Community based approaches to tackling Gender-based violence in Malawi: Lessons and challenges of involving women and men

A Research Report prepared in collaboration with ActionAid

by

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Executive Summary

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has been described as “a widespread but silent epidemic in Malawi” and its incidence is increasing (MGCDSW, 2014b). An estimated one in five women has experienced sexual violence (NSO, 2005 and NSO, 2011) and almost half of all girls in Malawi experience physical abuse (NSO, 2011). The importance of cultural norms, practices, discourses and behaviours in both driving and addressing such violence is now well recognised. So too is the attendant need to involve men as well as women in community interventions to address this.

In this context, this research aimed at exploring the advantages of and challenges posed by community-based approaches (CBAs) to tackling GBV. Specifically the research aimed at:

- Exploring the complexity of factors causing GBV in four research sites in the districts of Chiradzulu and Rumphi;
- Exploring how men are involved in ActionAid’s Women’s Rights programme in these four sites;
- Exploring and understanding the emerging impact of men and women’s involvement in these programmes, both positive and negative;
- Drawing lessons on how to involve men in WR programming more broadly while ensuring that women remain the most critical group and take the lead on relevant struggles.

The findings and analysis presented draw from a range of relevant background documentation, together with the views and perspectives of different actors in the field. Overall, eight interviews were held with national level actors; 36 with local leaders in the four research sites including local ActionAid staff; and 33 with randomly selected individual community members. In addition, eight focus groups were conducted with mixed community groups across the four research sites. Efforts were taken to ensure an equal gender balance in participation, together with a balance of community members both involved and not involved in ActionAid’s Women’s Rights programme.

Overall, the research finds that CBAs to tackling GBV in the four sites under investigation have yielded a number of successes – notably a reported reduction in GBV as communications between couples have improved and economic stresses within households reduced. However, CBAs have also raised a number of challenges. These centre around resource distribution; CBA’s impact on local power dynamics; and CBA’s ability to challenge and interrogate dominant norms, ideologies, identities and practices.

Specifically, the research identifies three causal factors of GBV in the four research sites under investigation. These are male dominance and control at household levels; dominant norms of masculinity and femininity which render women subservient to men; and ongoing perceptions of GBV as ‘a women’s issue’ to be addressed through women’s own agency. A fourth factor – the stresses brought about by household poverty – is identified as a related, but not a direct causal factor. The research also finds evidence of national and international discourse reproducing rather than challenging these causal factors, together with broader structural discrimination and inequality at a national level.
Men have become involved in the CBA through their involvement in ‘Real Men’s’ groups and Reflection Action circles. Although these were established with the aim of providing spaces to interrogate and construct alternative forms and models of masculinity with members, the research finds little evidence that this is taking place. Instead, the evidence points towards the use of ‘Real Men’ in local monitoring and policing of actual GBV cases, counselling against violence as a solution and reporting incidences to local authorities when deemed necessary. Thus, while the programme’s CBA appears successful in transmitting the message to both women and men that GBV is unlawful and wrong, its impacts on the principal underlying causal factors remain weak. The approach, as currently implemented, risks reinforcing unequal power relations and adding to women’s already considerable burden (of work and responsibility to address stress factors leading to GBV themselves).

Drawing from these findings a number of recommendations are made. These include specific strategies for engaging men while attempting to ensure that women retain some degree of power and resources; shifting the thrust and focus of the ‘Real Men’ component to an interrogation of the dominant norms, values and attitudes towards masculinity including its link to GBV; and introducing a component which interrogates dominant norms, values and attitudes towards women, opening a space to construct alternative ideas and imaginaries of the multiple possible forms of ‘Real Women’ within the local context.
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>ActionAid</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAVWOC</td>
<td>Centre for Alternatives for Victimized Women and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBA</td>
<td>Community Based Approach (to tackling GBV)</td>
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<td>CBE</td>
<td>Community Based Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COWFA</td>
<td>Council of Women Farmers</td>
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<tr>
<td>COWLHA</td>
<td>Council of Women Living with HIV and AIDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSW</td>
<td>Commission on the Status of Women (UN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCU</td>
<td>Dublin City University</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfID</td>
<td>Department for International Development (UK)</td>
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<td>FG</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender Based Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPV</td>
<td>Intimate Partner Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDHS</td>
<td>Malawi Demographic Household Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>MGCDSW</td>
<td>Ministry for Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (Malawi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MKw</td>
<td>Malawi Kwacha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSO</td>
<td>National Statistics Office (Malawi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Disease</td>
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<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>T/A</td>
<td>Traditional Authority (Malawi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWAMA</td>
<td><em>Ufulu wa Amayi / Women’s Rights</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WR</td>
<td>Women’s Rights</td>
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These contributions notwithstanding, the usual disclaimer applies and the views and opinions expressed in this report are our own and in no way represent the views of ActionAid-Ireland, ActionAid-Malawi or any of the other agencies and actors participating in the research.
1. Introduction

GBV has been described as “a widespread but silent epidemic in Malawi”\(^3\). An estimated one in five women has experienced sexual violence (NSO, 2005 and NSO, 2011). Most violence occurs in the home, is viewed as a private family affair and is seldom reported. One in three girls who have sex under the age of 18 is forced or coerced and almost half of all girls in Malawi experience physical abuse (NSO, 2011).

Years of programming to tackle this appear to have yielded limited results. The recent *National Gender Policy* refers to an increasing number of GBV cases (MGCDSW, 2014b: 10) and commits to reducing these. Within policy and programming more broadly, there has been a move away from single-sex interventions towards community-based approaches. The advantages to this approach are seen to lie in the opportunities it poses to address dominant social norms, attitudes and ideologies which are now widely viewed as one of the key drivers of GBV, as well as its potential to reduce male backlash and resistance to GBV interventions. However, this approach also carries with it a number of risks and challenges. Chief among these is the danger that it diverts power, resources and control away from women – the principal targets of GBV interventions in the first place, thereby consolidating their discrimination and marginalisation.

One of the key issues for programme designers and practitioners is the limited number of high-quality studies on GBV programme effectiveness however (see Morrison et al, 2007 for example for a review; see also DfID, 2015a and 2015b; WHO, 2010). Moreover, incidences and causes of GBV prove difficult to measure, assess and compare due to the wide variation in the definition, understanding and measurement of GBV.

In 2014, ActionAid (2014a) identified the need for enhanced participation of men in its WR programme in Malawi “as a risk management strategy and an opportunity to underpin and expand the gains already made for women and girls.”. This approach has been rolled out in its programming throughout the country and there are plans to extend this approach to its other programme countries of Kenya, Nepal and Vietnam. This research aims at informing these plans and programmes.

1.1 Research context

This research was carried out in collaboration with the Women’s Rights (WR) programme of ActionAid Malawi and was supported by a grant from the Irish Research Council’s (IRC) New Foundations programme. The focus and research design was discussed and agreed with ActionAid over the course of a series of meetings at the outset and it is hoped that the findings will feed into ActionAid’s programming in Malawi and further afield.

1.2 Research aims

The broad aim of the research was as follows:

- To explore the advantages of and challenges posed by community-based approaches to tackling Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the two sites under investigation.

Specifically in this regard the research aimed:

- To explore the complexity of factors causing GBV in Chiradzulu and Rumphi districts;
- To explore how men are involved in the WR programmes in these two districts;
- To understand the emerging impact of men and women’s involvement in these programmes, both positive and negative;
- To draw lessons on how to involve men in WR programming more broadly while ensuring that women remain the most critical group and take the lead on relevant struggles.
2. Research design and methodology

2.1 Research design

Research for this study employed a mixed method approach drawing from relevant policy material, focus groups (FGs) and interviews. In addition to an analysis of relevant background documentation, the research draws heavily on the views and perspectives of different actors, including community members involved in ActionAid’s WR programme in Chiradzulu and Rumphi districts.

The steps taken in carrying out this research are set out below.

2.2 Secondary research

A review of relevant secondary materials and literature was carried out in March-April 2016. This research focussed on the broad literature on GBV, together with studies on gender, gendered relations and GBV in Malawi more specifically. These included development agency and NGO documentation (including that of ActionAid) on this issue and strategies employed to tackle it.

Drawing from this review, a framework of analysis fleshing out the broad research aims set out above was developed. This was used to develop a series of semi-structured interview schedules (for different interview categories) and FG guides which were used in the fieldwork phase.

2.3 Primary data collection

Primary data collection took place in May with support provided by ActionAid colleagues in Malawi. The research assistant spent two days in Lilongwe meeting with relevant national level actors and collecting relevant documentation. This was followed by two weeks in the field conducting interviews and FGs with community members, local leaders and ActionAid staff in Chiradzulu and Rumphi districts. Field research aimed at exploring dominant social norms and gender power relations in the two research sites and so included both participants in ActionAid’s programme and a random selection of non-participants. Translation was provided by two independent interpreters.

Overall, eight interviews were held with national level actors; 36 with local leaders including ActionAid staff in each of the four research sites; and 33 with individual community members. In addition, eight FGs (of approximately 8-12 citizens depending on availability and willingness to participate) were conducted. Individual interviews were conducted
separately with women and men and efforts were taken to ensure a gender balance in participation. Participants were selected randomly on transect walks through the sites while local leaders were drawn from suggestions of local ActionAid staff. Focus groups were conducted with both mixed and separate sex groups. These were also conducted with both programme participants and non-participants. A full list of research participants is provided in Appendix II.

National level interviews sought to elicit information on the relevant legislative and policy context in Malawi, together with views and experiences of community-based approaches to tackling GBV. At a local level in the two research sites, interviews with local leaders and ActionAid staff sought to explore social norms and behaviours around gender and GBV as well as, where relevant, interviewees’ views and experiences of ActionAid’s WR programme. The individual interviews with randomly selected community members focused on both social norms and behaviours within communities and on interpersonal relations within households.

The FGs with both programme and non-programme participants were designed to examine in more detail the dominant social norms and behaviours in households and local communities. FGs are ideally suited for this purpose as gender beliefs and norms are dominant not necessarily because everybody endorses them, but because they are the ones most likely to be enforced by socially advantaged actors and are therefore the default beliefs that individuals presume to prevail. And so, what people say in FGs reflects their assessment of what the dominant norms are.

2.4 Site selection and characteristics

With the assistance of ActionAid Malawi and their local partners, four research sites in two areas of Malawi were selected. In addition, national interviews were conducted in Lilongwe and Blantyre. The two areas chosen were the districts of Rumphi, situated in the Northern Region of Malawi, and Chiradzulu in the Southern Region. Two research sites were selected in each of these districts. Each research site consisted of a Traditional Authority [T/A] area and individual interviews and FGs were conducted in two to three villages within each T/A to ensure a variety of respondents. All interviews took place in villages where the programme was being implemented, dubbed ‘Model Villages’. In some cases interviewees also came from other nearby villages to take part in the study and ensure adequate numbers participated in the FGs.

Site A is T/A Njikula in Rumphi district. This is located along the main road to Tanzania, the M1, and roughly a one hour drive North-East of Rumphi town. Within this site, the researcher

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4 See also Jakobsen (2014: 545) on this point.
conducted research in two villages with participants also attending from neighbouring villages. Site B is T/A Chisovya with field research taking place in two further in this T/A.

T/A Ntchema in the district of Chiradzulu, located to the East of Blantyre, the commercial capital of Malawi, was chosen as Site C. Interviews in this district were conducted in two villages. The last research site, Site D, included two further villages in Likoswe T/A, also in Chiradzulu district.

Interviews with national officials took place in Lilongwe on May 16th and 27th, and in Blantyre on May 24th, with interviews being arranged by ActionAid Malawi and the researcher on site.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Full consideration was given to the diverse ethical issues involved. The research proposal and all interview and FG guides were discussed and agreed in meetings with ActionAid Ireland, as was the full research schedule. Where necessary, questions were edited, amended and/or re-worded. The final proposal and interview and FG guides were submitted to DCU’s Ethics Committee which approved the research.

Participation in the research was completely voluntary and was based on informed consent using a consent form which was signed by all participants. Community participants’ identities are protected via both confidentiality with respect to data and anonymity in terms of reported findings from the research. Data from this project is stored in confidential electronic files on a secure DCU server and confidentiality of information is provided subject to legal limitations.

2.6 Data coding, analysis and documentation

Following the fieldwork, the recorded FG discussions and individual interviews at all levels, excepting those with randomly selected community members, were transcribed in full. Interviews with randomly selected community members were recorded manually. The resultant data was coded manually to identify key emerging themes and the resultant analysis is presented in Section 4 below.
3. Gender-based Violence: Causes, consequences and challenges

Incidences and causes of GBV are notoriously difficult to assess and compare due to wide variations in definition and understanding of the phenomenon worldwide. Moreover, measures of GBV are plagued by self-reported biases due to social desirability, reference group norms and other factors (such as the difficulties in disentangling forced sex within a marital relationship from GBV etc.). With these caveats in mind, in this section we draw on a wide range of secondary literature from both academic and donor communities to review what is broadly understood to date about the causes, consequences and challenges of GBV globally and, more specifically, in Malawi. We begin with a consideration of what constitutes GBV.

GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed gender differences between males and females. The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries, and regions. Examples of GBV include, but are not limited to sexual violence; sexual exploitation and abuse; forced prostitution; domestic violence; human trafficking; forced or early marriage; and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, widow inheritance, among others. While many commentators implicitly conflate GBV with violence against women (VAW) exclusively and others use the terms GBV and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) interchangeably, some authors are careful to expand the definition to include a broader understanding of gender violence as any form of violence perpetrated against an individual or a group because of gender, rather than the typical focus of male violence against a female intimate partner with the attendant assumption of a heterosexual relationship (see, for example, Gibbs et al, 2012). Cognisant of this expanded definition, and of the diverse and varied forms of GBV in Malawi as elsewhere, in line with ActionAid’s own focus in this study we focus primarily on both IPV and VAW more broadly.

In the following three subsections we present the key arguments and debates from the relevant literature on the diverse causes and consequences of GBV globally and in Malawi; and on the lessons and challenges emerging from policies and programmes aimed at tackling this issue.

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6 We note, for example, the significant research gap on boy’s and men’s experience of GBV in a Malawian context (see Mellish et al, 2015).
3.1 GBV globally: Causes and consequences

Much of the literature on GBV focuses on examining and attempting to understand the complex, multiple and interrelated factors which give rise to GBV globally and in specific contexts. A distinct difference in focus is immediately discernible between donor and/or NGO literature – which focuses almost exclusively on roles, norms, ideologies and practices at household and community levels (see for example DfID, 2015a and 2015b; Morrison et al, 2007), and the broader academic literature which, in addition to these levels, also includes the broader structural/institutional context, stressing that VAW is inherently linked to women’s social position vis-à-vis men (see for example Heise, 1998; Websdale and Chesney-Lind, 1998; Kitzinger, 2008; Barker et al, 2010; Freedman and Jacobsen, 2012; and Gqola, 2007). Taking a more holistic approach, these authors argue that we cannot map or understand the incidence and causes of VAW without simultaneously mapping women’s social, economic and political disadvantage vis-à-vis men. This is the approach taken in this study which combines an examination of the roles, norms, ideologies and practices at household and community levels with women’s institutionalised disadvantage and discrimination at a national, structural level.

3.1.1 Household issues

Male dominance and control
Studies at household level have focussed on three principal causal factors – male dominance and control; wealth/poverty; and education. On the first, there appears to be a consensus within the literature that male dominance and control within the household (over money, decision-making and behaviourally) correlates strongly with IPV (see Morrison et al, 2007 for a wide-ranging review of IPV interventions in this respect; see also Choi and Ting, 2008 on the specific case of South Africa).

Poverty
The evidence in relation to a correlation between wealth and/or poverty and IPV is far less conclusive however. While some argue that poverty does constitute a causal factor (e.g. Morrison et al, 2007 broadly; Choi and Ting, 2008 on South Africa), others (e.g. Bamiwuye and Odimegwu’s (2014) six country study in SSA) find no correlation. Again, these contradictory findings may well be reflective of definitional variances. For example, as discussed in the following section, Kamndaya et al’s (2015) study from Blantyre, while finding no correlation between poverty and GBV broadly, finds a strong link between women’s poverty and prostitution among the same cohort.

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7 The countries included in the study are Cameroon, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
**Education**

Interestingly, although a lack of education is often cited as a contributory factor to GBV at household level with training constituting the most common programme intervention, there appears to be little empirical evidence to support this. Indeed, Morrison et al’s (2007) review of IPV interventions finds no correlation between education levels (among women and men) and IPV.

