

A Critical Gender Analysis of Public Works Programmes in Malawi: Using Naila Kabeer's Social Relations Approach (SRA) to Analyse Intra-Household Gender Relations

BRIGHT BRAINIOUS SIBALE¹, DAIMON KAMBEWA², JESSICA KAMPANJE PHIRI² AND CATHERINE MTHINDA²

¹Centre for Development Management, Consulting and Learning Facility, P.O Box 31810, Lilongwe 3, Malawi

²Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Bunda College, P.O Box 219, Lilongwe, Malawi

Abstract

In this paper, we critically gender analyse public works programmes (PWPs) in Malawi to identify parameters of PWPs that affect gender relations within the household. This analysis is critical as evidence suggests that although PWPs are recognised globally as poverty reduction policies, their impact on engendering job creation, economic empowerment, and poverty reduction is questionable. We used the social relations approach (SRA), developed by Naila Kabeer, to implement the gender analysis. We found that at the local level, PWPs are implemented differently from how they are designed at the national level, with local leaders and project implementation committees (PICs) changing the programme's scope of work and the wage rate. We further find that these local adaptations negatively affect intrahousehold gender relations, thereby reducing the impact of PWPs on gender relations at the household level. We recommend that the government and its development partners ensure that PWP design and implementation modalities are maintained across all institutions involved in implementing the programme, if PWPs are to be gender transformative.

Keywords: Public works programmes, social relations, intrahousehold, gender relations, participating households

1. Introduction

With high levels and depth of poverty in Malawi, programmes that create mass employment, such as PWPs, have become popular instruments of poverty reduction and resilience building. By definition, PWPs are a subset of social protection policies where the poor who have labour are recruited to work on community labour-intensive

projects and, in return, receive a transfer in cash or in-kind (Barrientos, 2008). The condition is that the participating household, in exchange for the transfer, provides labour that is invested in building or maintaining a community or public asset, such as roads, bridges, and others (National Local Government Finance Committee, 2019). The beneficiary household benefits through the transfer received, which can be used at their discretion and the transfer can be in the form of cash or in kind, such as food, agricultural inputs, training, or otherwise as defined by the available public policy. In Malawi, historically, the largest PWP has been the one implemented by the Government of Malawi through the National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC), formerly (before 2018) the Local Development Fund (LDF), which, as a programme was called the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) between 1995 until 2018. The MASAF programme was the object of this study.

PWPs target both the moderately poor and the ultra-poor as long as they have labour. According to the Government of Malawi, the objectives of PWPs are: (i) to enhance paid labour and employment and (ii) to produce an asset, with the overall objective of promoting social protection for the targeted poor who have labour (Barrientos, 2008; GoM, 2012). Due to the conditionality for households to provide labour in exchange of a transfer, PWPs are forms of conditional cash transfers. The PWP being analysed was implemented in Lilongwe district in the year 2014/2015 and aimed to improve resilience among the poor and strengthen social safety net delivery systems and coordination across programs (National Local Government Finance Committee, 2019). PWPs, like many social protection programmes, target the household as the primary beneficiary of the cash transfer, with the household head as the participant and recipient of the transfer. The targeting assumption is that the transfer will benefit the household in terms of the expected objectives of the programme. Many scholars, including Kabeer (2004, 2010), Beegle, Galasso, & Goldberg (2015), Holmes & Jones (2011) and evidence from this study suggests that this assumption is seriously problematic because of how individual members of the household behave towards each other (intra-household gender relations), the choices they make on how to use wages, and the needs of individual members, can affect the extent to which PWP objectives are achieved at household level.

Typical PWP projects include construction and maintenance of roads, afforestation, irrigation farming, construction of dams and other associated water facilities (ponds). In turn, these assets provide benefits to the community, households and individuals. The benefits include income, food, both agricultural and non-agricultural inputs and improved access to social services by poor people (Barrientos, 2008; GoM, 2011). In Malawi, by 2018, PWPs had reached about one million households (985,635), of whom 53% were women. In terms of impacts, a study by Phiri, Chilongo, & Phiri (2017) showed that participation in PWP activities contributed to improved food security at household level with 54% of the sampled beneficiaries reporting that they

