

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

## **Moyo Olemkezeka Cohort Study Baseline: Key Findings Summary**

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# Moyo Olemekezeka Cohort Study Baseline: Summary of Key Findings

Tithetse Nkhanza! (TN) was a VAWG prevention and response programme, funded by the UK FCDO, working in three districts of Malawi. It was designed to pilot and evaluate prevention interventions with the potential for scale up. One of these prevention models was Moyo Olemekezeka (MO), or “Living with Dignity” in Chichewa, which aims to address intimate partner violence (IPV) through a couple’s-based curriculum on both social and economic empowerment, including income generating activities (IGA). The MO intervention was planned to be coupled with women’s economic empowerment initiative onto this community-based social norms programme. TN adapted the MO approach based on the Zindagii Shoista intervention, previously implemented in Tajikistan.<sup>1</sup>

## Who is this paper for?

This paper is for practitioners working on topics related to gender-based violence, women’s economic empowerment, and social norms related to gender. The focus is on Southern Africa, though many dynamics and implications are relevant to a global audience.

*SASA! Together* to test the added value of layering a women’s economic empowerment initiative onto this community-based social norms programme. TN adapted the MO approach based on the Zindagii Shoista intervention, previously implemented in Tajikistan.<sup>1</sup>

This document presents a snapshot of findings from the baseline study for the MO intervention. It is intended to complement other learning products produced by TN related to MO, including the MO adaptation learning brief, and the MO manuals, which together create a package of background information and training materials that may be useful to practitioners wishing to implement this, or a similar programme in the future.

## Study objective and approach

The study aimed to provide a baseline for the MO intervention, with the ultimate goal of understanding whether and how the lives of individuals participating directly in MO activities had changed as a result of the intervention. Specific research questions used to guide this study are presented in [Annex 1](#).<sup>2</sup>

This paper presents key insights from the baseline data collected in March 2020, based on qualitative interviews carried out with all couples participating in MO in Karonga, Mangochi and Lilongwe, prior to the implementation of MO activities.<sup>3</sup> These participants were selected to join MO based on a number of criteria, including:

- Prioritisation of couples with food sufficiency of less than three months,
- Households where young women have no access to livelihood interventions,
- Couples where women have a lesser degree of decision making,
- Families with a willingness to bring change in the family and commitment to attending all MO sessions.
- Additionally, special efforts were made to include couples living with a person with a disability when selecting programme participants.

Interview transcripts were coded using a qualitative coding framework as well as to capture specific quantitative measures, allowing for a mixed methods analysis of the data set to be presented in this brief. Unfortunately, limited resources did not allow for dyadic analysis of couples’ responses;<sup>4</sup> however, where possible responses by female participants were triangulated with responses from male participants.

<sup>1</sup> This curriculum can be found here: <https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/curricula/248-tajikistan-livingwithdignity-toolkitpt2-en-2018/file>

<sup>2</sup> The full study methodology is provided in the Moyo Olemekezeka Cohort Study Concept Note, available upon request.

<sup>3</sup> Each member of the couple was interviewed separately.

<sup>4</sup> Dyadic analysis would entail analysis of specific responses from both members of the couple in tandem

## Purpose of this brief

As TN prematurely ended in July 2021 due to UK aid budget cuts and no further MO activities were to be implemented, this brief is intended to share insights gained through this baseline study relevant to the key themes underpinning the MO intervention. The aim is to provide insights for others working in Malawi and on combined social and economic empowerment interventions for GBV prevention. Specifically, this brief covers:<sup>5</sup>

- **Household economic status:** including sources of income, income earning roles, assets, debt, savings, to provide context into the economic realities of the couples included in the study.
- **Intimate partner violence:** to understand views on the acceptability of violence, experiences of violence, and the association between violence and triggers of violence, including social norms, alcohol, and household finance.
- **Income generating activities and micro-business:** to explore people's history of IGA and business, successes, challenges and aspirations, relevant to the economic empowerment interventions under MO.

