

The state of Malawi's poor: Who they are

Special points of interest:

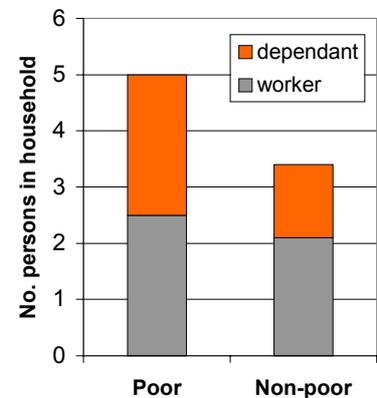
- Poor households are larger than non-poor households.
- Poor households have more dependents for every worker in the household.
- Most poor households are headed by men, but a disproportionate number are female-headed.
- Individuals in their twenties, both men and women, are the most likely to be non-poor.
- Urban households are less poor with fewer females.

The size of poor households

Poor households in Malawi are significantly larger than non-poor households. As shown in the chart here, poor households have an average of 1.6 additional persons. This same pattern of household size is maintained, by and large, in both rural and urban areas.

Moreover, the composition of poor households is considerably different from that of non-poor. The extra persons in poor households are primarily individuals under 15 years of age, as the difference between the poor and non-poor in numbers of household members by age group are greatest in this age group. Consequently, poor households have considerably more dependants per worker in the household than do non-poor households.

Relative to the non-poor, poor households in Malawi have one extra dependent to support for every three members of working age (individuals aged 15 through 64).



The age and sex characteristics of poor households

The differences in the age and sex structure of poor and non-poor households in Malawi is seen in the population pyramid. The colored bars break each age-sex category into poor and non-poor.

- The population pattern for the poor is bottom-heavy with a tilt to the right. There is a higher proportion of women

and children in poor households.

- The early adult years is when individuals are most likely to adequately meet the basic needs of their households.
- However, when adults begin raising children in their late 20s and 30s, many households slide into poverty. This is especially apparent for women.

PMS

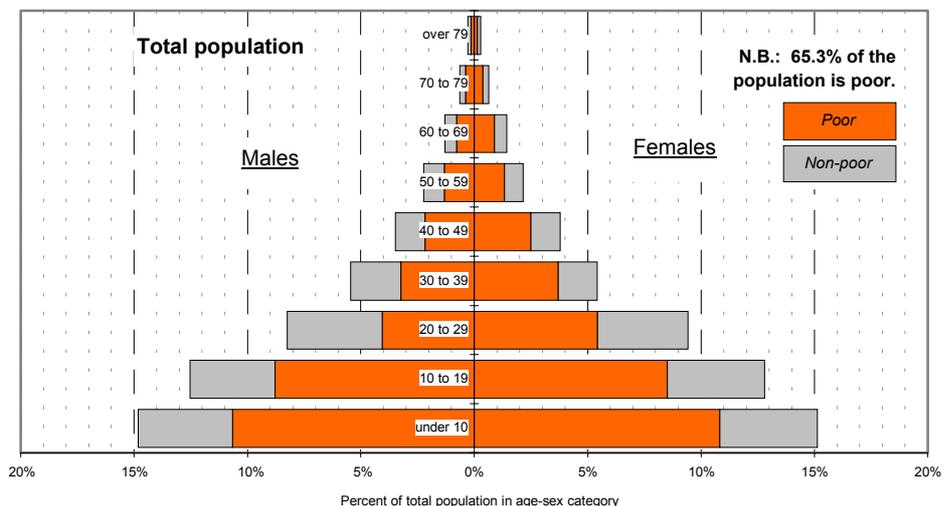
Poverty Monitoring System

The Poverty Monitoring system is an activity under the Poverty Alleviation Programme of the Government of Malawi. The core research activities of the PMS involve four institutions:

- National Economic Council,
- National Statistical Office,
- Centre for Social Research of the University of Malawi,
- International Food Policy Research Institute.

The poverty monitoring research program has been designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of poverty in Malawi. The findings presented here are part of a series of briefs designed to inform policy makers about the current state of poverty and the methodologies used to measure poverty.

The PMS is funded by a grant from the Danish government which is administered by the World Bank.



