



under wraps

**a survey of public attitudes
to homosexuality and gender
non-conformity in Malawi**

Other 
THE OTHER FOUNDATION

under wraps

A survey of public attitudes to homosexuality and gender non-conformity in Malawi



Africascope is a market research firm which provides decision-makers with strategic information for market and socio-economic development of people in Africa.

This report is called Under Wraps because it shows that Malawi has a comparatively high LGBTI population that is known by a significant number of ordinary Malawians to be socially vulnerable – but this reality remains hidden in Malawi's social consciousness. Despite strong social values and aspirations of equality, non-violence, and belonging in a community, the majority of Malawians restrict LGBTI people from being openly recognized and safely included in families, communities, workplaces, cultural practices, and public policies. However, a large number of Malawians are thinking differently about discrimination, even the majority in relation to recognition of intersex people and violence towards LGBTI people.



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15%

of Malawians opted not to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity, identified as 'other', or said they did not know their sexual orientation or gender identity.

3,5%

of Malawian's over the age of 16 identify themselves as homosexual, bisexual, transgender or intersex - from all population groups and geographical areas, both rural and urban. This is more than double the ratio for South Africa (1.4%) and well above the 2% rate that many countries in the world are clustered at.

60-68%

do not yet envision legal protection of transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people BUT...

96%

value people being treated equally AND

83%

agree that people should be free to challenge current social norms.



26%

of Malawians know a transgender woman.



10%

of Malawians know a transgender man.



8%

of Malawians know an intersex person.



7%

of Malawians know a gay man.



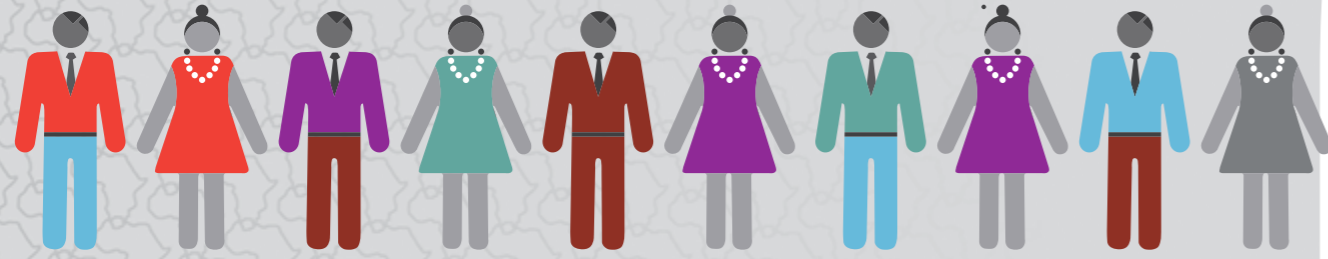
5%

of Malawians know a lesbian woman.

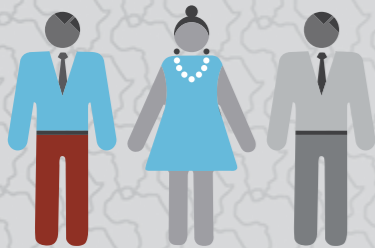




THE MAJORITY OF MALAWIANS REJECT VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI PEOPLE.



9 OUT OF 10 PEOPLE agree that intersex people should be protected from violence and the same number (87%) support Constitutional protection of the human rights of LGBTI people.



1 OUT OF 3 PEOPLE say that transgender people should be protected from violence and deserve the same human rights as all Malawians.



2 OUT OF 3 PEOPLE have not and will never be violent towards someone for being gender non-conforming.



1 OUT OF 2 PEOPLE have not and will never verbally abuse someone for being gender non-conforming.



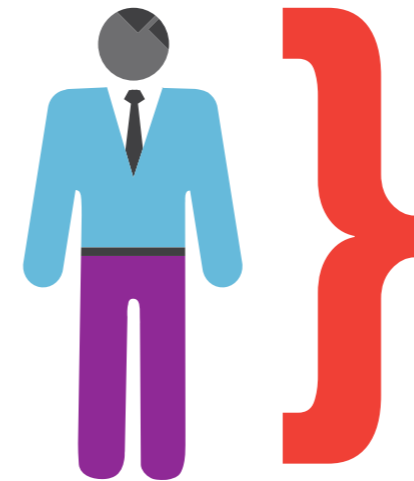
50%

have 'reported' gender non-conforming people to the authorities and . . .

BUT

23%

might be violent to gender non-conforming people in the future.



x2

Men are twice more likely than women to be violent towards gender non-conforming people and adolescent men (16-19 years old) are twice more likely than older men to be violent.



80%

believe that homosexual sex is wrong, but . . .



1 of 3 people believe 'God loves' people in same-sex relationships

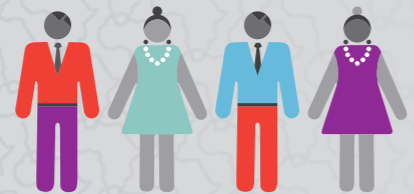


1 in 7 believe that homosexual sex is 'natural' and not wrong

On Sexual Diversity

Malawian's are much more favourably disposed to gender diversity than sexual diversity.

84%



4 out of every 5 people will 'accept' an intersex family member



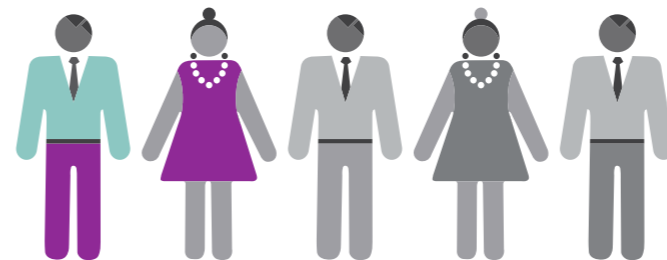
9 out of every 10 people will not advise a transgender family member to keep their gender a secret...



... even though 1 out of every 3 people agree that communities victimize people and reject families with transgender members



35-39%



say communities accept families with gay men or lesbian women - but...

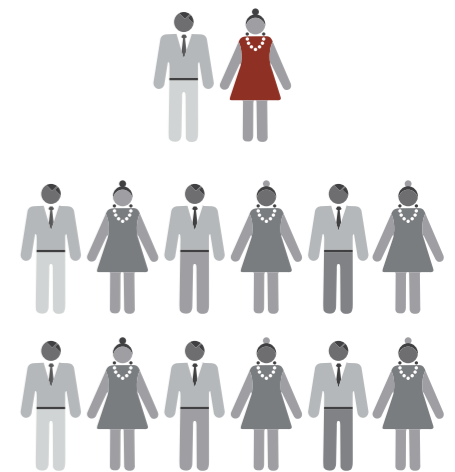


9 out of 10 people are not yet ready to 'accept' a gay man or lesbian woman in their own family

The strongest support for acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people is amongst Malawians living in urban centres who identify with major Christian denominations.



1 in 10 believe that LGBTI people are 'born that way' or 'it feels natural to them', and . . .



Only 1 in 14 believe that people are homosexual because they are 'sinners'

summary

1



The Malawi National Attitudes Survey (MNAS), the first nationally representative survey of attitudes towards LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people in Malawi, confirms many of the common assumptions people have about homophobia and transphobia in Africa, and calls others into question.

It shows that large majorities of Malawians have strongly negative views and misconceptions about gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. However, it also shows that attitudes towards transgender people are significantly less hostile and that attitudes towards intersex people are broadly positive and accepting. These findings offer LGBTI groups and all people who value freedom, equality, and social inclusion in Malawi, and in Africa in general, some important pointers to chart a path towards acceptance of all sexual and gender minorities.

A majority of Malawian's endorse sharing spiritual beliefs and experiences with LGBTI people, reject violence against LGBTI people, and support programmes to assist sexual and gender minorities. This ought to mean that Malawians should not oppose formal human rights protections for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

TABLE 1: SEXUAL ORIENTATION

	Total (%)	95% Confidence Interval - Lower	95% Confidence Interval - Higher
Heterosexual	82.0	78.0	85.2
Gay or Lesbian	2.0	1.2	3.5
Bisexual	1.1	0.4	3.2
Other	4.7	3.4	6.4
Don't know	7.1	5.0	10.3
Refused to answer	3.1	1.7	5.9

90% of Malawians find the idea of same-sex physical intimacy to be 'unnatural' but only 80% reject same-sex 'love'.



3.5 percent (186,000) of Malawian adult men and women, of all population groups, both rural and urban dwelling, and across age groups self-identify as either homosexual, bisexual, transgender or intersex in some way.

83 percent of Malawians will accept an intersex family member and nearly 86 percent say intersex people should be included in culture and tradition.

Nearly nine out of ten agree that intersex Malawians should be protected from violence and more than three quarters agree that they deserve constitutional protection.

A third of Malawians believe that transgender people should be protected from violence, though fewer (less than one in seven) think they should be accepted in families. One in five Malawians believe transgender people should be included in culture and tradition or protected in the constitution but nearly one in three (28 percent) agree that they deserve the same human rights as all Malawians.

The level of support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people is lower. Almost nine in ten (90%) find the idea of same-sex physical intimacy to be 'unnatural' but only four out of five (80%) reject same-sex 'love'.

“83% of Malawians will accept an intersex family member and 86% believe intersex people should be included in culture and tradition.”

introduction

2



There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence of homophobia and transphobia in Africa, yet hardly any detailed, statistically sound studies have been done about the actual opinions of Africans on sexual orientation or gender diversity. MNAS is a major step toward filling that gap for Malawi. This ground-breaking survey provides the first detailed, granular, and scientifically valid snapshot of how Malawians think and feel about a wide range of issues pertaining to sexual orientation and gender diversity.