This report concludes by considering the implications of the findings for VAWG programmes in Malawi and on those working on VAWG issues more broadly. While the findings are only intended to be generalised within study participants, they provide insights that may be relevant to those working on similar issues and with populations with similar traits and experiences.

## Participant Profile

Overall, this study presents the views of the 119 MO participants, which include 59 male-female couples: 60 women, 59 men (20F/20M in Karonga; 20F/20M in Lilongwe; and 20F/19M in Mangochi) as one man could not be reached. Of these individuals, 16 (10M/6F) individuals had a physical or cognitive disability (13.5%), which is higher than the national prevalence of disability<sup>6</sup> and reflects the programme's intention of reaching this group. All couples were married and all but six had children; participants most commonly had three children, with one couple having seven children. No couples were involved in a polygamous marriage, though one couple was separated and living apart at the time of the interview.<sup>7</sup>

## Household Economic Status and IPV

Couples were selected for the MO programme based in part on an understanding that they could benefit from support for economic empowerment and income generating activities (IGA). Participants commonly described themselves as 'poor' and felt they struggled financially. In total, 49 out of 57 men (85.9%) described themselves as the primary income earner. In comparison, only 7 out of 60 women (11.6%) identified themselves as the primary income earner, while four women said they played an equal role in contributing to the finances of the household.

### Income earning and sources

Overall, 50.4% of participants described their household as relying on 'piece work'/ casual, daily labour, followed by 18.5% on agriculture, and 17.6% on selling small goods, with responses from men and women corresponding on this topic. Participants explained that piece work included agricultural labour on other people's plots, as only a small proportion of respondents owned land (as noted below). Of those who owned land, 22 (62.1%) lived in Karonga, followed by 12 (34.2%) in Mangochi and only one participant in Lilongwe. Additionally, 4 men and 1 woman said they primarily depended on begging for income, two of whom had a physical disability, and all of whom lived in Lilongwe.

Participants struggled to define their individual income, as nearly all of them depended on a combination of cash, crops, and other forms of non-cash remuneration, including soap, cooking items and kerosene, to survive. For most, this cash

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<sup>5</sup> Note that this document is not intended to provide a full assessment of the study findings at this stage. A full data set for this baseline is available should more detailed additional analysis be required.

<sup>6</sup> According to the 2018 Malawi Housing and Population Census Disability Report

<sup>7</sup> The decision to focus on couples in monogamous marriages was part of the MO design and is further discussed in the MO learning brief.

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income was also highly volatile, due to both seasonality as well as the nature of informal labour, for which the supply of work and the remuneration can vary widely. One woman in Karonga explained her situation, as follows

*'I sell fish. I had a grocery shop, but it ended because there was a certain problem, my child was sick... [my husband] he does piece work, he looks for piece works, that's all...we only earn small, God gives MK500 it's enough of if you earn MK1000 that's all.'* Female participant, Karonga

A man in Lilongwe also explained his situation,

*'It is difficult to say how much money you get from motorbike taxiing because today you get an amount of money different from the one you will get tomorrow. The most important thing is that when we get a bigger amount, we just find out to say, what is it that we don't have in the household? Is there no flour? What is not there? So we just take the money and use it on flour. That's all. When we find the flour, we start hunting money for relish.'* Male participant, Lilongwe

Approximately half the respondents provided their cash income by the day. Of these individuals, the majority of both men and women earned less than MWK 1,100 (approx. USD \$1.40) per day. While some participants worked every day, they also noted that this income was not guaranteed as the supply of work was unpredictable. Other participants found it easier to estimate their cash income by month. On average, this group said they earned an average of approx. MKW 15,000 (approx. USD \$18.71) per month, though this was approximately double in Lilongwe, where people said they required cash more often than those living in rural areas. In total, 10 of the 16 participants with disabilities said they earned less than MKW 12,000 (approx. USD \$14.97) per month.

For the 86 total people who estimated their cash income by the month, on average men said they earned approximately twice that of women: MWK 18,895 for men, as compared with MWK 9,700 for women. While on average male participants accurately estimated their wives' income (MWK 9,265 or USD \$11.56 per month), female participants estimated that their husbands earned MWK 38,800 (approx. USD \$48.40), more than double the average that men reported earning.

