limited control over income from agricultural sales. BRAINS will therefore focus on enhancing women's and youths' access to critical productive resources, including improved and climate-resilient bean varieties, quality fruit tree planting material, appropriate beekeeping technologies, and insect production systems. The project will work with input suppliers, cooperatives, and financial institutions to promote tailored and affordable financial products that respond to women's constraints in collateral, cash flow, and risk exposure.

Market-oriented interventions such as collective marketing, aggregation centres, and strengthened linkages to traders and institutional buyers, will be designed to ensure that women benefit from improved prices, reduced transaction costs, and more stable market access. Nutrition-sensitive approaches will also be integrated to enhance household consumption of nutrient-dense beans, fruits, and insect-based foods, recognising women's central role in household food and nutrition security.

3.3. Empower (Strengthening agency, leadership, and voice)

The **Empower** dimension focuses on strengthening women's and youths' ability to make and act upon strategic life choices. In Malawi, quantitative findings reveal persistent gender imbalances in household and community-level decision-making, particularly regarding crop choice, marketing, and control over agricultural income. BRAINS will address these imbalances by integrating leadership development, negotiation skills, and financial literacy into capacity-building activities. Women and youth will be supported to assume leadership roles within farmer groups, cooperatives, and innovation platforms, thereby increasing their influence over value chain governance and resource allocation.

The project will establish and strengthen [youth and women quality centre \(YWQC\)](#) as spaces for continuous learning, mentorship, and peer exchange. These centres will combine technical training with gender-transformative approaches aimed at increasing confidence, agency, and collective action. Mentorship networks linking successful female agripreneurs and youth leaders with emerging entrepreneurs will be promoted to support skill transfer and role modelling. Engagement with men will be a deliberate component of empowerment strategies, recognising that shifts in women's agency are more sustainable when accompanied by changes in male attitudes and behaviours. Household-level dialogues and community sensitisation will promote joint decision-making and more equitable sharing of responsibilities and benefits.

3.4. Transform (Shifting norms, systems, and institutions)

The **Transform** dimension addresses the underlying social norms, institutional arrangements, and policy environments that perpetuate gender inequality. In Malawi, deeply rooted norms around land ownership, leadership, and gender roles continue to limit women's participation in high-value agricultural enterprises and decision-making spaces (Government of Malawi, 2015). BRAINS will support transformative change through community dialogues that challenge restrictive gender norms and promote positive masculinities and shared responsibility. Religious leaders, traditional authorities, and community champions will be engaged as advocates for gender equality within agricultural and climate resilience initiatives.

At the institutional level, the project will work with government agencies, research institutions, and development partners to mainstream gender considerations into agricultural extension systems, climate information services, and value chain development policies. Evidence generated through BRAINS, including gender-disaggregated data and outcome stories will be used to inform policy dialogue and strengthen accountability for gender-responsive programming.

4. ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan operationalises the Malawi Gender Strategy by translating the RBET framework into concrete, measurable, and context-specific actions across the bean, fruit tree, beekeeping, and insects for food and feed value chains. The actions respond directly to gender gaps identified through the Malawi Quantitative Gender Analysis and are aligned with national gender, agriculture, and climate policy priorities. The Action Plan emphasises adaptive learning, institutional ownership, and sustainability to ensure that gender equality outcomes extend beyond the project lifecycle.

4.1. Gender analysis

BRAINS conducted a quantitative gender analysis in Malawi to examine how gender shapes access to resources, participation in value chains, decision-making power, and benefit distribution across climate-resilient agricultural systems. The survey covered households in Nkhoswezi and Mwanza districts and generated sex-disaggregated evidence on land access, production practices, agro-weather information services, marketing, income control, group participation, and labour roles.

The analysis revealed that men cultivate larger land areas, dominate higher-value fruit and bean markets, and exercise greater control over income, while women are concentrated in subsistence production, local markets, unpaid labour, and informal financial systems. Gender gaps were also observed in access to extension services, mobile phones, and digital agro-weather information, limiting women's adaptive capacity to climate shocks.

