

## **Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme**

National Influencing for Systemic Change to End  
Violence Against Women and Girls: Lessons from the  
Malawi Tithetse Nkhanza Programme

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## Acronyms

<b>ABC</b>	Actor Based Change
<b>ACM</b>	Accountability Committee Mechanism
<b>ADC</b>	Area Development Committee
<b>CoP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>DEC</b>	District Executive Committees
<b>DoDMA</b>	Department of Disaster Management and Affairs
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>FEDOMA</b>	Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>MHRC</b>	Malawi Human Rights Commission
<b>MHRWGD</b>	Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls with Disabilities
<b>MLS</b>	Malawi Law society
<b>MPS</b>	Malawi Police Service
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NGO-GCN</b>	NGO Gender Coordination Network
<b>OoO</b>	Office of the Ombudsman
<b>PDIA</b>	Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation
<b>SOF</b>	Strategic Opportunities Fund
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedures
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
<b>SSF</b>	Survivor Support Fund
<b>TA</b>	Technical Advisors
<b>TLA</b>	Technical Legal Adviser
<b>TN</b>	Tithetse Nkhanza
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence Against Women and Girls
<b>VDC</b>	Village Development Committee
<b>VfM</b>	Value for Money
<b>VSU</b>	Victim Support Unit
<b>WLA</b>	Women Lawyers Association
<b>YFHS</b>	Youth Friendly Health Service

# 1. Background and Introduction

This paper discusses the lessons learnt from implementing the Tithetse Nkhanza (TN) Programme's national influencing interventions: the Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF) and the CSO-led National Advocacy Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), which was spearheaded by the programme. The paper looks at how these interventions contributed to an improvement in both formal and informal justice services in terms of accessibility, responsiveness, and accountability, and what can be learnt in terms of the design, relevance, suitability and utility of these interventions. Furthermore, the paper discusses the effectiveness of linking local engagement to national level change and vice versa, in order to influence the whole Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) ecosystem and build a movement for change.

The Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme, also known as Tithetse Nkhanza (TN), was funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and delivered by a consortium of Tetra Tech International Development, Social Development Direct and Plan International. It was designed to be a £17 million six-year programme aimed at reducing the prevalence of VAWG and improve the justice system for women and girls experiencing violence. The programme was expected to run from November 2018 to January 2025, split into a four-month inception phase (January to April 2019), then a two-phase implementation period. However, the programme underwent an unplanned early closure in mid-2021, following significant cuts to FCDO's aid budget. The closure was in no way a reflection of the programme's work; it was purely a case of funding unavailability.

Working at national, district and community levels, the programme's work took a politically smart approach, delivering context specific interventions and building in adaptation based on emerging evidence and lessons. TN worked towards the achievement of the following five outputs:

- Output 1** | Formal and informal justice services have capacity and knowledge to handle VAWG cases in line with protocols and laws.
- Output 2** | Men and women duty bearers have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to prevent and respond to VAWG.
- Output 3** | Local level mechanisms in place in target areas to support VAWG survivors to access justice and related support services.
- Output 4** | Men and women, boys and girls have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to prevent and respond to VAWG.
- Output 5** | Improved evidence and communications on what works to prevent and respond to VAWG in Malawi.

It was expected that the achievement of these five outputs would lead to three intended outcomes as follows:

- Outcome 1** | Formal and informal justice services and local institutions are accessible, responsive and accountable to women and children's needs.
- Outcome 2** | People in target areas are less tolerant of violence and more supportive of survivors.
- Outcome 3** | Individuals use non-violent means to settle disputes, avoid harmful practices, and seek support if they experience violence.

Whilst the achievement of the outcomes would contribute toward the intended impact:

- Impact** | Reduced prevalence of violence against women and girls and progress towards the full realisation of women and children's human rights.

TN worked in three districts of Lilongwe, Karonga and Mangochi, testing intervention pilots that were to be scaled-up if Phase 2 was to come into effect. The Programme also worked at national level to influence key institutions through the SOF and national influencing activities. This paper draws its lessons learnt against the first expected outcome noted above, and discusses the lessons learnt from implementing these interventions.

The programme also had a Technical Legal Adviser (TLA) embedded in the Judiciary whose work contributed to the first outcome and worked in synergy with the interventions discussed in this learning brief. Further information about the TLA role is available in another learning piece titled [Lessons from Embedding a Technical Legal Adviser in the Judiciary in Malawi](#).