were in the high improved food security category, 45% reporting to be in the medium food security category and less than 2% had poor food security category. According to NLGFC (2019), the main lessons learnt from the PWPs include, but not limited to, the problem of poor quality of projects implemented, corruption where non-beneficiaries also receive wages, poor record keeping and poor targeting with high exclusion rates. McCord and Slater (2009) reviewed 167 PWPs in Sub-Saharan Africa and identified four distinct forms of PWPs. The forms of PWPs were defined on the basis of their core design features and primary objectives of the programmes. These were 1) PWPs that offered short-term employment (Type A), 2) PWPs that were government employment programmes (GEPs), which offered some form of employment guarantee (Type B) for the poor, 3) PWPs that promoted labour intensification of government infrastructure spending (Type C) and 4) PWPs that enhanced supply-side characteristics, promoting 'employability' (Type D). According to McCord and Slater (2009), while some PWPs may include more than one aspect and have a range of objectives, PWPs tend to have a primary design identity under one of the four categories; and this primary design identity has a significant influence on programme design. The PWPs that were studied under this research were short-term Type A projects implemented during food lean months to cushion household food insecurity.

According to Kabeer, (1994), gender relations refer specifically to those aspects of social relations which create and reproduce systematic differences between men and women in relation to their status and positions in the society in which the two live. It defines their roles, responsibilities and obligations and governs the division of resources between them. Gender relations are also defined as a complex system of personal and societal relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially constructed, maintained and deconstructed, through which men and women access power and material resources within society" IFAD, (2000, p4).

Gender and power relations within the household are important concepts that can determine the impact of a national public policy or programme at household level. However, most programmes are designed without examining the gender and power relations associated with their programmes (Kabeer, 2004). A case study of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) by Holmes & Jones (2011) acknowledged that the programme strongly focused on women's role in agriculture and food security, paying attention to women's specific needs and vulnerabilities on several levels. However, the authors identified some major design weaknesses that are relevant to this research and have strong implications for the programme's implementation and its impacts on gender relations within the household (Holmes & Jones, 2011). Arguably the most important weaknesses noted were a) inadequate attention as to how to promote women's meaningful participation in the programme beyond focusing on numbers and b) limited emphasis on addressing unequal gender

relations in food security and agriculture productivity at the household and community levels (Holmes & Jones, 2011). These limitations are in line with critiques made in gender studies that showed that Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development Approaches (WAD) in development intervention had failed to achieve sustained empowerment of women as well as addressing engrained household and community level inequalities (Icaza & Vázquez, 2016). Tebaldi & Bilo (2019) have argued that much more can be done to ensure women's participation in PWP work activities on more equal terms, suggesting that quotas for women and vulnerable groups, provisions for equal wages, child-care and breastfeeding facilities and breaks and flexible working hours, incentives for women to take on leadership roles can be measures that can be strengthened to ensure gender equality.

In a study of a public works programme in Chivi District in Zimbabwe, Moyo, Oluyinka, & Onyenankeya (2014) found that community-run PWP projects gave sufficient priority to women and that their participation helped to break down unfairness, which is an indication of unequal power relations within the household. Despite bringing equity, providing opportunities to women was believed to provide household welfare, over and above the benefits derived from giving men an equal opportunity (Moyo, Oluyinka & Onyenankeya, 2014; Hanna & Karlan, 2016). In that study, the typology of gender and power relations that were found to be critical in the transformation debate but which had not been studied adequately in PWPs included issues of who has access and control over the productive household as well as community assets, division of labour within the household, access to skills and knowledge and others. Building on these knowledge gaps, the overall objective of this research was to critically gender-analyse public works programme in Malawi, and to identify what parameters of the programme and its participants that influence gender relations and eventual programme impact at household and individual levels. This research was interested in unearthing these gender and power roles within households that participate in PWPs, exploring whether or not PWPs can be a vehicle for transforming gender and power relations within the household. The specific objectives of the study were to 1) analyse how PWPs influence gender relations at various institutional levels, 2) analyse how rules, resources and other dimensions of the SRA affect gender relations and finally 3) identify policy options that can be used to ensure that PWPs best implement gender objectives at all institutional levels.

2. Ontology, epistemology and framework for analysis

Given the nature of the phenomenon under study (individual practices and gender relations), the researcher opted for a constructivist or post-positivist epistemological position (Bryman, 2016). This study was concerned with how participants of public works programmes behave towards other household members. The social concepts and categories which are central to this research were public works, gender relations, power relations, individual social behaviours and decision-making, within the context