Building on this baseline, BRAINS will undertake continuous and iterative gender analysis throughout implementation. This will include:

- Periodic updating of gender-disaggregated indicators to track changes in access, agency, and benefits.
- Intersectional analysis capturing age, marital status, disability, and household structure to better understand differentiated vulnerabilities.
- Integration of gender findings into annual work planning, adaptive management, and policy engagement processes.

4.2. Capacity building activities

Capacity building is central to closing identified gender gaps and strengthening institutional and community-level competencies for gender-responsive and gender-transformative action. In Malawi, limited access to training, extension services, leadership opportunities, and agribusiness skills disproportionately constrains women and youth.

BRAINS will implement the following capacity-building activities:

- Train project staff, partners, and extension agents on gender mainstreaming, RBET application, and gender-transformative approaches within climate-resilient value chains.
- Strengthen women's and youth's technical capacities in climate-smart production, post-harvest handling, value addition, and enterprise development across beans, fruit trees, and insects.
- Provide targeted business development support, coaching, and mentorship for women- and youth-led enterprises, including financial literacy and market negotiation skills.
- Build leadership and governance capacities of women and youth to enhance their participation and influence in producer organisations, cooperatives, and innovation platforms.
- Train male champions, community leaders, and extension workers to support gender-equitable practices, joint decision-making, and positive social norm change.
- Strengthen the capacity of government and private-sector extension systems to deliver gender-responsive advisory services, including flexible delivery modalities that accommodate women's time constraints.

4.3. Awareness creation activities and policy development

Sustainable gender transformation requires changes in attitudes, norms, and institutional practices. BRAINS Malawi will implement awareness creation and policy engagement activities to foster inclusive mindsets and strengthen enabling environments.

Key actions include:

- Conduct community dialogues and sensitisation campaigns to challenge restrictive gender norms related to land ownership, leadership, labour roles, and income control.
- Promote shared household decision-making and equitable labour distribution through facilitated household and community discussions.

- Document and disseminate gender-responsive and transformative outcome stories to support learning and advocacy.
- Engage district and national-level policymakers to integrate gender evidence from BRAINS into agricultural, climate, and extension policies and strategies.
- Strengthen collaboration with ministries responsible for agriculture, gender, and climate change to support gender mainstreaming in programme design and implementation.

These actions will ensure alignment between community-level change processes and policy-level commitments.

4.4. Tool development

To support standardised and effective implementation, BRAINS Malawi will adapt and develop practical tools that integrate gender considerations across project activities.

Planned tools include:

- Gender-responsive training curricula and facilitation guides for climate-smart agriculture, nutrition, and value chain development.
- Gender-integrated extension tools, including checklists and coaching guides for frontline staff.
- Participatory gender assessment and reflection tools for farmer groups, cooperatives, and partners.
- Gender-sensitive monitoring tools embedded within project data systems to capture sex- and age-disaggregated outcomes.
- Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) materials tailored to local contexts and literacy levels.
- Leadership, advocacy, and couple-dialogue tools to support shifts in power relations and decision-making dynamics.

4.5. Scaling the gender transformative socio-technical innovation bundling approach

The gender transformative socio-technical innovations Bundling (GTSTIBs) approach has been tested and validated as effective in building men's and women's empowerment and resilience to climate change in Africa and Asia. Evidence from CGIAR Gender Equality (HER+) initiative learning labs in Kenya, Ethiopia and India indicate that the adoption of GTSTIBs – a combination of co-designed technological (e.g., climate-resilient seeds, inputs, fertilisers), technical (e.g., integrated pest management, gender-responsive nutrition, market and agronomic training), and social innovation (e.g., access to digital, finance, policy and market solutions) enhanced women's decision-making at household level and increased anticipative, absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience capacities, resulting in higher agricultural productivity, empowerment, and food security (Ayuya et al., 2024). GTSTIBs will promote gender-balanced platforms that enable co-creation of solutions among researchers, farmers, and private-sector actors to address the multiple constraints faced by women and youth across the three agricultural value chains. GTSTIBs will connect women and youth producers to markets, input suppliers, and microfinance institutions through existing and new multistakeholder platforms. It will replicate and scale up best practices documented in pilot areas across the country and within the BRAINS network. Table 1 presents an example of GTSTIBs proposed for promotion in Malawi. STIB's approach will enhance inclusivity, build empowerment, and increase income for all genders.