In line with the expected outputs, outcomes and programme goal, TN developed a Theory of Change; *how* the programme hypothesised change would be brought about through the delivery of its interventions. The Theory of Change was developed through the Actor Based Change (ABC) framework, (this will be discussed in detail in a separate learning piece on the Programme's Theory of Change). With respect to work on improvement of the response service providers capacities to offer survivor-centred services, TN implemented seven interventions that aimed to address some of the behavioural drivers and systemic barriers to provision of accessible, responsive and accountable services. These initiatives include the development and roll out of the Gender Transformative Curriculum, strengthened social accountability for the Judiciary, influencing national policy and procedure, the Strategic Opportunities Fund, improved case management systems, referral pathway guidance development and roll out, and interventions designed to increase the extent to which survivors seek help.

Against the backdrop of a very short and fast-paced inception phase (January to April 2019), some rapid changes in the operating environment characterised by frequent changes of holders of ministerial and principal secretaries positions in line Ministries TN works with, a general election in May 2019, whose aftermath saw a protracted period of court challenges, civic protests and spates of violence, as well as a raging COVID-19 pandemic, the TN team achieved substantial progress in implementing work through the SOF and national influencing as detailed below.

## 2. National Influencing Interventions

The Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF), and the development of the CSO-led National Advocacy Strategy were critical avenues through which TN contributed to national level influencing. In addition to these, the programme's Team Leader and Community Engagement Lead played key roles in continuous strategic engagement with national actors and institutions, and district level stakeholders to affect positive changes for women and girls. The programme also established a national VAWG Community of Practice (CoP) platform, in line with one of the programme's expected outputs on improved evidence and communication on what works to prevent and respond to VAWG in Malawi, with the intention to influence improvements in practice.

### 2.1. The Strategic Opportunities Fund

TN established a Strategic Opportunities Fund to address emerging barriers to effective and efficient justice service provision in Malawi. The fund supported innovative, specific and strategic justice sector initiatives and reforms that are in line with the programme's overall objectives. The SOF was designed to be flexible, aimed at responding to emergent issues and opportunities. The SOF funded short to medium term activities that complemented the programme's other activities, and which specifically contributed to men and women duty bearers having the knowledge, skills and attitudes to prevent and respond to VAWG. The SOF was governed by an Accountability Committee Mechanism (ACM) whose mandate, among others, was to review partner progress reports and approve themes for funding windows. The SOF was deliberately designed to support high-impact, low-cost yet strategic and catalytic interventions. Interventions were designed to ensure that they would have low spend while achieving maximum impact, or catalysing institutional reforms and transformation with respect to response to VAWG. This enabled TN to deliver the most value for money through SOF interventions.

The programme worked with ten institutions under the SOF, as detailed in the sections below.

#### 2.1.1. Malawi Judiciary - Piloting a VAWG case management system

The Judiciary was supported to develop an electronic VAWG case management system in the three target areas of Karonga, Lilongwe and Mangochi in order to improve VAWG data collection, documentation, analysis and case tracking. The data management system was developed using a unique approach of drawing from the Judiciary's internal IT expertise to develop a home-grown system designed to be low-cost, user friendly and flexible. The installation of the

system was followed by an orientation session for clerks who will be responsible for entering data into the system, and the development of a guide on use of the electronic case management system. The Judiciary also held sessions with Magistrates from the target districts and the Chief Resident Magistrates in order to acquaint them with the system. At the time of TN's closure, the system had been successfully rolled out by the Judiciary.

### 2.1.2. Development of handbook on VAWG case handling for the Judiciary

The Chief Justice, through the office of the Registrar, constituted a taskforce comprising all Chief Resident Magistrates, two judges, three assistant registrars and the TN TLA, to spearhead the development of the judicial handbook on VAWG case handling. The handbook targets all judicial officers and support staff in order to provide them with a practical and comprehensive guiding tool and a point of reference on gender sensitivity, safeguarding and human rights-based approaches to VAWG case handling, as well as entrench principles underpinning a survivor-centred approach to justice delivery throughout the judicial process. The process of developing the handbook took a judiciary-driven approach in that, first, a needs assessment was carried out by the Judiciary, and the area of development of a VAWG case handling handbook was identified as a significant need. At the close of the programme, this project had been completed; the handbook was duly commissioned by the Chief Justice and rolled out across the Judiciary.