**Alcohol**

A fourth factor often cited in the literature (notably in donor/NGO literature) is alcohol. However, the complex root causes of alcohol abuse remain unexplored and this is often cited as a consequence as well as contributory factor to GBV.

Overall therefore, the literature appears to suggest that male dominance and control within the household constitutes the principal causal factor at this level. Clearly this is embedded in dominant social norms, roles and practices which are constructed, consolidated and reinforced within communities. It is to this level that we now turn.

### 3.1.2 Community issues

*A women’s issue*

Early interventions in the area of GBV focused exclusively on women. Reinforcing the image of women as passive, submissive victims, with men demonised as natural perpetrators, such simplistic understandings of gender were critiqued as keeping gender related issues as “women’s issues” and preventing men from becoming involved. Moreover, as Ratele et al (2011: 250) argue in a South African context, the focus on women in interventions “resulted in the inadvertent ‘blaming’ of women for social problems and pressured women to ensure that change takes place.”. A similar point is made by Johnson (2012: 634) in her research on women living with AIDS in Malawi’s Chiradzulu district where she notes that the focus on individual behaviour in many popular prevention campaigns not only ignores structural issues, but it also places the blame on those infected and contributes to the creation of stigma.

Over time, the more comprehensive analyses of scholars such as Kimmel (1994) and Connell (1995) led analysts and commentators to challenge this erasure of men and it has now become widespread to consider masculinities when reflecting on gender issues in general and GBV in particular.

**Roles and responsibilities: Masculinities and femininities**

Most commentators and practitioners have now come to accept a social constructivist approach to gender. Gender analyses now include a consideration of social constructions of masculinity and femininity whereby gender-bound roles and responsibilities within the
household and society more broadly are constructed and reinforced by dominant social norms. Often restricting women to the domestic sphere and men to the broader economic and political spheres, these norms are underpinned by unequal power relations thereby setting the context for GBV (see, for example, Barker et al, 2010; Flood, 2011; Freedman and Jacobson, 2012). Thus, Uthman et al’s (2009) study of GBV in 17 SSA countries reveals that women are more likely to justify domestic violence than men, with ‘neglecting the children’ cited as the most common cause, followed by ‘going out without informing the husband’ and ‘arguing back with the husband’.

At an academic level ‘gender-role strain theory’, positing that males never attain the socially ascribed prescriptive masculine norms, argues that the gap between expectations and realisation leaves many men feel insufficient and inadequate. Following this theory, men then internalise negative self-judgements which leads to poor mental health and risk-taking behaviours, including violence. Masculinity varies in different cultural contexts. But it always exists in relation to femininity and many other social constructs leading to multiple masculinities. As Connell (1995) and later Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have argued, there is not one but a plurality of masculinities. These may be hierarchically arranged and institutionalised, but they are always subject to change. And dominant or ‘hegemonic masculinities’ (Connell, 1995) become dominant through social and cultural consent rather than forceful domination. Masculinity scholars (including Connell, 1995; Conway-Longway, 1994; Izugbara and Undie, 2008; Kimmel, 1994; Weeks, 1985) argue that the socialisation of boys in most world cultures involves training them to protect their masculinity or lose it. Very early on, they are made to feel that masculinity is fragile and requires regular and high maintenance.

While a number of authors highlight the intersectionality of masculinity with a range of other identities, others (e.g. Ratele, 2008: 517) draw attention to material conditions – notably the effects of lack of income on men and the psychosocial effects of this leading to violent reactions against women’s independence and feminism. And so access to income becomes a major issue because of the dominant role of males as breadwinners. The effects of this can manifest in a number of ways – IPV can increase as men seek to exert their power and control in the context of feelings of frustration and inadequacy as they find they can no longer fulfil their traditional breadwinning role; or IPV can increase as men react against women’s independence and freedom as women source alternative means of income and traditional roles are challenged; or GBV more broadly can increase as women seek alternative means of income support (see Gaynor, 2015 and Hollander, 2014 on the multiple effects of economic crisis on hegemonic masculinities in the Congo).

The implications for GBV programming and interventions are clear. As Freedman and Jacobson (2012: 12) argue “If we acknowledge that gender inequalities are fundamental to the prevalence of gender-based violence and that these inequalities are embedded in complex and multidimensional relationships between men and women, and production of normative constructions of masculinity and femininity, then it is clear that we must engage both men and women in changing these unequal gender relations. Thus GBV can no longer be treated
merely as a ‘woman’s problem’, which can be overcome by asserting women’s rights or women’s empowerment. Barker et al further argue (2010: 541) that “…these multiple issues - gender norms and dynamics, social exclusion, ethnicity and religion - when possible, should be addressed simultaneously to ensure the most significant and lasting impact.”.

**Violence as an acceptable way to control women**

Morrison et al’s (2007) wide-ranging review of IPV interventions reveals strong correlations between both social norms that support violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts and/or punish transgressions and norms which support male dominance over women.

Overall therefore, there is now a fairly widespread consensus that GBV is not merely a ‘woman’s issue’, but is rooted in broader norms, ideologies and practices arising from socially constructed notions of what it means to be an ideal man or woman. Interventions aimed at tackling this therefore need to target both men and women, exploring both their own gendered beliefs, ideologies and assumptions and the broader social and political economy which feeds and reinforces this. It is to this latter structural level that we now turn.

3.1.3 **Structural issues**

**Structural disadvantage and discrimination**

Moving beyond local communities to a broader, structural level, Websdale and Chesney-Lind (1998) argue that violence against women is inherently linked to their unequal position in societies vis-à-vis men. The authors go on to argue (1998: 55) that “therefore we cannot document the magnitude or the locus of violence against women without simultaneously mapping women’s social, economic, and political disadvantage vis-à-vis men.” Kitzinger (2008: 141) similarly argues that violence against women is a reflection of broader patriarchal society. This can take the form of discrimination in economic, social and political fields. For example, in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Malawi, many societies have patrilineal systems which increase women’s dependence on the male head of household (Conroy, 2014: 868).

**Gender-based policies and legislation**

A commonly used approach in tackling gender-based discrimination is the introduction of dedicated legislation and/or policies. However, less of a correlation is observed between specific dedicated legislation, policies and practices and GBV (see for example Morrison et al’s, 2007 review of IPV interventions generally; and Burnett, 2011; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013 and Gaynor, 2014 on the Rwandan case) than between broader institutional and social transformation and GBV.
The lesson from this is that the focus needs to be on broader social transformation and the inclusion of gender equality issues in policy and practice across society more broadly rather than a more narrow reliance on dedicated policies and laws.

### 3.1.4 Consequences of GBV

Morrison et al (2007), in their wide-ranging review of IPV interventions, enumerate the range of consequences of GBV/IPV. These include physical injuries (including exposure to HIV, STDs etc.); psychological damage; the reinforcement of traditional gendered norms and practices; and – of particular interest to donors and states – economic consequences in the form of lower income and productivity.

Overall therefore, it is clear from the literature that the causes of GBV are complex and multifaceted. Although commonly associated with dynamics and relations at household and community levels, the roots of GBV lie more broadly in economic, social and political inequalities and discrimination at structural levels across society. GBV interventions therefore need to be linked to broader social, economic and political transformation. In the following section we turn to the causes and consequences of GBV in Malawi.

### 3.2 GBV in Malawi: Causes and consequences

As we noted at the beginning of this report, GBV in Malawi is reported to be widespread with findings from national surveys conducted in 2004 and 2010 respectively revealing that one in five women has experienced some form of sexual violence over their lifetime (NSO, 2005 and 2011). Much GBV occurs in the home, is viewed as a private family affair and is seldom reported. According to national data, one in three girls who have sex under the age of 18 is forced or coerced and almost half of all girls in Malawi experience physical abuse (NSO, 2011).

A number of studies point to “an alarming pervasiveness” (Bisikaa et al, 2008) of GBV among students. A recent study across ten schools in Nsanje district (Rancourt, 2013) found that 45 per cent of students reported having experienced an incident of sexual violence in the past year (42 per cent female and 48 per cent male). GBV appears also pervasive at university level, with a 2007 study examining sexual harassment at Chancellor College (Kayuni, 2009) finding that 12.6 per cent of female students had been raped on campus while 67 per cent had been sexually harassed.

As we also noted at the beginning of this section however, incidences and causes of GBV are notoriously difficult to assess and compare due to wide variations in definition and
understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, measures of GBV are plagued by self-reported biases due to social desirability, reference group norms and other factors. Mellish et al (2015: 23-24) highlight these varying understandings of GBV in a Malawian context. The authors cite a 2005 study by the Malawian Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation with community members across eight districts\(^8\) which found that women were generally hesitant to label acts they considered ‘normal’ as GBV – e.g. wife beating and verbal abuse. The authors also note the widespread underreporting of incidents of GBV drawing from the findings of a 2002 national survey in which 80 per cent of female and 75 per cent of male respondents agreed with the statement that “violence between a man and a woman is a private matter in which others shouldn’t interfere” (Mellish et al, 2015: 24). Indeed, contradictions in the data abound with Alio et al (cited in Conroy, 2014) reporting a low level of IPV while the Ministry’s own data (NSO, 2005 and 2011), the data from Pelser et al’s (2005) study of 3,546 households and more recent data collected by Greco et al (2015) point to high rates of IPV, particularly in rural communities. Moreover, the literature is also ambiguous about social norms and the social acceptability of GBV. Both Alio et al (2010 – cited in Conroy 2014) and Greco et al (2015: 74) assert that IPV is not considered socially acceptable, while Small and Nikolova (2015) draw on the 2010 MDHS to argue that there is a strong correlation between social norms and acceptability and the incidence of GBV. These contradictions notwithstanding, incidences of GBV do appear to be widespread and underreported. The remainder of this section examines the multiple causal factors put forward in the literature for these, together with their consequences and impacts.

### 3.2.1 Household issues

**Male dominance and control**

Mirroring the dearth of literature more broadly, the literature on both incidence and causality of GBV in Malawi is also quite sparse. In one of the more comprehensive studies on the topic, Conroy (2014) notes the lack of empirical data on the social factors leading to IPV. Conroy draws from a sample of 466 young couples in rural Malawi and argues that both male dominance and control within the household and the quality of marital relationship are the two principal causal factors of IPV.

**Wealth and education**

In contrast to the broader literature, Conroy’s study – conducted over a three year period with eight waves of longitudinal survey data – finds no correlation between education or income with IPV (Conroy, 2014).

Thus, the sparse evidence available on causal factors at household level appears to mirror the literature more broadly in pointing to male dominance and control within the household (together with the allied issue of the quality of the marital relationship) as the key driver of

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\(^8\) The districts involved in the study were Chitipa, Dedza, Karonga, Lilongwe, Mchinji, Mangochi, Salima and Zomba.
IPV at household level, with no evidence for a correlation between IPV and either income or education levels.

### 3.2.2 Community issues

‘A women’s issue’
Both Mkandawire (2009) and Stephenson, Winter and Elfstrom (2013) argue that social norms within communities are extremely important as causal factors of GBV. The authors differ in their prescriptions on how these may be tackled however. Mkandawire (2009), reverting to the neoliberal model of the self-optimising individual – a kind of hybridised ‘responsibilisation’ and ‘marketisation’ approach - emphasises women’s own responsibility and agency in securing financial independence as a means to become ‘empowered’ and escape GBV. Thus, for him, GBV constitutes ‘a women’s issue’ with this to be addressed through women’s own agency – often, the evidence notwithstanding – through their ‘economic empowerment’. Stephenson, Winter and Elfstrom (2013), on the other hand, focus on understanding and challenging community factors that influence men's sexual behaviour. This, they argue, may provide a more effective intervention resulting in opportunities for communities more broadly to initiate and promote behavioural change.

**Roles and Responsibilities: Masculinities and Femininities**
Men’s sexual behaviour and its linkage to dominant constructions of masculinity in Malawi is the focus of a number of studies. Chimaraoke and Undie’s (2008) study of sexual vulnerability among young men in Malawi reveals the strength of dominant norms of masculinity within Malawi and its association with sexual harassment and GBV. As the authors note, “The local preaching concerning men’s and women’s roles in Malawi thus ascribes more power to men. Such beliefs normally articulate in broader patriarchal ideologies in local tribal and community culture(s) that affirm the leadership and subordinate role of men and women respectively, in society.”. According to the authors (2008: 289), “responding male youth [research participants] considered sexual harassment to be an acceptable strategy for obtaining sex from girls, frequently justifying it with claims that they were merely salvaging their images by standing up to girls who tried to out-smart them or wanted to raise doubts about their male identities. Sexual coercion as practiced by responding male youth sometimes bordered on rape.”. In a country with the 8th highest global rate of AIDS, it is noteworthy that research respondents viewed it as unmanly to use condoms, with this widely seen as bowing down to women. The importance of community and cultural factors in influencing men’s sexual behaviour in Malawi is also emphasised in research carried out by both Stephenson et al (2013) and Swidler and Watkins (2007). Both sets of authors emphasise the need for interventions which interact with and challenge community factors influencing men’s behaviour in addition to programmes targeting women alone.
However, as Esocave (2010) has argued, when it comes to talk about sex and interpersonal relations, Malawi is a deeply conservative, heteronormative society and while poverty is a driver of sex outside marriage - especially by older men on young women, “Malawians are not willing to talk about sex and don’t understand STIs” (2010: 94). Kaler’s earlier study on the same topic (2004a) reveals a significant gender difference in this regard with women far less likely than men to engage in discussion on such topics.

More broadly in relation to gendered roles, Greco et al (2015) draw on FG data to highlight the traditional roles ascribed to rural women as respectable wives and mothers. The authors note (2015: 74) that in rural Malawi “women's quality of life is not realised in isolation but is to a large extent dependent on the behaviour and wellbeing of other members of the household, in particular on the children's welfare and the husband's conduct.” They go on to note the importance of traditional norms, with women’s main role characterised as “...being able to take care of the children and the husband was considered crucial for fulfilling their role as respectable mothers and wives”.

**GBV as an acceptable way to control women**
As in the broader literature, Mandal and Hindin in a Malawian context (2013: 1337) find a strong correlation between social norms of male dominance and social acceptance of GBV as an effective means to control wives and partners. The authors argue that “The positive relationship found between men’s controlling behaviour and women’s experience of physical violence stresses the need to employ gender-transformative programs with Malawian men and their communities not only to combat IPV, but also to address an important determinant of IPV—on an individual level, the desire of men to control their wives, and on a societal level, gender norms that perpetuate male dominance.”

The available evidence on the multiple causes of GBV in Malawi therefore is generally reflective of the causes set out in the broader literature. GBV is rooted in and underpinned by broader norms of what it is to be an ideal and indeed powerful or respectable man or woman respectively. Again, it is important to note that these norms are, in turn, rooted in broader structures which can either challenge or reinforce these.

### 3.2.3 Structural issues

Often, reflecting the strong neoliberal bias in gender policy and programming (see Cornwall and Rivas, 2015 for example), structural issues in Malawi tend to be conflated with individual situations of poverty. Thus, there is little literature on the impact of broader policies and institutions on women’s situation in Malawi broadly or GBV more specifically. In line with this dominant marketised approach (see Fraser, 2013), diagnoses and corrective measures often tend to focus on increasing women’s household income / financial independence therefore rather than addressing the broader structural inequalities which give rise to this.
These broader structures and institutions clearly have an impact on women’s livelihood prospects and income (for example, Action Aid, 2014c has identified the ongoing depreciation of the Kwacha is identified as impacting negatively on these women). These broader structures and institutions also have important impacts on social attitudes and behaviours towards women. With this in mind, in Section 4.1 of this report we examine these briefly in a Malawian context.

### 3.2.4 Consequences of GBV in Malawi

As elsewhere, GBV has a wide range of consequences and impacts on individuals, families, communities and society at large. A number of studies implicitly make a link between GBV and HIV (Kaler, 2004b; Mkandawire, 2009; Esocave, 2010; Gibbs et al, 2012; Johnson, 2012) with Kathewera-Banda et al’s 1995 study in Nkhota district finding that cultural acceptance of GBV makes women more vulnerable to HIV infection.