In Malawi, scaling actions will include:

- Co-designing innovation bundles with women and youth to ensure relevance, affordability, and accessibility.
- Integrating gender-responsive criteria into technology testing, piloting, and scaling pathways.
- Linking women and youth producers to markets, input suppliers, financial services, and climate information systems through multi-stakeholder platforms.
- Supporting private-sector engagement to ensure that inputs, services, and digital solutions respond to women's needs.
- Monitoring gender outcomes of innovation bundles, including impacts on income, time use, decision-making power, and resilience capacities.

Table 1: Potential Gender Transformative Socio-Technical Innovation Bundles

PROJECT SITE	GTSTIBS	SCALING PARTNERS (DISAGGREGATED BY SEX AND OWNERSHIP)			
		PARTNER NAME	LOCATION	LEADERSHIP COMPOSITION	ANNUAL VOLUME
Nkhotakota	Bean seed + IPM + gender training+ Market training + Frass fertilizer + VSL + climate information+ Nutrition and Value addition	Milele DAO Dzaleka BSF youth group	Zidyana	Men-led	12 MT
	Bean trial (climate smart) + IPM + Gender training	DAO	Zidyana	Woman-led	
Mwanza	Fruit trees + Bee keeping + IPM + Gender training + market training	Kadazi Cooperative Namisepha Cooperative	Khudze	Women-led	4500 crates 22 MT of honey
Nkhotakota	Edible insects + Nutrition and Value addition training + Gender Training + Marketing				
Nkhotakota	Bean trials + IPM + gender training				
Rumphi	Bean seed + IPM + gender training+ Market training + Frass fertilizer + VSL + climate information+ Nutrition and Value addition	Farm rite DAO	Ntchenachena	Man-led	100 MT

4.6. Gender budgeting

Gender budgeting is essential for translating commitments into action and ensuring accountability. BRAINS Malawi will integrate gender considerations into planning, budgeting, and financial monitoring processes.

Key actions include:

- Allocating dedicated budget lines for gender analysis, capacity building, awareness creation, and gender-responsive innovation scaling.
- Ensuring that a defined proportion of project resources directly benefits women, youth, and marginalised groups.
- Tracking gender-related expenditure through routine financial and programmatic reporting.
- Building partners' capacities in gender budgeting and financial accountability.
- Using budget tracking data to inform adaptive management and demonstrate value for money in gender investments.

5. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Effective implementation of the Malawi Gender Strategy requires a clearly defined and well-coordinated institutional framework that ensures accountability, collaboration, and sustained gender mainstreaming across all levels of the BRAINS project. The institutional framework clarifies roles, responsibilities, and partnerships necessary to operationalise the RBET framework and to embed gender equality and social inclusion across the bean, fruit tree, beekeeping, and insects for food and feed value chains.

The framework builds on existing national, district, and community-level structures while leveraging the comparative strengths of research institutions, government agencies, civil society, private sector actors, and community organisations. It emphasises shared ownership, coordinated action, and institutional learning to ensure that gender-responsive interventions are implemented consistently and sustainably.

5.1. Roles and Responsibilities

Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities is essential for effective gender mainstreaming and coordination under the BRAINS project in Malawi. These should align with national key priorities as follows:

- a. The BRAINS project management team, comprising the project lead and national coordinators, will provide overall strategic direction and oversight of gender strategy implementation. This team will ensure that gender equality objectives are integrated into annual work plans, budgets, and reporting processes. Gender considerations will be mainstreamed across all value chain activities, and progress against gender indicators will be regularly reviewed to support adaptive management.
- b. National research institutions and implementing partners will be responsible for integrating gender-responsive approaches into research, extension, innovation piloting, and capacity-building activities. Designated gender focal persons within partner institutions will coordinate gender mainstreaming efforts, support data collection and analysis, and facilitate learning and reflection processes. These partners will ensure that gender-disaggregated data are systematically collected and used to inform decision-making.
- c. Relevant government ministries, departments, and agencies, particularly those responsible for agriculture, gender, climate change, and local government, will play a critical role in aligning BRAINS gender interventions with national policies and development priorities. Government actors will support integration of gender-responsive practices into extension services, climate information systems, and value chain development initiatives. Engagement at district and community levels will facilitate local ownership and policy coherence.
- d. Farmer organisations, cooperatives, savings groups, and community-based organisations will serve as key platforms for implementing gender-responsive and gender-transformative activities. These structures will support inclusive participation, leadership development, and collective action among women, youth, and marginalised groups. Community leaders and traditional authorities will be engaged as champions to support social norm change and promote equitable participation and benefit-sharing.
- e. Private-sector partners, including input suppliers, traders, processors, financial institutions, and digital service providers, will contribute to scaling gender-responsive innovations and market opportunities. These actors will be encouraged to adopt inclusive business models that enhance women's and youth's access to inputs, services, finance, and markets.

