



Gender equality and social inclusion in PROSPER: Intervention design and impacts

Katharine Vincent, Liz Venable, Colleen Sullivan and Elliot Meador

February 2022

SUMMARY

The Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Empowered Resilience (PROSPER) project, under the Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change (BRACC) programme, developed a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy to guide its activities towards promoting gender equality. Among other things, this strategy was implemented through a gender-sensitive targeting strategy for participation in the project's various resilience-building interventions. Targeting was successful with women having higher participation in interventions than men (regardless of household headship). However, when considering household headship there are still persistent differences. Female-headed households participated in fewer interventions relative to male-headed households – with barriers also resulting from the fact that many female-headed households are also single-headed households, and thus have limited adult labour capacity. However, participation in at least three PROSPER interventions had a significant positive impact on consumption expenditures for female-headed (and 'hanging in') households who participated in PROSPER interventions. Female-headed households who participated in PROSPER interventions also reported a larger positive difference in reporting improvements in access to inputs, improved access to markets, crop diversification and sales, and increasing investment in kraals and having a non-agricultural business.

Recommendations include the following:

-) How data is collected around gender is important, with concern that focus on household headship misses other important gender aspects.
-) The targeting strategy needs to be carefully designed to ensure optimal inclusion of the target groups.
-) Further research on intra-household dynamics and secondary beneficiaries is needed to understand how intervention benefits are shared.
-) Greater focus should be given to inclusion beyond gender, specifically disability and intersectional issues.
-) Sensitive monitoring and evaluation is required to track progress on gender equality and social inclusion.

BACKGROUND

BRACC and PROSPER

Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Empowered Resilience (PROSPER) is a multi-stakeholder resilience programme supporting the Government of Malawi to reduce extreme poverty and end the recurrent cycle of crises and humanitarian assistance. With funding from UKAID under the Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change (BRACC) programme, and over the period from December 2018 to March 2023, the programme will target 950,000 vulnerable people in the districts of Balaka, Chikwawa, Phalombe and Mangochi. PROSPER aims at building household resilience and livelihoods, strengthening market and government systems, reducing the impact of climate

shocks, responding to seasonal consumption needs, supporting the design of social safety nets, and generating evidence and knowledge to inform government policy. The programme is implemented by a joint NGO, private sector and UN consortium consisting of Concern Worldwide, CUMO Microfinance, FAO, GOAL, Kadale Consultants, the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, UNDP, UNICEF, United Purpose, and WFP. PROSPER, as well as BRACC as a whole, receives knowledge management support from the BRACC Knowledge and Policy Hub, which contributes to monitoring and evaluation, research, and communications and advocacy.

The PROSPER programme is characterised by several unique approaches to resilience programming, which are enabled by its consortium structure. First, it implements bundles of complementary interventions in communities, aimed at addressing different resilience risks. Second, different bundles of interventions are targeted to households of different wealth levels, based on ranking exercises conducted with each community and aligned with the National Resilience Strategy that distinguishes stepping out, stepping up and hanging in categories. These approaches are intended to ensure that programming is robust and well suited to the households targeted for participation.

This brief, and the analysis in it, presents an overview of how PROSPER ensured that gender equality and social inclusion was considered in design, for example in targeting and inclusion in different interventions, and the impacts.

Gender in Malawi

Promoting gender equality and social inclusion is important in the Malawian context. A recently published issues brief outlines how Malawi is highly patriarchal with deeply entrenched gender inequality.¹ Gender roles are tightly defined and highly policed. Men are seen as providers, and his identity and position in the family is tightly bound with his control of money. Women are seen as the 'utilisers' of what men provide, and typically have limited influence over decision-making and little control or ownership of assets.

Marginalisation is not limited to gender. Children and adolescents are negatively affected by lack of education, child labour and early marriage. Although there is some respect for elders, growing old diminishes status, and creates vulnerability due to declining health and mobility. Older people and those with albinism risk being accused of witchcraft. People living with HIV still face discrimination, despite significant progress in access to and use of anti-retrovirals. Homosexuality is illegal, and people who identify as LGBTQI face routine violence and discrimination.

Preconceptions were also evident within PROSPER dating back to the initial wealth ranking exercises, where women, the elderly and people with disabilities were typically categorised in the most vulnerable hanging in category. This was also the case for people with disabilities, who are typically viewed through the 'charity model' in which they are seen to be given resources rather than participating in projects.

PROSPER's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy

PROSPER recognises that gender inequality and lack of inclusion of other disadvantaged groups is a significant obstacle to resilience-building, and aims to take a gender-responsive and inclusive

¹ Lovell, E. 2021. Gender equality, social inclusion and resilience in Malawi. BRACC Discussion Paper, 45p. https://www.resilience.mw/sites/default/files/2021-07/Gender%20equality%20social%20inclusion%20and%20resilience%20in%20Malawi_BRACC%20July%202021.pdf

approach to maximise opportunities for women, girls, and socially disadvantaged people to fulfil their potential and enjoy their rights.

PROSPER's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy outlined a number of pathways to progress from sensitivity to empowerment to transformation. These included meeting practical needs, providing training and awareness raising, encouraging greater participation of women in public decision-making and ultimately also in household decision-making (Box 1).

A number of modifications and adaptations were made to PROSPER's activities to create equal opportunities for benefits. Within PROSPER Markets, efforts were made to improve market conditions and make markets accessible for women and marginalised groups, and to facilitate their access to value-added services and entrepreneurship development.

In many cases, particular practices and technologies were employed so as not to create additional labour burdens. In the livestock pass-on, the easing of the requirement to build a shelter made the activity less onerous for women. Similarly, low effort drip irrigation in the farmer field schools made the process more accessible to the elderly and women. In the evacuation centres, modifications were made to ensure access to people with limited mobility, and gender-segregated rooms ensured safe spaces.