### 2.1.3. Women Lawyers Association

WLA was supported to carry out strategic litigation involving women from Nsundwe who were raped by agents of the Malawi Police Service (MPS) in the course of discharging their duty. The landmark *Nsundwe* court case involved 18 survivors and aimed to hold the MPS accountable for their actions, as well as seeking relevant remedies for the survivors, including compensation. The litigation concluded, leading to a landmark judgement on the protection of women's rights, as well as compensation for sexual violence at the hands of the state. This was the first time such compensation was awarded by the courts through litigation to survivors of sexual violence by state agents. WLA subsequently took forward the process of assessing damages for the court to determine the compensation for the affected women and girls. An order for damages was made and WLA continuously engaged with government until the payments were made to the survivors.

TN also separately supported the survivors under the SSF to provide psychosocial support through St John of God Hospitaller Services.

### 2.1.4. Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC)

MHRC conducted systemic investigations to address bottlenecks in VAWG service delivery. MHRC initially paused activity implementation due to Covid-19 pandemic, however they resumed work in 2021. They subsequently carried out targeted investigations and a public inquiry focusing on access to justice for VAWG survivors. The inquiry's report has since been compiled, presented to the Commissioners for validation and was adopted. It will subsequently be disseminated and used for accountability meetings with concerned duty bearers in order for these authorities to undertake remedial actions on the issues raised in the report.

### 2.1.5. Malawi Police Service

The Malawi Police was supported to develop SOPs on the Police handling of VAWG cases. These aimed to ensure that every police officer would have the capacity to apply survivor-centred approaches in the course of managing a survivor. Prior to the development process, MPS conducted a needs assessment aimed at documenting case management processes at the time and identifying the gaps. This subsequently informed the development of the SOPs, which were produced by a consultant hired by the MPS under SOF funding. The SOPs were finalised and adopted by the MPS High Command in April 2021 under the leadership of the Inspector General of Police. They will now be rolled out by the MPS using their own funding and resources.

### 2.1.6. Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare

The Ministry of Gender was supported to recruit a TLA for the Ministry, as well as to develop a Model Sexual Harassment Policy for the Public Sector. The TLA led the drafting of this policy, which has now been finalised. At the close of the TN programme, the policy was set to be taken through a validation process by the Office of the President and Cabinet and Principal Secretaries from relevant Government MDAs. It is anticipated that it will subsequently be presented to follow up cabinet processes by the Ministry. In the technical close out meeting with the Ministry of Gender, the Ministry expressed

commitment and openness to continue with the process of finalising the policy formulation, as well as collaborating with CSOs under the leadership of NGO-GCN in taking forward the interventions outlined in the Advocacy Strategy that CSOs developed with support of TN. The Ministry indicated that, wherever appropriate, the strategic interventions TN had been implementing with the collaboration of the Ministry would be integrated into the Ministry's workplan and the Ministry would also be making propositions to some donors to consider replicating some of the models of interventions that TN has been implementing. Furthermore, all the resource materials and guideline documents produced under the TN Programme will continue to be used/rolled out by the Ministry as far as resources would permit.

#### 2.1.7. Malawi Law Society

Malawi Law Society (MLS) was supported to carry out public interest litigation on the legal requirement for corroboration in sexual offences. However, in the course of implementation the intervention was rendered redundant as the High Court in a different litigation process made pronouncement that declared the corroboration rule unconstitutional. MLS subsequently adapted their intervention to tracing 24 VAWG survivors in the implementing districts of Karonga, Mangochi and Lilongwe. They were subsequently linked to various service providers including lawyers who will represent them on pro-bono basis. In order to motivate lawyers to carry out pro-bono cases for women and girls, the MLS organised a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training where lawyers were encouraged to take up VAWG related cases pro-bono basis, hence providing access to justice for VAWG survivors.

When TN followed up with MLS' leadership on the issue of CPD, they confirmed that MLS had developed a more structured long-term CPD Programme. As part of this, the training on issues of sexual harassment, developed in collaboration with TN, was going to be compulsory for all lawyers. According to MLS, this was expected to reach approximately 608 lawyers at the present time.