5.2. Partnerships and collaborations

Partnerships and collaborations are central to the success and sustainability of the Malawi Gender Strategy. BRAINS will leverage strategic partnerships to enhance reach, scale innovations, and influence policy and practice. Key partnership approaches include:

- Collaboration with government ministries and district authorities to align project interventions with national and sub-national gender, agriculture, and climate strategies.
- Engagement with civil society organisations, women's organisations, and youth groups to support community mobilisation, advocacy, and social norm change.
- Partnerships with private-sector actors to promote inclusive value chain development, access to finance, and market linkages for women and youth.
- Collaboration with development partners, regional institutions, and research organisations to share knowledge, harmonise approaches, and scale successful gender-transformative practices.
- Engagement with faith-based organisations and traditional institutions to support culturally appropriate and locally owned gender transformation processes.

6. GENDERED MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a core component of the Malawi Gender Strategy and will be used to systematically track progress, outcomes, and impacts of BRAINS interventions across the bean, fruit tree, beekeeping, and insects-for-food-and-feed value chains. The M&E framework will integrate gender-sensitive and sex- and age-disaggregated indicators across all project stages such as baseline, midline, and endline, to assess changes in access to resources, participation, decision-making power, income control, technology adoption, and climate resilience. Indicators will be aligned with the RBET framework to capture progression from reach and benefit to empowerment and transformation, ensuring that gender outcomes are monitored alongside technical and economic performance. The change will be tracked and measured from micro to macro at the individual, household, community, and organisation levels, as shown in Figure 2 below.

In addition to quantitative indicators, the M&E system will incorporate qualitative and participatory approaches to capture shifts in norms, attitudes, and institutional practices that are not easily measured numerically. Outcome harvesting, gender outcome stories, and periodic reflection sessions with women, men, youth, and marginalised groups will be used to document transformative change and unintended effects. Findings from gendered M&E will be systematically fed back into adaptive management, learning, and policy engagement processes, enabling BRAINS partners and stakeholders in Malawi to refine interventions, strengthen accountability, and ensure that gender equality and social inclusion remain central to climate-resilient agricultural development.