of a household that has received the benefits of a public policy programme, which is, in this case is an external actor or catalyst. These concepts are dynamic and cannot be purely understood using deductive and positivist theories, and this is what motivated the researchers to take a constructivist and interpretivist ontological and epistemological position, respectively, while mindful of the warning provided by Bryman (2016) that research does not need to focus on purely one epistemological theory. Given this epistemological position, the researchers used mainly a descriptive case study approach as the research design. To operationalise the epistemological position taken and given the objective of the research, the authors found it prudent to use the Social Relations Approach (SRA), a framework that Kabeer & Subrahmanian (1996) developed for the analysis of gender inequality. The SRA focuses on the institutional construction of gender relations and hence the institutional structure of gender inequality. The framework looks at gender relations as a continuum of institutions setting rules and norms at household, community, market and state levels. While Kabeer's institutions are different and occur at different levels, the framework identifies five distinctive elements that are common to all institutions, which include: 1) rules (i.e. how things get done), 2) resources (i.e. what is used and what is produced), 3) people (who is in, who is out and who does what), 4) activities (what is done) and finally 5) power (who decides) Kabeer & Subrahmanian (1996). This framework does not, however, look at an individual as an institution. But in this study, the researchers viewed an individual as an institution of its own because individuals also set their own rules, have individual resources and implement activities that may or may not affect others. Therefore, the Kabeer framework was adapted to start with the individual before the household, community, markets and the state. As indicated in the methodology chapter, data for this section was collected using focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

3. Methods

The study was conducted in Lilongwe District in Malawi in 2019. Lilongwe District, located in the Central Region of Malawi, was chosen because of its proximity to the author's university, the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). To assess how the programme interfaces with gender relations at the individual and household levels, individual in-depth interviews were done at the household level with individual members of households that participated in the programme. Table 1 shows the number of individual interviews done at the household level by a study using six field teams.

Table 1: Number of interviews done using individual in-depth interviews

TEAM	Field Team 1	Field Team 2	Field Team 3	Field Team 4	Field Team 5	Field Team 6	TOTAL
Male spouse	6	7	7	8	7	8	43
Female spouse	6	7	7	8	7	8	43
Male children	5	6	1	1	4	4	21
Female children	4	3	4	4	7	4	26
Total per household	21	23	19	21	25	24	133

To get perspectives of the broader community, an important analytical level in the SRA, eight focus group discussions were conducted with programme beneficiaries to complement individual and key informant interviews. To this effect, seven key informant interviews were done at the three levels: national, district and community. And finally, key informant interviews were conducted at the national level to understand the PWP's statutory provisions and policy perspectives of social protection and public works in Malawi. To this effect, officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ministry of Gender and Community Services, the National Local Government Finance Committee and the Lilongwe District Council were interviewed. The main issues covered during interviews included; the design, objectives and scope of PWPs in the country, the successes and lessons learnt, key challenges, their views about the programme, and how beneficiaries are selected. For the analysis of qualitative data, a phenomenological analysis was carried out on all interview notes. The interviews were read repeatedly to identify themes and patterns aligned with the SRA. This methodology was chosen because it is mainly concerned with 'the participant's view of the topic under investigation' (Smith et al. 1999: 218 cited in (Uny, 2008) and Bryman (2016).

4. Results and discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. The study used the Social Relations Approach (SRA), which analyses gender from four institutional levels (household, community, market and statutory), and the framework identifies five dimensions of social relations that produce gender differences through the distribution of resources, responsibilities and power, and are thus used to analyse gender inequality in society: power, resources, rules, activities, and people. The institutions and their dimensions are used to present and argue the findings of this study. As indicated earlier, the framework was adapted to include the "individual" as an institution that plays a critical role in the construction and engineering of gender relations.

4.1 Individual level factors

The study found that individual factors that include demographic, social and economic factors play an important role in determining how a participant behaves (the rules and standards they set for themselves to govern what they do) individually and how he or she relates with other members of the household as they participate in PWPs. The first important individual factor that influenced practices and gender relations was the type of information or education provided by the programme to the individual PWP beneficiary. The study found that the information provided to participants to guide their participation and behaviour in the PWP was inadequate to influence changes in gender relations and individual behaviours at the household level. It was noted that while policy documents are clear about the objectives of PWPs and what outcomes are expected amongst beneficiaries, only local leaders and programme

implementation committees are oriented and provided with information on the objectives in the study sites, which created an information vacuum for PWP beneficiaries (Rowlands, 1997). In addition, a review of the PWP manual found that the manual does not include guidance or “rules” on gender relations and how wages should be specifically used at household level. Instead, the manual only focuses on sectoral technical guidelines to ensure that quality projects are implemented. As a result, during the orientation of local leaders, District Officials focus on technical specifications for the sectors whose projects have been selected by that community. For example, for road projects, the orientation would only cover technical elements of road construction as explained in the PWP road sector guidelines. While participants are told about the need to use “wages” wisely, there is limited emphasis and guidance on what is using wages “wisely”, and generally the orientation does not cover behavioural issues at individual and household levels, which may affect the achievement of objectives of the programme.

