



Women@work Campaign

# TOWARDS DECENT WORK FOR ALL

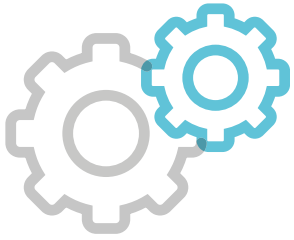
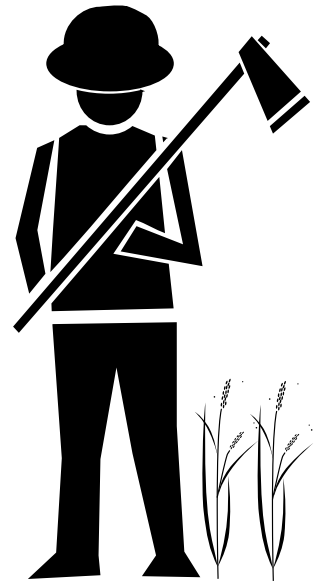
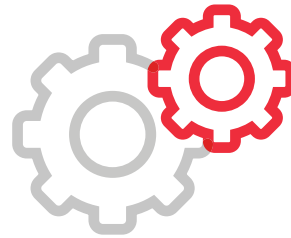
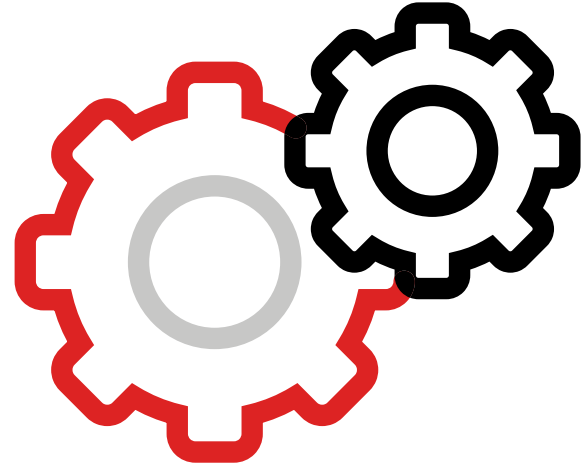
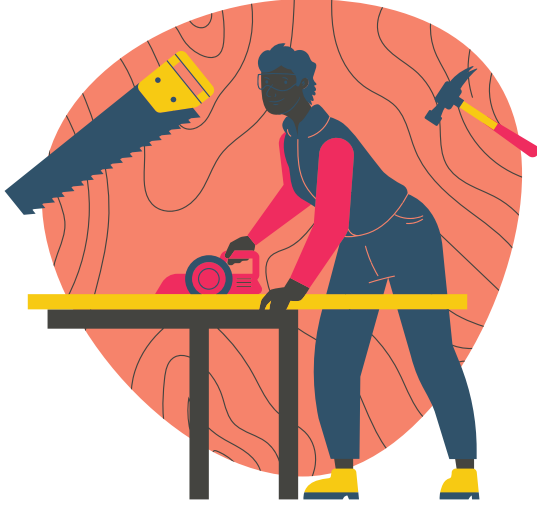
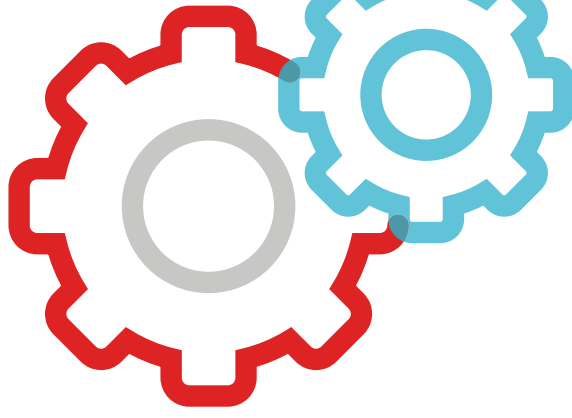
A FOCUS ON THE INFORMAL AND AGRICULTURE SECTORS

POLICY BRIEF

**Hivos**  
people unlimited

every girl in school alliance  
**egisa**

[HTTPS://WOMENATWORKCAMPAIGN.ORG/](https://womenatworkcampaign.org/)





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

The Malawi Decent Work Country Program 2011 – 2016 (MDWCP) was developed after deep consultations with various stakeholders. The purpose of the Decent Work Country Programme for Malawi was to coordinate, harmonize and align technical assistance and financial resources around an achievable set of priority outcomes related to the promotion of the ILO's global Decent Work Agenda.