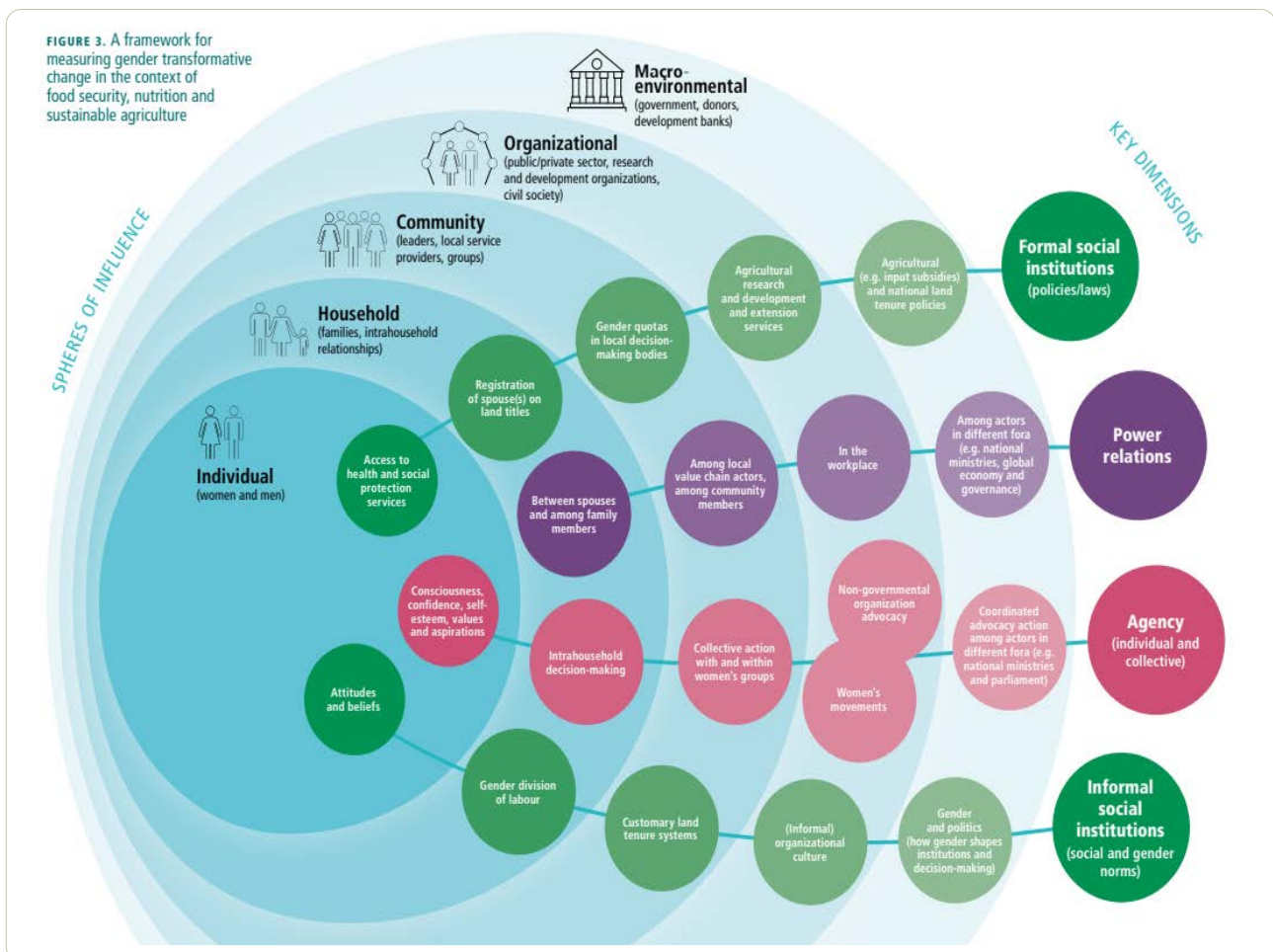


Figure 2: A framework for measuring gender transformative change

7. RISK MITIGATION

Implementation of the Malawi Gender Strategy may face several risks that could undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of gender-responsive and gender-transformative interventions. One key risk is resistance to change stemming from entrenched social norms, cultural practices, and power relations that limit women's agency in land ownership, leadership, and income control. Such resistance may manifest at household, community, or institutional levels, potentially leading to low uptake of interventions or backlash against women's empowerment initiatives. To mitigate this risk, BRAINS will adopt inclusive and participatory approaches that actively engage men, traditional leaders, religious authorities, and community champions in dialogue and sensitisation processes. By promoting shared benefits, positive masculinities, and joint decision-making, the project will reduce resistance and foster local ownership of gender equality objectives.

Another significant risk relates to unequal participation and benefit capture, whereby women and marginalised groups may be reached by project activities but fail to derive meaningful benefits due to constraints such as time poverty, limited mobility, or lack of access to complementary resources. BRAINS will mitigate this risk by designing flexible delivery modalities, providing targeted support for women and youth, and closely monitoring participation and benefit distribution through gender-disaggregated data. A further risk involves institutional capacity limitations and weak coordination among implementing partners, which could result in inconsistent gender mainstreaming. This will be addressed through continuous capacity building, clear role definition, and regular learning and reflection platforms. Finally, climate shocks, market volatility, and policy changes may disrupt implementation; adaptive management, diversified livelihood strategies, and strong linkages with national institutions will be used to enhance resilience and safeguard gender outcomes.