Malawi

Malawi is a multi-ethnic, multicultural society of just under 18 million people. Five ethnic groups—Chewa (34 percent), Lomwe (18 percent), Yao (13 percent), Ngoni (10 percent), and Tumbuka (9 percent) together make up about three quarters of the population, a majority of whom live in rural areas. About 16 percent of the population live in urban areas, with 90 percent of the urban population concentrated in and around four cities: Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu, and Zomba. About 80 percent of the population identifies as Christian and 14 percent as Muslim. 2 percent have no religion.

The social and individual values that Malawians identify with most strongly are living in safety, being treated equally, being loyal to family and friends, and respecting others. Community decision-making and culture and tradition are also important social values in Malawi.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in Africa. Nearly three quarters of the population is considered socially and economically vulnerable, half are classified as poor, and 25 percent live in extreme poverty. The highest concentration of the extremely poor are found in the Southern Region and around the capital and largest city, Lilongwe, in the Central Region. Malawi ranks very low in gender equality. It was ranked 171st out of 188 countries on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index in 2018.

Malawi's Bill of Rights prohibits any form of discrimination.

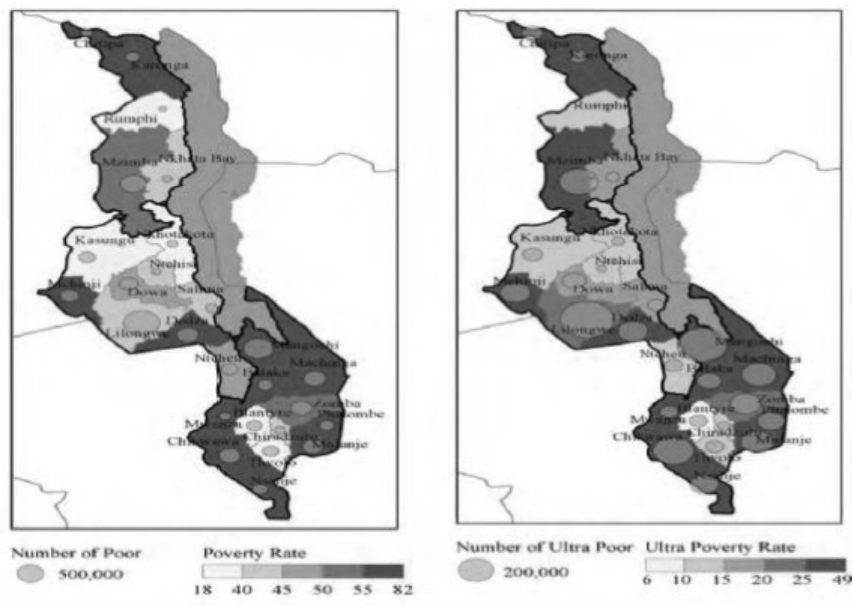


FIGURE 1: LEVELS OF POVERTY AND EXTREME POVERTY IN REGIONS OF MALAWI

Source: Poverty Assessment team calculations based on the IHS3 data.

Being LGBTI in Malawi

Laws and policies

Homosexual acts are criminalized under Sections 153, 156, and 137A of the Malawi Penal Code. Section 153 criminalizes “unnatural offences”, that is, “carnal knowledge ... against the order of nature”. The penalty is up to fourteen years’ imprisonment. Section 156 outlaws “gross indecency” between males, with a penalty of up to five years in prison. Section 137A, added to the Penal Code in 2010, extends the prohibition of gross indecency to females. Carnal knowledge against the order of nature is understood to mean anal intercourse, while gross indecency is understood to refer to any other same-sex physical intimacy.

The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act of 2015 defines marriage in heterosexual terms only. It also specifies that sex/gender is determined at birth, effectively denying the existence of transgender or intersex Malawians. However, the Constitution of Malawi is the supreme law of the land. Any other law inconsistent with it can be declared invalid. The Constitution’s Bill of Rights prohibits any form of discrimination and guarantees equal and effective protection against discrimination.

Malawi has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the African Union’s Cultural Charter for Africa, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights ACHPR). All of these prohibit any form of discrimination. CEDAW, CRC, ICESCR, and ICCPR, which are part of Malawi’s domestic law, have been interpreted by the United Nations Human Rights Council as including protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.¹

In recent years, various Malawi government policy and strategy documents have recognized the need to protect people against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The National HIV and AIDS Policy (reviewed and amended in 2016) acknowledges the need to reform or repeal laws criminalizing same-sex conduct in order to enable equal access to health services. However, despite declaring a moratorium on enforcement of these laws in 2015, the government has hesitated to take the next logical step of decriminalizing same-sex sexual relations and recognizing the human rights of LGBTI Malawians. The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR), a leading human rights non-governmental organisation, notes that the statutory Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) has remained silent on LGBTI issues. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has expressed concern over the MHRC’s reluctance to speak up for sexual minorities. However, the political climate around LGBTI human rights can be intimidating, as shown, for example, in a May 2016 statement by the Young Pastors Coalition of Malawi (YPCM) threatening to sue the government to force it to arrest the “4,000 homosexuals” the pastors claimed were living in the northern city of Mzuzu.²

Politics and culture

The challenges facing LGBTI people in Malawi are shaped by more than laws and government policies. The prevailing social, religious, and cultural norms of the Malawian people are what ultimately determine not only how (and if) the laws and policies are applied or reformed but how LGBTI people are treated in their daily lives. Since the high-profile arrest of Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbanga in 2010 for holding a same-sex engagement ceremony, these norms have mainly framed LGBTI lives as “unnatural” and contrary to Malawian cultures and morality.

The political situation has been contradictory. At times, governments have seemed willing to scrap discriminatory legislation, but fear of a backlash, or of appearing to give in to foreign pressure, has made them hesitate or backtrack. On the other hand, the resulting controversies and debates have raised public awareness of the issues and sensitized key stakeholders on the need for all citizens to enjoy equal rights. The trial of Monjeza and Chimbanga opened a space for LGBTI activists and allies to bring this need to wide public attention. The couple’s defence made the unconstitutionality of Section 153 one of its key arguments, and the court itself eventually issued a public invitation for interested parties to participate in the case as amici curiae (“friends of the court”). In 2013, the Malawi High Court announced a review of Section 153, but this has been delayed, apparently for “procedural” reasons. In 2017, the MHRC announced a ‘public inquiry’ “to inform the national position on the controversial issue of LGBTI,” only to back down after concerns from other human rights activists.³

Despite these contradictions, the public debate initiated by the Monjeza–Chimbanga case has created a more informed discursive space in which LGBTI human rights can be discussed. The complexity and unpredictability of the debate reveals an LGBTI movement straddling complex sociopolitical divides at the intersections of religion, tradition, regional, and international politics, and the complicated relationships among donors, activists, NGOs, and government.

¹ See the report on “Discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity,” para 15, 17 November 2011. https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/discrimination/a.hrc.19.41_english.pdf.



Governments have seemed willing to scrap discriminatory legislation but fear of a backlash has made them hesitate or backtrack.

Colonial legacy

As in other former British colonies in Africa and throughout the world, the original basis for criminalizing homosexuality and stigmatizing gender diversity in Malawi was a Victorian sexual morality and brand of Christianity imported into Africa by European colonialists in the 19th century. Their homophobia and transphobia stigmatized and disrupted the more diverse sexual practices of pre-colonial, pre-Christian, and pre-Islamic Africa.

This colonial legacy has lived on in post-independence Malawi and the homophobia and transphobia brought by the colonialists are still regarded by many Malawians as traditional, authentic local values.

Politicians fear acting in ways that look like caving in to neocolonial pressures, especially when the country is as heavily donor-dependent as Malawi is. They know the political value of appearing to “stand up” to western donors. As Foreign Affairs Minister George Chabonda declared in 2016, after alleging that Malawi’s access to critical donor funds was being linked to LGBTI rights, “We [politicians] are there to implement what our Malawian people want.”⁴ However, what the Malawian people want has not been definitely known until now. Before MNAS, there was little verifiable data on what Malawians actually think about sexual orientation and gender diversity.

² G. Singini. “Pastor coalition wants homosexuals re-arrested.” *The Nation*, 4 January 2016. <https://mwnation.com/pastor-coalition-wants-homosexuals-re-arrested/>

³ Human Rights Watch. (2018). “Let Posterity Judge: Violence and Discrimination against LGBT People in Malawi.” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/10/26/let-posterity-judge/violence-and-discrimination-against-lgbt-people-malawi>

⁴ N Meki. “George Chabonda hits at donors on gays.” *The Times*, 23 December 2015. <https://www.times.mw/george-chabonda-hits-at-donors-on-gays/>

“homophobia and transphobia brought by the colonialists are still regarded by many Malawians as traditional, authentic local values.”

background to this study

3

under wraps - a survey of public attitudes to homosexuality and gender non-conformity in malawi



Afrobarometer, a pan-African research network operating since 1999, conducted the first random, stratified probability survey on democracy and governance in Malawi shortly before the 2012 national elections.