#### 2.1.8. Office of the Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman (OoO) was supported in undertaking a monitoring exercise to ascertain accessibility, responsiveness and accountability of the Malawi National Response to COVID-19, with a focus on VAWG. The work was jointly funded by TN's SOF and Plan International Malawi. The OoO had finalised all monitoring visits in target areas and prepared a report that is yet to be disseminated. This work by the OoO should inform further accountability engagement processes with the relevant duty bearers and other key stakeholders. The report is expected to be disseminated imminently.

#### 2.1.9. Department of Disaster Management and Affairs (DoDMA)

TN supported DoDMA on a project strengthening the safeguarding and protection protocols used by different MDAs in the humanitarian sector. DoDMA carried out a desk review and carried out consultations with relevant sectoral stakeholders in six districts (Blantyre, Nsanje, Dowa, Dedza, Mzimba and Karonga). The consultations reviewed various safeguarding protocols being used by government and non-government humanitarian actors in order to inform the development of a new safeguarding framework for MDAs working in the humanitarian space. This was envisaged to be more a more comprehensive safeguarding policy and code of conduct to guide the protection of beneficiaries and staff and safeguard the reputation of institutions in this sector. The framework was to be used to create awareness amongst staff and communities on their rights to seek accountability from relevant MDAs.

The report compiled following the consultations indicated, among other things, that different actors had taken various approaches to their safeguarding protocols, all of which contribute to ensuring that no harm is done to the people they serve and staff. However, these were disjointed and there was need to harmonise them into one framework for MDAs. It was envisaged that DoDMA's development of this framework would ensure a systematic approach to safeguarding implementation, monitoring and evaluation across the various actors as they carry out their mandate of saving lives and property during emergency situations.

Unfortunately, the grant to DoDMA was curtailed prior to completion due to TN's closure. DoDMA is currently seeking additional funding from government or other sources in order to continue the work.

### 2.1.10. Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA)

FEDOMA was supported to implement a project on promoting disability inclusion in VAWG service delivery in the formal and informal justice system. The intervention sought to generate evidence on the barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities in accessing services within the VAWG and justice service provision sector using the rights-based approach as per articles 6, 8 and 9 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This would work towards enabling VAWG service providers to mainstream disability in their interventions hence leaving no one behind, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, 10 and 16.

The project's rationale was that women and girls with disabilities experience VAWG in a myriad of ways including emotional, physical and sexual abuse. In fact, women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience intimate partner violence and other forms of VAWG than women who do not have a disability. Disability therefore adds to the disadvantage customarily experienced by women and children in various sectors of society. This makes women in particular the victims of a 'two-fold discrimination': as women on one hand, and as persons with disability on the other hand. Unfortunately, women and girls with disabilities face compounded challenges in accessing justice, particularly for sexual violence. This is due to many reasons including negative attitudes regarding disability by service providers, inability of VAWG service providers to provide physical accessibility and reasonable accommodation, limited access to legal protection and representation, lack of knowledge and skills of law service providers to ably protect the rights of women and girls with disabilities, and the legal community are ill-equipped to address the violence. In addition, service delivery to women and girls with disabilities is often perceived as 'acts of charity' and not from a human rights perspective. Thus, service delivery is not rights-centred, but instead delivered as acts of generosity or favours.

At the close of the programme, FEDOMA had completed an access audit to assess the accessibility of partners' offices to people with disabilities. The exercise mainly targeted justice service delivery institutions in Mangochi, Karonga and Lilongwe. The activity also involved conducting a survey for women and girls with disabilities to collect their views on the VAWG services offered to them. The following centres were visited for access audits:

- *Karonga*: Karonga Women Forum and Karonga magistrate court.
- *Lilongwe*: One Stop Centre, Kawale Police and Lilongwe Police
- *Mangochi*: One stop Centre, Magistrate Court and Social Welfare Office.

In addition, FEDOMA had planned to undertake an access audit of FCDO's office at FCDO's request. Unfortunately, however, this was unable to take place due to some delays in getting requisite approvals. With the programme's early closure, this meant that plans to conduct this access audit were curtailed.

FEDOMA collated the findings from the access audits into a report for each of the centres visited, providing some recommendations. These are expected to inform strategic interventions on ensuring better access to VAWG services for women and girls with disabilities. One centre has already implemented changes as a result, by removing steps at the entrance and replacing them with a ramp to make it accessible to those with mobility challenges.