The average monthly income for women who experienced physical or sexual violence from their spouse was similar to the overall average (MWK 14,282 or USD \$17.81, with average approx. MWK 15,000 or USD \$18.71). However, 23 out of these 30 women, or 76.6%, said they earned less than MWK 11,430 per month. While belonging to a lower income group was associated with experiences of IPV, the study was not designed to assess causality or whether lower income was related to increased risk of IPV.

### Assets, savings and debt

Relatively few couples had significant assets. Overall, approximately one third of couples (21 men and 14 women) said they owned land, slightly fewer (17 women and 16 men) said they had large assets like furniture or bicycles, and even fewer, about one fifth of couples (11 men and 16 women) owned animals or livestock. While approximately one third of couples (24 men and 22 women) said they had some savings, similar numbers (20 men and 14 women) noted that they currently have debt.

### Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

As the MO intervention aims to reduce IPV against women in relationships, participants were asked for their views on the acceptability of violence, and the circumstances in which it might be ok. When asked this question, nearly all respondents, both male and female, initially responded that violence in a relationship was not acceptable. Commonly, participants noted that violence is not a desirable state in a relationship and characterised an ideal relationship as harmonious and with mutual understanding and love. Many women in particular also noted that violence from a spouse was an infringement on women's rights and described it specifically as 'gender-based violence' or 'violence against women'.

However, as researchers explored the issues further, participants shared more nuanced views on this issue. When probed, both men and women noted that violence from a man to a woman would be acceptable in the event that a woman did something 'wrong' that disrupted the harmony of the relationship. When speaking in the abstract, the majority of participants identified sexual infidelity by a woman as an instance when violence is acceptable. One woman in Lilongwe explained this,

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*If I could leave or cheat on him then yes he can beat me, but if I have not done anything wrong to him then he cannot beat me.* Female Participant, Lilongwe

Though men and women provided similar answers on this topic, men's responses focused more on using violence to teach their wives a lesson or providing consequences if their wives disobeyed them, while women focused on specific incidences where they had contradicted an expectation that their husbands had of them. This is consistent with other studies carried out by TN in Malawi, which identified norms of male authority and unequal expectations as drivers of IPV.<sup>8</sup> While some women felt that the violence they experienced was justified on this basis, many of those who did not consider their husband's actions to be justifiable did consider them to be understandable, given their behaviour.

These same themes re-emerged when discussing the real-life circumstances that led to violence in participants' relationships. For ethical reasons, female participants were not asked directly if they had experienced IPV in their current relationship; however, 50% (30 of 60) women shared these experiences in response to a more general question about challenges in their relationship. This compares to only 6.7% (4 of 59) of men who said they experienced physical or sexual violence from their spouse. Many of these women noted that they also experienced threats or other forms of emotional violence from their spouse.

Three of the six women with a disability shared they experienced IPV as compared to zero of the 10 disabled men. In comparison, 20.3% of men (12 of 59) said they had ever acted violently toward their spouse; along with one woman. This suggests possible response bias to this question on behalf of male respondents and may also indicate that men and women share differing understandings of what constitutes violence.

Both men and women explained that physical violence resulted from women's failure to respect male authority or fulfil the expectations of their husbands, though this was also often accompanied by emotional violence. This took the form of arguments that occurred when women arrived home later in the evening than their husbands considered acceptable, when they failed to prepare food as expected, or questioned a decision that their husband had made. As noted previously, this also commonly occurred when women refused sexual relations with their husbands, which male participants generally viewed as an entitlement of marriage. When reflecting on these cases, men often framed violence as an effort to teach their wives a lesson, or otherwise punish this transgression. One man in Lilongwe explained,

*MP: Most of the times a wife thinks like a child. So, you just need to understand her to say, 'There is this and this.' If you disagree you just annoy each other but you still understand each other*

