



MAKING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING WORK FOR WOMEN AND VULNERABLE STUDENTS IN MALAWI: IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Executive Summary

Despite gender policies, affirmative action strategies and the inclusion of gender issues in development plans, strategic plans and programmes, women and girls continue to lag behind in almost all aspects of Malawi's development indices, including in education and socio-economic status. The technical, entrepreneurial and vocational education and training (TEVET) system remains male-dominated, and students with disabilities (SWD) and other vulnerable students do not have equal access to skills training. This policy brief reports the main findings and recommendations from a study examining the current status of access and success for these vulnerable groups in Malawi's TEVET education system.

This policy brief outlines issues related to access, equity and success for female and other vulnerable students. It identifies gender and inclusion-related barriers and challenges, and provides recommendations for changes in areas such as policy, programming, teaching and learning, and institutional management.

The main finding is that female students, SWD and other vulnerable students face a range of barriers limiting their chances for access to and success in TEVET programmes. These barriers include:

- restrictive cultural gender norms
- lack of role models and career guidance
- inadequate teacher training and college management
- weak secondary education background of students (primarily in maths and science)
- issues of gender-based violence (GBV) and lack of respect
- lack of appropriate institutional support for social well-being issues in colleges
- lack of teaching and learning equipment and materials
- deficits in infrastructure and maintenance practices.

In spite of an overall increase in enrolment of students in technical education, the enrolment of females and SWD continues to be low, and it is especially low for females training to work in traditionally male-dominated trades. This policy brief is designed to illustrate a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to increase access and improve success for females and SWD in the TEVET system.

Introduction

The Malawi National Gender Policy (2015) identifies challenges to gender equality and strategies to promote equality in all areas, including in education.¹ The Malawi TEVET Policy of the Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports, and Manpower Development (MoLYSMD) has increasing access and equity in Malawi's TEVET system as its priority area 1. MoLYSMD strives to increase current levels of enrolment of female students and vulnerable students in TEVET training from less than 30 per cent to 60 per cent.² The policy documents identify the many challenges faced by females and vulnerable students as they navigate the education system. Goals and targets have been set for improving performance.

Increasing access to technical training provides opportunities related to the needs and conditions of the target group, whether in terms of educational background, interests, or proximity to institutions and availability of training options. A TEVET student is successful when their TEVET training programme leads to achievement of the desirable outcome – the opportunity for decent work.

A Gender and Inclusion study was conducted from October to November 2017 in twelve training institutions in the three regions of Malawi. They included examples of all four types of institution: public and private technical colleges, community technical colleges and community skills development centres. Also included in the study were a training institution catering to SWD (Lilongwe Vocational Institute, run by the Malawi Council for the Handicapped, MACOHA) and two TEVET teacher training institutions. Individual interviews with students, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, document review and observation were used to obtain data which was analysed to identify issues affecting access and success for females and SWD at each institution. The analysis evaluated the impact of policies and plans in supporting access and success. The study also examined the physical and cultural environments of selected TEVET institutions in terms of how they supported or hindered access and success in the TEVET system.

Main Findings

Lack of appropriate targets and indicators for measuring access, equity and success

At the policy and planning level, there is a stated desire to recruit female students and those with disabilities or who are otherwise marginalized or vulnerable. However, gender and inclusion are not mainstreamed throughout the policies and plans, rendering them less effective. Specific strategies are specified, with unrealistic targets listed which may or may not support the goals. In addition, increasing access is not aligned with specific strategies that support success in the training, to ensure that vulnerable students graduate and become employed or self-employed. The policies and plans are also made less effective by the lack of mechanisms for tracking female students and SWD, both on access (especially SWD and other vulnerable students), and on completion/success and transition to decent employment.