### 2.1.11. NGO-Gender Coordination Network (NGO-GCN)

NGO-GCN was supported to develop a framework to be used at community level to address child marriages and teenage pregnancies. The project reviewed model community by-laws to address the issue. In the medium-term, these by-laws are envisaged to be aligned with Malawi's gender and child rights-related laws. NGO-GCN held three dialogue sessions in the impact districts of Karonga, Lilongwe and Mangochi. These aimed to:

- Disseminate consolidated child-related laws and policy handbooks to project beneficiaries and determine the best ways in which district and community stakeholders can reference the handbook when developing or reviewing community bylaws denouncing child marriages and promoting ending VAWG.
- Promote strengthened coordination among referral system players that will enhance service delivery and enforce the implementation of gender and child-related laws and policies in the districts.

- Build community leaders' capacity and improve their understanding of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and counselling services for better management of their communities and beneficiaries.
- Promote discussions to address SRHR issues in communities through gatekeepers' interaction with targeted stakeholders.

The dialogue sessions involved key community-level stakeholders who have the potential to influence change in addressing child marriages and teenage pregnancies. These included formal and informal actors, such as traditional leaders, faith leaders, initiation counsellors, mother groups, selected parents, district social welfare office representatives, the Police (especially Victim Support Unit (VSU) representatives), magistrate courts, teachers, nurses, and Youth Friendly Health Service (YFHS) providers. The dialogue sessions have resulted in the following outcomes, among others:

- Empowered participants with the knowledge and skills on how they would facilitate either the development or review of community by-laws that would be aligned with gender and child rights-related laws.
- Solicited commitments from service providers and government stakeholders to continue engaging and improving their coordination and feedback mechanisms in order to enhance the access of young people to quality and comprehensive SRHR services.
- Defined next steps for either development or reviewing of community by-laws, subject to resource availability.

NGO-GCN's SOF project achieved its stated objectives and has now ended.

## 2.2. The CSO-led National Advocacy Strategy

The TN Programme successfully carried out a series of VAWG related advocacy and influencing engagements throughout the implementation phase at both the national and district levels (district assembly, Area Development Committee (ADC) and Village Development Committee (VDC)) in the three impact areas. For TN to achieve lasting and sustainable changes, the programme was designed so that VAWG prevention and response interventions would be complemented with robust advocacy engagements with relevant duty bearers on structural and systemic issues that impede an effective response. In this regard, during the first year of implementation, an important all-inclusive stakeholder's advocacy convening was held. This led to the identification of key and priority issues for advocacy and strategies, which informed the development of a CSO-led Advocacy Strategy on VAWG. The issues identified in this process continued to inform the programme's strategic engagements with duty bearers. The main themes for the Advocacy Strategy were:

1. Government of Malawi increases central resource allocation to VAWG prevention and response and commits to establishing an effective VAWG budget monitoring system by December 2023.
2. Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare to improve the coordination and collaboration among and between the informal and formal duty bearers and civil society for the effective and efficient delivery of VAWG prevention and response work by December 2022.
3. Government of Malawi ensures the drafting and adoption of regulations and sentencing guidelines for the gender and child rights related laws by December 2023.
4. Government of Malawi improves the essential services for survivors of VAWG such that they are accessible, responsive and survivor-centred by December 2023.
5. Civil society effectively and efficiently deliver their mandate of holding the Government of Malawi accountable for VAWG prevention and the delivery of VAWG response services.
6. Donors and development partners coordinate and collaborate to effectively and efficiently support the Government of Malawi to achieve objectives 1-4 and provide consistent and sustained support for VAWG prevention and response programming, in-line with the long-term objective of reducing the prevalence of VAWG in Malawi.

## 2.3. National and district level engagement

TN's Team Leader and Community Engagement Lead played key roles in continuous engagement with national actors and institutions and district level stakeholders to effect positive changes for women and girls. TN built strong strategic relationships with Ministries of Gender, Child Development and Community Development, and Justice and Constitutional Affairs, DoDMA, Local Government, the Judiciary and Malawi Police Service, Constitutional bodies of Malawi Human Rights Commission and Ombudsman, Traditional Authorities in all impact areas amongst others, gaining buy-in and support for the delivery of the programme.