*I: So, you have said that it is not legitimate for a husband to hit a wife.*

*MP: Yes.*

*I: Does this depend on how severe the hitting is?*

*MP: Maybe we can say that but maybe a slap. You can just slap her*

*I: Alright. Slapping her only and not?*

*MP: Not hitting her like you are hitting a fellow man. Just a slap makes her feel that, 'I really made a mistake.'*  
Male Participant, Lilongwe

As illustrated above, male participants often noted that though they had 'hit', 'slapped', or 'beaten' their wives, they had not hurt them. Many women also did not consider slapping or hitting from their husband to be something that 'hurt' them, and equally did not classify forced or coerced sex within marriage to be a form of violence. However, at least 11 of the 30 women who experienced IPV described at least one instance of physical violence that left them with severe injuries requiring medical attention, and/or that had long-term effects. A number of women also described experiencing physical violence from their husbands while pregnant. In discussions, the 12 men who disclosed committing IPV did not mention the severity of the violence that their spouses had experienced. This may indicate a disconnect between men and women

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the Tithetse Nkhanza! Formative Research study carried out in 2019, as well as the baseline survey for the Tithetse Nkhanza! Independent evaluation completed in 2020.

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on these issues, a tendency among men to trivialise women's experiences of violence or may be the result of response bias leaving men hesitant to disclose such details to interviewers.

While men and women agreed that violence was often based on men asserting their authority and reinforcing expectations, a number of women also noted that alcohol often exacerbated arguments and made violence more likely and more severe. Overall, 11 women discussed harmful drinking habits in their relationships, 9 of whom lived in Lilongwe. All of these 11 women had experienced IPV and cited excessive alcohol use as triggering violence. One woman in Lilongwe explained this,

*To me I feel that there is no reason [we fight], but because of the beer that is what makes him to beat me. He also confessed that he wish he could stop drinking beer, but he is addicted to it, so he finds it hard to stop.* Female Participant, Lilongwe

Another woman in Karonga shared similar experiences,

*I: What was the cause of the disagreement?*

*FP: the beer he drinks, if he comes from drinking and he arrives here, he says yes you were with men here, so where are the men? You are answering me? Then he starts hitting me. Anytime he comes from drinking he says I was with men, that's the only reason.* Female Participant, Karonga

Though five men did acknowledge that alcohol contributed to more frequent arguments with their spouse, only two of these men disclosed acting violently toward their spouse. These men agreed that they were more likely to start an argument if they had been drinking or respond to their wife's failure to cook food or return home on time in a violent manner.

### IPV and household economic status

When reflecting on the causes of IPV, though participants did not often explicitly connect economic factors and violence, money and household spending did emerge as a theme in discussions on IPV. In many instances, both male and female participants noted that disagreements about how money is spent triggered violence or tension in their relationship. In some cases this stress stemmed from the fact that the household had very scarce resources. One man in Mangochi explained this, noting,

*I: Okay, so, why do you frequently have disagreements?*

*MF: Because we don't have money.*

*I: Okay, so what happens because there is no money in the household?*

*MF: If there is no money in the house, we always have disagreement because when I keep asking him to give me money, he really doesn't like it. And he doesn't like me to be asking him for money.*