8. GENDER-RESPONSIVE COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

Effective communication is central to achieving gender equality and social transformation under the BRAINS project in Malawi. Communication approaches will be deliberately designed to address gender-based barriers to information access, participation, and decision-making, while promoting inclusive narratives around climate-resilient agriculture, entrepreneurship, and leadership. BRAINS will use a gender-responsive communication strategy to:

- Ensure that project information, training materials, and knowledge products are accessible to women, men, youth, and marginalised groups by using appropriate languages, formats, and communication channels, including radio, community meetings, visual aids, and digital platforms.
- Address gender gaps in access to digital and agro-weather information by combining digital communication tools with traditional and community-based channels that are more accessible to women.
- Promote positive and inclusive messaging that challenges harmful gender stereotypes and highlights the contributions of women and youth as farmers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders in climate-resilient value chains.
- Support behaviour and social norm change through targeted social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) approaches that encourage joint decision-making, equitable labour sharing, and shared control over agricultural income and resources.
- Amplify women's and youths' voices by documenting and disseminating gender-responsive and gender-transformative outcome stories, case studies, and testimonies from BRAINS project sites in Malawi.
- Tailor communication products to different stakeholder groups, including policymakers, extension agents, private-sector actors, and community leaders, to strengthen buy-in and accountability for gender-responsive action.
- Use participatory communication approaches that engage communities in dialogue, feedback, and learning, ensuring that communication is two-way and responsive to local priorities and concerns.
- Strengthen knowledge sharing and learning across the BRAINS network by disseminating gender-disaggregated evidence, lessons learned, and good practices from Malawi to national, regional, and continental platforms.

9. SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of gender equality outcomes under the BRAINS project in Malawi depends on the extent to which gender-responsive and gender-transformative practices are embedded within institutions, community structures, value chains, and financing systems. This Gender Strategy therefore prioritises long-term capacity development, community ownership, inclusive financial mechanisms, and institutionalisation of gender practices to ensure that gains achieved during project implementation are sustained and scaled beyond the project period.

9.1. Skills development in gender-sensitive practices and climate resilience

BRAINS will invest in sustained skills development for women, men, youth, and institutional actors to strengthen long-term gender responsiveness and climate resilience. This will include building technical competencies in climate-smart agriculture, agribusiness development, post-harvest management, and climate risk management, alongside gender-sensitive leadership, negotiation, and decision-making skills. Continuous training of extension agents, local leaders, and partner organisations will ensure that gender considerations remain integrated into service delivery systems and agricultural advisory services. By strengthening local human capital, BRAINS will support adaptive capacity and enable communities to respond effectively to evolving climate and market challenges.

9.2. Community ownership and engagement

Community ownership is central to sustaining gender-transformative outcomes. BRAINS will foster inclusive community engagement by strengthening local institutions such as farmer groups, cooperatives, savings and credit associations, and innovation platforms. Women and youth will be supported to assume leadership roles within these structures, ensuring that decision-making processes reflect diverse perspectives and priorities. Community dialogues, participatory planning processes, and the engagement of traditional and religious leaders will reinforce collective responsibility for gender equality and climate resilience. These approaches will enhance local accountability, legitimacy, and long-term commitment to equitable value chain development.

9.3. Develop gender-responsive financial systems

Sustainable gender outcomes require financial systems that respond to the needs and constraints of women and youth. BRAINS will promote gender-responsive financial mechanisms by strengthening linkages between women and youth producers and formal and informal financial institutions. This includes supporting savings and credit groups, tailored loan products, digital financial services, and risk-sharing mechanisms that accommodate women's asset profiles and cash-flow patterns. By enhancing financial inclusion, BRAINS will enable women and youth to invest in climate-resilient technologies, scale enterprises, and build economic resilience beyond project support.

9.4. Institutionalisation of gender practices

Institutionalisation of gender-responsive practices is critical for long-term sustainability. BRAINS will work with government agencies, research institutions, extension services, and private-sector partners to embed gender equality principles into policies, guidelines, operational procedures, and monitoring systems. Gender mainstreaming will be strengthened through the adoption of gender-sensitive planning, budgeting, and reporting mechanisms within partner institutions. Evidence generated through the project, including gender-disaggregated data and documented outcome stories will support policy dialogue and institutional learning. By anchoring gender equality within institutional systems, BRAINS will ensure that gender-transformative approaches continue to influence agricultural and climate-resilience programming in Malawi beyond the project lifecycle.

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