The national Malawi Demographic Health Survey (MDHS) of 2010 documented the range of physical injuries accruing from GBV. These include cuts, bruises and aches (32 per cent); eye injuries, sprains, dislocations and burns (10 per cent); deep wounds, broken bones, broken teeth and other serious injuries (9.8 per cent); with 35 per cent of respondents experiencing one or more of these physical injuries (NSO, 2011). Bazargan-Hejazi et al’s (2012) survey of 8,291 women aged between 15 and 49 years found 13 per cent reporting emotional violence; 20 per cent reporting being pushed, shaken, slapped or punched; 3 per cent reporting severe violence such as being strangled or burned, threatened with a knife, gun or other weapon; and 13 per cent reporting sexual violence. Peterman and Johnson’s 2009 study found that women who had experienced sexual violence were 70 per cent more likely to report incontinence than women who had not.

Although very little is known about the range of mental health impacts of GBV, Chepuka et al’s study which draws on interviews and FGs across five sites in the district of Blantyre, provides some idea of the depth and scale of psychological trauma caused by DV. Research participants described a range of challenges including depression, anxiety, fear and suicidal ideas and attempts. Women living in situations of ongoing DV with ‘controlling husbands’ described how they live in a state of constant anxiety. Their situation is compounded by social pressures to resolve conflicts at home and a fear of judgement from communities more broadly (Chepuka et al, 2014).

Mellish et al (2015: 35) cite a 2013 study commissioned by the Economic Commission of Africa and UN Women on the economic costs of VAW. Distinguishing between direct costs (defined as the treatment or prevention of violence through various services) and indirect costs (those not involving actual monetary exchange but affecting women’s productivity in
the home), direct costs are estimated at MKw 877 million at an average cost per case of MKw 1,800. Indirect costs are estimated at MKw 28 billion per annum putting the total annual cost to Malawi’s economy at close to MKw 29 billion. The more egregious psychological, social and political costs (affecting women’s confidence and capacity to resist traditional norms and the violence they can engender) are not mentioned in this study.

It is clear therefore, that the causes of GBV in Malawi are as complex and multifaceted as elsewhere. Underpinned by social discourses, practices and institutions which both reinforce and promote gendered hierarchies of superiority and inferiority, its consequences are far-reaching and egregious for communities and society more broadly as well as for the people involved. This highlights the urgency in identifying appropriate and effective approaches and strategies for tackling it. With this in mind, we now turn to an examination of efforts in this regard and the lessons learned from these to date.

3.3 Tackling GBV: Some lessons and challenges

The dearth of comprehensive evaluations of GBV interventions (see DfID, 2015a, WHO, 2010b) coupled with empirical problems due to varying definitions and understandings of GBV render it difficult to draw any definitive lessons from experiences to date in this field. Moreover, as Barker et al (2010) note, while much of the emphasis of programmatic interventions is based around shifting rigid gender norms, a notable weakness in any evaluations conducted is the near ubiquitous analysis of individual changes in male attitudes and actions, rather than a broader analysis of social norms and gender power relations. DfID (2015a: 31) also draw attention to the methodological shortcomings of many programme evaluations highlighting in particular three main problems – i) evaluations are generally conducted only with men participating in programmes and not the general population; ii) only short-term changes are reported, with a maximum follow up of one year following a programme; and iii) changes in attitudes and behaviour are self-reported soon after the end of the intervention, which can result in social desirability bias.

In relation to Malawi more specifically, Mellish et al’s comprehensive literature search (2015: 36-37) uncovered just four final evaluations of NGO programmes with two of these focused on clinical interventions for children who had experienced sexual abuse, another on police and health sector capacity to respond, and the fourth on violence within schools. This dearth of specific evaluation material notwithstanding, the broader studies and literature reviewed above point toward four clear lessons for commentators, programmers and practitioners alike. These are discussed below.

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9 It is noteworthy that the study appears to focus exclusively on women’s traditional role within the household ‘inability to perform household and other domestic tasks by IPV survivors’ (p.31 – cited in Mellish et al (2015: 35)) rather than more broadly.
3.3.1 The lessons

**GBV is not ‘a women’s issue’**

As we have already seen, some interventions or commentaries (see for example Mkandawire, 2009) can focus on women’s situation and behaviours alone. For example, women are exhorted to engage in income generation activities and avoid situations where they may be vulnerable. This, as Esocave (2010: 105) argues in a Malawian context, is “*Because the protective forces of modernity are understood to be located in the rationality and legal status of the individual, rather than the systems and institutions of modernity, the individual becomes the logical target to address “sociocultural” issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and the lack of education opportunities… Because of their almost exclusive focus on the individual, these interventions border on blaming girls for not attending school and women for not exercising their right not to be abused. This is also the case with income-generating efforts that assume individual ingenuity and hard work is enough to overcome poverty in one of the world’s poorest countries.*” Yet we now know that there is little empirical evidence to support the much touted link between women’s access to income and social transformation (see for example Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). Money, although undoubtedly a welcome assistance to any cash-strapped household, will not make women (sexually) autonomous.

Moreover, as Gqola (2007: 121), in a South African context persuasively argues, “*These warnings [to women to who fail to take responsibility for their actions] do not work, and they are dangerous warnings at that, because they communicate quite unequivocally that South African public spaces do not belong to the women who live in this country.*”. As she notes (2007: 119) “*We cannot re-shape patriarchy without an honest look at our society, our language and our everyday practice.*”.

As discussed heretofore, it is now widely established therefore that interventions targeting women alone are less effective than those targeting men also. This leads us to the lessons learned from such interventions.

**Targeting boys and young men works but we’re not sure how**

There has been an increasing tendency to focus efforts to change social and cultural norms among adolescent males or younger boys using universal or targeted programmes that are delivered through a variety of mechanisms, including school-based initiatives, community mobilisation and public awareness campaigns. Objectives typically include increasing an individual’s knowledge, changing attitudes towards gender norms and violence and changing social norms around masculinity, power, gender and violence. Some programmes also aim to develop the capacity and confidence of boys and young men to speak up and intervene against violence, with the goal of changing the social climate in which it occurs.
For example, ActionAid (2014a) suggests that, in Malawi, alternative visions and constructions of masculinity need to be developed. This is the focus of interventions in Peru as outlined by Mitchell (2013) although she provides no detail on the success or otherwise of the approach. Hoang et al (2013), drawing on a study of ‘Responsible Men’s Clubs’ in Vietnam which work with men to end violence against their wives, emphasise that the importance of developing positive ideals of masculinity. The authors note that poverty and alcohol abuse are not direct causes of violence, rather they impact on men’s sense of masculinity, with poverty causing men to feel inferior, in turn causing them to drown their sorrows and then react violently. They emphasise (2013: 93) that the process of working with men in the groups “was not just about transferring knowledge. Recognising the pressures that men are under from economic and social factors in society, and the need for them to understand these and deconstruct their impact on men’s culturally rooted notions of ‘being a man’ and the power that men have in society and the family were all crucial. Discussions of husbandhood, fatherhood, and sexuality should be included in the discussions about the wider concept of being a man.”

Generally, such approaches are viewed positively within the literature (see for example Barker et al’s review of 58 evaluations (2010); Flood’s (2011: 360 list of benefits10; DfID, 2015a: 44; Peacock and Barker, 2014) but little is known about what form of intervention works best. The WHO, for example, notes that (2010a: 57) “…while programmes to alter cultural and social norms are among the most visible and ubiquitous of all strategies for preventing intimate partner and sexual violence, they remain one of the least evaluated. Even where evaluations have been undertaken, these have typically measured changes in attitudes and beliefs rather than in the occurrence of the violent behaviours themselves, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions on their effectiveness in actually preventing intimate partner and sexual violence.”. DfID is also somewhat ambivalent on this issue. In its Review Paper 2 (2015a, p.17) it notes that the existing evidence on interventions targeted primarily at boys and men “…is conflicting and does not allow for recommendations to be made, either for or against the intervention. Also, most of the evidence is from North America (see also Morrison et al, 2007:43 on this point) and there remain limitations to the generalisability of these findings beyond Anglo-American populations.”.

And so, while efforts targeted at boys and young men are generally positively received, specific lessons on what forms of intervention work best and in what context remain elusive.

**Community-based interventions appear more effective than single-sex ones**

There appears to be an emerging view that the most effective interventions are those that engage with both sexes together through community based approaches. DfID (2015a: 31),

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10 These include personal well-being (freedom from the costs of conformity with dominant definitions of masculinity), relational interests (men’s care and love for the women and girls in their lives), and collective and community interests (the benefits to communities, e.g., of a diminution in the civil and international violence associated with aggressive constructions of masculinity and patriarchal nation states).
draws on a range of additional literature to argue that “interventions that combine group education with boys and men (sometimes in combination with women and girls) and adopt a gender transformative approach and intense community mobilisation are promising.” In a Malawian context (Mandal and Hinden, 2013: 1337) conclude that “The evidence around working with men and boys has been mixed but encouraging, and promoting attitudinal and behavioural change at a fundamental level may lead to multiple positive health outcomes. In addition to working with men and boys, IPV mitigation efforts may also consider working with couples, especially since it is common for both males and females in Malawi to consider wife-beating justifiable in at least one scenario.” Moreover, as Nicholson and Carty (2015) note, such interventions generally require a lengthy period of implementation before significant improvements can be observed.

Such approaches generally come with a long list of proposed interventions. Barker et al argue (2010: 547; as does DfID, 2015a and 2015b) that programmes “with community outreach, mobilisation and mass-media campaigns, and integrated programmes seem to be more effective approaches to changing behaviour among men and boys than single-focus interventions. This highlights, but does not affirm definitively, the usefulness of reaching beyond the individual level to the social context - including relationships, social institutions, gatekeepers and community leaders - in which men and boys live”. While the programming prescriptions are certainly comprehensive in scope within this literature, they are perhaps of less use to smaller agencies and bodies with limited resources who seek to be more focused and strategic in their form of intervention. Michau (2007: 98), drawing on experiences of community-based interventions in Eastern Africa grapples with precisely this challenge of how to transform large visions of social change into practical programmes and actions on the ground. She emphasises the use of multiple strategies over time with whole communities supporting people to face the fact that violence is not something ‘out there’ that ‘happens to other people’, but is something we all grapple with in our relationships. She further emphasises that community mobilisation is not only about raising awareness and capacity building, but must be multi-faceted and creative. Warning against the tendency to degenerate into compartmentalised activities and strategies, Michau emphasises that community-based approaches cannot be neatly completed within short timeframes as much time needed to build common understandings of what constitutes GBV, together with a critical mass for its elimination.

Overall, DfID notes (2015a: 40) that while research into the impact of projects and interventions in some areas has uncovered some evidence of what works and what does not – in schools, microfinance and interpersonal relationships, complex, multi-component interventions to transform masculinities and/or change social norms remain “sorely under-researched” even though it is known that precisely these forms of gender transformative approaches are more effective than those simply targeting attitude and behaviour change (p.44) – see also Dworkin et al (2013).
Urgently required – longer term transformative approaches
This brings us to the main lesson from experiences and studies of GBV interventions to date. Stemming from the view that GBV results from broad-based gender inequalities across economic, social and political spheres, there appears now a wide consensus that longer term transformative changes are required which target not just so-called perpetrators and victims of GBV and their immediate communities, but which challenge and seek to transform broader social, economic and political inequalities and discrimination within societies at large (WHO, 2007; Barker, 2009; Barker et al, 2010; Dworkin, Treves-Kagan and Lippman, 2013; Heise, 1998; Davies and True, 2015; DfID, 2015a and 2015b; SIDA, 2015). This derives in part from survey research using standardised attitude scales which has found that men and boys who adhere to more rigid views about masculinity are more likely to report having used violence against a partner (WHO, 2007; Fulu et al, 2013). Thus, as Fulu et al (2013: 94) put it, “Work to prevent violence against women must expand beyond efforts to change individual men and towards change objectives that aim to transform larger social norms around masculinities and promote non-violent ways to be men.”. These social norms are rooted in broader structural and institutional inequalities and so, as the WHO (2010: 2) notes “long-term interventions that address structural factors, gender inequalities and harmful gender norms are essential if one is to reduce VAW and HIV”.

As we have seen however, broader, national-scale interventions tend to focus on dedicated laws and policies in the area of GBV rather than tackling discrimination within political economies more broadly. Interestingly, given the near ubiquity of this approach, there is little data available on the impact of legislative and policy changes on GBV. Indeed a number of commentators (WHO, 2007; Morrison et al, 2007; and DfID, 2015a) suggest that revised laws and policies have little effect. DeLaet (2013) notes that this is particularly the case in countries with weak legal and administrative capacity where policies and laws mean little as the means to monitor and enforce these are lacking. Indeed, this was one of the key findings the 2014 review of Malawi’s National Response to Combat GBV (2008-2013) (Centre for Development Management, 2014) which highlighted the lack of national-level impact indicators or a functional monitoring and evaluation system.

3.3.2 The challenges

Three principal challenges to initiatives aimed at tackling GBV are highlighted in the literature. These are discussed below.

Male resistance and backlash:
Given that GBV is rooted in inequitable structures and relations and therefore inherently political, it should come as no surprise that one of the principal challenges to initiatives aimed at mitigating or eliminating it comes in the form of resistance and backlash from individuals.

11 It is noteworthy that this strategy is somewhat inaptly named as its focus appears more on services to women affected by GBV rather than a more holistic approach to combatting this.
groups and institutions challenged by these. This is widely reported in the literature and is one of the key threats to initiatives in this area. For example, ActionAid (2014a) reports that resistance from men to efforts to reduce / address GBV is “more hidden and potentially more sinister” in Malawi than elsewhere and it is noted that there is a fear that there will be reprisals and increased violence once the ActionAid project winds up. This warning is tempered a little however by another ActionAid report produced in the same year (2014b) which cites a key achievement of the programme in Malawi as being Malawian men changing traditional roles and advocating an end to GBV.

Some organisations advocate involving men to prevent backlash (WHO, 2010; ActionAid, 2014a) while, as we have seen above, such an approach is more widely advocated as being more effective in challenging hegemonic norms, ideologies and prejudices. Yet, care needs to be taken in how this might be achieved as, as discussed below, such an approach carries with it its own challenges.

Involving men: Diverting resources?
Involving men in GBV initiatives can have a number of unintended effects. One of these is that it potentially diverts resources away from women, the primary focus of GBV interventions in the first place. UN Women (2015: 49) warns that recent efforts to engage men and boys “carries a risk of diverting attention and resources away from women towards men, and thereby continuing the cycle of gender inequality that results in violence against women.”. Flood (2011) makes a similar argument. To avoid this, UN Women (2015) advocates that all efforts/interventions be aimed at the transformation of harmful gender roles; the promotion of non-violent forms of masculinity; and that they be rooted in principles of feminism, gender equality and human rights. Flood (2011: 360) similarly argues that “efforts to involve men must be guided by a feminist agenda and done in partnership with, and even be accountable to, women and women’s groups”. The WHO (2007: 19) reports on evidence from two programmes in SSA which show evidence of men’s negative backlash or reasserting control when they were involved in reproductive health and maternal health issues. To mitigate this, they suggest that programmes engaging men to promote gender equality should develop protective measures for women: for example, by engaging women in project design, consulting with women and including the voices of women in evaluating the process and impact.

Involving men: Diverting power and control?
An associated unintended effect of involving men in GBV interventions and programmes is that it can divert power and control away from women. Kululanga et al’s study (2012) on the impact of recent approaches to include men in maternal health programmes in Malawi may be pertinent in this regard. The study found that power and control appeared to revert back to the male partners as, with women denied the service if their husbands were not present and seen last if they had no husband, health clinic practices implicitly reinforced the idea that men’s time is most precious and they must be attended to first (2012: 150-151). Again, both
the UN and the WHO’s recommendations are pertinent in this regard. Women’s power and control over such programmes should be maintained by engaging women in project design, and including them in monitoring and evaluating programme processes and impact, as well as being rooted in broader principles and practices of feminism, gender equality and social and political transformation.

In this section we have examined the key arguments and debates in the relevant literature on the diverse causes and consequences of GBV globally and in Malawi, together with the lessons and challenges emerging from policies and programmes aimed at tackling them. The findings and lessons learned from this literature form the framework for the primary research conducted in this study. These findings are presented and discussed in the following section.
4. Field research findings and analysis

This section sets out the principal findings and analysis from the field research conducted in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Chiradzulu and Rumphi districts, together with findings from the policy literature as relevant. Beginning with an examination of the broad context for gender equality and GBV in Malawi, we go on to draw on interviews and FGs in the four research sites to explore household and community norms, values and practices in this regard. Sub-sections 4-6 inclusive focus more specifically on ActionAid’s programme in these two districts. Analysing the research findings in the context of debates and evidence in the broader literature, we highlight some key successes and challenges to the programme in its efforts to engage both men and women in addressing the root causes of GBV in the sites examined.