In addition to the PROSPER GESI Strategy, PROSPER Markets developed its own GESI Review and GESI Approach Guide. These documents recognised the unique challenges faced when addressing GESI in the context of working with private sector partners, particularly the importance of establishing a business case for inclusive business strategies. The PROSPER Markets GESI Approach Guide identifies key steps to be taken during the activity design and implementation phases to build inclusive practices, and commits to including GESI indicators in impact assessments.

Box 1: PROSPER's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy

PROSPER created a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy to identify principle objectives and guidelines for pathways for achieving those objectives.

The principle objectives are captured in five strategy pillars:

1. Meet the practical needs of women and disadvantaged people.
2. Include socially excluded people as active participants.
3. Address gender-based violence as a spoiler to resilience.
4. Promote participation of women and disadvantaged groups in community leadership.
5. Promote joint household decision-making.

Nine programmatic pathways to achieving the five pillars are identified—three mandatory for all partners, and six optional. The GESI Strategy provides examples of how these pathways could be implemented in the context of different PROSPER interventions. The nine pathways are:

1. Ensure that all activities are gender-sensitive and socially inclusive. (Mandatory)
2. Measuring inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups in activities. (Mandatory)
3. Providing Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and safeguarding training. (Mandatory)

4. Renewed emphasis on women's economic empowerment. (Optional)
5. Inclusion of gender transformative dialogues. (Optional)
6. Social behaviour change messaging in two areas: promoting women's engagement and leadership in agriculture and livestock and promoting a more balanced division of care work. (Optional)
7. Instituting quotas on committees, and within specific interventions. (Optional)
8. Training in self-confidence, negotiation, leadership, public speaking for women and other socially disadvantaged groups. (Optional)
9. Promoting active engagement of older people and people with disabilities. (Optional)

The GESI Strategy recommends that, to ensure accountability, there should be specific budgeting for GESI activities, and that GESI outcomes be incorporated into monitoring and evaluation. Several recommendations regarding evaluation are made, including developing a more nuanced measure of women's control over income, updating indicators to refer to 'women and men' in place of 'individuals', and conducting formative research to better understand the dynamics of inclusion in communities.

Methodology

Findings come from the PROSPER annual survey, which was conducted in July-August 2020 and again as part of the BRACC programme evaluation in July-August 2021². Findings regarding targeting are drawn from the 2020 survey, while findings regarding programme participation and outcomes are drawn from the 2021 data. Quantitative data from these surveys were supplemented by interviews undertaken with programme staff as part of the process evaluation (February-April 2021), specifically on the implementation of the GESI Strategy (March 2021), and focus group discussions and key informant interviews with programme beneficiaries as part of the evaluation.

FINDINGS

Ensuring inclusion of marginalised groups when targeting for interventions

PROSPER's targeting approach classified households into three different wealth categories in alignment with the National Resilience Strategy. The three wealth categories are hanging in, stepping up and stepping out, with the implicit assumption that there is a graduation pathway between categories.

Hanging in, stepping up, and stepping out categories³

Hanging in refers to those who continue to survive on a subsistence level, and require consumption support with change happening if circumstances allow. **Stepping up** in agriculture,

² Leavy J, Gould C, Klema M, McConnachie M, Venable E, Vincent, K. 2022. Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change. Synthesis of the 2021 BRACC Evaluation. BRACC programme. Available at www.resilience.mw

³ Government of Malawi Department of Disaster Management Affairs. 2018. National Resilience Strategy 2018 – 2030. Breaking the Cycle of Food Insecurity in Malawi. Lilongwe: Office of the President and Cabinet, Government of Malawi Department of Disaster Management Affairs.

choosing to take risks, accumulate assets, diversify investments in agriculture, increase access to services and value addition, thereby diversifying risk and reducing vulnerability. **Stepping out** of agricultural activities, partially or entirely, into higher SMEs or employment that has a different risk profile, but higher return.

The process of targeting was done through community wealth ranking followed by selection of individuals, where labour capacity was necessary to participate in the majority of interventions. PROSPER staff facilitated sensitive discussions focused on overcoming perceptions that act as barriers to equality of opportunity. The perception that women are not leaders and should not be involved in high value agriculture, for example, impeded the selection of women as lead farmers. In contrast, however, village savings and loans (VSLs) were considered to be a woman's activity, hence uptake here among men was typically smaller. Watershed management activities were also typically dominated by women.

Some of the PROSPER interventions necessarily target a particular category of people – so, for example, the final selection of participations for nutrition interventions followed the government targeting criteria. To reduce malnutrition, pregnant women and mothers with children aged two years and younger were targeted. For other interventions, there was scope for some flexibility and positive selection by implementing partners to enable inclusion of typically marginalised groups.

For some interventions, women were purposively selected as a means of economic empowerment. This was particularly the case for the VSLs, where there is an 80:20 balance of women to men in the beneficiaries. Women were also proactively targeted for asset-transfer activities based on the evidence that women tend to spend cash for the benefit of the whole household. In other cases where an intervention was accessible for both men and women, implementing partners often purposefully registered the woman. This was particularly the case where transfer of assets takes place, reflecting the evidence that women are more likely to spend money or distribute food for the benefit of the wider household than men.