Among other things, it found that 94 percent of adult Malawians did not accept that people had a right to private, same-sex relationships. A 2008 survey by the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) found that more than one third of gay men in Malawi had been denied services such as housing or healthcare or had been blackmailed due to their sexual orientation. Nearly one in ten had been beaten by police or other security forces. In a 2014 report CEDEP and CHRR noted that “the voices of lesbians and bisexual women in Malawi are systematically silenced... women do not have a space, even in protest, to express and live their sexual orientation”⁵ In 2018, Human Rights Watch followed up with a report, “*Let Posterity Judge: Violence and Discrimination against LGBT People in Malawi*,”⁶ based on in-depth interviews with LGBTI people in Lilongwe and Blantyre as well as with lawyers, activists, and government officials. The report confirmed that “discrimination against LGBT people is rife in Malawi... creating an atmosphere in which some of its most vulnerable citizens are afraid to seek out police assistance or potentially life-saving medical care.”⁷

⁵ CEDEP and CHRR. (2014). *Human Rights Violations on the Basis Real or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Malawi*. Lilongwe: CEDEP. http://iranti-org.co.za/content/Africa_by_country/Malawi/2014_CEDEP_Human_Rights_violations_report.pdf

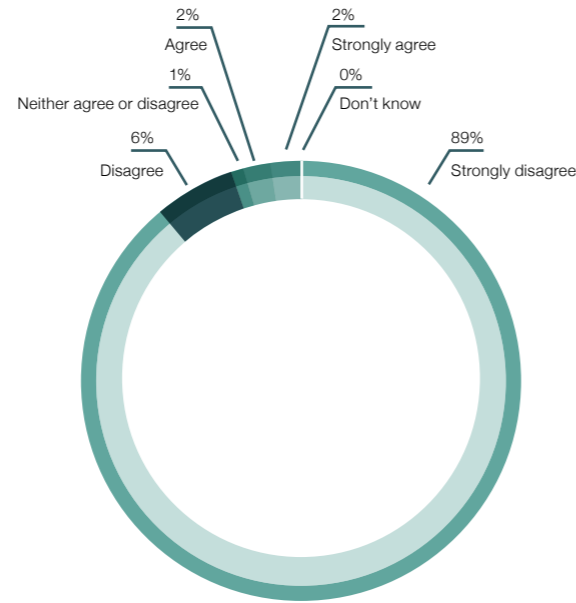
⁶ Human Rights Watch. (2018). “*Let Posterity Judge: Violence and Discrimination against LGBT People in Malawi*.” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/10/26/let-posterity-judge/violence-and-discrimination-against-lgbt-people-malawi>

⁷ Human Rights Watch. (2018). “*Let Posterity Judge: Violence and Discrimination against LGBT People in Malawi*.” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/10/26/let-posterity-judge/violence-and-discrimination-against-lgbt-people-malawi>



Discrimination creates an atmosphere in which the most vulnerable citizens are afraid to seek police assistance or potentially life-saving medical care.

FIGURE 2: AFROBAROMETER PERCEPTIONS OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE IN MALAWI



MNAS largely confirms this previous research, but with detailed and comprehensive data that is disaggregated in greater depth that delineates the moral frames that could form a potential basis for change in attitudes amongst Malawian citizens. It not only identifies and describes what the attitudes of the Malawian public are, but goes deeper to analyze why those attitudes exist, how they are informed, and what the prospects are for progress in shifting public attitudes to be less harmful. It provides a new depth of insight into how public attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity in Malawi drive stigma and discrimination – but also how underlying social values can form the basis for progress towards equality, freedom, and social inclusion. It reveals some surprising findings that offer hope and direction for the future in Malawi.



MNAS in context

It is commonly thought that attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are uniformly negative across the African continent. Until recently, this belief has not been tested scientifically. Since 2015, the Other Foundation has been funding sound statistical research on attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity in southern Africa. Its 2016 report, Progressive Prudes, based on the 2015 South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) into which a specific survey module was built, is a comprehensive snapshot of attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa twenty years after the promulgation of the new constitution made South Africa the first country in the world to include sexual orientation as a protected category.

As with SASAS, the respondents in the Malawi survey were representative of the whole society in terms of culture, language, income, religious beliefs, education and age. Its findings offer an instructive comparison to those from South Africa reported in Progressive Prudes. Despite revealing that a sizable share of South Africans still clung to intolerant views of same-sex relationships and transgender identities, the SASAS results showed that attitudes were shifting in a positive direction. In some areas, the shift had been dramatic. For example, between 2012 and 2015, there was a tenfold increase in those who said they “strongly agree” with allowing same-sex marriage, while the proportion “strongly disagreeing” dropped by more than half (from 48.5 percent to 23.4 percent).

In Malawi, attitudes towards same-sex sexuality and transgender identities remain much less accepting. MNAS confirms that large majorities believe same-sex sexuality and transgender identities are morally wrong or culturally unacceptable, while the proportion of Malawians who oppose same-sex marriage is four times higher than in South Africa.

However, MNAS also uncovered some surprising, and hopeful, findings. These cluster around attitudes towards gender identity. A large majority of Malawians accept intersex people and think their rights should be protected. Many also recognise gender diversity as a reality in society and believe that gender non-conforming people should be accepted in families and communities. The survey also reveals that much of the hostility towards gays, lesbians, and bisexuals is based on lack of familiarity with the lived experiences of LGBTI people. These key findings suggest promising directions for future activism.

In Malawi, as in much of the rest of Africa and throughout the world, many people know little about LGBTI identities and lives, and even less about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. One common misperception is that gender non-conforming people must be gay or lesbian. Conversely, gender conforming people are usually assumed to be heterosexual. There is little reliable data about heterosexual Africans’ understandings of gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientations or non-conforming gender identities. This survey attempts to address that research gap with respect to Malawi. Future surveys will do the same for other southern African countries.

A large majority of Malawians accept intersex people and think their human rights should be protected. Many also believe that gender non-conforming people should be accepted in families and communities.

about the other foundation

4

under wraps - a survey of public attitudes to homosexuality and gender non-conformity in malawi



MNAS was commissioned by the Other Foundation, an African community foundation that advances human rights and social inclusion in southern Africa with a focus on LGBTI people. The Other Foundation promotes an understanding that homosexuality and variance in gender identities and expressions are legitimate – and that LGBTI people in African are entitled to social acceptance and legal equality.

Through MNAS, we aim to provide a rich empirical resource to deepen the knowledge and understanding of attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity in Malawi and in southern Africa more generally. In particular, we hope the findings will be used to clarify what Malawians think about sexual orientation and gender identity, challenge Malawians' misperceptions about sexual orientation and gender identity, and strengthen advocacy to promote the freedom, equality, safety, and social inclusion of LGBTI people in Malawi.

definitions

5



Before discussing the MNAS findings in detail, some definitions⁸ will help clarify the issues. Like any topic in the human sciences, there is ongoing debate over some concepts relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. The following definitions have been compiled from a variety of sources to reflect commonly agreed core meanings.

Biological sex

A person's biological sex is an anatomical classification based on the visually verifiable external sex organs, internal reproductive structures, and sex chromosomes. Typically, all these physical features can be classified as either "male" or "female."

Intersex

For most people, the anatomical indicators of sex line up in a way that is typically understood in terms of the binary opposites of male or female, but for as many as two percent of live births, they do not. Intersex refers to a variety of conditions in which an individual is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical assumptions about female or male bodies. Recent advances in genetics and biology have made it clear that biological sex does not fit a strict binary model, and intersex conditions are increasingly recognized as naturally occurring variations of human physiology.

Gender

Gender is a person's inner sense of whether they are male, female, or neither. It is about a person's sense of identity, not about sexual attraction, desire, or behaviour.

Transgender

Some people experience a sense of disconnect between their biological sex (as assigned at birth) and their gender identity. A transgender woman is a person who was assigned male at birth but who later identifies as female. A transgender man was assigned female at birth but later identifies as male. Some transgender people become aware from a very early age that their gender identity does not align with their biological sex. More commonly, transgender people realize during puberty that their gender identity differs from their biological sex. Sometimes the sense of disconnect does not emerge until adulthood. A transgender person can be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or any other sexual orientation.

⁸ The definitions in this section have been adapted from the Stonewall Glossary. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms>



Cisgender

People who are cisgender experience no disconnect between their biological sex and gender identity. The term was coined in order to clarify that cisgender is not the “natural” or “correct” experience of gender, only the majority experience.

Gender expression

Gender expression refers to the ways in which people choose to reveal their internal sense of gender to the external world. People express their gender identity in many different ways. Dress, speech, mannerisms, and behaviour can all express gender identity and can do so in various ways, to various degrees, and differently at different times and in different social contexts. Every person inhabits and expresses their gender identity differently and should be free to do so, and able to do so safely.

Societies instill and reinforce expectations around gender in almost every area of life. Even very young children quickly learn the different behaviours, tastes, and interests that boys and girls are expected to have in their society. Those whose gender expression does not conform are seen as strange or special and are often bullied. In adolescence and adulthood, they may be discriminated against in a variety of ways depending on how strictly gender norms are enforced in their society.

Gender conformity refers to behaviour or appearance that matches a society’s or culture’s dominant gender norms. Gender non-conformity is the opposite. Gender conforming women, for example, dress and behave in ways their society considers “feminine” and gender non-conforming women dress in ways considered more appropriate for men in their society. Gender norms are socially constructed and vary from society to society. They also evolve over time. What is considered feminine behaviour or dress in one culture or one historical period may be seen as gender neutral or even masculine in another place or time.

Sexual orientation

A person’s sexual orientation is a deep sense of emotional and sexual attraction to others. Like gender identity, it is an internal experience. Anyone may be attracted to the “opposite” sex (heterosexual), the same sex (homosexual), both sexes (bisexual), or neither sex (asexual). In every society, there are significant numbers who are attracted to persons of the same sex or to both sexes, although the great majority of people are heterosexual for all or most of their lives. This has been the case throughout human history and reflects a naturally occurring variation in human sexuality, as medical and scientific evidence has overwhelmingly shown.

In an increasing number of countries nowadays, including some countries in Africa, it is accepted that people have diverse sexual orientations. In other countries, only heterosexuality is considered natural. Other orientations are seen as aberrations that society should be protected against. In such countries, discrimination and abuse on the basis of “abnormal” sexual orientations is prevalent, and in many (32 out of 54 in Africa), consensual same-sex sexual activity is criminalized.