Local leaders interviewed who had been oriented on the PWP and had been orienting participants reported that the duration of the training is too short to cover all the materials required and because of the limited time, the focus is usually on covering technical aspects of implementation. They reported that they cannot keep participants longer because there are no financial resources allocated for participant orientation workshops to cover lunch and refreshments for participants. However, both local leaders and participants are told that the wages are meant to improve their well-being and address their poverty. One local leader interviewed said that how this message translates into what one would call well-being at the household level depends on the individual understanding and wisdom. Within the study sites, no specific information, education and communication materials were produced and disseminated to participants to explain anything about the programme. And perhaps this explains why the majority of participants interviewed reported that they were not told or guided on how to use the money.

The lack of key information to beneficiaries defeats the empowerment process, as argued by Rowlands (1997), who says that generative empowerment requires that programmes implement processes by which people become aware of their interests and how those relate to the interests of others, for both to participate from a position of greater strength in decision making and actually to influence such decisions. This implies that for PWPs to have an impact, people should be aware of the expectations of the programme and government at individual, household and community levels. In relation to Kabeer's SRA, it means that the state, as represented by the NLGFC and District Councils, has the power to determine how the programme is implemented and that power affects how communities participate in PWPs. If the state does not have adequate resources (access to resources), then it is not able to provide sufficient

training to communities and cannot even increase wages so households benefit more from PWPs.

4.2 Household level factors

The study found that the household's demographic characteristics strongly influenced how one behaved as an individual and towards others. Household sizes were identified as a critical factor. The study found an overall household size range of 1-18, with the range being larger for female-headed households compared to male-headed households and higher for Nathonje (semi-urban) than for Chadza Headquarters (rural area). In the SRA framework, the distribution of resources at the household level is an important phenomenon. The implication of household sizes in terms of distribution of resources and intrahousehold gender relations is that larger household sizes have more complex and diverse intrahousehold and power relations than smaller households, which could negatively affect the impact of PWPs at the household level. Since the size of the wage is the same across all households, large household sizes have smaller per capita wages, implying that the PWP wage is shared between more people, which weakens the impact of PWPs at the household and individual levels. It also means that whatever the wage is used for, the period it will last within the household, which is called gender remnantism in this study, will be shorter for larger households compared to smaller households. This argument is consistent with what Barrientos (2008) and Quisumbing and Maluccio (1999) put forward that the size of the household is an important consideration for an effective social protection programme. In the social cash transfer programme (another large social protection programme in Malawi), the size of the household is one of the determinants of the size of transfer that a beneficiary household receives, which is not the case with PWPs. Since institutions are selective about whom they include and exclude, who has access to various resources and responsibilities, and who is positioned where in the hierarchy, the large households might mean that the weaker members of the household are excluded from benefitting from PWPs. This selection may reflect class, gender, or other social inequalities and may constitute a form of gender injustice by the programme.

According to one focus group discussion with women, when the household size is large, there is also pressure and expectation from more household members, especially spouses and children, who also expect to benefit from the wages. When benefits are not satisfactory, it leads to quarrels between the PWP participant and the spouse, which negate relationships within the household. The quarrels can lead to gender-based violence manifested as physical, economic and emotional relations between spouses, which can also affect relations with children. The age of a participant or household member was an important attribute in determining relations between household members. It was reported that children do not access certain assets because they are young, and parents fear that they can damage such assets and also that some

assets can injure children. Therefore, households make rules that govern access and control over assets and some of such rules restrict what children can access or control. In addition, it was reported that the personal health status of individual members of the household was key in determining how they related to PWP participants: a married man said:

Normally it is me and my wife who would use a mosquito net, but the priority went to my wife when she became pregnant. Since we had only one mosquito net, it was only her who was now using it to protect her and the unborn baby (Married Male Participant 1, 2020).

Age also affected production relations in deciding who would allocate what task at the household level. Very young children, for example, would not help their parents with PWP activities because they are too young and expected to be in school, as exemplified by the quote below by another male participant.

My children did not help because they were too young and were going to school. I did not think it would be right to ask them to help with PWP work. In terms of protecting and controlling the assets, we are the only elder ones to do so since our children are young. Due to that reason, they are barred from accessing some sensitive assets like finances of the family because they cannot manage to take good care of them and giving them that responsibility they may put the entire family on the risk of starvation and bankruptcy (Married Male Participant 2, 2020).