The programme attempts to address the decent work deficits by focusing on three priority areas namely: creating more and better employment and income generation opportunities including the youth, women and people with disabilities, as well as ensuring the elimination of the worst forms of child labor; enhancing and extending the coverage of social protection; and building the capabilities of the government and social partners to improve service delivery.

However, almost 10 years later, the reality that exists is a Programme whose impact has been minimal in addressing decent work deficits. Malawi still faces a lot of decent work deficits such as gender unresponsiveness, gender pay gaps, low wages, absence of sufficient employment, inadequate social protection, the denial of rights at work and failure to participate in social dialogue.

This policy brief analyses the implementation of the Malawi Decent Work Country Programme (2011-2016), identifies key gaps and offers recommendations for policy change. This is particularly critical now as the country engages in a review process of the decent work programme.

# METHODOLOGY

This policy brief was informed by submissions from 27 writers, through the National Essay competition, who wrote essays analyzing the Malawi Decent Work Country Programme 2011-2016 and offering recommendations for inclusion in the ongoing country level review of the MDWCP. The writers spanned from young women, students, academics and development practitioners who used their different lenses to analyse the programme. Emerging themes from the different authors were synthesized to produce this concise but comprehensive brief.



1. Poor enforcement of existing labours laws by the government due to insufficient capacity
2. Historical gender discrimination based on deeprooted cultural attitudes and beliefs
3. Inadequate capacity of the dispute settlement and adjudication system
4. Generalised minimum wage across all working sectors
5. Limited representation of informal workers in unions due to fear of 'losing their jobs'
6. Outdated laws that are not in line with the constituition, Labour Act and other International protocols Malawi is a party to
7. Poor social protection mechanims, especially within the informal sector
8. Widening gender pay gap, particularly in agriculture and mining
9. High unemployment
10. Poor wages - minimum wage is not always a fair wage!

## DECENT WORK DEFICITS

According to research, the following are the major decent work deficits in Malawi:





# RESEARCH, RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. RIGHTS AT WORK AND EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Despite the inclusion of creation of employment that is decent for women, youths and people with disabilities in the Decent Work Country Programme, the country is to date still experiencing high levels of underemployment due to the insufficient number of jobs created by the formal economy. As of 2019, the Malawi Unemployment rate was 5.65%, an increase of 0.03% from 2018.

Even though the government acknowledges that women mostly work in the agriculture sector, the DWCP fails to address the decent work issues women (and men) face in the informal sector by mostly focusing on decent work strategies that are mostly applicable to the formal sector. Work in the agriculture sector tends to consist mostly of self-employment, casual and seasonal work. By failing to acknowledge these forms of employment, the programme fails to address the issues of low wages, delayed payments or work without pay, overworked laborers, child labor, gendered pay gap and many other decent work deficits.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The new MDWCP should direct strategies and activities towards the informal economy, particularly casual and self-employment which are normally characterized by low labour productivity, informality, underemployment, gender inequality, discrimination and exploitation. The MDWCP must refocus on strategies that promote employment-creation programmes in rural areas, train smallholder farmers in agribusiness and access to markets, injecting funds in the rural areas for the investment and growth of business through grants and loans to local entrepreneurs, to enforce and police occupational health and safety (OSH) standards for the rural workforce. Lastly, the MDWCP should speak to living wage not minimum wage!



# RESEARCH, RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 2. SOCIAL PROTECTION

The country still has a long way to go in the achievement of social protection that is extensive as well as available in the formal sector because of the slowness to formulate and implement tangible policies and guidelines. The structure of the Malawian labor market and the large number of jobs in the informal economy leave the majority of workers without basic forms of social protection. The voluntary pension and medical aid schemes provided by few large employers are also threatened by the controversy over severance allowance provisions in the law.