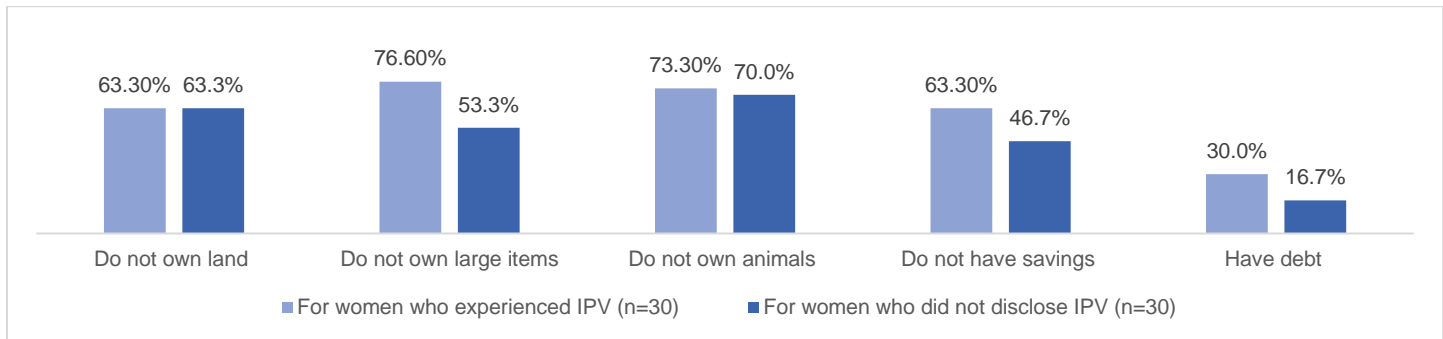
Female Participant Mangochi

The majority of female participants shared that they expected their husbands to provide for the family financially, either in part or fully. Consistent with the above quote, both men and women commonly noted that women often criticised their husbands or complained when their husbands failed to conform to this expectation. This reaction was, in turn, viewed negatively by men as a challenge to their authority.

Household assets and savings were also relevant to violence in the home. Figure 1 below provides an overview of asset ownership, savings and debt, comparing women who disclosed experiencing IPV with those who did not.

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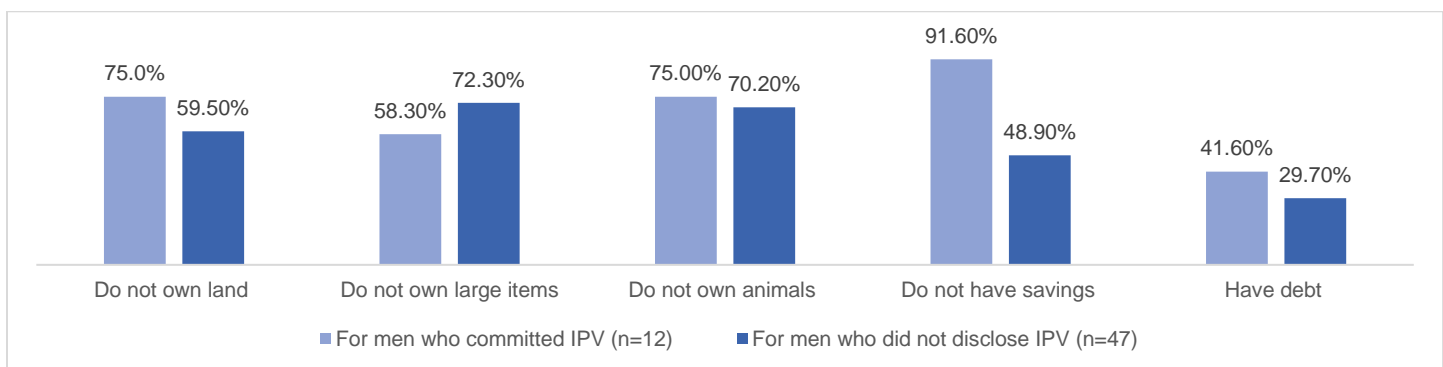
Figure 1: Women's self-reported economic status, according to disclosure of experiences of IPV



As illustrated above, as compared to women who did not experience IPV, those who had experienced IPV more commonly did not own large items, animals, or having savings, and also more commonly had debt. While analysis is limited on the four men who disclosed experiencing violence perpetrated against them by their intimate partner, the only clear association relates to savings, where 100% of men who experienced violence also noted that their household did not have savings. This is discussed further in the following section.

Similar trends emerge for the 12 men who disclosed committing physical or sexual IPV, illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Men's self-reported economic status, according to disclosure of perpetration of IPV



As illustrated above, similar trends emerge related to male perpetration of IPV, with men who committed IPV more commonly having debt and not owning assets. The fact that nearly all men who perpetrated IPV did not have savings is particularly notable and suggests that this in particular may contribute to household tension, described further below.