“In terms of FFA... when we are registering these beneficiaries at the beginning, for example maybe you have a husband and a wife, most of the times we deliberately register the wife although maybe when it comes to working it is the husband who works, but when it comes to getting the cash or food we want to make sure that it is the wife who gets the money because we know, culturally in Malawi, women are the ones who manage our homes most of the times. So we deliberately make sure that when we are registering, we register women, although maybe when it comes to working, anybody can come and work like the husband and the wife, but when it comes to getting cash, it is the wife who gets the money.” (BRACC programme staff, Phalombe)

In many cases, women are very well represented due to the tendency for labour migration of males (e.g. to South Africa from Mangochi, and to Mozambique from Phalombe, as well as within Malawi). Interventions with lower cash incentives, such as VSL groups, watershed activities and community meetings, had higher rates of women's participation. Activities with lower rates of female participation are cotton picking, lead farmers, and agricultural extension workers. There have also been examples of traditionally women-dominant activities, like groundnut farming, that have become more profitable, attracting men to participate in higher numbers. Youth and those with disabilities are increasingly participating in community-based training to monitor VSL groups. However, while there is greater participation by women in some interventions, gender roles are reflected in the fact that men typically hold leadership roles, even if there are only a few of them participating relative to women. This was identified as a specific issue for VSL groups. In response to this, some interventions have gender disaggregated interventions, to ensure that women can hold leadership roles.

In general, though, the pre-condition of being able to perform labour ran the risk of excluding some categories from some interventions, for example the elderly and the disabled. To counteract this,

implementing partners were able to exhibit some flexibility and adaptability to ensure inclusion of marginalised groups, in line with the GESI Strategy. To get around this, if there was a household with an elderly or disabled person and a younger working-age adult, they would register the younger person with the intention that the benefits would accrue to the household.

“Let’s say a person cannot provide labour, that person obviously cannot be part of Food For Assets unless maybe, for example, you have a grandfather or grandmother and the grandmother lives maybe with someone who is around maybe 20 or 30, we encourage to register that person so that this one in turn can look after that grandmother or grandfather because the grandmother or the grandfather cannot work, so have someone who can provide labour.” (KII, BRACC programme staff, Phalombe)

Some interventions, such as microfinance, cash transfer and the lean season response, did not require labour capacity and thus were accessible to the elderly and the disabled (and in fact were often proactively targeted toward them).

Analysis of the composition of the targeted households showed that female-headed, elderly headed households, single-headed households and households containing a member with a disability were overrepresented in the ‘hanging in’ wealth category (Table 1). Male-headed households, and large households, are more likely to be in the higher wealth categories. However the intersection of gender and age and ability is important: households that are elder-headed, single-headed or have a member with a disability were only more likely to be categorised in the lowest wealth category if the household head was female. Male-headed households that were also single-headed or elder-headed, or that included a member with a disability, comprised a share of each wealth group similar to their share of the general population. In addition, large households were only more likely to be included in the highest wealth group if the household head was male. This suggests that factors like the age of the household head, household size, or the presence of household members with disabilities may have different implications for welfare—or be perceived to have different implications for welfare—depending on the gender of the household head.

Table 1. Difference in representation of households with different demographic traits in each wealth category, and in the general population

Categories	Percentage Point Deviation From General Population			Share of Wealth Category, By Demographic Category			Share of Population, by Demographic Category
	Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	
Male-Headed Households	-10%	5%	6%	54%	69%	70%	64%
Female-Headed Households	10%	-5%	-6%	46%	31%	30%	36%
Youth-Headed	0%	0%	-4%	8%	8%	4%	8%
Prime-age Headed	-6%	3%	2%	72%	80%	79%	77%
Elder-Headed	6%	-3%	2%	20%	11%	16%	15%
Household includes a member with a disability	3%	-1%	-5%	36%	31%	28%	32%
Household head is single	11%	-5%	-8%	40%	23%	21%	28%
Household head is single and female	10%	-5%	-8%	36%	21%	18%	26%
Household head is single and male	1%	-1%	0%	3%	2%	3%	2%
Household size 6 or greater	-4%	1%	12%	34%	39%	50%	38%
Household size 6 or greater, and female-headed	1%	-1%	1%	12%	10%	12%	11%
Female-headed and has a disabled member	5%	-2%	-5%	18%	11%	8%	13%
Male-headed and has a disabled member	-2%	1%	0%	17%	20%	19%	19%
Female-headed and has no disabled member	5%	-3%	-1%	27%	20%	22%	22%
Male-headed and has no disabled member	-8%	4%	5%	37%	49%	51%	45%
Female and elder-headed	6%	-3%	-2%	13%	4%	6%	7%
Male and elder-headed	0%	0%	3%	7%	7%	11%	7%
Female and prime-age headed	4%	-2%	-3%	29%	23%	23%	25%
Male and prime-age headed	-10%	5%	4%	42%	57%	57%	52%
Balaka	2%	-1%	-3%	22%	19%	18%	20%
Chikwawa	-5%	1%	-1%	18%	24%	22%	23%
Mangochi	5%	-2%	-5%	40%	33%	30%	35%
Phalombe	-3%	0%	8%	20%	23%	31%	23%

Gender differences in participation in interventions

Hanging in households were less likely to participate in interventions than the other wealth categories. Female-headed households participated in PROSPER interventions at a significantly lower rate than male-headed households: participating in an average of 4.6 activities compared to 5.5 activities in male-headed households, a difference that was statistically significant at the 5% level. Some of the activities where female-headed households participated at notably lower rates than male-headed household included VSL groups (28% for female-headed households versus 35% for male-headed households), farmer groups (29% versus 36%), tree planting (22% versus 28%), and irrigation schemes (10% versus 14%). For other activities, participation was more comparable: Cash for Inputs (18% versus 19%), participation in care groups (4% for both), and participation in Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bag training (16% versus 15%). There were also differences in participation rates across districts; Mangochi and Phalombe tended to have higher participation than Balaka and Chikwawa.

In some cases, differences in participation appear to be explained by disparities in wealth ranking, or correlations between demographic factors. Some vulnerable groups—including female-headed households—are overrepresented in the ‘hanging in’ wealth group. Hanging in households were less likely to participate in many interventions, which translated into a lower likelihood of participation in some PROSPER programmes by some vulnerable groups.