4.1 The structural context: Institutions, policy and legislation

4.1.1 Dedicated legislation, institutions and policy

Malawi has recently passed a raft of dedicated legislation in relation to gender equality and GBV. As one interviewee noted “When we went to the CSW 60 [United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – 60th session] this year in New York, it was clear that Malawi was one of the best examples. We’ve gone quite far with the legislative reforms, with the passing of Acts. So in addition to the Marriage Act, is the one on Gender Equality, because that one was sitting on the shelves for 12 years. We managed to have it passed in 2013.” (interview representative of international agency, male). The range of legislation introduced includes the following:

- **Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (2016)** – This raises the legal marriage age to 18 thereby outlawing child marriage.
- **Gender Equality Act (2013)** – This prohibits harmful traditional practices and also makes reference to sexual harassment in public places.
- **Wills and Inheritance Act (2011)** – This aims to prohibit property grabbing
- **Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006 but currently under review)** – This aims at the prevention of domestic violence with the current review reportedly including its redefinition within a marriage context.

In addition, a number of national policies and plans have been announced. These include:

- **The National Gender Policy**
While the introduction of this range of dedicated legislation is certainly an important and necessary step in tackling gender inequities and GBV, many interviewees remain sceptical in relation to its ultimate impact. Two principal grounds for this scepticism are articulated. First, there is the perceived lack of political will at national level. Representatives from a number of national and international agencies note this. Moreover, this lack of will is also apparent at local levels, as outlined by a number of local level actors. For example, one NGO official cites a case he was recently involved in...

"I had a case, I think someone called me from home two days ago and was asking me... ‘My sister, she was married somewhere and the husband has [had] actually assaulted her.’ And I said ‘go to the police’. So she went to the police and the police told us that she should go [back] and discuss [with her husband]. You see? So you can see the way the police handle the gender-based violence. They handle them as a minor case. But if someone hears that someone has stolen a chicken, there will be a rush and they will arrest that person. While these [DV] cases, they say ‘ah no, those are cases to do with domestic violence’.

(Interview national NGO representative, male)

Interviews with both police officers and community members reinforce this view. In interview, police officers noted that cases are often dealt with locally, between families. Meanwhile community members noted that police were only contacted as a last resort, with the preference being to either not report at all or to go to the local chief or Nkhoswe12. Excerpts from interviews with local police officers in two research sites illustrate this point. In the first, the police officer explains that the first option is to calm the couple and let the matter go. Only when the victim insists on prosecution is the matter pursued through legal channels.

"I am the coordinator for the community policing and we also handle issues of victim support where most of the families - you find that the husband has been beating his wife and the wife comes to complain to the police. In such scenarios we will calm them and assist them accordingly so that that issue will end right away... And

12 Nkhoswe are marriage ‘guardians’ within the traditional marriage system whose role is to advise on marital issues and discord. Research participants note that these are consulted on major family issues. Chepuka et al’s (2014) research notes that they are not very effective however due to a combination of burnout and a lack of understanding of the complex drivers of DV. Moreover, many participants in this research note that it is better to keep domestic problems private due to social norms and stigma… “what happens is that if you refer a case to the family relatives [Nkhoswe], it would seem that you don’t love the husband. So you just persevere. That’s why you just have to persevere.”, (Focus group D, female participant).
whenever that victim has decided that the case should proceed as a criminal offence, we proceed because it is criminal in nature. But whenever we thought [think] that maybe the victim or the wife has decided that the case should not proceed, we give advice that the husband should stop that malpractice.

(Interview police officer, Site B, male – emphasis added)

In the second instance, the police officer explicitly notes that the decision to pursue with a case lies with himself and not the victim. Later in the same interview, he cites a case of incest as a possible instance meriting legal action.

When there is this problem of violence within the family... what we normally do is that someone will call both parties... So we have to listen to both [husband and wife]. After listening to these two, then [if] we see the husband was right, he hit the wife because of this - even if the wife had shouted or insulted the husband, [we advise that] this is not the solution. Then we say that [if] the gravity of the beating is not all that serious, then we advise them not to do this practice, because if they continue they will plant bad behaviour in these young ones [their children]... but if it is serious, then first of all we lock up the one that had injured the other.

(Interview police officer, Site D, male – emphasis added)

At a national level, it appears international pressure has been instrumental in bringing about recent legislative developments. The Ministry representative attributes two reasons to this – the prevalence of domestic violence and international pressures to be seen to be acting on this.

“Several studies were done that proved there was a lot of domestic violence happening. At the same time the government of Malawi is a signatory to so many international conventions and protocols which talk about prohibiting these domestic violence cases. So it was proper [timely] for them [colleagues in the Ministry] to allow [influence] government to use that chance to ratify those laws.”.

(Interview representative of MGCDSW, female)

The second reason for a scepticism among interviewees in relation to the impact of recent legislation on the incidence and prevalence of GBV is the reported lack of resources. As the representative of one international agency puts it...

This is one of the big challenges - implementation. The Ministry of Gender has developed a national plan of action on gender-based violence. It has been costed, but the resources are not there to implement it.

(Interview representative of international agency, male)
On the other hand, a representative from another international agency argues that some of the required resources are there in the Ministry itself together with the relevant institutions such as the judiciary, police etc… The problem, according to this informant, is less resources and more political commitment and prioritisation. Thus, while resources are clearly an issue, undoubtedly they are also easily and all too often invoked as a proxy for political will.

In any case, it is worth reiterating – and this point was made by representatives of two international agencies interviewed – that, despite the clear necessity for appropriate laws and policies, the relevant research to date shows no correlation between these and a significant reduction in GBV. The lesson is that legislative reform on its own is insufficient.

4.1.2 The broader structural context

Given the emphasis in the literature on the importance of broader structural context in which social values, norms and practices are embedded and reproduced (see Sections 3.1.3 and 3.2.2 in particular), the cursory and, at times, somewhat problematic treatment of gender considerations in broader policy, discourse and institutions is noteworthy. Economically, in 2005 female-headed households earned only 60 per cent of the annual income of male-headed households and the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector in 2008 was just 15 per cent. While it is clear from these figures that women are discriminated against in the economic sphere, no official statistics are available on wage differentials. A number of interviewees, including the Ministry of Gender official, argue that there is no pay gap in Malawi – certainly within the public sector.

*I hear there is a small gap [in the private sector]... We hear that there is a gap. But in the public sector it does not exist. Once I’m employed at the certain grade and a male colleague is employed at a certain grade, we receive the same salary.*

(Interview representative of MGCDSW, female)

Similarly, a representative from an international agency notes, “*In Malawi we don’t have that [a gender pay gap]. Everybody gets paid equally depending on the job. Of course, I feel that we have never made a real assessment of this, particularly at the lower level maybe. But I have never seen anywhere that there is unequal pay*”. Later noting that this may indeed be a feature of the tobacco industry, this same respondent attributes the blame for this on female employees themselves, failing to identify the broader structural limitations in which they are operating… “*in terms of gender, in relation to pay, it is that women do not know how to negotiate. If an employer offers to pay a certain rate, they will not negotiate.*” (interview, representative of international agency, male).

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In contrast, a representative from a national NGO does acknowledge however that it is far more difficult for women to secure posts vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

_I think you will find that there are many companies, many organisations, if there is a man and a woman, if we want to be crude, people will prefer that we recruit a man. Why? They think that the women have got extra burdens at home so they will be making excuses that ‘I am busy’, ‘my son is sick’. Some people prefer that ‘No, I am on maternity leave’. People don't appreciate those things and they will say that these people are just wasting my time._

(Interview representative of national NGO, male)

In addition, women are discriminated against in accessing productive resources, education, additional sources of information, credit and loans, agricultural inputs and services etc…(interview, representative of international agency, male).

Whatever the empirical reality, the apparent lack of interest in gathering data to investigate the reasons for this feminisation of poverty is interesting in itself.

Politically, in marked contrast to the regional trend, the percentage of women in politics has decreased in recent years. Currently women occupy 2 out of 17 cabinet posts. They make up 32 of the 192 seats in parliament, and their percentage in district councils has fallen to 11 per cent (Interviews representatives from international agencies and Ministry). And the future prospects look quite bleak. As one interviewee notes, politics is very much seen as a male arena and, in contrast to other countries in the region[^14], there is no appetite for gender quotas.

_The area of women’s participation in politics is a bit hazy in Malawi. There is a lot of competition and the men do not seem to want to give much space. They feel that, it’s almost like they feel that it’s a men’s area... I feel we need to move towards affirmative action, so we could have quotas. This discussion has been going on, but doesn’t seem that there has been real buy-in from political parties so even the men folks, so as I say they do not want to give women the space, so we have quite a tall order on that one for Malawi._

(Interview representative of international agency, male)

Socially, women are discriminated against in terms of access to education. Around 67 per cent of women are literate compared to 77 per cent of men and just 16 per cent of girls complete primary education compared to 26 per cent of boys[^15]. The political and public discourse around gender equality also tends towards a blaming of women for ‘lagging behind’, with much modernist talk of their empowerment to ‘catch up’ with their male counterparts.

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[^14]: Gender quotas are in place in the nearby countries of Burundi, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

counterparts. In line with this discourse issues of GBV tend to be framed in three ways, none or which acknowledge the issue as a human rights issue or recognise its broader political, economic and social underpinnings. In an effort to secure some level of political buy-in and in line with recent World Bank discourse\textsuperscript{16}, some agencies have moved towards an economic framing of the issue As one interviewee notes…

\begin{quote}
We have tried human rights and we have been told, also by policymakers, that we cannot eat human rights. So the motivation to tackle gender-based violence from a human rights perspective is very, very low... So we can begin to look at it from a very economic perspective and a few people begin to change from that perspective.
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
(Interview representative of international agency, female)
\end{flushright}

Indeed, relevant policy in Malawi tends towards either this framing or a public health framing. For example, as set out in its introduction, the National Strategy on GBV characterises GBV as an economic and health issue but not in terms of rights or power relations “The Government of Malawi not only recognizes GBV, especially violence against women as a severe impediment to poverty reduction, but also recognizes its impacts on vulnerable groups in relation to the prevalence of HIV infection.” (MGCSW, 2014: 11).

According to Chepuka et al (2014), in the Malawi Health Sector Strategic Plan (2011-2016), GBV is characterised as a non-communicable disease.

The second prevalent framing is that of GBV and gender equality more broadly as women’s issues, to be tackled by women themselves. Thus, the most recent national economic and development strategy speaks promoting women’s productivity and activism in the economy and politics alone, as well as strengthening of GBV services rather than addressing the more complex causes (Government of Malawi, 2012: 24-25 and 51-52). While the strategy does talk of “mainstreaming gender at all levels” (p.52), no further detail on how this is to be achieved is included. Moreover, at the recent (April 2016) launch of the national Gender Policy, the Minister for Gender, Children, Social Welfare and Disability stated that the Ministry aims ‘empowering women’ by focusing strategically on these alone. As she notes, “there is a need to close the gap between men and women... [to do so] we will be putting in place strategies that will specifically target women. This will include areas such as education, health and agriculture among others.”\textsuperscript{17}

The third common framing is that GBV is simply a cultural issue. For example, the Ministry representative interviewed notes that she has no time for a feminist agenda …

\begin{quote}
I really don’t agree with that feminist approach. It’s like we are at war with men. So we are not fighting because ‘hey you have enjoyed for a long time, now it is our turn’.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} ‘According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2012: xiii) “gender equality is smart economics”.

\textsuperscript{17} Reported in https://malawi24.com/2016/03/04/malawi-govt-launch-gender-policy/
Moreover, national and international norms and discourses around femininities are at times problematic and discriminatory. One example is in relation to sexual compliance and women’s rights to full control over their bodies. The most recent (2013) Malawi Gender Based Violence Survey, designed and compiled by Malawi’s National Statistics Office, UN Women and UNFPA (NSO, 2013) somewhat bizarrely and worryingly includes ‘sex deprivation’ as a category of sexual violence. In addition, ‘refused to have sex with you’ is included as one of the categories of psycho-social violence. Although no definition of ‘sex deprivation’ is given, its inclusion in the study as a form of GBV indicates a level of support among national and international officials for viewing the act of having sex as one of the duties of a spouse. In another recent example, the research report of the Economic Commission of Africa and UN Women on the economic costs of VAW (cited in Mellish et al, 2015: 35) bases its costings on the indirect costs of VAW on women’s productivity in the home, thus attributing women’s sole worth to domestic duties alone. Therefore, the messages and constructions emerging from national and international agencies and institutions are mixed at best and regressive and discriminatory at worst, standing in direct contradiction to the broader aspirations and goals espoused in recent legislation and policy.

Overall therefore, the data presented in this section demonstrates that, despite the recent impressive range of legislative and policy developments, broader national and international discourse and messaging on women’s responsibilities, identities, roles and rights remain ambiguous and, at times regressive. Explicitly reproducing traditional, discriminatory constructions of femininities while implicitly endorsing narrow constructions of masculinity, they lie at odds with the rights-based aspirations articulated within recent relevant legislation. Moreover, structural and institutionalised discrimination remains endemic at broader economic, political and social levels. As we have noted in the previous section (Section 3.3), these broader discourses and structural inequalities filter through to local levels. And it is to an examination of their impacts and manifestations at these more local levels that we now turn.
4.2 Description of the research sites

Field research was conducted in Lilongwe, Blantyre and four rural research sites. As noted in Section 2.4, two of these were in the district of Chiradzulu and the remaining two were in the district of Rumphi. Below, we sketch out some of the features of these areas including their demographics, poverty levels, literacy rates, GBV statistics and any other relevant information to the study.

4.2.1 Chiradzulu

Chiradzulu is situated in South-Eastern Malawi, near the country’s commercial centre of Blantyre. The population is composed of a mix of ethnicities including Chewa, Yao, Lomwe and other smaller populations. The majority of the population is Christian and a minority follow Islam or traditional religions. The area is characterised by its matrilineal inheritance system. This means that land is passed from mother to daughter and, after marriage, newly-wed husbands move in to their wife’s family compound. The district is considered to be one of the poorest districts in Malawi. One proxy indicator - household access to electricity – stands at just 1.7 per cent and is much lower than the national average of 8.7 per cent (NSO, 2011: 281). Female levels of education are relatively low. Just 5.3 per cent of women have completed primary school, while the median amount of years of formal education completed is 2.4 (NSO, 2011: 273). In addition, nearly a third of women are unable to read at all (NSO, 2011: 286). High poverty rates along with high levels of food insecurity have been compounded by the current drought ravaging large parts of the region. This is particularly harmful as the vast majority of residents are farmers of either subsistence crops or cash crops. Common subsistence crops include maize, cassava, tomatoes and pumpkins, while the primary cash crop is tobacco. Due to their heavily reliance on good harvests to ensure sufficient food provisions for the year, the impact on the local population of the El Niño phenomenon, exacerbated by global climate change, has been drastic and a national state of emergency has been declared to assist those in need of supplementary foodstuffs.

GBV in Chiradzulu

Chiradzulu gained national notoriety in the early part of this century following reports of gangs organising particularly gruesome attacks on women fetching water or firewood (Interview with members of CAVWOC). Traditional healers or ‘witch doctors’ were blamed for inciting these attacks by prophesying that possession of a woman’s breast or eyes would bring the owner wealth and happiness. A number of perpetrators were arrested and imprisoned and, since these attacks, a number of initiatives to address gender-based violence have been instigated. Interestingly, the statistics around GBV vary considerably across different studies. For example, in the 2013 collaborative baseline report between the Malawi National Statistics Office (NSO), the UNFPA and UN Women (NSO, 2013) the proportion of psycho-social and physical violence cases in Chiradzulu are high relative to the
corresponding national averages. Respondents’ answers on issues such as beatings, trafficking, property grabbing and dictation of one’s conduct in public were over double the national averages, while cases of sexual harassment, death threats and threatening with weapons were also above the national average (NSO, 2013). Yet, in the MDHS of 2010, many indicators were below the national averages. Only 3.5 per cent of women and 7.3 per cent of men agreed that in some cases, examples given included burning food, arguing and neglecting the children, a husband was entitled to beat his wife, with these responses much lower than the national average of 12.6 per cent of women and 12.9 per cent of men (NSO, 2011: 393-4). Similarly, 17.6 per cent of women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, of which 6.6 per cent in the last 12 months, whereas the national average is 28.2 per cent and 14.2 per cent (NSO, 2011: 395). Regarding domestic violence, 22.3 per cent of women have experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their partner or husband. Again, this is well below the national average of 39.9 per cent (NSO, 2013: 399). This discrepancy may be due to methodological differences, or perhaps due to the selection of only some Districts for the 2013 baseline report.