Additionally, approximately half of female respondents said their husband made decisions as to how household income was spent, and the other half said they made these decisions together. Many participants of both genders identified household spending as a source of tension with violence functioning as a mode of conflict resolution. A number of women noted that such arguments began when they questioned how their husband had chosen to spend money. One man explained this, saying he had spent MWK 22,000 on alcohol after receiving a large payment,

*'Yes we disagree over money issues. You know, maybe there was money and I squander it. So, we disagreed. She said, 'Here you have done wrong. You have squandered the money... That time I hit her, and she was also hitting back, but it never reached that extent of hurting each other.'* Male Participant, Lilongwe

Many women noted that their concerns over how their spouses spent money often led to arguments and violence. The majority who shared these views noted that these arguments are underpinned by a lack of trust between couples on this issue,

*'I get angry because he has wasted money. If he spends K1,000 to me that is alright, but when he spends K2,000 I try to advise him, but he gets angry...What happened was that he made money almost K40, 000 and he took his friends to drink beer and somebody stole K5,000 from him. When he came home, he threw the money on*

*our sleeping mat, but I didn't touch the money. When he was sober, he started accusing me of stealing his money. I was very angry with the accusations.'* Female Participant, Lilongwe

Many male and female participants shared similar experiences, noting that such tension was particularly high when the family had seen an influx of cash. While this often stemmed from payments received from a harvest or sale of goods, others noted that this also applied to funds received by women from NGOs, women's groups or savings groups. In these cases, men objected when women used this for their own purposes and did not allow their husbands to decide how the money was spent.

Following experiences of violence, both men and women shared that they seek help from elders or marriage counsellors in case they have ongoing disagreements. In many cases, women who experienced IPV sought help from these same authority figures. While these individuals often advised the man to stop his violent behaviour, both male and female participants noted that they also commonly advised women to obey their husbands, implying that their failure to do so caused the violence. One woman in Lilongwe explained this,

*I: The time that he injured your chest and the days that he hits you, chasing you, have you ever gone to organisations or somewhere else to seek help?*

*FP: Yes, I went to the chief he told me that my husband is very tough and has been very tough even before his parents died so I should just persevere and am not from here, so I just avoid him because I have no other chance but to come back here.* Female Participant, Lilongwe

As noted above, by sharing these views, these authority figures reinforce the social norms and expectations specific to women that underpin violence. However, neither male nor female participants objected to this advice and felt that it was consistent with their own beliefs regarding appropriate behaviour for both men (not acting violently) and women (respecting male authority and obeying their husbands).

## Income Generating Activities

As MO aims to support economic empowerment for both members of each couple, participants were also asked about their history of and views on income generating activities (IGAs) and business. Overall, 61.0% of participants (38 men and 34 women) said they are currently or had previously engaged in some form of income generating activity (IGA), defined as any activity designed to generate income over a period of at least one year. Slightly more participants had participated in an IGA in Karonga (67.5% or 27) and Lilongwe (65.0% or 26), as compared with Mangochi (48.7% or 19). These activities were largely individual enterprises or micro-businesses, and ranged from selling items (snacks, clothes, products), to having a small shop like a grocery or a repair business. In most cases, participants described these initiatives as supplementing their main or multiple sources of income and sustenance, rather than serving as their primary livelihood source.

Many men in particular spoke of having had multiple such businesses previously. While in most cases both male and female participants described the husband as leading the activity or 'business', in many cases participants of both genders explained that their wives would play an active role in the business, following their husband's lead. The exception was related to businesses that involved making or selling food, which more commonly were led by the wives with less support from their husbands. While men did not generally expect their wives to support the family financially, some did explain that businesses were most successful when the husband and wife worked together.