The study, however, found that the PWP was not implemented in a gender-structured way, hence some of these engendered rules were broken by the programme. It was implemented as a gender-neutral project, where men and women were allocated tasks in the same way. Only the elderly were assigned lighter tasks. Allocation of tasks without considering what women and men are expected to do by the society allowed both men and women to do what is not expected of them from the society, which breaks the norm that certain tasks are for men and others are for women. For example, women were also maintaining roads and digging holes for planting trees, while men could also draw water to water tree seedlings planted by the community. These role-changing tactics were, of course, not planned as a gender mainstreaming strategy by the project, but were coincidental, although they had impact further downstream at the household level. This accidental gender mainstreaming was also reported by Holmes, Jones, & Vedas (2010), who found that PWPs in South Africa and Ethiopia had actually mainstreamed gender, not by plan, but by coincidence. But they had impacts on changing production and power relations within the household. In the context of SRA, it means that the rules that make women and men work on the same tasks, without regard to gender, are transformative in nature because they allow, for

example, women to engage in productive tasks at the same level as men, hence transferring skills to women, who are often disadvantaged.

The current study further noted that children who attend school are likely not to be used to support their parents in actually doing PWP activity and supporting them to domestic work on behalf of the parent who is participating in PWP activity, which is important because it enables them to concentrate on and in school and improve their likelihood to continue their education. This is also a progressive rule that the community as an institution in the SRA has set. However, for children, who are not in school, the study found that they are likely to be the ones to support parents with PWP activity and work on the roles that the participating parent could have done had they been at home. These results indicate that if PWPs can empower individuals through knowledge and skills, it will enhance their ability to act or do something because their actions will be determined by the skills or means that influence them to act or do something (Mntambo 2017).

The study found that households in which a husband is economically active (i.e. has access to resources) and is a participant in PWPs tended to delegate both reproductive and productive work to their spouses and children more than others. In contrast, those household where the man is not actively involved in small-scale business, tended to get involved even in reproductive roles, which are generally spaces for women. Both scenarios have implications on women and children, with the earlier scenario tending to overload women and children with work while the other scenario might reduce women's work at the household level. The study found that in married households, men are called “mutu wa banja”, i.e. head of households, and therefore, they are expected to have control over everything, which is a symbol of power. When asked about what factors couples consider when allocating tasks in their household, a woman said that she assumed the position of a wife and, therefore, she takes care of responsibilities and tasks that are socially expected to be conducted by a wife, such as collecting water, fetching firewood and other similar household chores. Further, the same respondent reported that she learnt to be disciplined from her grandmother before getting married and added that her husband takes care of the roles meant for men.

The study found that men generally considered women as their subordinates (with a lot of power over and controlling behaviours over women), and hence women are allocated tasks related to reproduction and maintenance. In the context of the SRA, this confirms that the household, as an institution, allocates 'rule-governed' sets of activities to different members of the household in order to meet specific needs or the pursuit of specific goals (Kabeer & Subrahmanian, 1996). These activities can be productive, distributive or regulative but their rule-governed nature means that institutions generate routinised practices, which are carried over between generations (ibid). For example, a 43-year old male respondent said, ‘my wife is the one handling

all chores such as cooking, cleaning the house and washing plates because that is her duty as a woman and that is what is expected of her. It is what she was taught by her parents before she got married’.

Further, the study found that because women have too many tasks in the household, they are time-poor, which limits their ability to perform activities outside their home, as evidenced by the quote below:

As a woman, I am always home to take care of the children. So, I cannot travel to far places to fetch money. For example, I cannot travel long distances, leaving children alone at home as a man is usually involved in other distance activities like tilling the land. Since a man has nothing to do at home and has no obligation by culture to nurture the children, his responsibility rests in pursuing for food for the family (Married Female Participant 1, 2020).

The study found that children were not allowed access to high-value assets, for fear of causing damage, which is also a rule that governs access to assets by the rule of exclusion. Related to this rule, it was also found that access and control of assets were also determined by the one who earned that asset. One woman explained that because a lot of assets were fetched by the husband as the head of the family, it is wise for him to be in control of the assets. In this case, the study finding implies that if a PWP enables women to buy assets, the programme would then improve asset ownership amongst women, contributing to their economic empowerment and reducing their vulnerability to shocks, including climate-related shocks.