4.2.2 Rumphi

Located in the North of the country, Rumphi is situated between Lake Malawi in the East and Zambia in the West. As well as bordering Zambia, one of the country’s primary trade routes passes through Rumphi. This links the rest of the country to Tanzania, and especially the Tanzanian port of Dar Es Salaam through which a significant portion of Malawi’s international trade flows. The largest ethnic population is Tumbuka, but there are significant numbers of Chewa and other smaller ethnic groups. In contrast to other areas of Malawi, especially in the Southern and Central regions of the country, Rumphi has an inheritance system which is traditionally patrilineal. This results in very low levels of female control and ownership of land. Yet, female education levels are higher than in other areas, with 8.6 per cent completing primary and 4.8 per cent completing secondary school, while the median number of years spent in formal education stands at 7.3 years, above the national average of 4.9 years (NSO, 2011: 273). Also noteworthy is that unlike many other districts, the median years of formal education for women mirrors the male figure, and Rumphi is the only district where female illiteracy rates are lower than men - 12.2 per cent versus 14.1 per cent respectively (NSO, 2011: 286-7). Despite having a relatively high level of household access to electricity in comparison with other primarily rural districts, Rumphi has recently suffered from erratic rainfall and weather patterns affecting communities’ living standards and food security. Even before this year’s drought, Rumphi was badly affected by extensive flooding in 2014.

GBV in Rumphi

Although the NSO’s baseline report does not include the district of Rumphi in its study, the figures from the 2010 MDHS (NSO, 2011) indicate that GBV is relatively high compared to Chiradzulu, as well as to the national average. For instance, 23.8 per cent of women and 16.9
per cent of men agree that a husband is entitled to beat his wife in certain cases. Examples given include burning food, arguing and neglecting the children. These figures are higher than the national average of 12.6 per cent for women and 12.9 per cent for men (NSO, 2011: 393-4). The number of women who have experienced physical and sexual violence also lies above the national average, with 35.3 per cent of women having experienced physical violence since the age of 15, of which 25.3 per cent in the last 12 months (NSO, 2011: 395) and 29.8 per cent having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime (NSO, 2011: 396). With specific reference to DV or IPV, 43.6 per cent of women have experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their partner/husband (NSO, 2011: 399) and nearly three-quarters of husbands display at least one of the controlling behaviours specified, including limiting contact with family or female friends, not trusting one’s wife with money, and frequently accusing her of infidelity, in comparison with the equivalent figure of less than half in Chiradzulu (NSO, 2011: 398).
4.3 The household and community context: Factors contributing to GBV in Chiradzulu and Rumphi districts

This section draws on field research to present the findings on the principal factors contributing to GBV in the four research sites in Chiradzulu and Rumphi districts. The findings, presented in terms of household and community norms, practices and institutions, resonate strongly with causal factors located in the broader literature as presented heretofore in Section 3.

4.3.1 Household norms, practices and institutions

Most of the [incidents of] gender-based violence are in households, within marriages. Culturally, women are advised, women are counselled when they go into marriage that they should endure in marriage. So marriage is endurance. When you are in marriage there will be problems. Keep everything within the four walls.

(Interview representative of international agency, female)

While DV or IPV is commonly ascribed to ‘culture’, it is important to remember that culture does not exist in a vacuum. It is the product of human agency, whereby certain norms, values, practices, and behaviours are deemed acceptable – respectable even – and others are not. These same norms, values, practices, and behaviours can reinforce and reproduce what is acceptable while stifling alternatives. But also, as culture is neither static nor immutable, it is also important to remember that they can also be challenged and transformed. In this and in the following sub-section we therefore attempt to go beyond the commonly ascribed monolithic ‘cultural factors’ attributed to GBV to investigate some of the underlying forces which reinforce and reproduce and/or challenge and transform these.

Male dominance and control

There is unanimity across all research sites and interviewee categories that men are seen as the heads of households. In this role they are seen as constantly needing to enforce their dominance and control. As evidenced in Section 4.3.2 below (see Table 4.3.2b in particular), this is strongly reflected in the rigid role ascribed to men as breadwinners and primary decision-makers within the family.

Research participants (randomly selected individual interviewees, local leaders and FG participants) were asked under what conditions (if at all) is it acceptable to hit or shout at one’s wife. FG participants noted that the situations were similar with shouting preceding beatings. The combined findings are set out in Table 4.3.1 below.
Table 4.3.1: Situations in which it is deemed acceptable to hit or shout at one’s wife

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Individual interviewees (public)</th>
<th>FG participants</th>
<th>Individual interviewees (local leaders)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>11 (7M / 4F)</td>
<td>FGE; FGF; FGG; FGH</td>
<td>15 (12M / 3F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When wife disobedient / insubordinate</td>
<td>11 (6M / 5F)</td>
<td>FGA; FGB; FGC; FG</td>
<td>9 (6M / 3F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When food not prepared</td>
<td>5 (2M / 3F)</td>
<td>FGA; FGC</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When sex is refused</td>
<td>4 (3M / 1F)</td>
<td>FGA</td>
<td>1 (1F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When wife is unfaithful</td>
<td>3 (2M / 1F)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When husband unhappy</td>
<td>2 (2F)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When wife comes home late</td>
<td>2 (2M)</td>
<td>FGC</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When wife squandering household money</td>
<td></td>
<td>FGA, FGC, FGG</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When husband is drunk</td>
<td></td>
<td>FGB; FGH</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When wife not working hard enough</td>
<td></td>
<td>FGC</td>
<td>4 (2M / 2F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings show that there are mixed views across all respondent categories on whether this is acceptable or not. 15 of the 36 local leaders responded that it is never acceptable, while 14 felt that in some cases it is warranted. The remaining 7 were not asked this question as interviews focused more on the programme itself. FG participants were somewhat equally divided although, as discussion ensued, a number cited incidences where it is warranted despite initially having initially noted it is not. More randomly selected community members felt that it is warranted and acceptable in certain incidences than those that did not. As the findings in Table 4.3.1 demonstrate, the most popular reason for hitting one’s wife is perceived disobedience, insubordination and/or lack of respect. This clearly demonstrates male dominance within households and the perceived need to maintain control when wives are seen to be not fulfilling their prescribed duties or acting in an ‘acceptable’ manner. Some excerpts from FG discussions illustrate some of these incidences.

*The husband can hit his wife when the wife is insubordinate or is unruly. For example if the husband asks the wife ‘can you go collect the water for me?’ And the wife says ‘no you have legs, why don’t you go get it yourself?’.*

(Focus group A, male participant)

*It’s the frequency of the misunderstandings which causes the husband to hit the wife. Maybe today you haven’t washed his clothes. Tomorrow you haven’t washed his*
clothes. So the repetition of the disobedience, that is what makes the husband hit his wife.

(Focus group B, female participant)

Male participant: The other situation is the man asking for his conjugal rights, wanting sex, and the wife saying no. Maybe they have had sex once already, but the husband wants to do it two or three or four times a day, so the wife is refusing, and the husband gets furious and starts beating the wife.

Researcher: And would everyone agree with that?

Male participants: Yes

Female participants: [eyes down, don’t respond…]

(Focus group B, multiple participants)

Two reasons for this level of male dominance and control are apparent. The first is ascribed to culture (see also 4.3.2 below). The second appears to be rooted in the institution of marriage and the dowries which are paid by husbands to their wives’ families at the time of marriage. This practice, institutionalised in the Northern region in particular, commodifies women and renders them the property of their husbands in the same was as a piece of livestock, machinery or some other asset. A number of interviewees explain how this works.

We believe that we own a woman, sort of. So I am coming from the north. We believe that a woman should sort of be a property so you can actually do whatever you want with her. So you can slap. It is only now I think that people are talking about gender-based violence. But again, even the women they are not empowered enough. They are not empowered economically. So whatever your husband does to you, they think that ‘this is okay, I don’t have any problems, it is fine’.

(Interview, national NGO representative, male – emphasis added)

According to our culture, when a man marries a wife, the man pays a lot of money for the dowry. So he says ‘no, I’ve paid a lot of money for the bride-price, so you are my workman, you are my labourer.’

(Focus group D, male participant)

The term that we use here for that particular woman who leaves her society and goes and joins her husband’s people, we actually call that woman - she is ‘ntengwa’, literally meaning that she is somebody that has been taken… So you can already see the power issues in the language that we speak.

(Local AA staff member, Site B, male)

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19 In relation to this particular point, it is worth reiterating the point made in Section 4.1.2 above that communities are receiving mixed messages from national and international agencies in relation to what are here termed ‘conjugal rights’. Thus, national and international discourse on what (and what does not) constitute GBV remains ambiguous as do constructions of masculinity/ies and femininity/ies.

20 Although, as noted above (footnote 19), national and international discourses on ‘wifely duties’ also appear at times to reproduce traditional, damaging norms.
In the Southern region, dowries are not so commonly used. One interviewee notes that this can carry its own problems as, in his view, this leaves women the leeway to harass their husbands and not give them the respect which they feel they are due. The result can be wife desertion.

*Here in the Southern region, there is a culture where you take a woman free. [You do] not pay anything. So that woman has a mandate to harass a man. Then he has to go... so the day after the man will take some clothes and off he goes from the house.*

(Interview local police officer, Site C, male)

A further reason for men’s domination, as noted by one interviewee, highlights a broader challenge to those working in the field of gender rights. He notes that democracy, and women’s empowerment in particular, has increased the need for control over women as traditional boundaries are increasingly tested and stretched.

*This [domestic violence] happens because these days there is democracy. So, in democratic living, ladies are free to do anything. So you [husband] are there to control them, or to tell them that ‘don’t do this. Once you do this you will be misled and you can quarrel with your husband or your wife.’.*

(Interview, primary school teacher, Site B, male)

**Poverty and education**

While interviewees – notably local leaders and national and international agency representatives – do ascribe economic and educational factors to GBV, these factors do not strongly appear in findings from FG discussions or random community member interviews. It is clear however that economic hardship in households can certainly act as a stressor, pushing men to exert their dominance in forceful and often violent ways as their masculine breadwinner role is challenged.

### 4.3.2 Community norms, practices and institutions

**Roles and responsibilities: Masculinities and femininities**

As we have already noted above, the research sites are characterised by very rigidly defined gendered roles and responsibilities. These were explored in two ways with interviewees. Firstly, FG participants who had not participated in the programme\(^\text{21}\) were asked, in small working groups, to compile timelines of their daily activities. Table 4.3.2a below sets out the findings.

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\(^{21}\) Due to time constraints, it was not possible to conduct this exercise with FGs of programme participants also as these were asked to evaluate the programme’s activities during this time.
**Table 4.3.2a: Focus group timelines – Daily activities of women and men**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Focus Group A</th>
<th>Focus Group D</th>
<th>Focus Group F</th>
<th>Focus Group H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Clean house</td>
<td>Wash and breakfast</td>
<td>Clean house and surrounds</td>
<td>Clean house and surrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set fire</td>
<td>Escort children to school</td>
<td>Wash dishes</td>
<td>Draw water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare water for husband to wash</td>
<td>Feed livestock</td>
<td>Draw water and cook food</td>
<td>Wash dishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clean dishes</td>
<td>Chat to wife</td>
<td>Wash children</td>
<td>Sweep the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare breakfast and children for school</td>
<td>Go to work</td>
<td>Prepare breakfast for family</td>
<td>Wash clothes for husband &amp; children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>Mill maize</td>
<td>Farm work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search for relish (sauce)</td>
<td>Fetch relish for lunch</td>
<td>Fixing up house</td>
<td>Fetch relish &amp; firewood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare lunch</td>
<td>Prepare lunch</td>
<td>Lunch and relax</td>
<td>Prepare lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>Wash children and send to school</td>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>Wash dishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wash clothes</td>
<td>Play bao, football etc</td>
<td>Fetch water for husband</td>
<td>Farm work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clean house</td>
<td>Clean house</td>
<td>Shed constructn</td>
<td>Bath children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mill maize</td>
<td>Prepare supper</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make the bed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chat with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macheza – conjugal rights with husband</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Wash</td>
<td>Discussio n with children</td>
<td>Clean up after supper</td>
<td>Wash and eat nsima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Macheza</td>
<td>Macheza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In discussion following the exercise, the differential in workloads between women and men were apparent to all. These were attributed to differences in roles between men and women which, in turn, when probed, were attributed to culture. When asked where this culture comes from or how it is determined, FG participants variously described it as ‘handed down by our ancestors’ or simply ‘God’s will’.

This view is reinforced by and sometimes reproduced in interviews with other actors. For example, the Ministry of Gender representative, in responding to a question on why gender inequality exists in Malawi, notes that “…the very obvious factors are the beliefs, the cultural beliefs. That women are supposed to be in the home and [that] the men are and should be the overall breadwinners and should be working [externally]”. A representative from an international agency explains this in further detail.

It is just the culture, you know? The woman’s place is in the kitchen. The woman’s job is to raise children and [to] give birth to children, and all the decisions of whether children go to school are left with the men... In all decision-making positions. Only in household chores does the woman have a say. Because even how many children to have or when to have children is a decision by the man.

(Interview representative of international agency representative, female)

A second way these traditional roles and identities were explored was by asking research participants to outline the characteristics of an ‘ideal’ man or woman. The findings from this exercise are set out in Tables 4.3.2b and 4.3.2c below.
Table 4.3.2b: Characteristics of ideal men and women identified by individual interviewees (random community and local leaders)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of an ideal man</th>
<th>No. of respondents (comm.)</th>
<th>No. of respondents (leaders)</th>
<th>Characteristics of an ideal woman</th>
<th>No. of respondents (comm.)</th>
<th>No. of respondents (leaders)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financially supports the family</td>
<td>29 (15M / 14F)</td>
<td>25 (18M / 7F)</td>
<td>Looks after the family and children</td>
<td>14 (5M / 9F)</td>
<td>18 (11M / 7F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends the children to school</td>
<td>4 (4M)</td>
<td>4 (4M)</td>
<td>Is respectful / obedient / faithful to husband</td>
<td>10 (6M / 4F)</td>
<td>5 (4M / 1F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settles disputes in the family</td>
<td>2 (2F)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Works (farm or business) to earn additional cash for family</td>
<td>9 (7M / 2F)</td>
<td>8 (5M / 3F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is God fearing / prayerful</td>
<td>2 (2M)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Keeps the house clean</td>
<td>8 (4M / 4F)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is presentable / respectable</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (1M)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A remarkable consistency is apparent across the findings with men’s identities largely associated with the ability to financially support their families through work outside, while women are largely associated with the domestic sphere, looking after their husband and children.

The findings from FGs largely mirror these findings also. These are set out in Table 4.3.2c below.