Almost half of the 74 countries around the world that still criminalize consensual same-sex activity are in Africa. As in Malawi, their anti-gay and anti-lesbian laws are a legacy of British colonial empire, when concepts of “carnal knowledge against the order of nature” were embedded in British Victorian morality and in misguided European science. However, the first country in the world to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is also in Africa. Section 9(3) of the 1994 South African constitution explicitly protects people against discrimination based on sexual orientation.



Since the turn of the millennium, an increasing number of countries around the world have followed South Africa’s lead and reformed their laws and policies relating to sexual orientation. Besides abolishing nineteenth-century “sodomy” laws, a trend that began, appropriately enough, in Britain in 1967, many countries now include sexual orientation in non-discrimination statutes and policies and recognize same-sex marriage. These common sense reforms have been hard won through years of advocacy, public outreach, and political lobbying but have always encountered tough opposition at first. Activists have endured not just ridicule, verbal abuse, ostracism, and dismissal from jobs, but in many places, they have been violently attacked and sometimes even killed. In a few countries, governments have tried to stifle LGBTI activism by refusing to register advocacy organizations, increasing the penalties for consensual same-sex relations, or intensifying surveillance and enforcement.

In Malawi, many political and religious leaders continue to denounce sexual minorities, and both the courts and the government have been reluctant to go beyond the moratorium on enforcement of the sodomy laws. As our survey shows, there is overwhelming opposition to legal equality for all but intersex Malawians and little public understanding of sexual and gender identity issues. By providing the first detailed and reliable empirical evidence of Malawians’ attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity, MNAS provides a solid foundation for further research and better informed, more effective activism.

approach and methodology

6

under wraps - a survey of public attitudes to homosexuality and gender non-conformity in malawi



MNAS was designed in collaboration with AfricaScope, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa, and local Malawian researchers. The methodology was designed not just to measure the attitudes towards and understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity in Malawi but also to identify, where possible, the underlying factors that influence them.

Some of the key factors likely influencing attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity include personal knowledge of LGBTI individuals in the family and community, knowledge of sexual orientation and gender identity issues gleaned from media, school, church or mosque, community values, moral frameworks based on religious, traditional, and cultural affinities, knowledge of human rights theories and practices, and political affiliations. To explore these factors, a comprehensive questionnaire (172 items in total) was developed by the HSRC, AfricaScope, and local researchers, and fine-tuned by the Other Foundation in collaboration with a Malawi-based reference group. The questionnaire was based on the SASAS instrument but with various tweaks to make it better suited for the Malawian context. After lengthy consideration, ethical clearance was obtained from the National Health Sciences Research Committee (NHSRC) of the Ministry of Health and Population in Malawi at the end of May 2018.

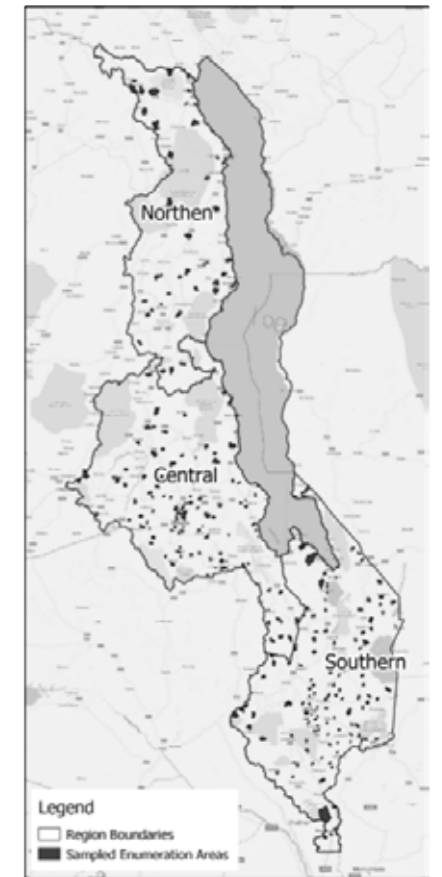
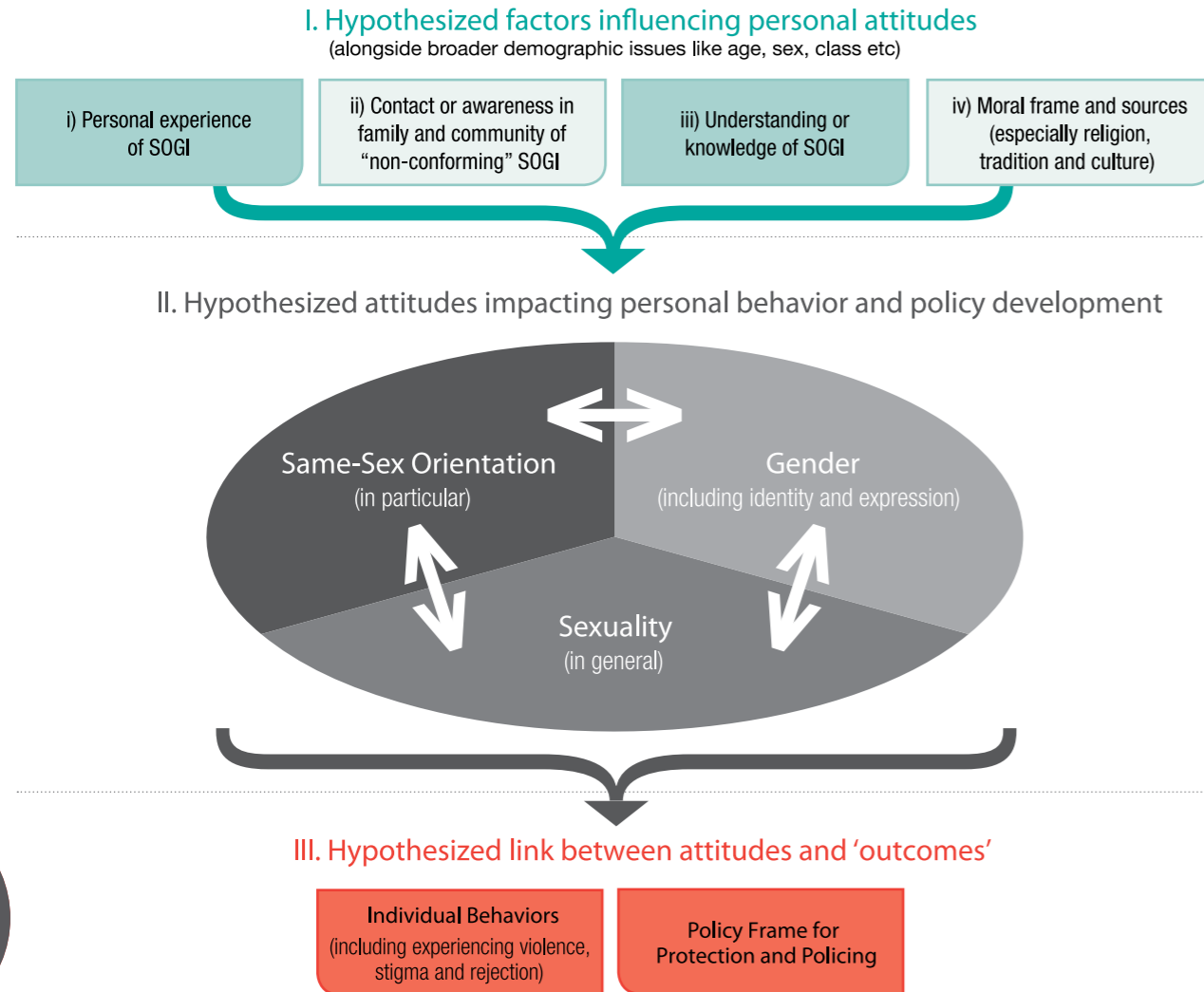


FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE IN REGIONS OF MALAWI



FIGURE 4: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK GUIDING THE RESEARCH



“Some of the key factors likely influencing attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity include personal knowledge of LGBTI individuals in the family and community.”



99%

99% percent of selected households and 100% of individuals agreed to participate in the study.

Three Malawi field teams were recruited to conduct the survey, one in each of the country's official regions: Northern Region, Central Region, and Southern Region. The team members (enumerators) were fluent in the appropriate indigenous languages and also had experience of conducting representative surveys on sensitive topics such as human rights, sexual orientation, and gender. The twenty enumerators and supervisors were trained on the specifics of this survey over three days in June 2018. The training covered all aspects relating to correct fieldwork procedures, use of fieldwork technologies, the purpose of the study, the details of the questionnaire, and techniques for conducting effective interviews on this subject matter. A key aspect of the training involved sensitization on issues of sexual and gender diversity.

A brief pilot study was conducted to enable the field teams to practice procedures and test the questionnaire. As a result, some minor modifications were made to fieldwork procedures, and the order of some items in the questionnaire was changed. Similar questions on LGBTI issues were incorporated into a single section to minimize respondent fatigue, and a few questions were given additional answer options. In other cases, answer options were rephrased for clarity, and some instructions were modified to improve the accuracy of data collection. The pilot interviews were completed in an average of about 65



FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY GENDER

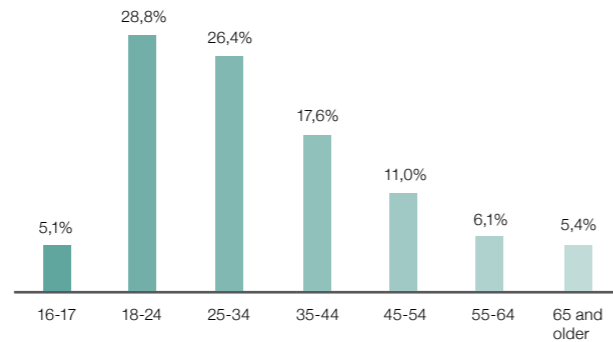


FIGURE 6: AGE PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



minutes, which was within an acceptable range, and was approximately the time they took during the actual survey.