Controlling for district, wealth group and other demographic factors, there is no longer a statistically significant relationship between a household having a female head, and number of interventions households participated in. However, households whose head is single participated in significantly fewer interventions, on average. Female-headed households are much more likely to be single-headed than male-headed (82% compared with 5%).

Common barriers to participation for women included care responsibilities, time poverty, lack of transport, cultural power structures, religious beliefs and inherent bias that limit access. For instance, men’s cooperatives are given market opportunities over women’s cooperatives. There is also a perception from some women that specific activities are male-dominated and thus not accessible. In some interventions with a labour component, such as catchment conservation, women who participated took longer to complete the activity; this could reflect women having less time each day, less access to tools, or taking more time to complete physically demanding work.

Female-headed households may face additional barriers related to time and labour scarcity, or having fewer adults in the household. Multivariate analysis of the factors associated with participation in higher numbers of interventions, and in particular interventions, suggest that lower participation among female-headed households is largely accounted for by the fact that they are mainly single-headed households: 82% of female-headed households are single-headed, compared with only about 5% of male-headed households. Higher dependency ratios, and lower household size, are also associated with lower participation in some interventions. Single female heads of household may have less time to participate in labour-intensive interventions such as Food For Assets; having fewer adults may make it less likely that someone in the household is selected to benefit from a programme like Cash for Inputs.

Implementing partners also highlighted gender differences in implications of how interventions were rolled out. In some cases there were inadvertent barriers to participation. For example, as a result of Covid-19, some field training modules were delivered in the field via a Bluetooth speaker or audio clip, which created difficulties for beneficiaries with hearing impediments. Promotion of chemical pesticides can improve yields but is not suitable for use by pregnant or lactating women, so implementing partners do not encourage their participation (there is the option to hire spraying

services).

Table 2 summarises the share of each demographic group, including wealth group, self-reporting participation in each intervention. The table is colour-coded to indicate deviation from the share of the overall population who reported participating in each intervention; green indicates participation at a higher rate than the general population, yellow indicates participation on par with the general population, and red indicates lower participation than the general population

Table 2. Participation rates by intervention and demographic group, PROSPER interventions

Program (PROSPER)	Overall Participation Rate	Demographic Groups											
		Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	Female-headed households	Single-headed households	Youth-headed households	Elderly-headed households	Households with a member with a disability	Balaka	Chikwawa	Mangochi	Phalombe
PROSPER Activities													
Hanging In Targeted													
Food for Assets FFA	24%	33%	25%	20%	23%	22%	25%	21%	23%	10%	6%	24%	42%
Accessed crop yield or weather insurance	2%	3%	3%	3%	1%	1%	5%	1%	3%	0%	0%	4%	3%
Membership in a care group	4%	2%	7%	7%	4%	3%	7%	2%	4%	5%	3%	3%	6%
Participation in care group activities	4%	2%	6%	7%	3%	2%	6%	1%	3%	3%	3%	3%	6%
VSL groups Bank	35%	30%	42%	43%	28%	26%	32%	27%	32%	34%	38%	32%	36%
Participation in a mother's group	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	4%	3%	2%
Stepping Up/Stepping Out Targeted													
Received livestock in the first round of a livestock pass-on programme	7%	5%	13%	13%	5%	5%	6%	7%	7%	3%	3%	11%	9%
Received livestock passed on from another household in a livestock pass-on programme	5%	3%	8%	7%	3%	3%	5%	3%	4%	3%	2%	6%	6%
Accessed services from a Community Animal Health Worker	5%	4%	10%	8%	4%	4%	5%	4%	6%	1%	2%	8%	6%
Attended an input fair	6%	4%	11%	9%	7%	7%	3%	3%	5%	1%	8%	9%	5%
Received cash for inputs	19%	18%	28%	18%	18%	17%	15%	15%	19%	17%	21%	24%	12%
Access microfinance loans	6%	5%	8%	11%	4%	4%	6%	6%	4%	0%	1%	7%	12%
Participation in an irrigation scheme	14%	13%	21%	18%	10%	10%	14%	12%	14%	4%	10%	12%	23%
Purchased or received a treadle pump or rope and water pump	1%	1%	2%	3%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%
Received training or equipment for beekeeping	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Smallholder agricultural market systems (SAMS)	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	1%
Targeted to All Groups													
Farmer group	36%	32%	54%	46%	29%	28%	33%	30%	35%	22%	36%	41%	39%
Extension/technical training with your lead farmer or extension worker in the last 3 months	17%	17%	24%	30%	14%	15%	12%	18%	15%	4%	7%	26%	23%
Extension/technical training with your lead farmer or extension worker during the last growing season	26%	25%	36%	42%	22%	22%	24%	26%	25%	6%	14%	37%	34%
Marketing Club	4%	4%	8%	6%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%	7%	5%
Received information about nutrition or sanitation	14%	14%	20%	19%	11%	11%	20%	8%	14%	5%	7%	12%	27%
Watershed activities	16%	16%	22%	24%	12%	13%	16%	15%	15%	9%	11%	15%	24%
Received training on PICS bags	16%	12%	27%	28%	15%	13%	12%	15%	17%	13%	14%	26%	9%
Received a free PICS bag	17%	13%	28%	29%	16%	15%	14%	15%	18%	15%	15%	26%	9%
Participated in tree planting	28%	27%	39%	31%	22%	21%	25%	23%	26%	16%	33%	27%	32%
Radio clubs/PISCA	2%	2%	2%	5%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	2%
Integrated Climate Services	11%	11%	17%	15%	7%	8%	9%	9%	12%	1%	11%	11%	18%

Gender differences in resilience and welfare outcomes

Resilience Index and Resilience Index Components

PROSPER monitored progress towards resilience through a number of resilience indicators. In 2020 and 2021 these indicators were variously combined to create resilience indices; and in 2021 the Hub team created its own (Hub-7) version of the index, based on theoretical drivers of resilience and the removal of mutually reinforcing indicators.