Further, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that TN had to forge partnerships with other relevant key ministries it had not previously engaged with. In this regard, TN established strategic linkage with the Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events, resulting in an urgent needs assessment upon which basis TN was set to render technical and financial support for VAWG mainstreaming in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, starting with support towards the development and rolling out of safeguarding protocols. TN also played an instrumental role in the COVID-19 Social and Protection Cluster. The programme was involved with other collaboration platforms with development partners implementing similar programmes, in particular the UN Spotlight Initiative, as well as other donors/implementers working in the programme's impact areas such as Concern Worldwide under the co-location initiative, and played an active role in the Access to Justice Donor Coordinating Group.

As a result of positive national stakeholder relationships, TN was drafted into some key national level taskforces/working groups through which accountability influencing with duty bearers, as well as technical expertise and leadership, was being provided to Government's programming on VAWG. These taskforces or institutions included: the Presidential Taskforce on Rape and Defilement, the *Nsundwe* Women Rape Case Litigation Task Force, the Social and Protection COVID-19 Cluster, the Inter Agency Humanitarian Working Group on COVID-19 and various technical working groups, such as the Gender Technical Working Group and the Youth Friendly Health Services Sub-Technical Group. Specifically, in the last quarter of the first year of implementation, the programme influenced the re-activation of the GBV Sub-cluster under the national protection cluster by facilitating the first convening of the forum. Thereafter, the Sub-cluster completed a number of tasks, the major one of which was carrying out a rapid gender assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Had the programme continued, TN was planning to deepen its strategic relationships and engagement with stakeholders including the Malawi Parliament (especially the relevant committees of Legal Affairs, Women Caucus and Community and Social Welfare), the Law Commission, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.

## 2.4. National Community of Practice

In 2019, TN launched the National VAWG Community of Practice (CoP) during the 16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in line with the 2019 theme, 'Orange the World: Generation Equality Stands Against Rape'. The CoP was in line with one of TN's outputs on improved evidence and communication on what works to prevent and respond to VAWG in Malawi. The outcomes of the launch included getting endorsement and buy-in from the government through the Ministry of Gender which plays an oversight role in the CoP. Additionally, it was agreed that while the TN would provide support and coordinate a mini steering committee, the convening role for the CoP was to be on a rotating basis particularly for virtual meetings and smaller capacity development webinars where need be. Several stakeholders expressed interest to co-convene the CoP with TN.

In the second year of implementation, a second CoP was convened on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020. TN hosted the annual National VAWG Community of Practice with a limited number of in-person participants due to COVID-19 related protocols. The 2020 theme was "Sustaining the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Agenda: Prevent, Respond, Fund- what are we learning?" CoP participants came from a cross section of institutions including Save the Children, Spotlight Initiative, OXFAM, Malawi Law Commission, CARE International, Plan Malawi, Catholic University, Gender Justice Unit, Malawi Sex Workers Association, Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls with Disabilities (MHRWGD) and the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare. Some of the key action points from this CoP were:

- Creation of an online platform for the Malawi VAWG CoP to share resources and learning in real time.

- Pooling of resources and technical expertise to convene the VAWG CoP annually/ bi-annually.
- Hosting virtual CoP meetings and co-convening the physical CoP/ steering committee.
- Strengthening relationships with more academic institutions to build a strong VAWG CoP that produces robust research and evidence.

## 3. Lessons Learnt

### 3.1. Design of interventions and implementation

**Stakeholder/beneficiary institution-driven processes are critical success factors for increased institutional buy-in, ownership and sustainability of interventions.**

A critical success factor for activities that significantly contributed to national influencing through the SOF is that the process for identifying the interventions were driven by the concerned stakeholder/beneficiary institutions and followed comprehensive needs assessments. As far as practicable, implementation was also wholly carried out by officers in the respective institutions. Examples regarding the Judiciary include the development of a home-grown electronic case management system, where the Judiciary's internal IT personnel were involved, as well as development of the Judiciary's handbook which was developed by a taskforce comprising judicial officers. This provided for a conducive process for ensuring institutional buy-in of the interventions leading to successful implementation, and laid a sufficient level of foundation for sustainability of the intervention long after the programme phases out. Where consultants were engaged for tasks, for example the development of SOPs for the Malawi Police Service, arrangements were made to ensure that consultants worked closely with an internal technical taskforce comprising senior and middle level police officers.