The study found that there are individuals and households where issues of privacy and transparency are quite respected to the extent that spouses are not allowed to access each other assets, such as phones; to preserve each other’s privacy. In other households, this was not an issue; spouses could access each other’s phones. In one household, we found that the woman was not ready to buy a phone of her own because she was afraid the husband would ask her who she was talking to if a phone rang. The implication is that even if the woman had enough resources, she is not free to invest in the assets that she wanted because she is afraid of losing her marriage, which confirms what many studies have reported that married women are controlled by their men, and for that reason, they are not free to do what they would like to do on their own (Holmes, Jones, & Vedas (2010). This finding also affects access to information communication and technology (ICT), which can affect the adoption of agricultural, health and development technology by women, given that assets such as phones come with many value-added services, which include health information, financial inclusion, agricultural and weather information and disaster management information.

I do not use or own a phone to avoid my husband and people in the village raising suspicions like whom am I talking to apart from my husband, and he

too may have infidelity suspicions of his own when he sees me with a phone (Married Female Participant 2, 2020).

As participants work on PWPs, they create a labour/role/leadership vacuum at the household level. In the study area, participants worked between two to four hours per day for 14 days. With more Type B PWP projects being implemented in the country, participants work for about the same time per day for 24 days. While a participant is participating in PWP, someone else at home must, therefore, take up their roles, regardless of the type of roles. The following quotes by two women provide evidence of this argument.

At one point, for example, as a woman, I had to thatch the bathroom with grass... it is normally my husband who does that, and he is the one who constructed it in the first place. But since he was not around doing PWP and the bathroom was in bad shape, I had to take the task on his behalf (Married (Married Female Participant 3, 2020). I had to spend more hours at the farm than before to cover for the work that would have usually been done by my husband, who was now busy with MASAF... I had to employ ganyu (casual labour) to help me with the work ((Married Female Participant 4, 2020).

Married men whose wives were PWP participants had these words to say in supporting the fact that they help their wives during the programme:

My wife was working hard to help provide for the family, as such, I was merely supporting her by taking up some tasks that she was no longer available to carry out because she was participating in the PW project ((Married Male Participant 1, 2020).

My wife was working to help provide for the family as such, I was merely supporting her by taking up some tasks that she was no longer available to carry out ((Married Male Participant 2, 2020).

Analysis of the four quotes above shows that men and women can perform the roles of each other if the space or opportunity to do so is available. This confirms that the division of labour is not because one sex is not able but because it has been constructed by the society to be so. It can also be argued that if PWPs are longer, then these reversed roles will be performed on a more regular and repeated basis, which means that it may later become a behaviour by each gender to perform functions that are not ascribed to them by the community, transforming gender relations temporalism into a permanent behaviour. This would be needed if PWPs were able to transform gender relations(Kabeer & Subrahmanian, 1996).

4.2.1 Community level factors

The most important community factor that drove individual practices and intrahousehold gender relations was that PWP failed to change cultural norms, traditions and beliefs to transform gender relations at the household level. For example, for division of labour, it was reported by almost every interview that according to rules and norms set by the community culturally, women and men are already assigned roles to do and, therefore, it is not expected that a short-term programme like PWP can structurally change these norms, which agrees with Kabeer (1994) that deep-rooted norms dictate gendered divisions of labour (Kabeer, 1994). Through these community norms and expectations, reproductive roles, such as cooking, drawing water, fetching firewood and cleaning utensils, are expected to be done by women and girls, while boys and men are expected to perform productive tasks that generate income, assets, and food for the household.

Secondly, the PWP failed to change men's control over household decisions and assets. The study found men had control over everything their household had, and PWP had no effect on the men throughout the programme's three phases. When asked about why the situation was so gendered, one man who was a respondent in the study and was a participant in the PWP said emphatically in this following quote:

It is my wife who does almost all the all the household work especially kitchen work and house cleaning while I am busy with gardening or tilling at the farm or doing ganyu to earn money for the household. This is what our culture says. Cooking, collecting firewood are the duties of the woman at home. My job is to look for money to feed the family. I am the household's head. I proposed her and I build a family. I am the one who decides and she must just agree with me. I look for money, and when I get it I give her to buy household needs. In other words, I am the one who dictates what is supposed to be done, and she just has to take what I say (Married Male Participant 3, 2020).

The rules that govern institutions are protected by those who benefit from those rules, such as the man in the quote above. For example, when asked about the state of affairs with the division of labour after the man participated in the programme, he reported that nothing changed because, to him, because, according to him, "PWP did not come to the village to change gender relations", implying that PWP should not be affecting cultural norms. Not only do men assert their roles within the household, but they are supported by women, as evidenced by this female PWP participant, who, when asked about who controls assets within the household, had this to say:

My husband has control over assets because a husband is the head of the house, and me as a wife, I respect that just as I was taught by my grandmother before

I got married. ‘osakalamulira katundu mnyumba mukasiyire abambo’¹. Whatever good the husband does in the family is for the benefit of everyone, whether he has the assets or not. It is culture, and I have to respect it (Married Female Participant 5, 2020).