Female-headed households tended to have had lower resilience index scores, averaging a score of 2.4 on the Hub-7 version of the resilience index, compared with an average of 2.8 for male-headed households.

Female-headed households were less likely to be categorised as resilient for most indicators in the resilience indexes, particularly access to good climate information (31% for female-headed households versus 41% for male-headed households), making a deposit into an account in the past year (26% versus 33%) and having a non-weather dependent source of income (26% versus 27%). The latter was driven by female-headed households being less likely to engage in both irrigated agriculture and non-agricultural household businesses, potentially reflecting less access to capital. However, there were also a couple of resilience indicators where female-headed households performed on par or slightly better than male-headed households, including making investments into future resilience (88% versus 87%); higher resilience investment among female-headed households was driven by higher investment in education (

Table 3).

Differences in resilience outcomes between male- and female-headed households were explained by female-headed households' lower wealth rankings and their status as single-headed households. Controlling for wealth ranking, district, single-headed household status, and other demographic factors, being a female-headed household was not significantly associated with worse outcomes for the resilience index components.

Agricultural practices and outcomes

Among programme participants, female-headed households adopted many agricultural practices, including climate smart agricultural practices, at a slightly lower rate than male-headed households, as shown in Table 4. However, these differences were largely explained by differences in wealth, as female-headed households are more likely to be in the hanging in category than male-headed households. Wealth ranking was much more robustly linked to differences in agricultural practices than any demographic factors examined: stepping up and stepping out households were significantly more likely to report trying new crops or varieties, growing improved varieties, using irrigation; they also adopted more climate smart agriculture practices and grew more crops on average. All of these practices generally require cash resources. Tellingly, one practice not significantly associated with wealth group was early planting, which does not require additional resources other than time.

Once geographic area and wealth group were controlled for, only one demographic group had significantly different adoption of agricultural practices: elderly headed households were less likely to report growing improved varieties, but more likely to adopt early planting.

Table 3: Comparison of outcomes for male- and female-headed households, annual survey data, and statistical significance of difference based on T-test results

	Female-headed households	Male-headed households	Difference	* Significant at 5% level
Average Resilience Score, Hub-7	2.4	2.8	-0.4	*
Percent Achieving Resilience, Hub-7>=4	22%	28%	-6%	*
Household spent income to improve resilience	88%	87%	1%	
Household with women with control of income decisions in at least 3 out of 4 areas*	66%	61%	5%	*
Household received assistance during lean season	35%	34%	1%	
Household has at least one type of insurance*	1%	3%	-2%	*
Household has adopted 6 or more prompted Climate Smart Agriculture practices*	1%	3%	-2%	*
Household has cash food expenditures equal to less than 50% of total cash expenditures	32%	37%	-5%	*
Household had adequate food provisioning past 12 months	20%	23%	-3%	
Household reports being able to build savings*	14%	19%	-5%	*
Household had access to timely and good quality climate information*	31%	41%	-10%	*
Household made use of climate information for risk reduction or mitigation*	45%	52%	-7%	*
Household reports increased sales for at least one crop type*	20%	26%	-6%	*
Household has weather-independent income source	26%	37%	-11%	*
Household has made a deposit in a savings account in last year	26%	33%	-7%	*
Average Maize Yield	838	1060	-222	*
Average Household Expenditure Per Capita	82500	89700	-7200	

Table 4. Agricultural practices adoption, by group

Practices	Overall	Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	Female-headed households	Single-headed households	Youth-headed households	Elderly-headed households	Households with a member with a disability	Balaka	Chikwawa	Mangochi	Phalombe
Grew a new crop	28%	24%	34%	31%	25%	25%	29%	27%	29%	25%	25%	37%	22%
Grew a new variety	28%	24%	33%	29%	25%	26%	30%	26%	27%	25%	28%	36%	21%
Grew an improved or hybrid variety	76%	71%	82%	83%	73%	71%	73%	68%	77%	75%	58%	80%	81%
Planted starting Oct or Nov	47%	46%	44%	52%	45%	47%	41%	53%	44%	47%	57%	39%	50%
Used irrigation any time of year	27%	25%	33%	32%	23%	23%	28%	25%	26%	24%	17%	18%	44%
Average number of crop types cultivated	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.0	1.8	2.5	2.0	2.2
Average number of CSA practices	1.8	1.7	2.2	2.2	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.4	2.3	1.8

Yields for the four most commonly grown crops are reported in Table 5. The gender yield gap, long observed in Malawi, persisted among PROSPER participants, with female-headed households reporting lower yields—an average maize yield of 838 kg/ha, compared with 1060 kg/ha for male-headed households. However, the differences in yields were not statistically significant once district, wealth group, and other demographic characteristics were controlled for. This suggests that approaches that successfully build agricultural resilience and productivity among low-income households may also be highly effective at addressing the yield gap.

Table 5. Crop yields for common crops, by group

	Overall	Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	Female-headed households	Single-headed households	Youth-headed households	Elderly-headed households	Households with a member with a disability	Balaka	Chikwawa	Mangochi	Phalombe
Average Maize Yield	998	871	1216	1345	838	820	976	829	946	829	583	1148	1126
Average Pigeon Pea Yield	536	530	538	681	419	409	654	419	527	338	372	593	618
Average Groundnut Yield	441	374	445	644	360	394	278	443	438	367	234	517	350
Average Sorghum Yield	726	704	691	640	617	620	712	550	765	440	764	676	712

Food insecurity events and use of coping mechanisms

In the area of food insecurity events and coping strategies, female-headed households and households with members with disabilities had worse outcomes for some key indicators, including the number of days that households reported not having enough food or enough money for food in the past month, and the number of coping strategies the household reported using in the past week, such as reducing meal sizes, relying on piecework, or sending children to beg (see Table 6.) As

expected, the wealth category was also highly correlated with outcomes in this area.