Table 4.3.2c: Characteristics of ideal men and women identified by FG participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Characteristics of an ideal man</th>
<th>Characteristics of an ideal woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FG A - Mixed M/F - Non-programme participants</td>
<td>Fertility/ability to produce children Ability to marry Financial support to household Faithful to wife</td>
<td>Fertility/ability to produce children Obedience/faithfulness/submissive to husband Sexual gratification of husband Assist husband in business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG B - Female - Programme participants</td>
<td>Financial support to household Love for his family Faithful to wife Allow wife to do business Keep family matters private Allow his wife to go to church Go to church Pay school fees</td>
<td>Obedience and submissive to husband Faithful to husband Keep family matters private, including cases of domestic violence Financial support to family / have a business Keep house clean Keep children clean and in school Go to church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG C - Male</td>
<td>Financial support to family Decision making in family – on family</td>
<td>Faithful to husband Respect husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG D</td>
<td>Mixed M/F</td>
<td>Programme participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>planning, sending children to school…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Faithful to his wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finds time to chat to wife/good communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Churchgoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dress respectfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not squander family resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to communicate with husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keep family matters private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual gratification of husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support family, send children to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have a business and/or VSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hard working supporting husband on farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attentive to husband and his needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good at sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support family, send children to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have a business and/or VSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hard working supporting husband on farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attentive to husband and his needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good at sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG E</th>
<th>Mixed M/F</th>
<th>Programme participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hardworking, supporting family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pay school fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to build a bath or toilet etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fertile/ability to produce children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support family, send children to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have a business and/or VSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hard working supporting husband on farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attentive to husband and his needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good at sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG F</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Programme participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial support to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not squander tobacco money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build toilet and ensure hygiene around home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure children can go to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not beat his wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allow wife to do small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support family, self-reliant with own business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assist husband on farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take care of family and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wash clothes properly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure accountability and transparency in family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be able to get assistance from forums, committees or chiefs if she is victimised in the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draws water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeps a clean house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeps children clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooks for husband and children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG G</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Programme participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support to the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows love and care for family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensures food in the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does not hit his wife or children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The father is the head of the family”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows love and respect for husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Takes care of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A hard worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A good cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Know the right time to be at home – before 8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“There is no way whereby the woman should show cruelty to the husband, because the husband is the most superior of the family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“a woman is an auxiliary, subordinate to the husband.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG H</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Programme participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Should be married to a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial support to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good farmer and worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Able to build a house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fertile – can bear lots of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looks after husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual gratification of husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looks after children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respectful of husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very quiet, does not talk too much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the overwhelming characteristic attributed to men across all FGs, is to provide financial support to the family by working hard. Some groups add that he needs to be able to build a good quality dwelling for his family while FG B also notes that he should keep family matters private. The domestic sphere of family and household again appears strongly in characterisations of the ‘ideal’ woman. Reinforcing the earlier point about male dominance in the household, there is also considerable emphasis placed submissiveness and obedience to husbands as well as, for some groups, sexual gratification. Interestingly, the point about
privacy in relation to family matters also appears in relation to women’s roles, even among programme participants.

What stands out perhaps most prominently from this overview however is the almost absolute rigidity and hierarchy of roles and identities, despite the view within two groups that an ideal man should not beat his wife. These findings thus appear to suggest that, while a message of the unacceptability of DV has filtered through, little change is taking place in relation to a deconstruction and shifting of hierarchically gendered identities. Some excerpts from some of the FG discussions illustrate these points in more detail.

*A real man should be hard-working and visionary. He has to have vision about how he can support the family. For example if there is hunger he has to find some way to feed the children.*

(Focus group B, female participant)

*The wife, the perfect woman should be very obedient, even submissive to the husband. She should not even dare to deny him conjugal rights [sex] even if she is doing something, if she is cooking, if the husband says no come let’s have sex, she has to do that. So she has to do that.*

Researcher: *Even if the food burns?!*

*Yes!*

(Focus group B, female participant)

‘A woman’s issue’: *Responsibilising women, but where are the men?*

What also stands out from these characteristics identified by research participants is the responsibility of women (in addition to their traditional domestic roles) to ‘assist’ their husbands in financial support for the family through their own businesses and/or their involvement in VSLs. This reduction in the pressures on the family finances is widely seen as contributing to a reduction in GBV. In this context, it is important to emphasise that, while this may well smooth stresses and tensions within the household for a period (although, in contrast – as we have seen in Section 3.1.2 – it can also exacerbate them), it does not address the principal causes of GBV. Moreover, echoing earlier interventions on GBV, it places the responsibility and burden squarely on women, adding to their workload and implicitly suggesting that the ‘blame’ and solutions for GBV must come from women alone. This appears to be, to some degree, the rationale behind the popular VSL scheme for example.

Overall, the findings presented in this section demonstrate that principal factors contributing to GBV in the four research sites under investigation are the fixed identities, roles and responsibilities of women and men which embed and reinforce male dominance and control, thus laying the foundations for GBV when tensions run high and stresses escalate. The remaining sections examine the effectiveness and potential of AA’s programme in engaging women and men in this regard
4.4 ActionAid’s programme: Methodology and strategies employed

ActionAid’s Women’s Rights programme is active in four countries: Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, and Vietnam and is funded by Irish Aid’s Programme Partners Grant Scheme. Each country has developed its own specific objectives, strategies and activities in response to the local context, although naturally many of these are shared across the programme and are adapted to each particular context. The Women’s Rights programme in Malawi is called UWAMA, an acronym of ‘Ufulu wa Amayi’, the chiChewa translation of women’s rights. It began in 2011, based on the lessons learned from the previous Social Empowerment on Rights of Vulnerable and Excluded Women [SERVE] and Bridge projects, and will run until the end of 2016.

4.4.1 Programme aims and objectives

AAMalawi’s programme goal is that “Women in target areas can break the cycle of poverty and violence, build economic alternatives and claim control over their bodies”, while the high-level objective states “Women and girls in target areas are claiming their social, economic and political rights, have increased access to economic opportunities and have increased access to public services”, (ActionAid, 2014c). To implement this goal and high-level objective, AAMalawi and its local partners have decided to focus on the following two primary strategic objectives:

- To mobilise women and girls in target areas to challenge and reject gender-based violence in a supportive environment;
- To support women to have greater access to resources, more control over their income and more time to engage in commercial activities

Regarding the first primary objective, which is shared across all four countries running the Women’s Rights programme, AAMalawi and its partners have instigated a number of activities to eradicate GBV from their communities. In many cases the two primary strategic objectives have been pursued concurrently and the various activities and strategies used to achieve these objectives are outlined below.

4.4.2 Programme methodology

Reflection-Action Circles have been the locus for many of the changes advocated by the programme in Malawi. Previously, AAMalawi used a number of methodologies or approaches, ranging from STAR approaches to tackle HIV/AIDS, Participatory Vulnerability Analysis to look at climate change and food security and REFLECT to analyse broader development questions (ActionAid, 2014b). However, AAMalawi recently moved to
consolidate all of these participatory instruments into one approach called Reflection-Action, which is put into practice in the programme’s Reflection-Action Circles.

**Reflection-Action Circles**

One of the principal means of communicating women’s rights and their relevance to community members’ lives is the Reflection Action Circle. In this forum, circle facilitators and community-based educators (CBEs) teach people their rights, including national and international legal instruments, and solutions to the infringements of rights experienced by participants are discussed and evaluated as a group. The circles consist of three main components; literacy, numeracy and open discussion. In some areas, due to the low literacy levels of rural inhabitants, particularly women, it was deemed necessary to include a literacy component to ensure that women were given the opportunity to learn to read and write. To enable women to engage in small-scale business ventures and to better manage household budgets, it was decided that in many areas a portion of the circle time would be dedicated to numeracy skills.

The third component is called ‘macheza’ in chiChewa. This is roughly translated as discussion or chat. This portion of the circle comprises awareness-raising of the current national and international legal protections of women’s rights; the services available for victims of gender-based violence; and some preparation and acting out of plays representing real life situations to participants viewers of the harmful effects of GBV. It also provides a forum for community members to express themselves, whether it is about certain situations or experiences where women’s rights were infringed or to find solutions together on how women’s rights issues can be solved. A trained circle facilitator or CBE organises and plans the meeting, while a reflection action committee, made up of the circle facilitators, some community members and some members of the’ Real Men’ group, oversee the work of the Reflection Action Circles. This problem-solving aspect of this component is outlined by one of the programme’s staff.

> At Macheza what they do is they sit down as people of the community, discuss the problems that they have in the community, then finding ways on how we can get away from those problems, so to eradicate them, then they find ways of doing that. So at the end of the month they need to evaluate all the problems that they found maybe in that particular month, in that particular year. What have we done? Is there any problem that is still progressing. Now what should we do? Can this problem be solved at a local level? If it is [possible] at a local level they will do it. If not, if it is at a regional level whereby they need the council, maybe they need the other stakeholders to handle it...

(Interview local AA staff member, male)

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22 For each Reflection Action circle there is generally one male and one female facilitator.
**Model Village**

Due to resource restrictions, the programme is active in certain villages called ‘model villages’ with the expectation that the model they provide in terms of a reduction in GBV and positive gender relations will encourage neighbouring villages to follow their example. Model villages typically run many of the programme’s components concurrently, including the Reflection Action Circle and committee, the GBV committee, a Village Savings and Loans scheme and a ‘Real Men’ group.

**‘Real Men’ - AmunaMuna**

Men have been included in the programme in Chiradzulu since 2013 and, following a programme mid-term review in 2014 which found a strong preference among men and women in the community for including men more broadly in the programme, groups of ‘Real Men’ or in chiChewa AmunaMuna were established in all programme areas in Malawi. A number of strategies have been employed to involve these and both male perpetrators of violence and more influential men within communities are reported to have been strategically targeted in this regard (interview, WR programme manager).

In Site B, male participants noted that they had organised a football match to disseminate information on women’s rights (FG B, male participant) and other interviewees mentioned outreach at other sports events and tournaments of bao, a traditional game, where large numbers of men congregate (Interview member of women’s forum, Site B, female). Furthermore, the success of door-to-door awareness campaigns is also highlighted, as one facilitator claimed it was the most successful method to involve men, “because he saw a good number of men joined the circle after the door-to-door”, in comparison with other approaches (Interview Reflection Circle facilitator, Site B, male). Finally, in Site A, interviewees mentioned a communal garden established by programme participants which attracts men by providing them with extra resources and gives male programme participants a space to encourage other men to join the programme and teach them about women’s rights (Interview community support victims unit member, Site A, male).

Members of the ‘Real Men’ component of the programme take part in the Reflection-Action Circles and are reported to act as role models for other men within their communities by advocating women’s rights and the importance of gender equality in the home and in society. In some cases, these men were previously engaged in domestic violence incidents, but through their engagement in the UWAMAMA programme, they are reported to have now stopped these harmful practices and now advocate against violence in the home. ActionAid (2014b) reports that 2,018 (600 men and 1,418 women) were involved in Reflection Circle groups in 2014.
Village Savings & Loans

The Village Savings & Loans (VSL) facility is a central component of the strategic objective to increase women’s economic empowerment as a means of ensuring their rights are respected and that GBV is reduced. In almost all model villages, a VSL group is in place to encourage women to save their money, provide seed funding for small businesses and assist them to manage money more effectively. Many of these groups are run by committees of local women and members have also been taught business management skills to assist them in developing businesses. Many have also received assistance from programme staff in accessing markets and negotiating fair prices for their products.

Gender-Based Violence Committees

A gender-based violence committee is active in every model village to monitor and deal with cases of GBV in the village. The committee is usually made up of the Reflection Circle facilitators, some community members, including prominent figures such as the local village chief, and some members of the Real Men group. As well as referring suspected cases of GBV to the relevant authorities, the committee supports efforts to disseminate information on women’s rights in order to prevent cases of domestic violence through door-to-door campaigns, as well as through theatrical performances, dances, songs and speeches at large community meetings or gatherings.

Partnerships [Chiefs, Police, Health Workers, Teachers.]

The UWAMA programme has also engaged with many key stakeholders in efforts to eradicate GBV. These include paralegals, magistrates, police officers, health workers and Chiefs at various levels. Activities in this regard include printing leaflets, conducting training sessions; and holding meetings to inform stakeholders of the legal documents related to GBV, standard operating procedures for GBV cases, and to ensure co-ordination among stakeholders to avoid overlap of service provision. In addition, the programme has assisted the Community Victim Support Units recently established by the MGCDSW in developing standard operating procedures for GBV cases. Other partners include Chiefs from village level to T/A level, who have been involved in trainings and meetings with women from their community and other stakeholders to ensure their support for women’s rights. In some cases they have been encouraged to pass by-laws to ensure women enjoy their full rights. In schools, teachers have been trained to hold sensitisation meetings with students and staff on women and girls’ rights and suggestion boxes have been made to allow students to report any abuse.
Women’s Forum

Much of the programme has revolved around the successful formation of Women’s Fora at district level. Following the successful establishment of the national Council of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) and the national Council of Women Farmers (COWFA), both of which were established to advocate on specific issues as their names suggest, a Women’s Forum was set up in each district by ActionAid to bring together these groups and attract new participants so that a wide range of issues affecting women could be addressed and fought for by one united group. The Women’s Forum in each district works in tandem with AAMalawi and its local partners, but they have also been encouraged to develop their own initiatives and to seek alternative sources of funding to ensure that the gains made by the programme are continued after its completion. Among other things, Women’s Fora have encouraged women to take up decision-making positions in the community, and a number of their members have become Village Chiefs. Finally, Women’s Fora provide moral and financial support to women who wish to report their cases to the police and to bring their abusers to court.
4.5 Successes in ActionAid’s community based approach

You need a process that will allow them [community members] to internalise a concept. Why am I saying that? It is because it’s like politics. People have their own ideologies, [they] have their own values. So the moment you say ‘women’s’, they say ‘Ah, is it about gender? Is it about all these women the elites, the pampered women who you want to bring into our community?’. So automatically they will trash the topic. But if we have a process that will make them think through, understand why, how... so there are a couple of strategies. We have the women’s forum members, circle members engaging men, talking to them, having one-to-one, bringing them into the circle. That is what I’ve seen to be effective - unlike when you just talk to the audience that you haven’t thought about.... It is a way of trying to make people to have a conversation around the topic.

(Interview ActionAid WR Programme Coordinator)

We begin this section with a reminder from the WR programme manager of the substantive aim of programme which is to challenge and transform dominant norms, ideologies and practices through ongoing conversation and interaction with women and men across different communities. The programme has had a number of successes in this regard. It is also facing a number of challenges. These are discussed in this and the following section. We begin with an analysis of the most useful activities and outcomes as outlined in an exercise with FG members engaged in the programme.

Focus group participants who have taken part in Action Aid’s programme (Focus groups B, C, E and G) were asked to discuss and identify the most useful activities and outcomes of the programme to them. The results of this exercise for each group is set out in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5: The most useful activities and outcomes of ActionAid’s programme identified by FG participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity / outcome</th>
<th>FGB</th>
<th>FGC</th>
<th>FGE</th>
<th>FGG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of GBV</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village savings and loans activity (VSL)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy for women</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of child rapes within families</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of WR</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for orphans (training in caregiving)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for HIV testing and counselling</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced overall crime rate (Real Men as local police…)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the findings in Table 4.5 demonstrate, the two most commonly cited outcomes/activities are a reduction in GBV and the VSL facility provided by the programme. Focus groups E and G in Rumphi cite the provision of literacy classes for women as part of the Reflection Action Circles as extremely useful also. These, together with other key successes as revealed in wider interviews with programme participants and staff are discussed in further detail below.

4.5.1 Reduction in GBV

The most common response when asked to identify the most useful activities and impacts of the programme is its role in reducing or in some cases eradicating gender-based violence. As this quotation demonstrates, the reduction in GBV cases due to the programme is seen as a crucial advancement, “It was very important because as I have been living here, there has been so much of that kind, to say there was a lot of violence that was happening to women but nothing was done. But since that [programme] workshop, people started teaching each other, ok that this violence, yes I see a lot of men stopping beating their wives. And I see other people now taking their wives as wives [getting married]” (Interview primary teacher, Site A, male). GBV reduction is in many ways connected to the teachings of women’s rights and many of the strategies used to disseminate information on Women’s Rights is equally used to teach people how to avoid conflict in the family and to find solutions in cases of GBV occurring.

Three principal inter-related factors appear to be contributing to this reduction in GBV. The first is the reported improved communication within households following the programme’s intervention. As one interviewee notes, the Reflection Circles facilitate communication on otherwise taboo subjects at home, “Through the play circles [Reflection Circles], there was a lot being said. And even other women were able to provide evidence, to say ‘I was the one who is heavily beaten by my husband, but now through the programme I have realised a change. Because from here when I went home. I sat down with my husband and said ‘this is what is being said there’. (Interview Reflection Circle facilitator, Site C, female). This example shows how the programme is giving women the confidence to sit down with their husbands to discuss and develop positive ways of communicating when they disagree with each other.

The second factor is the involvement of men in the programme. Through men’s engagement in the programme, both in the Reflection Action Circles and the work of the ‘Real Men’, some male community members, including some of the most serious abusers, are reported to have changed their negative and harmful behaviour. This is widely appreciated and has led to a significant decrease in GBV cases: “by involving men we have seen that the rate of gender-based violence here has been reduced,” (Interview Reflection Circle facilitator, Site C, female). Indeed, the success of the programme is reported to be attracting ever more men to its activities, whether through the discussions with their wives or, in the following case, out of a desire to keep up with the progress made by their wives.
For example, if the woman joined adult literacy classes, at first both within the couple were illiterate. But through the advantage which this woman will start showing - that she is now able to write, now the man has also to admire and say that ‘if you are able to write and read, let me also go and join the class so at the end we will be on the same level.’  