Fourthly, the study found that local leaders modified the PWP designs at the community level. Some of the modifications weakened the PWP’s potential to transform gender relations in the household. While Government creates rules that govern the PWP, such rules are modified by local leaders to suit their needs and the local operating environment. Local leaders reported that they face pressure from communities to be included on the programme and when those eligible to participate are excluded because of the ceilings provided by the Government, some communities members withdraw from participating in other development projects while others threatened violence against leaders. Because of the high levels of poverty in the community, many people qualify for PWP, against a limited number that can participate due to resource constraints. In turn, the excluded community members threatened not to participate in other community activities. To mitigate this problem, the study found that local leaders recruit more beneficiaries than the ceiling per project as provided by the government. This means that the work and the wage were shared between participants, leading to participants receiving lower wages than what was prescribed by Government (the entitlement). For instance, some beneficiaries reported that they were promised to receive MK28000, but they only got half of it, suggesting that one more person worked on the same wage. They explained that some of the money gets back to the leaders, through rent-seeking behaviours by leaders, who were also allegedly involved in recruiting even ghost workers. Other beneficiaries reported that they are told that they would be in four PWP cycles (Type B) in a year but that this often does not happen.

The implication of local adaptations to the design and implementation of the PWP on individual practices and gender relations at the household and individual levels is that the actual wage is smaller than the entitlement, which reduces the potential transformative impacts at the household level. The wage can no longer support the household at the level that Government envisages, because its value has been reduced by splitting it, which is an indication of a conflict between the rules and goals of the community as an institution and those of the state. Surprisingly, in their argument, however, JIMATT Consulting Group (2008) concluded that local adaptations, such as shortening the duration of the contracted time, were good in order to maximise the number of beneficiaries reached and help more people and reach the participation of larger sections of the vulnerable population (JIMATT Consulting Group, 2008).

¹ Do not go to the marriage to rule the husband

Local leaders and beneficiaries reported that during PWP implementation, there are rules that community leaders formulate to govern the programme's implementation. An example is the rule that when a participant is absent, they are not paid that day. To enforce this rule, a daily participation register is kept, where every day, a foreman conducts a roll-call and marks in and out who has worked and not worked on the programme. In terms of the impact of this rule on gender relations, the study found that it was the main cause of participants using proxies to represent them when they were not able to participate for various reasons. In some cases, the study found that such proxies were older adolescent children, who, for that day or days, tend to absent themselves from school to participate in the programme on behalf of their parents and guardians, so that the household does not lose that day's wage entitlement. Potentially, this is a cause for concern, as it may be a form of child labour if children work more than what is allowed under the labour laws of Malawi. The findings agree with studies in Ethiopia which reported that PWPs might have substitution effects on child labour because, although the programme aims to provide employment opportunities during off-pick agricultural seasons, its implementation coincided with peak agricultural seasons in some parts of the country (Sharp, Brown, & Teshome, 2006; World Bank, 2011). Similar arguments have also been made by Dinku (2019), who reported that to the extent that labour supply commitments of adult household members conflict with their responsibilities in household production, households might resort to children to meet their labour demand, which necessitates an increase in child labour.

4.2.2 Market level factors

The study found that the type of products and services available within the area, which has to do with what assets and resources are available for the community, played an important role in determining the individual practices and gender relations between participants and household members. Firstly, at an individual level, regarding decision-making behaviour about choices of sources of income, the study found that the availability of alternative and better sources of income in the area influences a participant's choice on whether to participate in the PWP or not. In this study for example, 19% of all who were selected to participate in the programme either refused or dropped out of the programme early. According to focus group discussions, the main reasons for dropping out were that some participants viewed the wages as being low compared to the scope of work to be done under the PWP. Others found new economic opportunities which were better paying, and yet others were reported to have dropped out because they did not want to be viewed as being poor since the PWP targets the poor.

It was also reported that while Government promotes the use of wages for investments in savings groups and encourages participants to open bank accounts, this was not always possible in the area, because savings groups are quite limited and worse still, formal banks are very far and largely not available and accessible to the community.