Table 6. Use of coping strategies, by group

	Overall	Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	Female-headed households	Single-headed households	Youth-headed households	Elderly-headed households	Households with a member with a disability	Balaka	Chikwawa	Mangochi	Phalombe
Number of days in past month with not enough food	6.3	6.7	3.8	3.7	7.0	7.1	6.7	7.3	7.7	8.9	5.8	3.7	6.3
Number of coping strategies used in past week, out of 7	3.3	3.7	2.4	1.7	3.3	3.3	3.5	2.9	3.3	3.6	3.2	2.2	3.8

Controlling for wealth group, district, and other demographic factors, households with a member with a disability reported significantly more days of food insecurity, and more use of coping mechanisms over the past week. Female-headed households reported significantly more use of coping mechanisms; while they also reported more days of food insecurity, the results were not statistically significant.

Consumption

Household consumption expenditures are shown in Table 7. With respect to wealth group, consumption expenditures and expenditure per capita were as expected: the higher the wealth category, the higher cash expenditure and expenditure per capita were. Households in Mangochi had much higher expenditure and expenditure per capita than the other three districts. Female-, single-, youth- and elderly headed households had lower than average expenditure, but these groups also have smaller household sizes, so the discrepancies with respect to expenditure per capita were less severe. On the other hand, households that have a member with a disability tend to be larger, so although this group had total expenditures near average, expenditure per capita was relatively low.

Controlling for wealth group, district and other demographic factors, female-headed households have significantly lower expenditure per capita, as do households with a member with a disability. Youth- and elderly headed households have lower expenditure, but reflecting their smaller household size, their expenditure per capita is not significantly different from prime-age adult-headed households. Single-headed households have lower expenditure, but higher expenditure per capita, controlling for other demographic factors.

Table 7. Value of household consumption and per capita consumption, MKW, by group

	Overall	Hanging In	Stepping Up	Stepping Out	Female-headed households	Single-headed households	Youth-headed households	Elderly-headed households	Households with a member with a disability	Balaka	Chikwawa	Mangochi	Phalombe
Annual Total Consumption Expenditure	396,822	285,665	467,396	665,840	320,007	301,520	276,934	303,438	371,604	341,206	343,357	509,841	342,402
Consumption per Capita	87,724	67,728	100,438	134,313	82,518	87,410	86,256	82,883	79,341	78,588	76,174	109,654	76,818

Programme Impact

Despite the fact that female-headed households and the poorest households tended to have worse results for many outcomes related to resilience and welfare, these groups also often had the largest impacts from participation in PROSPER interventions. Some examples include:

-)] Adoption of improved livestock practices and livestock ownership: Female-headed households saw large impact from participation in livestock pass-on on likelihood of investing in kraals, and number of livestock owned.
-)] Increased consumption expenditure: Participation in at least three PROSPER interventions was found to have significant impact on consumption expenditures for female-headed and hanging in households, but not for other groups.
-)] Improved access to agricultural inputs and markets: The difference between the share of treatment and control households reporting improvements in access to inputs was particularly large for female-headed households, and female-headed households were the only group that saw significant positive impact in improved access to markets.
-)] Non-agricultural business: Participation in access to finance was associated with especially large impact on likelihood of having a non-agricultural business for female-headed households and those in the hanging in wealth category.
-)] Crop diversification and sales: Participation in agricultural interventions was associated with particularly large impact on crop diversification for female-headed households, though diversification remains low, and impact of participation on crop sales was highest for female-headed households and the stepping up wealth group.

These findings show that although female-headed households and households in the hanging in wealth group often participated in interventions at a lower rate, when they did participate, they often saw the largest benefits. This suggests that these interventions may address some of the barriers that disproportionately affect these groups, and underscore the potential gains from designing programmes to be inclusive and accessible.

Implications for gender roles and relations and intra-household dynamics

Gender differences in roles and decisions within households in Malawi are well-known and widespread. There is already evidence that it is methodologically challenging to ask any one adult in a household whether a man or a woman makes decisions, as the answers rarely correlate.⁴

⁴ Acosta M, van Wessel M, van Bommel S, Ampaire EL, Twyman J, Jassogne L, Feindt PH., 2020. What does it mean to make

Nonetheless, the impact evaluation assessed who makes decisions in households for a number of variables, and a binary outcome (yes/no) was also used for the resilience index, which classified a household as having improved decision-making power if a women had control over at least three key decisions in a household, we found no evidence of impact of participating in PROSPER on decision-making.

In the 2021 annual survey, about 63% of households reported that women were involved in decisions in at least three of the four areas examined decisions over plot use, crop use, use of income from crops, and decisions around non-agricultural business management. About 17% reported women were not involved in decisions in any of these areas. Women were more likely to be involved in decisions around plot use and crop use than control over use of income from crops or household businesses.

Qualitative data suggest that cultural conventions play an important role in women's empowerment in household decision-making. Women tend to have responsibility for reproductive decisions, while men have responsibility for productive livelihood decisions. Control of kitchen utensils is universally attributed to women; while men make ultimate decisions regarding livelihood activities, particularly around business activities and farming decisions where inputs are required.

They also had implications for participation in BRACC programme interventions. Women universally explained that they were encouraged to participate in these interventions, but typically had to seek permission from their husbands to do so. Although this was universally granted, one woman explained that, without her husband's permission, she would not have taken part.

It is typically the earner of the income that has control over it. In the past, and reflecting gender roles, men have largely been responsible for earning income, and thus have control over it. As time goes on, there are more income-earning opportunities for women, including through targeting for participation in PROSPER interventions. When women in male-headed households earn their own money, whether or not they have direct control varies. Some do, but others indicated that their husbands expropriated it and spent it on causes with which they did not agree (for example other women).