**Deliberate focus of the SOF on high-impact, low-cost strategic and catalytic interventions was essential for addressing systemic bottlenecks in survivor centred VAWG services.**

The SOF was deliberately designed to support high-impact, low-cost strategic and catalytic interventions. Interventions were designed to ensure that they will have low spend while achieving maximum impact or catalysing institutional reforms and transformation with respect to VAWG response. This enabled TN to deliver the most value for money through the SOF interventions. A key example was the support provided to WLA to carry out civil litigation on the rape of 18 women from Nsundwe area by agents from the Malawi Police Service. This provided for a mechanism of accountability and access by the women to appropriate remedies, including reparation. The WLA was also able to mobilise other actors for provision of attendant remedies such as psychosocial support.

#### **Time bound nature of the interventions**

Wherever feasible, the interventions were planned to be implemented within a short- and medium-term framework, and yet delivered results that were catalytic in nature. This also proved to be a cost-effective approach.

#### **Provision of technical support to implementing partners**

Provision of technical support to implementing partners provided critical value addition to the design and implementation of interventions where beneficiary institutions had some capacity gaps in relation to critical areas of VAWG prevention and response programming such as gender transformative approaches and survivor-centred programming. The interventions were designed in such a way that TN technical personnel and Technical Advisors (TA) would closely work with implementing partners to provide technical expertise and input in the implementation of interventions. For example, the TLA embedded in the Judiciary was instrumental in supporting the Judiciary with the development of the Handbook for the Handling of VAWG cases. The TLA embedded in the Ministry of Gender was instrumental in providing support on the development of the Model Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy for the Public Service. The TN technical team and TA also provided technical input into and reviewed the MPS SOPs for engaging with survivors of GBV. Similarly, TN lawyers worked hand in hand with the Women Lawyers Association in the litigation of the Nsundwe rape cases, as well as

on the CPD that the Malawi Law Society conducted for its membership. This went beyond the traditional approach for most funding agencies that normally provide financial support.

### 3.2. Working across the VAWG ecosystem – connecting local and national action

The prevention and reduction of VAWG requires holistic interventions across the prevention and response continuum from community to national levels, to ensure the needed complementarity between prevention efforts that lead to empowerment of survivors/communities to seek services, and the need for the services sought to be accessible, responsive to their needs and accountable. Thus, both the SOF interventions and the CSO-driven Advocacy Strategy were intentionally designed to ensure that this prevention and response continuum work was well balanced. For example, the Advocacy Strategy was designed around themes of duty bearer accountability, improved service delivery, resource allocation and utilisation tracking etc., to ensure improvement on the response side of the equation. Similarly, all SOF interventions were designed to ensure that services sought by VAWG survivors are accessible, responsive and that there was enhanced accountability on the part of service providers.

The greater part of other pieces of work around national influencing carried out either by TN or by TN in conjunction with other partners was also to ensure this complementarity and relevance of programming. Such pieces include: development and rolling out of the National Multi-Sectoral Referral Pathways for VAWG survivors, engagement of appointing authorities on lack of equal representation of women in leadership positions through the Boards of Statutory Corporations, as well as involvement in the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the Presidential Taskforce on Rape and Defilement, several strategic issues/cases at community and district levels were identified and pushed for national level urgent and decisive attention and action. Furthermore, through TN's intervention on the Survivor Support Fund (SSF), the TN TLA managed to provide technical support, including the fast tracking of some cases within the judicial system. Some strategic interventions that TN supported, for example the Nsundwe Women Rape Cases litigation by WLA were community level issues that were escalated to be handled at the national and most strategic level through engagement with relevant duty bearers and commencement of litigation.

### 3.3. Government's commitment

Another critical success factor for strategic interventions and national influencing work is the Government's demonstrable commitment to combating VAWG. For the most part the key ministries greatly supported TN and demonstrated commitment at the highest levels for the national level influencing work. The ability and capacities of the TN's Team Leader and Community Engagement Lead as local Malawian experts with existing networks and track record/credibility on women's rights, was also essential in providing leadership on advocacy work and enabling access to critical platforms of influencing.