A sample of 1,300 respondents were selected from 12,646 enumeration areas throughout the country, large enough for statistical precision at the national level at a 95 percent level of confidence. Initially, a sample of 2,000 respondents had been proposed, but due to delays in obtaining ethical clearance, the final sample size had to be reduced. Nevertheless, the data remains sufficiently robust and scientifically valid for the results to be considered nationally representative. Most items with high-majority responses also have statistical precision at a regional level, while some questions required responses to be combined to ensure statistical precision. Six interviews were conducted in each enumeration area.

To ensure effective implementation, regional overview and enumeration area maps were produced showing the locations of the enumeration areas in each region. These maps allowed teams to navigate quickly and accurately to each enumeration area using GPS. The enumeration area maps show the boundaries of enumeration areas overlaid on satellite imagery and the twelve visiting points (VPs)—the stands or dwellings where the teams conducted interviews—in each enumeration area. The oversample ensured that the required six interviews would be accomplished in each enumeration area.

The fieldwork was conducted from 12 July to 7 September 2018. After reaching each VP, the field teams enumerated the number of households, randomly selected one, made contact with the head of the household or another appropriate person, and asked if they were willing to include the household in the survey. If the response was positive, all the people 16 years and older in the household were enumerated, and one was randomly selected. This individual was invited to participate and asked to complete a consent form. If the participant was under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian also had to complete a consent form. Throughout the process, information sheets were provided explaining the study and the right to decline to participate or to withdraw participation at any time. Ninety-nine percent of households and 100 percent of selected individuals agreed to participate.

Demographics

Slightly more females than males were interviewed. Adult males were more likely, especially in rural areas, to have migrated elsewhere for work. The age profile of respondents accurately reflected the overall Malawi population profile. Most respondents (55.2 percent) belonged to the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups. The distribution of respondents among the three regions also reflected the overall Malawi population profile, as did the proportion of rural to urban respondents. Just over two percent of respondents identified as gay or lesbian, and a further one percent as bisexual. Just under one percent said they were transgender or intersex. This would extrapolate to 186,000 persons over the age of 16 in Malawi as a whole. Those who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex were distributed across all age groups, all levels of education, and almost all income groups in both rural and urban areas. The total population identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (3.5 percent) is in the middle of the range observed in other parts of the world. Studies from several countries at various times suggest that anywhere from 1.2 to 6.8 percent of adults identify as LGBTI, with many countries clustered around two percent. Just under 82 percent of respondents identified as heterosexual, while 16 percent declined to answer, identified as other, or said they did not know.

It should be noted that we asked respondents about identity rather than about same-sex attraction (e.g. have you ever been attracted to someone of the same sex?) or behaviour (e.g., have you had a sexual experience with someone of the same sex?). When people are asked about attraction or behaviour, the response rates for gay, lesbian, or bisexual attraction and behaviour are usually substantially higher than for identities.



Face-to-face interviews took place in the participants' vernacular. Tracking technology was used to monitor data collection, and AfricaScope was able to ensure that almost all the enumeration areas, and sufficient VPs in each, were visited. In a small number of cases, an enumeration area proved inaccessible and had to be substituted. Data from the completed questionnaires was received electronically by AfricaScope as the survey proceeded so that feedback could be given to the field teams. A change log was kept that recorded changes to the dataset and the criteria that were used to make changes. The final dataset was weighted by the sampling statistician.

After weighting, the dataset was analyzed by researchers from both AfricaScope and the HSRC using a number of statistical methods including frequencies, cross-tabulations, and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). MCA was used to factor in education levels, type of area, region, gender, and religion.

This report provides a descriptive overview of the key results. Further analysis of the data by members of the Malawi reference group and interested African researchers is encouraged. A cleaned, weighted dataset in suitable formats will be provided on request for this purpose. The data will also be provided on a web mapping portal to enable any interested party to gain a deeper understanding of the survey results.

**“186 000 Malawians
identify as gay, lesbian,
bisexual, transgender
or intersex.”**

values

7



Values inform people's thoughts, words, and actions at a deep and often unexamined level. They are profoundly important for understanding attitudes to issues such as those included in this survey. Although a community's values are formed from the values of the individuals in them, the community's collective values can differ from the values of individuals or even conflict with them. Conversely, community values, once established, influence the values of individual community members to a greater or lesser extent depending on the individual.

TABLE 2: COMMUNITY VALUES INCLUDING UMUNTHU AND CHILUNGAMO VALUES

	Very much like us	Like us	Somewhat like us	A little like us	Not like us	Not like us at all	Don't know/ refused to answer
Treated equally	74.5%	20.5%	2.6%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Live securely	69.5%	27.6%	1.9%	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%
Listen to different people	62.5%	26.4%	5.5%	1.1%	2.4%	2.1%	0.0%
Community decision-making	71.1%	24.0%	2.1%	1.3%	0.9%	0.2%	0.3%
Loyal to friends/family	68.2%	28.9%	1.5%	0.9%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%
Respect from others	66.7%	29.5%	2.7%	0.3%	0.6%	0.1%	0.0%
Culture/ tradition is important	66.2%	26.8%	3.3%	0.4%	0.6%	2.8%	0.0%
Protect community members	66.7%	30.1%	2.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%
Community events inclusion	65.1%	28.4%	2.2%	1.7%	2.1%	0.5%	0.1%
No stigmatization / discrimination	65.8%	26.5%	1.5%	0.3%	2.9%	2.6%	0.4%



TABLE 3: INDIVIDUAL VALUES INCLUDING UMUNTHU AND CHILUNGAMO VALUES

	Very much like me	Like me	Somewhat like me	A little like me	Not like me	Not like me at all	Don't know/ refused to answer
Treated equally	67.5%	27.5%	2.0%	2.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%
Live securely	64.8%	32.2%	2.6%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Listen to different people	59.7%	28.0%	6.3%	0.8%	3.3%	1.8%	0.2%
Community decision-making	64.5%	31.2%	2.9%	0.5%	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%
Loyal to friends/family	62.5%	32.3%	4.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%
Respect from others	65.9%	32.4%	1.6%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Culture/ tradition is important	64.7%	28.3%	3.4%	0.4%	0.9%	2.3%	0.1%
Protect community members	60.3%	28.5%	3.7%	1.0%	3.3%	2.9%	0.4%
Community events inclusion	65.1%	28.4%	2.2%	1.7%	2.1%	0.5%	0.1%
No stigmatization / discrimination	65.8%	26.5%	1.5%	0.3%	2.9%	2.6%	0.4%

The survey revealed that community and individual values align quite closely in Malawi.

This is an important finding in relation to the human rights of LGBTI people, which are often seen as a conflict between individual and community values. We found that the proportions of those who identified strongly (i.e. "very much like us" and "like us") with the listed values were very similar whether the values were regarded as community values or individual values. The values most strongly identified with as both community and individual values included living securely, being treated equally, being loyal to family and friends, and respecting others, all values that could facilitate acceptance of LGBTI people.

On the other hand, community decision-making and the importance of culture and tradition also ranked very high in both categories. These values are often invoked by those who cite community rights to justify opposition to acceptance of LGBTI people.

Living securely

Safety is one of the most fundamental human rights that both communities and individuals should enjoy. It is not surprising that, as both a community and an individual value, the belief in this right was very strong, with 97.1 percent saying it was either "very much like us" or "like us" as a community value and a virtually identical number (97 percent) saying it was

Community and individual values align closely in Malawi.

"very much like us" or "like us" as an individual value. Those who identified most strongly with this value included better educated urban dwellers, especially in the Southern Region, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Anglicans.

Equal treatment

A correspondence analysis of the value "treated equally" showed that those who identified most strongly with this response were the better educated, members of the larger religious denominations, and urban-dwelling males. Again, the numbers of those who selected "very much like us" and "like us" were similar whether the value was assessed as a community or individual value (95.9 percent and 95 percent respectively).

Loyalty to family and friends

Loyalty to family and friends was rated "very much like us" or "like us" by 97.1 percent of respondents as a community value and by 98.1 percent as an individual value. Those identifying most strongly with this value from either perspective included those living in urban areas and the Central Region, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, and unspecified Christians. Muslim respondents also identified strongly with loyalty to family and friends as an individual value.

Respect

As a community value, respect was identified as "very much like us" or "like us" by 96.2 percent of respondents and as an individual value by 94.8 percent. Interestingly, the difference (1.5 percent), was one of the larger gaps between a community value and an individual value found in the survey. People living in urban and peri-urban areas in and around Blantyre and Lilongwe identified most strongly with respect as a community value. Jehovah's Witnesses and members of the Assemblies of God also associated strongly with this response, as did Islamic and Christian faith communities in the Central Region generally. Identification was weakest in the northern region among Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Methodist faith communities.

Listening and tolerating

Another important value in relation to acceptance of LGBTI people is that of listening to others and tolerating their differences. As a community value, this was reported as either "very much like us" or "like us" by 88.9 percent of respondents and as an individual value by 87.7 percent. Members of the Church of God and Saints of Christ, Assemblies of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses were most likely to answer "very much like me", as were people

The values Malawians identify with most strongly include living securely, being treated equally, being loyal to family and friends and respecting others.



Protecting culture and tradition is often used as a rationale for denying LGBTI people their human rights.

living in the Southern Region with only a secondary or primary education. Rural women belonging to smaller religious denominations were most likely to answer “like us.”

Decision-making

Community decision-making received the second highest percentage of “very much like us” responses (71.1 percent) among the list of community values. Only equal treatment received more (75.4 percent). Those most strongly identifying with community decision-making included the more educated, men in urban areas, and members of the larger Christian denominations such as Anglicans and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Decision-making as an individual value was ranked significantly lower, with the response “very much like me” receiving 64.5 percent.

