



## Voices from the Field: Exploring Gender Dynamics in Malawi

By Ziana Ahmed, Cuso Volunteer, Malawi (May 2019)

**As a Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor working on the Southern Africa Nutrition Initiative (SANI) in Malawi,** I am always eager to see evidence that the project is improving the nutritional status of women and children under five in the Dowa and Ntchisi districts of Malawi.

Much of my work actually involves designing and implementing systems to monitor program progress and evaluate impact. During this process, **I have come to understand all the complex factors that affect project performance. One of the most interesting factors is gender.**

Before I came to Malawi, I did not understand the degree to which gender roles can influence nutritional status. After participating in Social Analysis and Action (SAA) methodology training (delivered in January 2018) with the SANI team from CARE Malawi and our implementing partners, (Evangelical Lutheran Development Services, and Parent and Child Health Initiative), **I have learned how important it is to address gender dynamics when tackling nutrition.**



During our training, we learned about how gender inequalities can affect decision making, division of labour, and access and control of resources, including money and food, and how this limits women and children's attainment of good health and nutrition. We were introduced to different SAA tools that can be used with the community members to facilitate discussion and catalyze behavioral change.

One of the most interesting and rewarding parts of this workshop was going to the communities to practice what we learned and begin to break down gender roles. During our visit to the

The **SOUTHERN AFRICA NUTRITION INITIATIVE (SANI)** is a 24,652,087 million CAD project to address undernutrition in women of reproductive age (15-49) and children under 5 in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. SANI is a partnership between CARE, Cuso International, the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD), McGill University, and the Governments of implementing countries. The project is funded by the Government of Canada, CARE, and the Canadian public. SANI is a four-year and six-month project, from March 2016 to September 2020.



community, we used the SAA tool called “Ideal Man or Woman.” Participants were split into two groups (male and female) and asked to draw their ideal man or woman and list the attributes they expect this person to have, including health and nutrition related knowledge. At the end, the male and female groups came together for a discussion around the gender norms, behaviors, expectations, practices and images, roles and responsibilities for males and females and their impact on gender and nutrition.

While I could not understand all of the activity due to the language barrier, one thing that was clear was that this activity was very successful in giving both women and men a platform to voice their views about issues that are often taboo. I was pleasantly surprised with how vocal many of the women were during the discussion.

It was also very promising to see men begin to understand the importance of participating in household chores, for example, or giving women equal access and control over resources, such as food, especially during pregnancy.

*Although gender roles remain deeply entrenched in Malawian society, I am hopeful that through SAA approaches, **the SANI project will continue breaking down gender roles to improve the nutritional status of women and children in Malawi.***



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