Barriers to access to TEVET courses

A number of barriers that limit access to TEVET training by female students and SWD were identified. These include the entry requirement of a Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) or its equivalent with credit passes in mathematics, English and science; restrictive cultural gender norms; lack of role models and career talks to motivate females to pursue TEVET in general, and programmes that are considered male-dominated in particular. The performance of female students at the MSCE level is lower than that of male students (in 2017 there was a 56 per cent pass rate for females and 67 per cent for males).

This limits their chances of being enrolled in technical education, especially in the male-dominated trades. Poor preparation in mathematics and science at the secondary level also negatively affects female students' programme choice. For SWD, the same barriers apply, and in addition most training institutions are not fully accessible to those with mobility problems, and there is a lack of specialist equipment.

1 Malawi. 2015. National Gender Policy, Lilongwe, Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare.

2 Malawi. 2013. TEVET Policy, 2nd edition. Lilongwe, Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Manpower Development.

As a result of these and other barriers, the participation of female students in TEVET remains low, ranging from 28 to 32 per cent from 2013 to 2018 (Table 1). Male students continue to be enrolled in programmes that train them for stereotypically male occupations such as construction, while most of the female students are enrolled in programmes such as tailoring and administration. The percentage of female students learning construction trades is minimal. The enrolment of people with disabilities is very low in technical education because most colleges do not have the facilities and materials needed to assist them. A lack of documentation makes it difficult to determine the exact numbers of SWD enrolled in any institution.

Table 1: Recruitment to TEVET programmes

Year	Male		Female		Total recruits
2013	782	72%	302	28%	1,084
2014	889	69%	394	31%	1,283
2016	1073	72%	413	28%	1,486
2017	1018	68%	471	32%	1,489

Source: abridged from UNESCO, Situational Analysis of TEVET Teacher Training in Malawi, 2018, Table 1, p. 15.

A gender-responsive and inclusive curriculum

It is TEVETA's responsibility to manage the development of curriculum materials (training modules) used in technical colleges. An unwritten policy of 'gender-neutral' curriculum development currently dictates the design of materials. Efforts are made to ensure a gender balance in photos used on document covers and in other written and electronic materials. A curriculum policy is required to ensure that all teaching and learning material development incorporates a gender-responsive and inclusive model, and that a SWD perspective is incorporated into these documents, in which SWD are currently invisible. An additional 'teacher's guide' is urgently required to impart improved teaching methodologies and guidelines for inclusive and gender-responsive techniques. This is especially critical because of the lack of comprehensive technical teacher training. The development and distribution of a students' manual to accompany the courses would be a major step forward, and would greatly enhance student success.

Barriers to success in the TEVET education system

Female students reported that they find it challenging to complete TEVET training for the following reasons: lack of personal funds; inadequate availability and amounts of bursaries and scholarships for female students; lack of enforced codes of conduct for administrators, instructors and students; GBV and poor attitudes of instructors towards female students; insufficient numbers of female hostels, and the poor condition of college infrastructure. Once enrolled, female students can face additional challenges such as having an unplanned pregnancy, being forced by a husband to discontinue their programme, being mocked by the community for joining a programme 'meant for males', and finding that instructors give challenging tasks to male students while side-lining female students. SWD face additional barriers to success such as discrimination, the scarcity of specialized equipment and teaching materials, a lack of specially trained instructors, and poor student support mechanisms in the colleges.

Gender and inclusion issues during work attachment

While on work attachments, insufficient and poorly timed financial support (training allowances) increases vulnerability, particularly for female students, as they are forced to use alternative coping strategies that may negatively affect their success. These include skipping on food, using unsafe transportation methods, and staying in unsafe boarding houses. Female students also experience sexual and other types of harassment at their workplace, boarding house, or during transport to and from the workplace. The forms of sexual harassment include supervisors who provide additional paid work demanding sexual favours in return; being given poor assessments when they have declined sexual advances from supervisors; being denied an attachment in industry after refusing to have sex with the industry placement person; and verbal abuse by

supervisors, something experienced by both female and male students. Female students are also subjected to stereotyping related to work assignments: they are often given less demanding work or sidelined by supervisors while male students are given job-appropriate tasks. Periods of attachment to industry tend to be lengthy, which can lead to students dropping out because of their inability to manage financially or unplanned pregnancy.