Even though the Country Programme aimed at putting in place mechanisms that identify and manage risks at work, be it repetitive tasks, long hours, exposure to harmful substances, noise, psychological pressure, physical aggression and much more; facilitate the establishment of national systems for a preventative culture; this is all but a dream in rural areas where employment is mainly from the agricultural sector. A majority of the population residing in rural areas still works in harmful environments and face physical as well as psychological aggression.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be well defined timelines to guide the formulation and implementation of policies. Malawi as a nation still lags in its labour policy formation and adoption rates. The relevant bodies expected to implement policies do so with little urgency and this impedes progress. For example, the second outcome of the second priority states that relevant policies in line with general social protection such as the pension act should be implemented, but the government as a model employer, had not complied with this by 2015 even though it was obliged to do so by 2013.

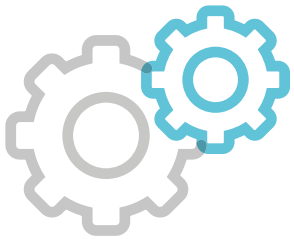
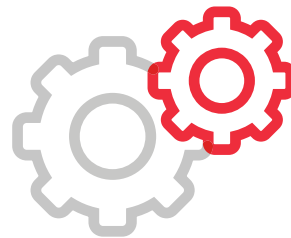
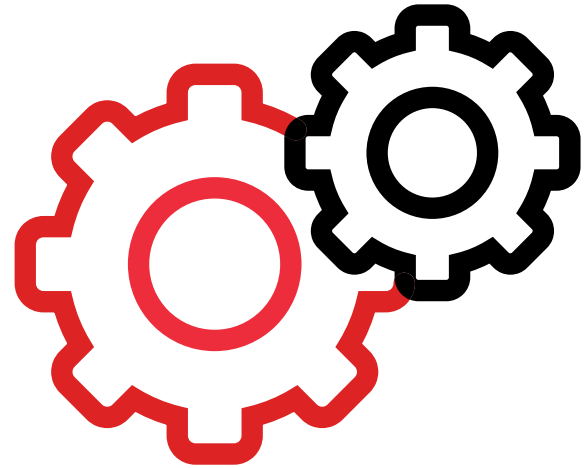
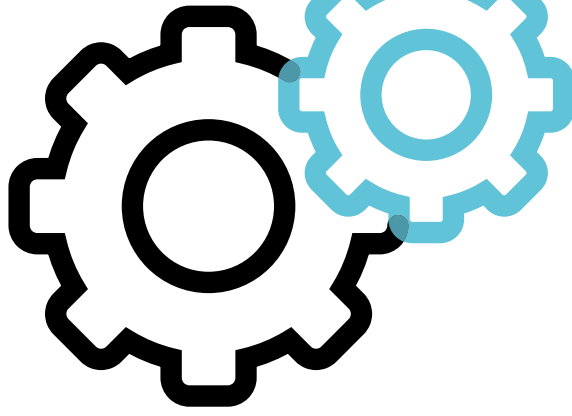
## 3. SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Malawi comes from a historical background where social dialogue was virtually non-existent, during the one party state era. Since then, much progress has been made. However, despite creating necessary institutional mechanisms and structures for social dialogue to thrive, for instance, the Tripartite Labor Advisory Council (TLAC), the National social dialogue forum still faces sustainability problems. Additionally, workers still face a huge knowledge gap, making their participation in social dialogue processes very minimal at best. Relationships between government, labour unions and employers are also in need of strengthening.

### 4 Decent Work for all

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that the interests of informal workers and economic units are represented in existing spaces for dialogue, or to generate new spaces to include them. On the government side, efforts can be made to create spaces for dialogue with informal economy players, in line with the Resolution on decent work and the informal economy, adopted at the 90th International Labour Conference (2002), and ILO Recommendation 204 (2015). Over and above that, government can enhance informal sector participation through creating room and space in political decision making, which will lead to designing more appropriate strategies, and lending legitimacy to the social dialogue processes





# TOWARDS DECENT WORK FOR ALL

A FOCUS ON THE INFORMAL AND AGRICULTURE SECTORS

This Policy Brief has been produced by Angellah Manda, Women@Work Programme Associate; and Willson Chivhanga, Executive Director, at Every Girl in School Alliance (EGISA) in September 2020. Our thanks to the HIVOS Malawi Country Office Team for the support and guidance through this project.

For further information on EGISA and our work, please contact us on:

[info@egisa.org](mailto:info@egisa.org) // +265 990 16 19 96

**Hivos**  
people unlimited