*'Yes, sometimes you can have good ideas about business, but you need a supportive wife for you to sail to another level.'* Male Participant, Mangochi

Though the majority of men did feel that women could play a role in contributing to the family income in some way, a minority asserted that this was not appropriate. One man in Lilongwe explained,

*Allowing a woman to be bringing income to the family causes her to be destroyed. As a man you live a dependent life to say, 'My wife will bring in some income.' That kind of life destroys a woman. A woman should be saying, 'As my husband will be coming back from where he is going, he will bring in some income.'* Male Participant, Lilongwe



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Those whose businesses had stopped explained that this often finished due to a lack of capital or a shift in the family's finances overall. In this case, they often needed their full income from the business to support the family's daily needs and could not afford buy additional inventory or make other investments that would allow them to continue operations. One man in Lilongwe explained this,

*I have done a number of businesses. Firstly I operated a business where I was selling rice. It broke because of what we are saying, paying rentals and problems of children... I also did business where I was selling charcoal even though it's illegal... If we can find good capital, the business of selling rice is the only one that I feel can change my life to another level.* Male Participant, Lilongwe

This man and many others also remarked that selling on credit also contributed to the decline in their business, requiring owners to spend time chasing their debtors and often not receiving the money owed. Others said that their businesses declined for other reasons, including due to an accident, illness, or economic shock.

Most participants – both men and women – whose business had stopped expressed a desire to go back into business, often with a different business concept than the original one they had tried. Participants commonly framed business as the best way for them to improve their family's economic situation and establish financial security for their family. While most identified start-up capital as the primary constraint to starting another IGA in the future, many also identified a need to learn more about basic business principles and operations,

*Teaching me how to invest in business...explaining to me the reasons that make businesses to fall. Or what is it that makes businesses to make a loss? That means there is need for someone who did that to teach you two or three things. You have to know these things so that your business should be successful.* Male Participant, Lilongwe

Others expressed interest in training related to market research, wholesaling and importing. Additionally, a minority shared an interest in gaining specific skills that would allow them to earn income, such as tailoring, mechanics or agricultural processes such as use of pesticides.

While male participants such as the one above spoke specifically about the aspects they would need to run a business in the future, female participants often answered this question more vaguely, noting that they needed to 'learn about business' or obtain capital. This is consistent with women's previous experience in business, in which women tended to describe their role as participating in one aspect of the business (cooking food, selling items), rather than planning, managing and otherwise sharing or leading the operations.

## Conclusions and Implications

This study has provided an overview of findings relevant to interventions that seek to address the economic drivers of violence against women, as well as for research on these topics.

While all MO participants have challenging economic circumstances, important distinctions within this group emerge across men and women, and across those who have experienced or perpetrated IPV and those who have not. This includes gender disparities in income and a more common association between low levels of asset ownership, savings and debt, and either experiencing or perpetrating IPV. The bias inherent in gathering data on sensitive topics like income, household status and violence means that figures presented in this brief likely undercount violence and may also underestimate income. These findings provide support for interventions designed under MO, aimed to promote both social and economic empowerment. They also point to a number of implications relevant to this and other programming that seeks to address IPV in Malawi and similar contexts in the future.

### Social norms

Consistent with other studies on this topic in Malawi and globally, this study also identified IPV as stemming from harmful social norms and unequal gender expectations. While other findings related to household income and economic empowerment suggest that the MO approach is relevant, they also highlight the importance of MO' combined social and economic empowerment approach, which addresses both the economic and social drivers of IPV. In addition, this finding supports the programme's approach to layer MO with SASA! Together, which aims to address social norms and challenge

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gendered expectations and broader concepts of male authority at the population level within communities creating an enabling environment for the MO household level work; and by layering to create the potential to deepen impact in communities. Such interventions should specifically take into account norms surrounding the acceptability of women's income earning, partnership in business, and work outside of the home, which will have direct impacts on the ability of MO and other similar interventions in reducing IPV.

### Supporting IGA

The concept of IGA and business was relevant to participants and in line with future goals and aspirations, as participants identified the need for start-up capital in their future endeavours, and commonly cited household economic shocks as reasons for stopping their previous endeavours. As such, MO's approach to provide resources in a manner that engages with a couple's holistic economic situation is appropriate. However, the provision of business resources rather than capital may not address couples challenges managing cashflow, and income volatility. This challenge reinforces the MO curriculum design, which aims to build a baseline understanding of foundational business principles through the IGA curriculum, alongside broader shifts in capacity and social norms.