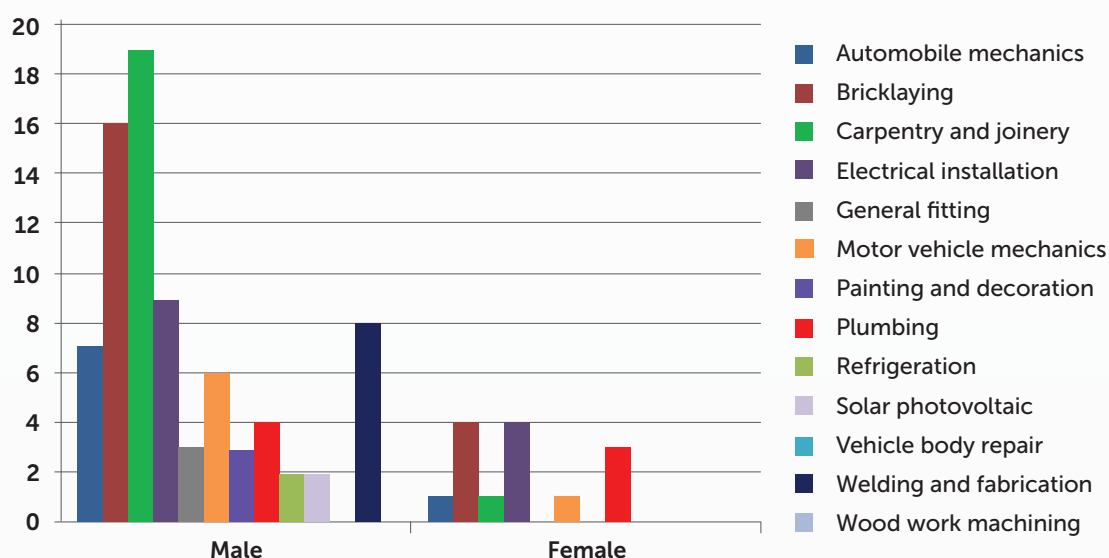
Gender equality and inclusion issues related to employment and self-employment

The study found that female and male graduates have different chances of obtaining relevant employment. According to students, this is mainly because some employers have a mindset that women cannot perform well in male-dominated technical trades. A TEVET tracer study (2017) also found that more females than males were unemployed after completing TEVET training. The tracer study reported that out of the fifty-nine female graduates participating in the study, few (12 per cent) became self-employed after TEVET training.³ The reasons they gave for not choosing to start an independent business included inadequate skills and experience, and a lack of capital.

Lack of career role models and career guidance activities in secondary schools

Female instructors continue to be outnumbered in the TEVET system and are predominantly found in female-dominated trades, resulting in few role models for females studying in male-dominated trades (see Table 2). A lack of comprehensive career guidance was reported by students, instructors and administrators as a significant barrier to students' knowledge about training options, especially in technical careers. Most of the students reported that they did not receive career guidance in secondary school. Those few students who reported having career talks in secondary school stated that only university programmes were discussed. Students suggested this lack of information plays a role in students perceiving TEVET as a fallback option should they fail to be accepted into a university programme. According to the respondents, TEVETA has begun implementing a number of career guidance activities in some secondary schools in Malawi. However, there is no career guidance policy or any national programme offered in schools.

Table 2: Technical teachers in study institutions by gender



Source: Interviews and data collected from study institutions.

³ TEVETA. 2017. The Tracer Study Report: Malawi 2014 Formal TEVET Graduates. Lilongwe, TEVETA.