(FG G, Male Participant)

The third factor is the reduced poverty within some households participating in the VSL scheme – this is discussed in Section 4.5.2 below.

As a result of this reported reduction in GBV, many interviewees mention the programme’s impact in bringing peace to their families, “Eradication of GBV is the most useful activity because now there is peace within the families” (FG D, female participant). As we saw above with women’s rights, the reduction in GBV rates and the establishment of better communication within families is reported as having resulted in families being able to develop, because “where there is violence, there is also poor development” (FG D, male participant). The interrelated and mutually causal nature of learning about and respecting women’s rights, reduction in GBV, literacy classes and reduced household poverty was frequently cited by research participants (for example Interview village chief, Site C, male). That these four factors are recognised as intertwined and that they can only be achieved in tandem with one other can be seen as a success on the part of the programme in promoting a full range of women’s rights, together with the indivisibility of these rights. The wide range of physical, sexual and psycho-social violence acts that constitute GBV appear to have been successfully transmitted by the programme.

Finally, the fear of being prosecuted or publicly shamed demonstrates the social change brought about by the programme. One interviewee who admitted to previously beating his wife explains his behavioural change,

When actually my wife is angry, or I am angry, I don't even reach now to the extent of saying that 'I will beat you up' or whatever. Because sometimes I just feel like 'No. What if I go there and then they start shouting at me?'. Or I will go to a place where there is a group and they will say this guy is beating his wife...

(Interview primary teacher, Site C, male)

Here the threat of being brought before fellow community members and being condemned for engaging in domestic violence clearly impacts the attitude and behaviour of someone who in the past may have been tempted to deal with a domestic disagreement through violence.

In particular, the presence of the Women’s Forum and the ‘Real Men’ seems to playing a significant role in the decline in GBV cases in the Model Villages where the programme is active, “if you are a Real Man, you should not beat your wife. If you try to beat her, we have Women’s Forum, here we have Real Men. If they happened to hear that you are beating your wife you will be severely dealt with. Through that they have seen a tremendous change” (Interview Reflect Circle facilitator, Site D, female). Chiefs have also become more proactive in punishing perpetrators, with many introducing bye-laws and fining those found
guilty of hurting their wives, “If one happens to violate these rights, they will be called to the court of the local leaders and fined - to the local leader a chicken, and to the T/A a goat. And with that you find that the situation has really reduced” (Interview village chief, Site D, female). The array of local groups working together within the community to eradicate GBV is showing many signs of success, not least the testimonies from men and women who perpetrated or experienced GBV before the programme arrived and now report huge positive changes in their lives.

4.5.2 Village Savings and Loans

A second area of success has been the alleviation of household poverty through the programme’s VSL facility. Through this, many women note their changed status from dependence on their husband to a level of economic independence and an increased ability to support their families, “through the VSL they see now that the woman is able to support at the household level, by providing food, relish and the like” (Interview local AA staff, Site A, female). In many cases, the programme has been able to soften the strict gendered division of labour by encouraging women to engage in small enterprises and to have a say in household budgets to which they now contribute. Naturally, this has also necessitated the involvement of men, as they highlight the improved communication and transparency in the families.

They have money in the family. Instead of the husband saying ‘I’m going to have the full control over the money’, it’s not now the situation. The situation is now ‘here is the money, we have 70,000 Kwacha’. It is a roundtable discussion within the couple, ‘how are we going to use the money?’

(FG G, Male Participant)

Many women and men mentioned the improvements they have been able to make to their homes since the advent of the programme and due to the economic activity encouraged by the programme, as it was put in one FGD, “Through village savings and loans most of the families have now improved economically” (FG G, Male Participant). Improvements have included the purchase and installation of iron sheets for roofing, building houses, increasing herd sizes, buying necessities such as soap, food and clothes, and paying children’s school fees.

Not only has women raising income for the family resulted in lower levels of GBV, some interviewees propose that such improvements have encouraged husbands to permit their wife’s involvement in the Women’s Rights programme, as well as attracting some husbands into the programme,

Previously, they [husbands] were bombarded with activities [pressure] to support the family. But now they are seeing that ‘Oh, my wife is supporting me, that’s a good idea. Now I have to get be engaged in UWAMA activities’.

(Interview local AA staff member Site A, female – emphasis added)
4.5.3 Adult Literacy and numeracy

Adult literacy and numeracy feature prominently in the positive feedback from research participants in Sites C and D. Conversely, the topic does not surface in any of the discussions held in Sites A and B. This is most likely due to the higher education and literacy rates in Rumphi in comparison with Chiradzulu as previously outlined in Section 2.4. Due to the high levels of literacy in Rumphi, the Reflection Action Circles attended by this researcher did not include an explicit literacy and numeracy component in the manner of the Circles in Chiradzulu, thereby explaining the absence of adult education as an advantage identified by respondents in Sites A and B.

Yet, in Chiradzulu, adult education was frequently mentioned as a successful activity initiated by the programme and as stated above, was often linked to an increasing ability of women to run their own businesses. Not only that, but in some cases it has also brought in men and the older generation and has encouraged them to engage with the programme. As one local leader put it “women, even men, even older people themselves, before the project they could not read and write but after this project had been launched, this situation now is that they are able to read, they are able to write, they’re able to calculate for their small businesses”.

(Interview village chief, Site D, male) Aside from this economic aspect, education has brought a much wider range of benefits,

The same education will assist one to manage his or her family well, in terms of disease, how to break in terms of hunger, the one who is educated will be able to manage that easily. When women are educated they will be able to stand free during violence to the extent that they can divorce their spouses when violence reaches a climax.

(Interview village chief, Site C, female)

As this quotation demonstrates, men and women that are taught to read, write and count are enabled to progress in many different spheres, whether it is preventing or curing illness, helping to assuage the causes of malnutrition or giving women the confidence to live independently and leave their partners if they are suffering domestic violence. The programme’s success in bringing about these positive changes has been broadly welcomed by both women and men.

4.5.4 Reduction in child marriages and an increase in girls in education

A prominent theme that surfaced during the fieldwork was the importance of education and the negative impact of underage girls marrying. As one interviewee put it, “The Women’s Rights programme has encouraged girls not to have early marriages, and those that did by mistake were brought back to school” (Interview local chief, Site A, male). The programme is succeeding in disseminating the message that girls should be encouraged to follow their
education and should not be married off when they are still children. The positive impact of the programme through its teachings on current laws in Malawi and the rights of girls is clear from the many respondents who identified the ending of child marriage as a positive development.

In the case of ending child marriages, there is again a geographical difference between the research sites. The issue was mentioned repeatedly in Sites A and B in the Northern district of Rumphi, yet it was mentioned just once in Sites C and D in Chiradzulu. Although keeping children, especially girls, in school was mentioned in Chiradzulu, it was not associated with the practice of child marriage as it was in Rumphi. An example of this divergence in the views of the causes of school dropout among girls is provided in Site C, where the interviewee attributes this to poverty, “even if these girls were talking about a high rate of school drop out, this is happening because of poverty” (Interview group village headman, Site C, male). In contrast, the group discussion in Site B blames early marriages and lack of prospects for girls leaving school, “And for the girls now, previously they were meant just for marriage, but now they know that they have the right to education, and now most of the girls are going to school and are educated” (FG B, Female Participant). In another example from Site C, a teacher suggests that chiefs and groups of unemployed men and women from the village should go around to force parents to send their children to school. Again absenteeism in this instance is linked to poverty, parental ignorance, tradition, and girls’ obligations to carry out chores at home, with no mention of early marriage as a contributing factor (Interview primary teacher, Site C, male).

In some cases, the programme has had very tangible successes. For example, one facilitator remarks that “In this village seven girls were withdrawn from the marriages, due to the early marriages, but through their [UWAMA’s] activities and their encouragement, they withdrew those girls” (Interview Reflection Circle facilitator, Site B, male). Despite this progress, some barriers remain once the girls have been withdrawn from their marriages, “those girls have small babies and they are eager to go back to school. They say ‘No, we can go back to school and learn’. But the only hiccup is financial. So he [interviewee] is directly asking for maybe support in education, like in the form of a bursary or any form of support in education” (Ibid.). Such comments serve to remind implementers of the programme that teaching women’ rights will not immediately result in their realisation if material constraints also exist. They also demonstrate the need to consider the challenges that come with the successes achieved.

Overall therefore, it is clear that the programme has brought about a number of significant impacts within the communities in which it is embedded. As we will now see in the following section, challenges remain however – notably in relation to the broad, substantive aim of the programme in challenging and transforming dominant norms, ideologies and practices. These are discussed in the following section.
4.6 Challenges to ActionAid’s community based approach

Bearing in mind the lessons learned from research and evidence to date on GBV, together with the overall transformative aim of the programme, this section draws again from interview and focus group data to identify and analyse some of the principal challenges to the community-based approach as it is currently being implemented. As in the preceding section, we begin with an analysis of the challenges identified by FG participants.

Focus group participants who have taken part in Action Aid’s programme (Focus groups B, C, E and G) were asked to discuss and identify the least useful activities and outcomes of the programme to them. The results of this exercise for each group is set out in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: The least useful activities and outcomes of ActionAid’s programme identified by FG participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity / outcome</th>
<th>FGB</th>
<th>FGC</th>
<th>FGE</th>
<th>FGG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More resources required (too few facilitators, transport, torches, allowances)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village savings and loans activity (VSL)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non participation of men in the programme</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women accused of failing on domestic duties due to meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women not completing literacy programmes – due to husbands resistance and/or lack of allowance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to address property/land grabbing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance from other men to programme</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient resources for the community-based childcare centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals insufficient and dying on the Pass-On-Programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want irrigation project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings from this exercise reveal more variation than in the previous exercise which identified the most useful activities (see Table 4.5). The findings are particularly instructive in three respects. Firstly, echoing one of the challenges to community-based approaches within the wider literature, the key preoccupation is clearly resources and the need for more of these. This is reflected in requests for additional inputs in relation to particular aspects of the programme itself (allowances, transport, torches, gumboots etc...), and in relation to ancillary or other programmes in the area (childcare services, livestock projects, irrigation projects). It is also reflected in repeated calls to expand the scope of the project, to train more facilitators, to offer more refresher training, and to organise exchange visits. While resources are clearly always an issue, communities’ heavy preoccupation with these does raise questions in relation to motivations for both men and women’s involvement in the project. One female FG participation discusses this issue in relation to difficulties in engaging both women and men in programme activities...

The other challenge is the allowance syndrome, because they say no, you are the facilitator. You went to the Boma, to the district, to get an allowance, but now you are facilitating to us without [giving us] anything. So there is low attendance of the meetings [including men].

(Focus group B, Female participant)

Another - a ‘Real Men’ member – warns that the sustainability of the ‘Real Men’ component may be in jeopardy in the absence of for further resources.

We know for sure that the ‘Real Men’ are there for counselling but once the project goes they know for sure that... I think that the sustainability of the ‘Real Men’ is not all that effective. 
Researcher: And how could you make it that the ‘Real Men’ continue? 
There should be an office set aside within the area. So even though the project goes, the group, the committee should meet in that particular office and have their duties performed correctly... If the ‘Real Men’, we are given a certain uniform to identify them or to separate them from others, or writing materials so that when handling cases, there are times whereby other instances have to be recorded for future reference. It also happens that maybe when we are working during the night we may need some protective garments, gum[boots] and the like.

(FG G, Male participant - ‘Real Men’ member)

Second, the findings here temper a little some of the successes reported in the previous section in that issues of DV, controlling husbands, land grabbing and male resistance are cited. This is unsurprising however and should not take from the reported successes as social transformation takes time and change can only happen incrementally. It does however raise some questions in relation to some of the more substantive ambitions of the programme (see also Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.4 below). Moreover, while the constitution of ‘Real Men’ committees have been welcomed and their role in improving respect for women’s rights is
often lauded, yet there is a widespread feeling that more men need to be included for the programme to be effective. As a participant in FG B outlines…

*During the Reflect-Action, there is what we call a subject in the ‘let’s talk’ - maybe on communication. And people speak freely. But the problem is that there is no involvement of men. Not many men are attending that forum and that is really an issue.*

(FG B, Female Participant)

A number of reasons are offered to explain the low involvement of men. These include men’s initial exclusion from the programme; the stigma attached to men working with the Women’s Forum; and male “shyness” or fear of being belittled by their male peers.

The third interesting finding from the FG exercise is the mention of the VSL facility as one of the negative, as well as one of the positive outcomes of the programme. This is discussed in further detail in the following sub-section.

### 4.6.1 VSL

While, as we have seen in the previous sub-section, the VSL facilities are broadly highlighted as one of the key successes of the programme, they have also brought some problems. One is the problem associated with the non-repayment of loans in some instances. This is explained by a participant in one of the focus groups.

*On the least useful [aspects of the programme], VSL is coming in again because most of the members, not most of the members, not most - but some of the members of the VSL – are not paying back their loans. When they take the loan to use it, they are not paying back in time. With that issue, is making some people uninterested in the VSL groups, because some members are not paying back their loans.*

(Focus group B, Female participant)

In interviews and other FGs, research participants explain that this leads to unrest in both communities and within households, in some cases leading to escalating violence within households.

A second issue with the VSL scheme, and one that evidences the point made in Section 4.1.2 in relation to responsibilising women alone, is that it adds to the workload and burden on women who are expected to use their new revenue (or loan) in support of the family. While this can have an immediate positive effect – as outlined below by a local AA staff member, its more longterm implications are worth considering in terms of household dynamics and roles and responsibilities in relation to constructions of masculinities and femininities more broadly.
By doing VSL it happens that families, where previously the husband had a lot of pressure to support the family, through the VSL they see now that the woman is able to support at the household level, by providing food, relish and the like. So men have seen that ‘oh, this is a good idea’. Previously, they were bombarded with activities [pressure] to support the family. But now they are seeing that ‘oh, my wife is supporting me, that’s a good idea; now I have to get be engaged in UWAMA activities’.

(Interview Local AA staff member, Site A, female)

Through village savings and loans, on his part, in his family he has managed to purchase a television screen. At the same time the woman [his wife] is able to continue with her business. So to him village savings and loans has really improved his life together with his family.

(Interview healthcare worker, Site C, male)

4.6.2 Challenging gendered norms, ideologies and practices: ‘Real Men’ and ‘Real Women’

This latter point in relation to VSL schemes discussed above raises an important broader point – the effectiveness of the programme in challenging, deconstructing and opening the space for transforming dominant norms, ideologies and practices. The data presented in Section 4.3 demonstrates the highly fixed rigidity of gendered roles and norms at household and community levels. While the VSLs are reported to have, in places, succeeded in shifting norms around household budgetary control, the data provides little other evidence of traditional roles being challenged, much less transformed. In contrast, there is considerable evidence of a reinforcement of traditional roles and power relations in tandem with exhortations to reduce stresses and pressures on women. A few interview excerpts serve to illustrate this point.

What they [AA programme in training workshop] have explained is that women should not be harassed and women should not be overworking and women should not be shouted [at] anyhow, because they are the ones that take care of men.

(Interview, Primary School teacher, Site B, male)

At first some women were coming to these meetings, forums, without necessarily taking care of their families. In that situation maybe ladies were coming out of the house without preparing porridge for the father, children and the like. That did not work well.

Researcher: And so how could this be addressed?

It is just a matter of having a proper timetable. When the day starts this is what I am supposed to do. I will start from point A to point B.

(Focus group G, Male participant - ‘Real Men’ member)
The very woman I have is my first woman that I married, and we are struggling but we are still staying together. But we used to fight also. Something that I had to see and some other people also had to give me advice on. [They said] ‘you should not be doing this way [beating your wife]. So maybe the wife protests too much. She picks up things in the wrong way. She is maybe angry. When she gets mad you have to realise that you are the head. At the head of the family you are supposed to pick at least a better direction so that the woman will follow.

(Interview Primary School teacher, Site C, male – advised by Women’s Forum members – emphasis added)

Moreover, in the curtailed Reflection Action Circles observed during the field research, some of the messaging appeared to contradict what is generally accepted as women’s rights. In particular, the lessons included recommendations on how to avoid IPV and unfaithfulness. These included - providing water for the husband in the morning; preparing food for him on time; and having sex with the husband on demand. Although there were also discussions about women’s right to run a business; to associate with their friends; and a discussion on the merits of sex, the general thrust of the discussion focused on women’s responsibility to appease their partners to avoid GBV. For example, in an FG with female programme participants, participants defended the idea that women should always be sexually available to men, “She should not even dare to deny him conjugal rights [sex] even if she is doing something, if she is cooking, if the husband says no come let’s have sex, she has to do that. So she has to do that” (FG B, Female Participant). The issue of ‘conjugal rights’ surfaced in a number of discussions. This is largely deemed to signify that when one is married, one is obliged to satisfy one’s partner’s sexual desires. Such a view implies that a woman’s role is to be constantly sexually available to her partner in order to avoid GBV. If she is not, the responsibility for GBV lies with her²³.