When the strongly positive responses (“very much like us” and “like us”) were counted together, community decision-making was supported by 95.1 percent and individual decision-making by 85.7 percent. The latter is still a large majority, but it is also the largest gap found between community and individual values in the survey. This suggests significantly lower support in Malawi for the importance of individual decision-making compared to community decision-making. However, although these two perspectives on decision-making might seem to be in conflict, the strongest support for individual decision-making, just as for community decision-making, came from well-educated urban dwellers.

The fact that almost two thirds of respondents identified individual decision-making as “very much like us” still indicates strong nationwide support for the importance of individuals being free to make their own decisions about their lives. Since the supporters of this principle tend to be better educated urban elites, and therefore more likely to be in positions of influence, it is important that LGBTI communities develop approaches to specifically engage with this demographic.

Culture and tradition

In many countries in Africa and elsewhere, protecting culture and tradition is used as a rationale for denying LGBTI people their human rights.

The strong support in this survey for the importance of culture and tradition—with 93 percent responding “very much like us” or “like us”—indicates that this rationale is likely to be powerful in Malawi too. The importance of protecting the community from harm was strongly supported by an even higher proportion. 96.8 percent said this value was either “very much like us” or “like us”, the third highest ranking among the ten community values surveyed.



Unlike decision-making, the importance of culture and tradition aligned closely as both a community and an individual value, with 66.2 percent of respondents indicating it was “very much like us” as a community value and 64.7 percent supporting it equally strongly as an individual value. Male Anglicans and Jehovah’s Witnesses living in the Southern Region with at least a secondary education associated most strongly with culture and tradition as both a community and individual value.

Religion

Malawi is a religious society, with more than 90 percent of adults reporting that they belong to a religion and 52 percent rating themselves “highly religious” (values of 8 to 10 on a scale of 10). Not surprisingly, this religiosity strongly influences Malawians’ social and political values. Nearly 90 percent of respondents agreed that “God’s laws” on marriage, abortion, and pornography should be strictly followed, with 70 percent voicing “very strong” support for this belief. 94 percent endorsed that “women should obey their husbands,” clearly demonstrating the strength of patriarchal norms. Throughout the world, such norms usually align closely with lack of acceptance of sexual and gender minorities.

TABLE 4: MORAL FRAME

	Best people challenge government and religion	Gods laws strictly followed	Women obey husbands
Strongly agree	58.94%	69.63%	70.38%
Agree	23.89%	18.53%	24.14%
Neither agree nor disagree	5.92%	2.59%	2.51%
Disagree	6.74%	6.57%	1.98%
Strongly disagree	1.64%	2.45%	0.89%
Don't know	2.49%	0.23%	0.11%
Refuse to answer	0.39%	0.00%	0.00%

94% endorsed that “women should obey their husbands”



83%

agree that
people should be free to
challenge religious and
societal norms.

83 percent of respondents agreed that people should be free to challenge religious and societal norms. This suggests that, although religious and patriarchal norms remain strong, Malawians could be receptive to initiatives that challenge these norms if there is an appeal to values that are even more strongly held such as loyalty to family and friends (97.1 percent), respect for others (96.2 percent) and equal treatment of people (95.9 percent).

It also suggests that engagement with the population on LGBTI issues should align itself with support for equality, fairness, and social inclusion.

“there is a strong nationwide support for the importance of individuals being free to make decisions about their own lives.”

knowledge about lgbti people

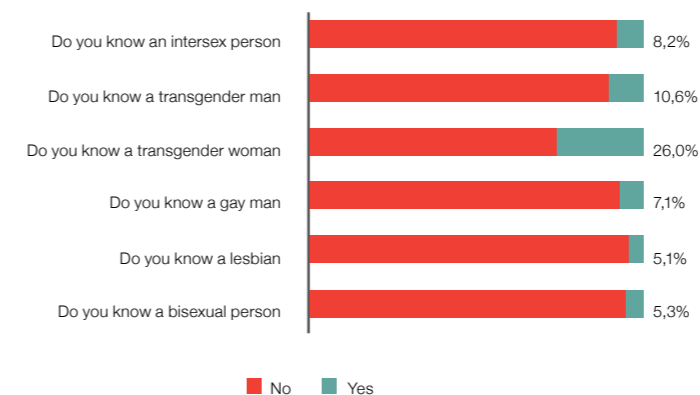
8



Apart from religious beliefs and cultural norms, people's personal knowledge of LGBTI people is one of the strongest determinants of their level of acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. When a family member or close friend is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex, it becomes much more difficult to deny the humanity of LGBTI people in general.

In Malawi, lack of such direct knowledge of LGBTI people is likely to be a major impediment to acceptance. Only 7.1 percent of respondents said they personally knew gay men and even fewer, a mere 5.1 percent, said they personally knew lesbians. An almost equally small number, 5.3 percent, said they personally knew someone who was bisexual.

FIGURE 7: KNOWLEDGE OF LGBTI PEOPLE



Direct, personal knowledge of LGBTI people is a key factor in promoting greater acceptance.

When a family member or close friend is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex, it becomes much more difficult to deny the humanity of LGBTI people in general.



When a family member or close friend is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex, it becomes much more difficult to deny the humanity of LGBTI people in general.

Personal knowledge of intersex people was somewhat higher. More than 8 percent of respondents said they knew someone who was intersex. However, nearly half of these (42 percent) said the intersex people they knew were friends or family members, whereas only about 20 percent said they had gay or lesbian friends or family members and just over 25 percent said they had bisexual friends or family members. This much higher level of direct personal connection to intersex individuals is likely to be a key reason that acceptance of intersex Malawians and support for their rights is so much higher than for other LGBTI categories.

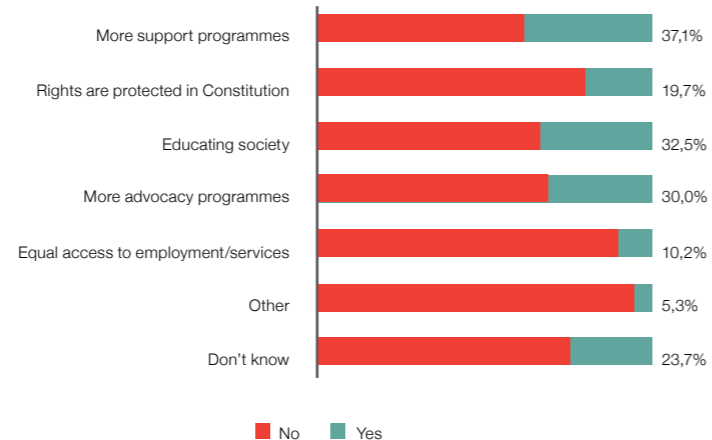
Perhaps surprisingly, more than a quarter (26 percent) said they personally knew a transgender woman. This is more than three and half times the number of those who knew a gay man and more than five times the number of those who knew a lesbian. For unclear reasons, perhaps having to do with social visibility, only a little over ten percent of respondents said they knew any transgender men.

The survey results show that direct, personal knowledge of LGBTI people is a key factor in promoting greater acceptance.

Intersex people are the only LGBTI category that large numbers of respondents reported knowing as family members or friends and, significantly, the only LGBTI category a majority of respondents said they accepted.

Knowledge of organizations or groups providing support to LGBTI people was very low. Less than one in twenty said that they knew of any. This shows that organizations advocating for inclusion of LGBTI people need to engage more broadly beyond LGBTI constituencies.

FIGURE 8: ACTIVITIES TO EMPOWER LGBTI IN SOCIETY



The need for education about the human rights of LGBTI people is acute.

When asked what words they associated with LGBTI people, most said they did not know, even though they were encouraged to provide as many names as possible and not to worry about being disrespectful. This seems to confirm the generally low level of knowledge about sexual minorities among respondents.

Perceptions which drive negative attitudes can be found in the local languages that are used to name persons who are not conforming to dominant gender or sexual identities. The names commonly used to label transgender, lesbians, bisexuals and gay men were associated with madness (wopenga), evil spirits (demon or chiwanda), stupidity (kupusa or chitsiru), prostitution (hule), homosexuality (mathanyula), sickness (wodwala or matenda) or as dirty people (nyasi). The naming suggests that it encourages social stigma and discrimination against LGBT people. This attitude is a reflection of the lack of appropriate terminology that can accurately describe sexual diversity or gender non-conformity. In terms of morality, the perceptions suggests an association of non-conformity with sin and wrong-doing. However, being intersex was mostly associated with disability (opuwala, chilema, or opunduka) or special needs. This suggests that the public view intersex conditions with more compassion than LGBT people.

However, the high percentage that refused to provide any word suggests that many Malawians may have a more open mind about LGBTI people than might have been expected. It may suggest that they avoid judging people if they do not know them.

Almost one third of respondents agreed that Malawian society needs to be educated about LGBTI people, and more than 37 percent said that more support programmes should be provided for LGBTI people. Nearly a third were also in favour of more advocacy programmes. The need for targeted education and engagement about the human rights of LGBTI people is particularly acute.

While the survey results indicate that significant numbers of Malawians are open to the idea of more support and advocacy for LGBTI people, more than 80 percent remain opposed to constitutional protections and nearly 90 percent oppose equal access to employment and public services.

understandings of sexuality and gender orientation

9



People's attitudes towards LGBTI people depend to a large extent on how much they know, or think they know, about diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities.