Inadequate facilities and materials to support gender equality and inclusion in TEVET Institutions

A lack of maintenance and repair at most technical training facilities perpetuates the poor image of TEVET, creates safety concerns, and discourages students, particularly female students and SWD. Open drains, lack of sufficient lighting and fencing, broken windows, lack of functioning toilets and other sanitary concerns increase health and safety issues for all students. It was observed that most of the facilities in public technical colleges are not user-friendly for SWD, especially the blind and those using wheelchairs. There have been initiatives to install wheelchair ramps in the colleges but they are only available to a few buildings, while others remain inaccessible. In a number of schools visited, newly built ramps were constructed without knowledge of appropriate specifications, so some are too steep or too narrow, and others end abruptly in piles of rubbish and other hazards. Only one college had purpose-built toilets and hostel facilities for SWD. At the MACOHA-run institute in Lilongwe, in general, the facilities such as classrooms, hostels and the dining room can easily be accessed by SWD.

For female students there is limited hostel accommodation, with deficiencies in existing structures such as a lack of sufficient and functioning toilets, no sanitary bins, and poor security in toilets and hostels, especially a lack of door locks and missing windows, screens or bars. Poor overall maintenance, and unkempt and littered grounds especially in public technical colleges, not create a only a poor image but can increase the chances of students dropping out.

Conclusion

There are structural, financial, educational and cultural barriers that prevent many females and SWD from obtaining access to TEVET, while programme choice, gender-based violence, lack of support for student well-being, untrained teachers, finances and infrastructure can cause a lack of success and non-completion. Barriers to access and success in TEVET programming for female students and SWD require systematic attention at all levels of the TEVET system.

Insufficient female boarding opportunities, and maintenance deficits which render existing facilities unpleasant if not unusable, must be remedied. Management oversight of technical training institutions is required to address these deficits and to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. New and attractive programming for female students should be prioritized, while specific programmes that can accommodate SWD should be identified and publicized. Gender equality and inclusion training is required at all levels of the system, from the Ministry to the college level (for administrators, instructors and support staff). TEVET instructors require training in gender-responsive teaching methodologies. Personnel dealing with students' welfare issues need proper training in psychological counselling and social welfare skills. Instructor qualifications are low, and increased training and upgrading would produce a more professional teaching service better able to teach all students effectively, including females and SWD. Codes of conduct for all (administrators, instructors and students) must be developed and enforced.



Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the main recommendations are as follows:

- Technical colleges/DTVT/TEVETA should design and implement a course for instructors, administrators and students which expands on the current administrator/instructor and student codes of conduct to include a policy and practice of zero tolerance of gender-based violence.
- TEVETA should design an effective management information system to determine system effectiveness and to systematically gather information on access, especially for SWD, and completion and employment rates for all students.
- TEVET colleges should develop institutional strategic plans clearly identifying strategies to increase the access and success of female students and SWD, with appropriate, measurable actions, timelines, performance indicators and areas of responsibility.
- DTVT/TEVETA, in partnership with STEP and MoEST, should develop career guidance materials for upper primary and secondary school students, their parents/guardians, and rural community leaders. Role-modelling activities should be included to motivate female students and SWD to consider TEVET.
- TEVET administrators and instructors must be trained effectively in gender-responsive and inclusive education concepts and teaching strategies through planned pre-service, in-service, and continuing professional development.
- TEVETA should develop a deliberate policy and guidelines for TEVET publications to ensure gender equality and inclusion in all public documents and a move from a 'gender neutral' curriculum to a gender-responsive one.
- DTVT/TEVETA should create 'centres of excellence' for SWD at the MACOHA Lilongwe and MAGOMERO training institutions as a first step in increasing SWD access and success.
- DTVT/TEVETA should implement a facility and environmental audit of college premises, identifying a list of high-priority maintenance requirements (particularly for hostels, cafeterias and toilets) and developing an effective ongoing maintenance plan with actions, targets, areas of responsibility and timelines.

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union under the Skills and Technical Education Programme (STEP). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the consultants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or UNESCO.



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