While remaining sensitive to local context, in the context of the overall programme aim, it should perhaps have more clear messaging regarding a woman or a man’s right to refuse to have sex. For instance, in a Reflection Action Circle observed by the researcher, when a participant asked the facilitator what a woman should do if her husband refused to have sex, the facilitator responded “Marriage is for sex. So if men [are] just sleeping, then it is time to go to the ‘Real Men’” to make a complaint.

This brings us to an important and allied point in relation to the implementation and roll-out of the ‘Real Men’ component. While the original idea was to strategically select and work with influential men within the community on dominant norms and masculine identities which prove damaging to women, ‘Real Men’, following their own testimonies and those of other community members, at times appear to function more as a parallel police force rather

²³ As noted heretofore (Section 4.1.1), this echoes national discourse on this issue.
than as role models for others. For example, in Site D, some interviewees and informal discussions with other community members give the impression that the ‘Real Men’ act as local vigilantes, by doing daily rounds of the village and intervening in cases where they suspected GBV was occurring…

They set aside a ‘Real Men’ committee and they say this number - say they are ten that attend ‘Real Men’ - five go around during the day and see how the communities are like. Is there anyone who is trying to cause violence in his family? If that one is caught he will be answerable. Now comes the night, there is another group of men that walk around at night, to listen to what is happening.

(Interview village chief, Site D, female)

Although their actions are viewed positively, especially in reducing the incidence of GBV, it is worth reflecting on the power dynamics that such a development may create. In Site C, a similar development appears to be occurring, although in that case, it involves protecting water taps that are being vandalised (Interview reflect Circle facilitator, Site C, female). In the same site, one interviewee suggests that the ‘Real Men’ should also take on responsibility for reporting school absenteeism…

So some are saying that when a parent is found to haven’t allowed the [female] child to go to school, then they [those involved in programme] may pick the parent and have at least something to pay to the TA, the chief, for not allowing the child to go. And in so doing to [they will] sensitise [that] not going to school to chase the learners to go to school that will assist UWAMA. Just to give them some threats that if you don’t go to school you will face severe punishment.

(Interview primary school teacher, Site C, male)

These developments highlight a fundamental overall challenge to the programme – its seemingly apolitical focus on (overtly) violent and/or discriminatory acts themselves within a broader contextual vacuum. It is not enough to condemn a particular action without exploring and seeking to understand why that action takes place in the first place. In this context, it remains unclear what a ‘Real Man’ is in the context of the programme. Moreover, it might be useful to pose the question as to what is a ‘Real Woman’ in this context. Is it, as suggested by the findings, a woman who remains subservient and obedient to her husband but works harder – through revenue acquired through the VSL – to assist him in providing for the family? Or is it something else?

One of the key sites in which such questions could be explored and interrogated are the Reflection Action circles. In interview, facilitators variously describe these as spaces for teaching and promoting VSL (Interviews, Site A, Site C) and for reporting incidences of GBV and providing counselling in this regard (Interview, Site B). However, their potential – as outlined by a local AA staff member in Site B, is much greater…

Change can only come if people realise that they have the power to push for change, which I believe they have. Added to struggle we need some type of revolution by the
people, a kind of understanding whereby if we have a corrupt institution structure somewhere, they should take it face on, head on... What I’ve talked about, is about the powerful nature of the Reflection Action circles. Because it is that type of understanding in all the Reflection Action circles, then they will be able to mobilise, organise themselves, speak with one voice. So I think that is the most important strategy they can actually follow... Then the other thing that I believe is the value system, the attitudes that we have, the value and the behaviours that we actually display. Basically because we might have some good laws in place but if we cannot change our attitudes, if we cannot change our values, it’s probably like there is no law in place.

(Interview local AA staff member, Site B, male – emphasis added)

The Reflection Action Circles provide an ideal space to explore, interrogate and begin to deconstruct these attitudes and values. It might provide useful and timely to revisit them with this in mind.

4.6.3 ‘A woman’s issue’?

Echoing framing within some of the early literature and approaches on GBV, a persistent framing of GBV and gender equity issues more broadly as ‘women’s issues’ is apparent in the data. This is reflected in particular in comments on the effectiveness of the VSLs and what is frequently termed women’s ‘economic empowerment’. As noted heretofore, while loans from the VSL can assist in meeting basic needs and alleviating stress at home, they cannot and do not address the underlying relational problems of GBV.

Apart from the play [Reflection Action] circles, there are these issues like adult literacy classes, VSLs, these have also assisted the women to change.... Women have been empowered economically. They are able to raise money on their own to assist husbands in the family

(Interview Reflection Circle facilitator, Site D, female – emphasis added)

They [women] get trained on village savings and loans, which have trained women on how to be economically stable in their families
Researcher and why is this important?
The involvement of women has for instance assisted them to raise income at household level. And so issues like soap and paying school fees for the children is no longer the issue of the man only, it is now the issue of both.

(Focus group E, male participant – emphasis added)

If the money is not there [from the husband], the woman has something from the business and is able to buy, to buy [for] the needs of the family. They have even come to the point where some women have built their houses from the VSLs. They are able to start their own businesses, though at a small-scale, but still they are able to have these basic needs.
4.6.4 Time required for change at all levels

While awareness raising and sensitisation coupled with some degree of follow-up and local policing can clearly yield positive results in reducing the incidents of GBV within communities as well as increasing the percentage of girls in school, more time is required to bring about the more deep-seated attitudinal and behavioural changes required to secure longer term and more sustainable change. And it is important to reiterate that these changes are required not just at community level, but also within the sector and across society more broadly. As an AA staff member notes, the programme’s new community-based approach is still encountering backlash from within the sector…

Other groups still think that “Okay, this is trash. We don’t want anything to do with men”. And that in a way has also been a form of backlash - to say male involvement in the feminist agenda is a modernised gender agenda. And we have seen others who were in alliance with us who have not been comfortable with that [involving men]... there’s still that backlash from the women sector.

(Interview Action Aid staff member)
In addition, as we have seen in Section 4.1, much work remains in this regard across society more broadly. Despite the recent raft of dedicated legislative and policy materials, broader structures and institutions, and discourse and messaging on women’s responsibilities and rights remain ambiguous at best and regressive at worst, at times reproducing traditional, hierarchical norms and social inequalities which lay the foundation for GBV in its many forms.

The project to eradicate GBV is nothing short of a long-term, ambitious project to transform society’s structures, institutions, practices, norms and ideologies. This poses a serious challenge to funders currently wedded to 3-5 year programme timeframes. As with a number of other complex areas of intervention, longer-term projects, programmes and budgetary commitments – linked to performance – are clearly required.

Overall, the findings outlined and discussed in this section to some extent echo those reported elsewhere in the broader literature in that they demonstrate the tremendous hurdles faced in attempting to challenge and transform dominant and deeply entrenched norms, ideologies and practices. While more time is certainly required, and while more resources are generally (although not always!) useful, the findings presented here clearly demonstrate that these alone are not enough. Unless the underlying relational norms, ideologies, identities, roles and practices are interrogated and challenged, the basis for GBV and gender discrimination will remain. And unless the responsibility for these changes shifts from women alone to both men and women, these changes cannot and will not happen. This poses significant challenges to all involved in the programme and invested in sustainable, transformative change.
5. Conclusion and recommendations

Researchers, policy-makers and practitioners are now largely in agreement that the most effective interventions on GBV are those that engage both women and men through CBAs. Moreover, all the available research indicates that such approaches can only prove effective when they adopt a gender transformative approach which challenges dominant social norms around masculinity, femininity, power and violence.

In this context, this research has sought to explore the advantages of and challenges posed by CBAs to tackling GBV. Overall, it has found that approaches to tackling GBV in the four sites under investigation have yielded a number of successes – most notably a reported reduction in GBV as well as a reduction in child marriages. This reduction is attributed to three principal factors – the inclusion of men in the programme; the improved communications between couples following their engagement in the programme; and reduced economic stresses within households involved in the programme’s VSL scheme. In addition, the VSL and literacy and numeracy components of the programme are proving very popular with communities.

At the same time however, the research has also uncovered a number of challenges raised by the CBA employed. First, echoing concerns within the broader literature on CBAs, a key preoccupation of both women and men involved in the programme is resources and involvement in the programme as a possible means of accessing these. This is, of course, unsurprising and completely understandable in the context of severe poverty and food insecurity. It explains the popularity of both the VSL scheme and the literacy and numeracy classes, both which can assist in running small businesses and generating much needed additional household income. These components are useful therefore in attracting both women and men to the programme. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that the benefits from these and other related inputs accrue predominantly to targeted women as originally intended and that women retain control in these areas. The second related challenge is the impact of CBAs on local power dynamics. Members of the ‘Real Men’, and to a seemingly lesser extent, the Women’s Forums, appear to have gained a degree of status and influence from their involvement. Testimonies on their role and activism point toward their reinforcing rather than transforming traditional power relations within communities as they focus on ‘policing’ cases of GBV rather than promoting debate and dialogue on their underlying causes as originally envisaged. The third challenge relates to the effectiveness of the CBA in challenging and interrogating dominant norms, ideologies, identities and practices. Given that the three causal factors of GBV identified within the research sites all centre around these, it is imperative that they become a central focus of the approach. This is perhaps all the more crucial given the evidence uncovered of national and international
discourse, as well as local messaging and discourse, reproducing rather than challenging these causal factors.

Drawing from these findings we make the following general recommendations.

*Continue to develop strategies for engaging men while ensuring that women retain some degree of power and control*

Given the understandable primary interest in resources, the VSL and literacy and numeracy components are important in attracting women and men to the programme and it is advisable that they be continued. However, it is important that women continue to be the driving force behind these. Background committees should continue to be run by women and local women should be supported and encouraged to gradually take on a greater role in monitoring, evaluating and re-designing these components as time evolves. Increased networking with other agents and institutions working in communities (local chiefs, teachers, healthcare workers, police officers etc.) while keeping women to the forefront of all activities and planning will also increase their visibility and status within communities.

*Shift the thrust and focus of the ‘Real Men’ component*

The findings presented in relation to both the reported role and functioning of the ‘Real Men’ and the messaging and general content of discussions within Reflection Action circles observed during field research points to a shift away from the original intent for these components. According to both the programme Manager and programme documentation, these were originally intended as spaces within which dominant, hegemonic understandings and manifestations of masculinity could be interrogated and challenged. The CBA as currently employed however, appears quite apolitical and problematic in two principal respects. First, it appears to focus on violent and/or discriminatory acts themselves within a broader contextual vacuum. However, it is not enough to condemn a particular action as a violation of women’s rights and/or an illegal act without exploring and seeking to understand why that action takes place in the first place. And second, it reproduces rather than challenges dominant and damaging norms around women’s roles and responsibilities in relation to their husbands and partners. Thus, contrary to what is generally understood and advocated as a CBA, the message transmitted appears to be that it remains women’s responsibility to appease their partners to avoid GBV, while it remains men’s responsibility to employ methods other than violence to exert their influence and power within the home.

In this context, it is recommended that programme implementers re-visit the original aim of the ‘Real Men’ component and that time and resources be committed to shifting the focus

24 Including perhaps re-training of and/or refresher courses for facilitators together with ongoing follow-up and support
within both ‘Real Men’ groups themselves and within Reflection Action circles to afford the
time and space to interrogate and challenge dominant norms, values and practices of
masculinity and their link to violence, as well as to explore and vision alternative forms of
masculinities.

Introduce a ‘Real Woman’ component

While there has been much talk about ‘Real Men’ within the programme, no time has been
given over to an exploration of what might constitute a ‘Real Woman’ – or indeed multiple
forms of ‘Real Women’ within local contexts\(^25\). As we have seen from the findings, one of
the principal challenges facing communities is the widespread reproduction of dominant,
discriminatory norms and constructions of womanhood and femininity which render women
subservient to men. If this is not only accepted but repeated over and over, it is just one small
step further to render GBV justifiable. In this context, it might be useful to introduce a
parallel component to that of the ‘Real Men’ to challenge and interrogate dominant
understandings and expectations of womanhood. As with the ‘Real Men’, both the Women’s
Forums and the Reflection Action circles provide ideal opportunities to do this. Interrogating
and deconstructing dominant norms, values and attitudes towards women, and opening a
space to construct alternative ideas and imaginaries of the multiple possible forms of ‘Real
Women’ within local contexts, such spaces would begin the transformations required to
tackle the fundamental causes of GBV.

Taken all together, the findings outlined and analysed in this report to some extent echo those
reported elsewhere in the broader literature in that they illustrate the tremendous challenges
involved in attempting to tackle the complex, deep-rooted causes of GBV. This certainly
requires time and resources. However, as we have noted heretofore, the findings presented
here clearly demonstrate that these alone are not enough. Unless the underlying relational
norms, ideologies, identities, roles and practices are interrogated and challenged, the basis for
GBV and gender discrimination will remain. And unless the responsibility for these changes
shifts from women alone to both men and women, these changes cannot and will not happen.
This poses significant challenges to all involved in the programme and invested in
sustainable, transformative change.

\(^{25}\) Although, during one interview, a village chief did suggest it might be useful if ActionAid were to promote
such models (interview village chief, Site C, male). Our suggestion, however, is that the programme afford the
space for women and men to explore multiple constructions themselves.
Appendix I

Map of Malawi showing Research Sites
Appendix II

List of Research Participants
\((F=\text{female}; M=\text{male})\)

National level representatives - interviews

Representative from Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare - F
Representatives from UN Women – F and M
Representatives from UN Women – M
Representative from UN Development Programme - F
Representative from Centre for Human Rights Education, Advice and Assistance - M
Representative from Programme Officer UK DFID - M
Representative from Concern Worldwide - M
ActionAid Women’s Rights Manager - F

Rumphi District

Site A

Interview 1: Primary Teacher - F
Interview 2: Primary Teacher - F
Interview 3: Local Chief - M
Interview 4: Health Worker - M
Interview 5: Reflect Circle facilitator - M
Interview 6: Community Victim Support Unit member - M
Interview 7: Local ActionAid Malawi staff member - F
Interview 8: Reflect Circle Facilitator - M

FG A : Mixed Gender, Non-Programme Participants

Random interviews with 8 (4F/4M) community members

Site B

Interview 1: Sub-Traditional Authority Chief - M
Interview 2: Health Worker - F
Interview 3: Primary Teacher - M
Interview 4: Reflect Circle Facilitator - M
Interview 5: Representative from Rumphi Women’s Forum - F
Interview 6: Reflect Circle Facilitator - M
Interview 7: Primary Teacher - F
Interview 8: Health Worker - M
Interview 9: Police Officer - M
Interview 10: Local ActionAid Malawi Staff - M
FG B: Female Programme Participants  
FG C: Male Programme Participants  
FG D Mixed Gender Non-Programme Participants  

Random interviews with 8 (4F/4M) community members  

Chiradzulu District  

Site C  
Interview 1: Traditional Authority Chief - M  
Interview 3: Group Village Headman - M  
Interview 3: Primary Teacher - M  
Interview 4: Health Worker - M  
Interview 5: Police Officer - M  
Interview 6: Health Worker - M  
Interview 7: Village Chief - F  
Interview 8: Representative from Tadzuka Women’s Forum - F  
Interview 9: Reflect Circle Facilitator - F  

FG E: Mixed Gender Programme Participants  
FG F: Male Non-Programme Participants  

Random interviews with 8 (4F/4M) community members  

Site D  

Interview 1: Village Chief - M  
Interview 2: Primary Teacher - F  
Interview 3: Health worker - M  
Interview 4: Police Officer - M  
Interview 5: Village Chief - F  
Interview 6: Health Worker - M  
Interview 7: Reflect Circle Facilit - Fitator  
Group Interview with members of the Centre for Alternatives for Victimised Women and Children [CAVWOC]  

FG G: Male Programme Participants  
FG H: Female Non-Programme Participants  

Random interviews with 9 (5F/4M) community members
Appendix III

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