The less well-informed that people are, the more likely they are to believe myths and half-truths and to have homophobic and transphobic attitudes based on these misconceptions. About one third (33.4 percent) of respondents said that people got into same-sex relationships either because they were confused about their sexuality or because they were controlled by "demonic spirits." Almost the same proportion (32.5 percent) said it was a choice or was done in order to get attention. Overall, more than four out of five respondents (81.3 percent) selected reasons that depict sexual minorities as troubled, ill, or immoral. Less than one in ten believed in neutral or positive explanations such as that "some people are just born that way" or "it just feels natural to them."

Religious explanations were less popular, with only ten percent blaming demons and slightly over seven percent saying that same-sex relationships happen because "some people are sinners." When asked if God loves people in same-sex relationships, the majority (52 percent) said no, but more than one third said yes, despite disapproving of such relationships.

Close to two thirds (64.6 percent) said their views on same-sex relationships were their own personal views rather than based on what they had heard on radio and television (1.8 percent), from politicians (1.0 percent), or from community organizations (0.6 percent). Only about 15 percent said that religion had "played a key role" in forming their views, and even fewer credited their community (7.3 percent) or family (5.6 percent). Given the importance of religious, community, and family values indicated by responses to other questions, we expected higher numbers. These results may suggest that Malawians prefer to think for themselves on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

On the other hand, the apparently weak influence of the media and community organizations suggests that LGBTI people should not rely on messages relayed through these channels to change people's minds.

Malawians want to think for themselves on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.



One in ten Malawians say that LGBTI people are "born that way" or "it just feels natural to them"



behaviour towards lgbti people

10



The inconsistent, even somewhat contradictory, mix of responses to the question of what should be done to empower LGBTI Malawians was mirrored in the responses to questions about people's behaviour towards their fellow LGBTI citizens.

Transgender people tend to be the most visible category of LGBTI individuals, so we focused on asking respondents how they had behaved in the past (or might in the future) towards people perceived to be transgender or gender non-conforming. While almost half said they had not, and never would, "keep well away" from transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, slightly more than half (50.4 percent) said they had reported transgender people to the authorities (despite the fact that it is not a crime in Malawi to be transgender or gender non-conforming). However, even more (54.2 percent) said they never had, and never would, verbally harass someone for appearing to be transgender, and more than two thirds (68.2 percent) said they never had, nor ever would, physically assault anyone who "behaves like the opposite gender."

Nevertheless, substantial percentages said that, although they had not behaved maliciously towards transgender or homosexual people in the past, they did not rule out doing so in the future. More than one in three (36.3 percent) said they might report transgender people to the authorities, and slightly more than a third that they might verbally harass them. Almost a quarter (22.9 percent) said they had never beaten "people who dress and/or act like someone of the opposite gender" but might do so in future.

Men were around two times more likely than women to use violence against gender non-conforming people.

Of even more concern going forward, young men (16-19) were up to two times more likely to report using violence, especially towards gender non-conforming women, than older men.

54% of Malawians have not and will never verbally abuse someone for being gender non-conforming and 68% have not and will never be physically violent to them.

1.4% of the population have been physically violent to gender non-conforming men and 23% of Malawians might be violent in the future.

attitudes towards lgbti people

11



Behaviours are driven by underlying attitudes, which, in turn, are influenced by a host of factors including community and individual values, culture and tradition, knowledge, and personal connections (or the lack of them). The survey revealed a number of surprising results that suggest how some of these factors drive hostility to LGBTI people—or may lessen it in the future.

Broadly speaking, the responses to our questions about underlying attitudes reveal that Malawians are more favourably disposed towards gender diversity than sexual diversity. Gender non-conforming, transgender, and, above all, intersex people are seen in a generally more favourable light than gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual people. This difference is most apparent in familial or cultural values towards protection of LGBTI people from violence and harm.

Attitudes towards gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people

TABLE 5: ACTIONS AGAINST GENDER NON-CONFORMITY

	Have done it in the past year	Have done it in the more distant past	Have not done it, but might do it	Have not done it and would never do it	Don't know	Refuse to answer	TOTAL
Keep well away from gay people	4.7%	2.6%	29.8%	46.6%	13.2%	3.2%	100%
I have reported transgender people to the relevant authorities	1.2%	1.3%	36.3%	50.4%	6.6%	4.2%	100%
Have shouted at or teased transgender people	1.5%	1.9%	33.4%	54.2%	6.8%	2.3%	100%
Have beaten up men who behaved like women	0.8%	0.6%	22.9%	68.2%	5.0%	2.5%	100%
In general, my attitudes towards transgender people has positively changed	1.9%	1.3%	17.1%	65.5%	10.4%	3.8%	100%

Almost nine out of ten respondents (89.3 percent) said they would not accept a gay man in their family, and nearly three quarters said gay men should not be accepted in Malawian cultures or take part in Malawian traditions. Given this level of hostility, it may be surprising that only about one third reported that gay men “are often victimized or assaulted in my community.” Well over a third (38.7 percent) denied that gay men were mistreated in the community. A similar number claimed their communities accepted families with gay men in them. Asked if communities should be encouraged to protect gay men, however, more than two thirds (67.6 percent) said they should not. Around the same number (65.7 percent) said the protection of gay men’s rights should not be included in the constitution.



TABLE 6: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refuse to answer	Total
If someone in our family were transgender, I would accept them.	6.9%	3.7%	3.3%	35.1%	50.2%	0.3%	0.6%	100%
A person who is transgender should still be part of / take part in my culture and traditions.	12.0%	7.9%	4.2%	32.0%	43.0%	0.5%	0.4%	100%
If a family member said they are transgender, I would tell them to protect themselves from others in the community by keeping it private.	8.4%	5.1%	5.5%	40.6%	38.5%	1.7%	0.4%	100%
Transgender people are often victimized and assaulted in my community.	16.1%	14.3%	7.1%	22.6%	17.4%	22.2%	0.4%	100%
Communities are not very accepting of families that have a family member that is transgender.	16.5%	13.9%	9.2%	21.0%	17.0%	22.2%	0.4%	100%

30%
of Malawians agree that communities victimize transgender people and reject families with transgender members.

Attitudes towards bisexuals were also similar. Just under nine out of ten respondents (88.6 percent) said they would not accept a bisexual person in their family, while four out of five (80.1 percent) said bisexuals should not be involved in Malawian cultures and traditions. However, only a third (33.3 percent) said this hostility resulted in victimization or assaults, and more than a third (35 percent) claimed their communities accepted families with bisexual members. Asked if bisexuals should have the same human rights as other Malawians, 71 percent said no they should not, and a similar proportion (68 percent) agreed that the human rights of bisexuals should not be included in the constitution. Since Malawi's constitution does not explicitly exclude LGBTI people from human rights protection, civic education and advocacy campaigns are necessary to educate the public about the imperative of equal protection of constitutional rights.

When asked whether same-sex marriages should be permitted, 92 percent said no. 1.5 percent supported same-sex marriage. Although knowledge of the Malawian constitution was poor, with 83 percent of respondents having at best a "basic" knowledge of it (including more than a third who said they did not know "anything" about it), the respondents seemed knowledgeable about the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act



of 2015, presumably because of the publicity it generated around child marriage. Nearly two thirds (62 percent) were aware that the act restricted marriage to be between a man and a woman.

The strongest support for acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people was found among Malawians living in and around major urban centres who identified with major church denominations (Roman Catholic, Church of Central African Presbyterian [CCAP], Seventh Day Adventist, and Baptist/Apostolic). The greatest hostility was found among men in the Southern Region and members of the Assemblies of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Apostle Twelve churches.

Hostility towards transgender individuals was only slightly less intense. Eighty-five percent said they would not accept a transgender family member, and about three quarters agreed that a transgender person should not take part in Malawian cultures and traditions. Nearly a third (30 percent) agreed that their communities victimized transgender people and rejected families with transgender members, and 66 percent said their communities should not be encouraged to protect transgender people from violence – yet almost nine out of ten (89.1 percent) said they would not advise a transgender family member to keep their gender identity a secret. At the same time, 64 percent said transgender people do not deserve the same human rights as other Malawians, and almost 60 percent said that the human rights of transgender people should not be protected by the constitution. Once again, the strongest hostility was found among men living in the Southern Region, people with only a primary education, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The least hostility was found in the Central Region and among those belonging to the dominant Christian denominations.

Close to 80 percent of respondents considered sex between two men "just plain wrong," and almost the same number (77.7 percent) said it was "disgusting." Almost three quarters (73.2 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that it was "unnatural." For sex between women, the responses varied only slightly.

Lesbian sex was called wrong by 77.2 percent, disgusting by 78.5 percent, and unnatural by 74.2 percent. Those who felt that sex between men or between women was natural, not disgusting, and not wrong, was consistent at around 15 percent, which indicates that the potential base for acceptance of LGBT people is firm, though small.

Respondents' feelings about transgender Malawians appeared to be a little more tolerant. For example, just under 72 percent (71.9 percent) said it was unnatural "for some men to dress like a woman" and agreed that "transgender people are disgusting" (71.7 percent). Moreover, at almost 22 percent, the proportion who disagreed that transgender people were "disgusting" was about 50 percent higher than the same response for gay men and lesbians, which suggests greater receptiveness to transgender Malawians.

9 out of 10 Malawians will not advise a transgender family member to keep their gender identity a secret





It may be significant that the questions on gay men and lesbians focused on sex while those on transgender people evoked only identity and appearance. This suggests that hostility to sexual minorities is driven more by aversion to the idea of same-sex sexual acts, especially between men, than by more abstract notions of gender and identity.

A comparison with responses to the questions about belonging also suggests that issues of sexual orientation and gender identity arouse more hostility in Malawi when imagined in the context of one's own family, community, and local culture.

15%

At 15% of the population, the current base for firm acceptance of homosexual people is small but consistent.

“hostility to sexual minorities is driven more by an aversion to the idea of same-sex sex acts than by notions of gender and identity.”

attitudes towards intersex people

12



The contrast between Malawians' attitudes towards gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual and transgender people on the one hand and towards intersex people on the other is dramatic. The responses on intersex acceptance were virtually the reverse of those for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people.