This is why the study found that only 19% of beneficiaries had used wages for saving in village savings and loan groups and banks, respectively. In this case, the study showed that PWP is limited in promoting financial inclusion because financial markets are not functional in rural areas, and the Government and the private sector have not done enough to provide financial products and services to rural areas. A critical finding reported by a local leader, which is also related to financial products and services, was that because of the lack of loan services in the area, most participants tend to borrow money from village loan shacks at an interest rate of 50%. In some cases, individual participants borrow such money without their spouses knowing. Because of high illiteracy, some beneficiaries keep borrowing during participation and by the time wages are paid, the money borrowed surpasses the amount of wages received, which means that such participants receive nothing on the payday and instead, they have to source additional money to pay the loan shacks. In such cases, it was reported that there are often disagreements and suspicion from spouses, leading to violence within the home.

4.2.3 Statutory level factors

According to key informants from Government and documents reviewed, the amount of wages that participants receive is determined by Government, and the main factors that government considers are the availability of resources and the current minimum wage rate (Phiri, 2012). Most respondents in the study complained that the wage they received was small, affecting what they could use it for and for how long (gender relations remnantism). What the wage is used for and how long the wage or what it is used to buy was reported to influence gender relations within the household. The longer the wage stays or its effects (such as food security) remain in the household, the more members relate well and love each other without arguments. This is the concept that the authors have termed “*gender remnantism*”, which in simple terms, is the gender effect that remains within the household after the wage is used up. Most importantly, it affects who can benefit from the wages because the limited wage means that the participants cannot support many members of the household, which means he or she will do some intrahousehold targeting by excluding some members who would eventually feel excluded and disenfranchised. Those household members not supported because of the prioritisation feel excluded and not loved, which can damage relationships with the participant.

It was also reported by beneficiaries that because the wage is small, it loses its transformative abilities because beneficiaries cannot invest in long-term resilience and development activities at the household level. As a result, the wages are only used for smoothing consumption, which only improves temporary gender relations, which has been confirmed through this study. A 67-year-old female, who is also the head of her household, had this to say, ‘the money was too little to change my behaviour. The only thing that changed was my food consumption pattern because I was at least able

to buy some meat and tea “popita kokatenga ndalama ndidamwa chikapu chachikulu chimodzi cha tea wankaka ndi bread pa ngongole kenako pobwerera kotenga ndalama ndidalipira ngongole ija ndikumwanso chikapu china kenako kumabwera bwino kunyumba’²

When wage payments are delayed, it also creates tension in the household because spouses and children think the participant may have already used up the wages when actually they have not been paid. The amount of wages to be transferred to beneficiaries is also determined by the Government. At a household level, most participants feel the wage is too small to transform gender relations. As argued earlier, this is why many participants suggested that there is a need for Government to change the PWP and increase the frequency of the work from once a year to two to three times so that beneficiaries earn wages (predictable income) several times a year, which could allow them to invest in meaningful developments at individual and household level, which transforms gender relations at the household level, through the wage transfer itself, the assets created, the skills development or work experience (McCord & Farrington, 2008).

One key targeting rule by the government is that only poor households with labour should be enrolled in the PWP. The community also confirmed this rule. However, this rule is rarely followed, as even those with limited labour are provided for in the programme because the community adjusts such targeting criteria. The need for many people to participate in the PWP results from limited employment and economic opportunities. The state’s dictate is that each project should have 200 participants. There is no consideration of where they come from, who they are and whether that corresponds to the number of eligible people in that community.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

In summary, the paper has critically gender-analysed the PWP in Malawi and has identified parameters of both the PWP at five institutional levels that affect gender relations within the household.

The study has also shown that these parameters do not operate in isolation, they are interlinked and overlap, and if PWPs have to be impactful at the household level, it has to understand and unpack the issues and mitigate against them at their operational level.

The study, therefore, recommends that Local Government Authorities or Councils should properly orient and train local leaders and PWP participants on the objectives of the PWPs and their linkages to gender issues. Training modules on gender should

² As I was going to collect the pay, I took a big cup of tea with bread on credit and repaid when I got paid and then returned home

be included in the operational manual for PWP, with the aim of building the capacity for communities and households on gender issues. Local leaders should not change the design and rules of the programme, which weakens its impact on the household. LGAs should put in place measures (such as e-payments) to ensure that wages are paid in time to reduce frustration amongst beneficiaries. Priority sectors within Local Government Authorities, such as agriculture, environment, climate change, health and education should coordinate and develop gender-sensitive extension and training messages that are directed at specific contexts in the country and use public works programmes as a means of delivering extension messages on various technologies. Gender analysis to understand specific factors that may influence implementation and impacts of the programme should be done as part of programme implementation and management.

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