### 3.4. Mobilisation, strategic relationship-building capacities and the right expertise and skill set of programme staff

A key success factor for the influencing work also lay in TN's ability and capacities to convene and mobilise stakeholders within and from outside of the sector and providing technical leadership in galvanising action for policy advocacy on VAWG. In addition, the technical expertise of programme staff in gender equality and VAWG programming also ensured that TN readily gained the confidence of stakeholders in the sector, including relevant ministries and government agencies. For example, the Team Leader is a respected leader, a published expert on VAWG, and a well-known Malawian advocate for gender equality. She has an established track record working in the human rights and justice sector and has networks that stretch from grassroots, across woman's rights organisations, to high policy leadership level in Government. TN was able to build on this to consolidate and sustain strategic relationships which are essential for effective national influencing and advocacy work. Similarly, the Community Engagement Lead has extensive experience in community engagement work and national level advocacy, the programme's Prevention Lead has critical technical expertise in VAWG and social norms change, and the Justice Lead brought in essential expertise working in both the formal and informal VAWG justice delivery system, while the Deputy Team Leader brought in much needed expertise in results management and Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). Collectively, the team held a shared passion for

improving VAWG prevention and response in Malawi. The right knowledge, skill set and key competencies on the part of programme teams is critical in achieving expected outputs, outcomes and overall programme results.

## 4. Challenges

The Programme faced some challenges in implementing the national influencing work. The major ones included:

- Limited structured engagement with other stakeholder institutions and duty bearers that are critical for national influencing, such as the Ministry of Education at national level, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. Engagement with such key ministries tended to be on an ad hoc basis. For some Ministries, strategic relationships were yet to be forged at the close of the programme.
- Some limitations with coherence between community/district and national level advocacy interventions. For example, the Community of Practice model was yet to be rolled out to district level at the close of the programme, and the extent to which district learning visits fed into national level influencing activities was also somewhat limited.
- Poorly resourced duty bearer institutions and large capacity and resource deficits in relation to service providers, coupled with competing priorities on the part of government, meant that the advocacy engagement would sometimes not lead to the expected outcomes and results, thereby diminishing the prospects for optimal impact.
- At the time of programme closure, the advocacy development processes had not made significant progress in engaging some critical actors such as the media, even though this was envisaged to be one of the key actors throughout the process.
- Changes at the levels of senior ranking officials in the key ministries, either through staff transfers at the level of Principal Secretaries, or through changes in Ministerial position-holders due to cabinet reshuffles or a change in administration, presented challenges with continuity of engagement on strategic issues. On a number of occasions the Programme had to carry out re-orientation sessions with new Ministers and Principal Secretaries for buy-in for the programme's interventions and for effective continuity of strategic engagement, advocacy and influencing work.

## 5. Conclusion

The design of the programme to adopt a twin track approach focusing on both prevention and response interventions, complemented by the implementation of contextually and politically sensitive VAWG advocacy and national level influencing work, was critical in TN's delivery of effective, sustainable and value for money interventions leading to improved justice outcomes for women and girls living with violence. Through the Strategic Opportunities Fund, TN delivered impactful VAWG interventions that addressed systemic and structural bottlenecks in accessibility, responsiveness and accountability of services.

Empowerment of survivors, for example through the SSF and prevention/demand creation interventions, needs to be complemented with advocacy for resourcing for critical service providers. VAWG programming becomes limited in its impact if the focus is only on prevention work at community level without tackling systemic issues. The TN programme realised significant valued addition and traction in its work given the focus on not only prevention and response (service provider capacity strengthening), but also focus on broader systemic bottlenecks to accessibility, responsiveness and accountability of VAWG issues through advocacy and national influencing work. Furthermore, the credibility of national work is enhanced when it is drawn from community level work and lessons generated at this level.

Processes driven by beneficiary institutions are essential for the success of interventions aimed at achieving institutional reforms, and catalytic short to medium term interventions that focus on strategic and systemic issues are a good investment to respond to structural challenges as well as emerging issues. The TN Strategic Opportunities Fund was one such mechanism and brought in great dividends in light of the key strategic and impactful interventions that it implemented within a short period of time. The flexibility of the SOF model also entailed that TN was able to respond to emerging

issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The SOF was overseen by an Accountability Committee Mechanism whose members were drawn from key stakeholder institutions, i.e., FCDO, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Ministry of Gender, Community Services and Social Welfare, Malawi Human Rights Commission, FEDOMA and NGO-GCN. This provided for a critical accountability oversight mechanism for decisions on resource allocation, design of interventions and progress of implementation. It also allowed for an all-inclusive stakeholder process in the management of the SOF.