In most female-headed households the woman is the main earner of income, and so in these cases they typically have greater control. One divorcee noted that, while married, her children would go hungry due to her ex-husband spending money outside the household but that *"Now I am in charge of my money and I use it to buy food for the children, and this makes me more happy and satisfied" (woman in a female-headed household, Mangochi)*. The exception is where female heads of household are elderly and thus the sons may assume 'male roles', including control over income generated and assets, particularly large livestock. However, perceived contravention of gender norms can cause challenges. One woman noted that, after her husband died, she started to make decisions about her children's education and paid school fees for boarding school without consulting her husband's family, who retaliated by denying her access to land to farm and stopping familial support.

In married male-headed households, the situation of women earning money can create tensions within households as men resist what they perceive to be intrusion on their responsibilities or experience jealousy. Some cases were highlighted where husbands had confiscated their wives' national IDs in retaliation, necessitating involvement of the police since stealing an ID is a crime. To address this, the implementing partner introduced modules on safeguarding and planned additional modules for couples on navigating jealousy. However, getting men to attend what they perceived to

be a 'women's issue' was also a challenge. This is particularly problematic as the very issues perceived to be women's issues are the ones where men's presence is essential to unpack and overcome some of the gender roles that lead to inequality—for example on gender-based violence and care responsibilities.

There was widespread acknowledgement of domestic conflict and failed marriages following spousal disagreements over unpaid loans, or arguments over how money from share-outs should be spent. In many instances, intra-household conflict arose when a spouse took out a loan without the consent of the other partner, and then the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) group came to confiscate household assets following failure to repay the loan. There were also indications that some husbands disapproved of wives' newfound economic independence following their participation in the VSLAs. However, there were also some positive impacts seen in this area, as participation in VSLAs was also credited with providing households with better options for addressing household challenges and facilitating household problem-solving. Cooperative household decision-making was commonly described as contributing to better financial decisions and better outcomes for participating in interventions like VSLAs.

Complexities of gender and social inclusion in resilience and resilience measurement

Overall, the results showed that while traditionally vulnerable groups such as female-headed households often had worse outcomes related to resilience and welfare, the relationship between group membership, intervention participation, and outcomes targeted by resilience programmes is often complex. Both the quantitative and qualitative data highlighted the importance of context and intersectional factors in determining barriers that targeted households and individuals were likely to face, and resilience and welfare outcomes. From an intersectional perspective, women in male-headed households may face different challenges than women who are single heads of household; single marital status does not always mean worse outcomes than for married individuals. For instance, in Phalombe and Mangochi, divorce is common and not necessarily seen as a vulnerability. In that context, divorced women may not face the same challenges as women in areas where divorce is more stigmatised.

A number of different factors were identified as potentially contributing to differences in outcomes among groups. Programme targeting, most explicitly by wealth level, likely played a role in disparities in participation; however, some groups may have faced additional barriers to participation, such as lack of time, despite the programme making efforts to include them and adapt activities to meet their needs. These barriers are likely to also have contributed to disparate resilience and welfare outcomes. Encouragingly, however, disadvantaged groups saw the highest impact from some interventions.

Interactions between group membership and data collection approaches may have also contributed to differences in observed outcomes. Males are more likely to be the survey respondents in male-headed households; males and females may answer survey questions differently. For example, women, who are generally responsible for feeding the family, may have greater awareness of food insecurity or coping mechanisms taken to address food insecurity, while men, who traditionally have greater involvement in marketing cash crops, may have better knowledge of yields and sales of those crops.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, there is significant and meaningful work being done in the area of gender and social inclusion in PROSPER interventions. There is high participation of women across the board, and some interventions reported higher resilience outcomes for female-headed households (specifically in agriculture interventions), although overall they were lagging male-headed households in outcomes. Meaningful adaptations have been made to facilitate greater inclusion of women and vulnerable groups in interventions, and although unintended consequences have been observed, steps are being taken to address them. Importance was placed on tailoring gender and social inclusion measures to be specific to districts and interventions, and that vulnerable groups were not treated as a monolith.

However, there are key themes around targeting and participation that have emerged from this research. Below are conclusions and recommendations for the PROSPER programme to enhance gender equity and social inclusion.

) *Funding cuts had a negative impact on gender and social inclusion.*

In addition to precluding implementation of GESI-specific activities, funding cuts have also limited implementation of activities targeted to the hanging in group. For instance, the UN partners had to reduce a pilot on nutrition sensitive social protection, which would have specifically targeted pregnant women and new mothers. The UNDP also stressed the need for an early warning system for flood evacuation, which would specifically benefit vulnerable groups such as elderly and those with disability, but do not have the resources currently. Concern identified those with disability as an excluded group and had plans to bring in resources from FEDOMA, the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi, to help them tailor interventions for greater inclusion.

) *How data is collected around gender is important.*

Gender is typically considered with regards to household headship, even though that has known challenges. Those challenges were also evident in PROSPER and its data collection. One issue is polygamy, which is common in Malawi. PROSPER's GESI strategy notes that women in polygamous households may be classified as married, but because they share a husband with other households, they may not have the same benefits in terms of income and labour resources that a married, monogamous household might. Comparing marital status of households may therefore disguise differences, and data that do not account for this will not be able to illuminate differences.

Considering household headship also disguises differences between women living in married households or single ones. Households were categorised according to wealth, but participants for interventions were chosen on an individual basis. Several of the findings here show differences in response depending on the gender of the person answering the survey. This highlights a role for individual-level data collection, as opposed to only household level.