### Women's role in IGA

Though the IGA concept is relevant to both men and women, the study identified that in most couples, men and women identified men as the leaders in IGA and business, with women playing a supporting role. Interventions that seek to use this approach should first use social norms approaches that build equality between members of the couple, ensuring equal ownership, participation and benefit from the endeavour. Without this, support for IGAs may risk reinforcing men's roles as leaders in business and may not support the women's economic empowerment gains as originally conceptualised.

### Household spending

This study identified that while scarce income did contribute to tension within relationships, decisions related to household spending were common drivers of conflict, particularly in the context of positive income shocks. This suggests that while increasing household income through IGA will help struggling couples, this must be done in conjunction with efforts to support couples to build trust and manage money collaboratively. In Lilongwe, this may also include specific interventions to address alcohol abuse. Otherwise, such an intervention may risk exacerbating conflict between couples, repeating the patterns described in the findings of this study.

### Participant selection

Overall, half of female participants had experienced some form of IPV. While this is likely an underestimation due to typical forms of response bias that characterise discussions on sensitive issues such as violence, nevertheless the findings confirm that not all participants selected for MO have experienced IPV. Should the intervention proceed, understanding changes in this outcome overtime may be challenging, as the lower proportion of individuals in this group would limit the extent to which the change process could be analysed, particularly given the relatively small number of participants. Future interventions adopting this approach may consider including only couples with known histories of IPV in the participant population, though this should be done only if this selection criteria can be implemented without any additional ethical risk. This can be done ethically and sensitively by working with support organisations and would provide a richer basis for understanding the ability of this intervention to reduce IPV and pathways to doing so. If this criteria is not considered appropriate, programmes that seek to understand the impact of these interventions should consider increasing participant numbers to ensure sufficient data can be gathered, increasing the likelihood that couples with a history of violence will be included.

### Community-level entry points

Marriage counsellors/advocates, elders and religious leaders were identified as sources of support and influence couples, men in particular, and often provide advice that reinforces harmful or gender unequal social norms. Programming that seeks to shift behaviour such as IPV that is underpinned by social norms should also consider engaging with this wider ecosystem of actors. Doing so can support behaviour change among programme participants and may also indirectly

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benefit their wider community. This reinforces TN's approach of pairing SASA! and MO interventions and suggests the need for other programmes working on VAWG using economic empowerment approaches to consider similar pairings.

### Research on VAWG

Though the MO intervention will not continue, assessments of similar interventions should consider ensuring that multiple rounds of data are collected from the study population before, during and after the intervention, as had been planned in Tithetse Nkhanza. The advantages of doing so not only builds a longitudinal dataset, but also ensures that the content of each round of data can be developed iteratively. This allows researchers to delve deeper into topics that emerge in previous rounds, and to follow up on specific topics as needed. Such a design should thus involve standardised questions given to all couples, as well as tailored follow ups for each, based on the previous round. Where possible, the same researcher should participate in each round of data collection with the same participants, allowing them to build a relationship of trust over time with participants. This can help address some of the bias inherent in questions on sensitive topics such as violence and household income.

# Annex 1: Overall research questions

To what extent does engaging families in the MO Economic Empowerment programme affect outcomes related to gender and VAW:

- Women's experience and men's perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence?
- Family dynamics, including treatment of and attitudes toward children
- Men and women's knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of social norms around gender relations and violence against women?
- Relationship and household gender roles, decision-making and communication skills?

To what extent does engaging families in the MO Economic Empowerment programme affect outcomes related to individual and household economic empowerment:

- Understanding of household financial planning and budgeting
- Spending and saving habits
- Decision-making over the generation and use of income and assets
- Attitudes and practices around women working
- Knowledge of how to develop and sustain an income-generation activity (IGA)
- Establishment and growth of an IGA
- Levels of income, expenditure and savings
- Individual and household economic wellbeing

Which aspects of the programmes were the most effective in producing positive changes?

- Which activities of the MO programme were the most transformative and why?
- Which works less well? Why? How could they be improved?
- Where possible, how do participants with disabilities experience the programme?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This will depend largely on the nature of the cohort and the extent to which individuals with disabilities are selected to participate.