TABLE 7: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS INTERSEX PEOPLE

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refuse to answer	Total
If someone in our family were intersex, I would accept them.	61.7%	21.7%	2.2%	6.4%	6.6%	1.2%	0.2%	100%
A person who intersex should still be part of/take part in my culture and traditions.	63.5%	22.2%	2.5%	6.2%	4.5%	1.1%	0.1%	100%
If a family member said they are intersex, I would tell them to protect themselves from others in the community by keeping it private.	45.8%	16.6%	3.8%	16.9%	15.1%	1.0%	0.8%	100%
Intersex people are often victimized and assaulted in my community.	28.1%	14.0%	9.0%	12.9%	13.7%	22.1%	0.2%	100%
Communities are not very accepting of families that have a family member that is intersex.	20.6%	12.0%	10.5%	18.4%	15.5%	22.8%	0.2%	100%

While an average of 88.2 percent of respondents said they would reject a family member who was gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, more than 83 percent said they would accept an intersex family member. An even higher percentage (85.6 percent) said that intersex individuals should be accepted by, and allowed to take part in, Malawian cultures and traditions, while those who said the same for gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender individuals averaged only about 17 percent. Close to 87 percent of respondents agreed that intersex Malawians should be given the same human rights as other citizens and that their rights should be incorporated into the constitution.

However, despite being highly accepting of intersex people, the respondents seemed less confident about their society's level of acceptance. Nearly half (42.1 percent) thought that intersex people were often victimized or assaulted, and just under a third agreed that their communities were "not very accepting" of families with intersex members, although slightly more (33.9 percent) disagreed. More than 60 percent said they would advise an intersex family member to keep this a secret from the community, a percentage almost twice as high as might have been expected on the basis of the 32.6 percent who thought their community unlikely to accept families with intersex members.

the way forwards

13



Overview

A number of important findings emerge from MNAS that offer hope for future progress towards LGBTI freedom, equality, and social inclusion in Malawi and, more importantly, suggest directions the country could take to achieve that progress. The survey uncovered a generally inclusive stance towards intersex people. It also found that attitudes towards transgender people were significantly less hostile than towards gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Attitudes towards gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals were, by contrast, highly negative. Despite such alarmingly negative attitudes, the survey revealed that a significant proportion of the population is relatively tolerant. The rhetoric that Malawians completely rejects gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals is therefore scientifically false.

The contrast between attitudes towards intersex and transgender people on the one hand and towards gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people on the other appears to be based on a perception that intersex identities and, to a lesser extent, transgender identities, are natural or God-given anomalies but that same-sex sexualities are sinful or perverse lifestyle choices. Malawians are more willing to accept “abnormal” identities and behaviours they believe occur naturally, even if they see them as ‘unpleasant’ or ‘shameful’. This may explain why a majority would accept intersex people in their families but would still want to keep it a secret. Malawians are less willing to accept identities and behaviours they believe have been chosen, even though they may generally feel no animosity towards the individuals. This may explain why substantial percentages of respondents, while condemning same-sex relationships, said they believe ‘God loves’ the people involved in them.

A large majority of Malawians therefore accept intersex people and think their rights should be protected. Many also recognize gender diversity as a fact of life and say gender non-conforming people should be accepted in families and communities. And although same-sex sexual relationships are viewed with repulsion by the great majority of Malawians, there is much greater acceptance of same-sex intimacy beyond physical intimacy, such as spiritual and emotional forms of connection and sharing.

Finally, the survey indicated that Malawians see themselves as independent thinkers and want to make their own informed decisions on social issues but that, on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, they are hampered by lack of knowledge. Two thirds support individual decision-making and more than three quarters think people should be free to challenge religious and societal norms, yet they have very little understanding of sexuality and gender and even less direct personal knowledge of the lived realities of LGBTI people. Substantial numbers believe Malawian society needs to be better informed about LGBTI people and that more LGBTI support and advocacy programmes should be provided.



Implications

There has been a cycle of progress and backlash around LGBTI issues and human rights in Malawi and in southern Africa generally in recent years, but the overall trend is one of gradually increasing acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. A complex bundle of factors is responsible, including urbanization, increasing access to secondary and tertiary education, empowerment of women, increasing access to media and the internet, a focus on particularly vulnerable people in HIV/AIDS initiatives, donor pressure, the desire of governments and civil society to be seen as “modernizing,” and, of course, the hard and courageous work of LGBTI activists and allies that has increased the voice and visibility of LGBTI people in communities. Increasingly, LGBTI campaigns are becoming more effective by building links to broader human rights and democracy movements and grounding their activism in local understandings of sexuality and gender.

There are also some key narratives opposing sexual and gender diversity perpetuated variously by the state, communities, families, the media, and religious bodies. These include a legalist narrative (“it harms others”), a moral narrative (“it’s corrupt and depraved”), a religious narrative (“it’s against God’s law”), a political narrative (“it’s neocolonial”), a cultural narrative (“it’s unAfrican”), a public health narrative (“it’s an illness”), a community narrative (“it’s dangerous to the community”) and a social narrative (“they don’t belong”). Some, though not all, of these narratives can be seen in the data emerging from this survey.

Is it possible to make equality for LGBTI Malawians acceptable to heterosexual and cisgender fellow citizens? The numbers in most of the responses in this survey might seem to make that a daunting prospect, yet some of the responses suggest good pathways forward for Malawi as it advances.

When the survey questions were framed, one of the key concerns was to capture local understandings of values about sexuality, family, social belonging, respect, and community. In Malawi, these values are underpinned by traditional ethics known as uMunthu and chilungamo. This moral frame of reference reflects worldviews that are common across southern Africa and that have an impact on the ways people think about and describe sexual and gender diversity.

uMunthu understands the individual in terms of mutual and interconnected relationships with the community and stresses the values of personal dignity, care for others, responsibility to the community, and harmony with the cosmos. Known by various names across the region, it has been the traditional foundation for social citizenship in southern Africa for hundreds of years.

Chilungamo is about justice, stressing fairness and principled conduct. It is grounded in principles of righteousness, honesty, equity, and integrity that have guided Malawi’s communities since before the colonial era. Together, uMunthu and chilungamo support the principle that LGBTI people are entitled to the same human rights as everyone else. They have the potential to frame aspirations for LGBTI freedom, equality, and social inclusion in terms of widely accepted values rather than in relation to values perceived by many Malawians as coming from outside.

The MNAS findings indicate, for example, that, although religious norms remain strong, Malawians could be receptive to initiatives that challenge these norms if LGBTI people can find ways to appeal to related values such as loyalty to family and friends, respect for others, and equal treatment of people. The findings suggest that action for progress should align itself with those social norms that support equality, fairness, and social inclusion.

The survey suggests media messages or those perceived to originate from activist organizations in general, do not have much effect in Malawi at present. Direct person-to-person or small group and community engagement is critically important.



The survey results strongly support the power of direct, personal knowledge of LGBTI people in debunking harmful myths and creating acceptance. The only LGBTI category a majority of respondents overwhelmingly accepted was intersex people, and this was also the only LGBTI category that large numbers of respondents had interacted with as family or friends. It seems clear that direct personal connection to intersex people is one of the main reasons that acceptance of intersex Malawians is so much higher than for other LGBTI people. The survey results also suggest that many Malawians prefer not to judge people they don’t know, which underscores the importance of direct communication to provide people with accurate information about diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Overall, the findings from the survey support a growing body of literature on the ways in which views on sexual and gender diversity in southern Africa are encoded primarily in terms of gender. The greater levels of acceptance and more inclusive values found by the survey in relation to gender diversity as opposed to sexual orientation have important implications for social change strategies. The greater levels of inclusion and support for intersex, gender non-conforming, and transgender people’s human rights point to possible levers for change in Malawi.

Going forward, it is critical that collaboration is strengthened. In particular, intersex and transgender participation and leadership to broaden the base of perspective, voice, and visibility is a priority.

uMunthu and chilungamo support the principle that LGBTI people are entitled to the same human rights as everyone else.



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acknowledge- ments

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under wraps - a survey of public attitudes to homosexuality and gender non-conformity in malawi



This report is the result of many months of intensive work by a large number of people, too many to mention all of them individually here. We thank them all for their hard work.

The study was first proposed by the Other Foundation, who then took the idea forward in consultation with the HSRC and AfricaScope. The research framework and survey questions were developed by Prof Finn Reygan at the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa in consultation with Alan Msosa from the Centre on Law and Social Transformation, and Craig Schwabe from AfricaScope. The questionnaire was reviewed by members of the reference group in Malawi and finalized by Craig Schwabe. The initial analysis of the raw data was done by Katiso Rachabane and Craig Schwabe, and the first draft of this report was written by Craig Schwabe with input from Finn Reygan. Additional inputs were provided by Alan Msosa and members of the research reference group profiled below.

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Timothy Mtambo is a passionate governance and human rights practitioner and activist. He is the executive director of the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation, one of the earliest human rights movements in post-dictatorship Malawi, whose mission is to protect and promote a culture of human rights and good governance for human development. He holds an advanced Master's degree in international cooperation and development from the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of Pavia in Italy. He is the chairperson of the Malawi Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Alliance, chairperson of the Malawi Human Rights Defenders Network, chairperson of the Civil Society Network on Transparency and Accountability in Malawi, co-chairperson for the National Technical Working Group on LGBTI Rights, spokesperson of Citizens Forum for the Defense of Good Governance in Malawi, and serves in various boards and committees such as at the Malawi Electoral Support Network, the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, the Africa Technical Working Group on Open Contracting, and the Malawi Alliance Against Child Marriages.

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