) *The targeting strategy determines how easy it is to ensure inclusion of marginalised groups.*

Some partners reflected that more could have been done in this initial targeting to include women and vulnerable groups, and cited several challenges. Firstly, wealth ranking was completed at the

beginning of the interventions, before the GESI Strategy was implemented, so there was not yet an explicit focus on inclusion of women and vulnerable groups. Second, targeting was done at household level, meaning that individuals may have been missed. While there is scope to do what implementing partners did and list other household members, this does assume sharing of benefits within the household. PROSPER Markets and the UNDP do not target at the household level, but rather bring resources into areas that may need them. In such cases even more explicit efforts are required to ensure equitable opportunities to participate and benefit from interventions.

) *The targeting strategy needs to be carefully designed to ensure optimal inclusion of the target groups.*

The wealth ranking exercise (which was completed prior to the finalisation of the GESI Strategy) led to many typically marginalised groups being placed in the hanging in category—for example female-headed households, elderly, those with a disability, or households with five or more children with no father. Implementation staff cited this as a mechanism for ensuring inclusion. However, the findings showed that, at least for some resilience outcomes, female-headed households are not always the worst off; and at the same time that participation of hanging in households was generally lower. There is a risk of focusing on household headship when considering inclusion overlooks the particular gendered needs of women and men in households of different headship status. The targeting strategy should be reviewed to ensure that assigning interventions based on wealth categories is consistent with various programme goals, including maximising programme impact by matching interventions to those who will benefit the most from them, and ensuring equity in communities.

) *Further research on intra-household dynamics and secondary beneficiaries is needed to understand how intervention benefits are shared.*

The 2021 evaluation included some qualitative data collection with women in both female- and male-headed households, and provided some illumination of decision-making and the implications of PROSPER participation and benefit sharing. However, more understanding of this—and in particular how to mediate the potential negative consequences of promoting women's decision-making capacity, is important. Likewise, the assumption of benefit sharing within households needs to be unpacked as this is the assumption of implementing partners on targeting individuals within households. Understanding benefit sharing and decision-making, both for women and vulnerable groups such as elderly, youth, and those with disabilities, will help to tailor programme targeting for maximum impact.

) *Greater focus should be given to inclusion beyond gender, specifically disability and intersectional issues.*

Within PROSPER the primary GESI consideration was on gender, which is vital and important. However, groups such as the elderly and those with disabilities were identified as gaps in all three wealth categories. One interviewee noted that none of the partners chose pathway 9 (promoting active engagement of older people and people with disabilities) in their pathway prioritisation exercise. Greater attention should be paid to inclusion of these groups, either as programme participants or secondary beneficiaries. There have been several positive programme adaptations to make interventions more inclusive for those with disabilities or the elderly. Further adaption of interventions should be encouraged, taking into account context and potential unintended

consequences. Finally, intersectional issues and nuances within groups should be recognised, including the implications of polygamy for programme participation and outcomes.

) *Sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is required to track progress on gender equality and social inclusion.*

Gender and social inclusion indicators need to be integrated into M&E. Some partners noted that while they collect demographic data, it is not linked specifically to targeting or resilience outcomes. Programme participation data disaggregated by age and disability status should be reported by implementing partners when possible, and integrated into results frameworks. Indicators should also be included to capture unintended consequences. For example some implementing partner staff mentioned anecdotal observations that may have not been formally captured by M&E. It is also possible that there are greater impacts not being reported—for instance, an increase in gender-based violence or lack of ownership over cash may not be relayed to PROSPER staff. Formal mechanisms of monitoring these consequences are encouraged. Some examples of potential indicators of success related to PROSPER’s GESI Strategy Results Framework (and applicable elsewhere) are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8. Example GESI Strategy Results Framework

Strategy Pillars	Indicators of Success
Meet the practical needs of women and disadvantaged people	Quantitative: Women and disadvantaged people have resilience and welfare indicators on par with others, and show improvement in these indicators Qualitative: Women and disadvantaged people indicate that interventions meet their needs in focus group discussions or other interviews
Include socially excluded people as active participants	Quantitative: Women and disadvantaged people participate in most programme activities and interventions at an equal rate Qualitative: Socially excluded people indicate meaningful participation in activities; documentation of adapting activities to meet diverse needs
Address gender-based violence as a spoiler to resilience	Quantitative: Number of activities conducted containing gender-based violence messaging; gender-based violence reporting through safeguard mechanisms Qualitative: Reporting of gender-based violence as a barrier to, or unintended consequence of, participation in programme activities
Promote participation of women and disadvantaged groups in community leadership	Quantitative: Women and disadvantaged people participate in programme leadership roles at an equal rate Qualitative: Socially excluded people indicate meaningful participation in leadership roles
Promote joint household decision-making	Quantitative: Improvements in the share of women with control over income, or improvements in the degree of control over income Qualitative: Women and disadvantaged people report more meaningful participation in decisions regarding use of household income

Acknowledgements

This brief has been distilled out of the evaluation of the BRACC programme undertaken in 2021 by the

BRACC Hub. The BRACC Hub is very grateful for all the support and assistance provided during the evaluation by the BRACC programme participants, implementing partners and funder. We would like to thank the team members who were involved in data collection, analysis, and particular studies that fed into the evaluation, including Gulden Bayaz, Nick Brooks, Khandan Danish, Catherine Gould, Obioma Egemonye, Merlin Hanauer, Ying-Syuan (Elaine) Huang, Zemira Humphrey, Jennifer Leavy, Emmillian Kasililika-Mlagha, Mackenzie Klema, Diana Mataya, Matthew McConnachie, Dylan Pyman, Bright Sibale and the Centre for Development Management team, Danny Smith, Kirsti Thornber, Liz Venable, Katharine Vincent, Lena Weingärtner. We would also like to thank Collette Vosloo for her help in copyediting and proofreading.