Poverty & gender

Overall, for every 100 women in poverty in Malawi, there are only 93.3 men. In contrast, in non-poor households there are slightly more men than women: 100.6. (Overall, the IHS national sex-ratio (*number of men per 100 women*) is 95.8.) A key characteristic of poverty in Malawi is this female skew.

However, these national statistics hide a more complicated story. For a wide range of characteristics, the rural-urban contrast is often as important as poor and non-poor. That is the case here. The sex-ratios for the wealth groups by rural-urban are shown in the table below. It is in the countryside where one finds women, and they are disproportionately poor. In contrast, non-poor rural households are more equally balanced between the sexes. The urban centers are male-dominated in any case, although the female characteristic of poverty in Malawi is revealed by comparing the poor and non-poor sex-ratios for the urban centers.

Age also interacts with sex in considering poverty. Different age-groups have different proportions of poor. The slide into poverty in middle age noted elsewhere is especially apparent for women. Women in their thirties make up a larger proportion of the poor population than they do of the non-poor population, whereas the opposite is true for women in their twenties. This is due in part to increasing numbers of women becoming heads of household during this time through widowhood or divorce, while still being responsible for dependent children.

Sex-ratios	Poor	Non-poor
Rural	92.7	99.5
Urban	100.6	107.6

Characteristics of the head of poor households

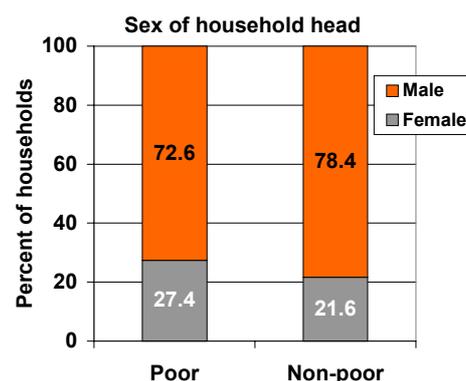
Overall, just under 25 percent of households in Malawi are headed by women. However, female-headed households are disproportionately poor: 27.4 percent of poor households are headed by women.

Far fewer households are headed by women in urban areas. Of those, however, slightly more are non-poor rather than poor. In contrast, 63.5 percent of rural female-headed households and two-thirds of individuals in rural female-headed households are poor.

The poverty measures for populations defined by the sex of the head of household are shown in the table at right. Poverty is deeper and more severe in female-headed households, indicating that the poorest of the poor are more likely to be living in female-headed households.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the vast majority of poor households in Malawi are headed by men: Men are the heads of 72.6 percent of poor households. A stereotype of the poor household in Malawi necessarily being headed by a woman is not correct.

Turning to the age of household heads, the examination of the population pyramid suggested that as the population ages, there is a slide into poverty. This is found to be the case when one focuses on



the age of the head of household. The lowest poverty indices are found for those households with the head aged under 30. Poverty incidence increases as the heads of households age into their 30s. However, thereafter poverty rates remain relatively stable with headcount between 60 and 65 percent.

	Male-headed	Female-headed
Mean consumption (MK/person/day)	13.74	10.94
Headcount (%)	57.9	65.6
Poverty gap index	0.22	0.28
Severity index	0.11	0.15

What sorts of people are not poor

The single age range with the largest proportion of non-poor is that of men and women in their twenties. Indeed, the population pyramid on the previous page reveals that the only age-sex group nationally in which there are more non-poor than poor is that of men in their twenties – 4.0 percent of the total population are poor males in their twenties, while 4.2 percent are non-poor.

However, when adults begin raising children, the incidence of poverty increases. Thereafter the proportion of the respective poor and non-poor populations made up by the older age-sex cate-

gories is quite comparable, although the poor dominate overall in each age-sex category, given that they represent more than 65 percent of the population.

In Malawi, the place of residence of a household, rural or urban, has an important bearing on the poverty status of a household. As the incidence of poverty is 10 percent less in urban areas, one finds a considerably larger proportion of non-poor adults in all age ranges in the urban centres, than is found in the rural countryside.

Other policy briefs

- *Activities of the Poverty Monitoring System*
- *The state of Malawi's poor: The incidence, depth, and severity of poverty*

- *The state of Malawi's poor: Their education*
- *The state of Malawi's poor: Their health*
- *The state of Malawi's poor: Their economic characteristics*
- *The state of Malawi's poor: Agriculture and making a living from the land*