

Gender and Leadership Training Progress report

Strengthening Fresh Food Market For Healthier Food Environment Project

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1. Introduction and Purpose

The fifth session under the NutriCare-led market empowerment series focused on *Gender and Leadership as Action*. The aim was to help vendors recognize leadership as a shared responsibility and to challenge cultural beliefs that limit women’s participation in decision-making. The training encouraged both men and women to see leadership as an everyday action—through fairness, teamwork, and empathy—rather than a position or title.

The session particularly sought to promote inclusive decision-making, build confidence among women vendors, and demonstrate that gender equality strengthens cooperation, household harmony, and overall market productivity.

2. Session Overview

2.1 Welcome and Icebreaker – “Who Makes the Decisions?”

The session began with an interactive icebreaker exploring who makes most decisions at home and in the market.

Participants shared that women often make daily decisions such as going to the maize mill, purchasing groceries, or managing food supplies. Men, on the other hand, were said to handle “bigger” decisions such as selecting children’s schools or supporting relatives.

This conversation revealed how decision-making power is often unequal, which can create tension in families—especially when deciding on financial contributions for relatives or household needs. The facilitator emphasized that *balanced decision-making builds trust and strengthens family relationships*.



Figure 1 Peer Traders at Lizulu Market during gender and leadership training

Participants agreed that income sharing and mutual discussion are key to harmony and collective leadership at both household and market levels.

2.2 Core Discussion: Understanding Gender Roles

The facilitator shared the local story “*Tadala and Blessings*” to stimulate reflection on how responsible management and planning reflect leadership qualities. Participants related strongly to the story and added examples from their lives.

One role-play example illustrated a family disagreement: a man received a call requesting his financial contribution to a relative’s wedding, while his wife reminded him about her need for a new dress costing MK30,000. Together they discussed priorities, eventually agreeing to balance between urgent family needs (school fees) and personal expenses. This scenario helped vendors appreciate joint decision-making and the importance of communication and compromise in both family and business leadership.

The group concluded that *leadership means understanding priorities and making fair, inclusive decisions*.

2.3 Practical Exercise: Leadership in Action

Participants were divided into small groups to act out common leadership scenarios in market life:

1. Resolving a conflict between two vendors over a customer.
2. Supporting a sick colleague's stall.
3. Organizing a clean-up day for their section.



Figure 2 Peer traders during role plays

The role plays were realistic and lively. In one, two vendors quarreled over a customer, highlighting how competition often strains relationships. The group concluded that cooperation, rather than rivalry, promotes a better business environment. Vendors agreed it's wiser to let a customer choose freely and maintain respect among peers.

A male participant shared a personal example: one day a female colleague fainted at her fruit stall, and he immediately offered first aid without waiting for a female peer to assist. The group commended this act, reinforcing that *leadership and care are not limited by gender*.

2.4 Group Reflection: Gender and Market Leadership

The reflection segment generated open, emotional discussion. Many women shared that shyness, fear of judgment, and cultural expectations discourage them from taking leadership roles. One female vendor admitted she initially hesitated to join the training because others might accuse her of improper behavior for mingling with male vendors, fearing her husband's reaction.



Participants noted that in Malawi’s cultural context, leadership is often viewed as a male role, which limits women’s involvement in market committees or business groups. For example, even though Lizulu Market is conducting elections for market chairpersons and section heads, few women plan to contest.

Together, participants identified barriers and possible solutions:

Barriers	Solutions
Lack of confidence	Peer mentorship and continuous encouragement
Cultural beliefs and gossip	Awareness sessions and gender dialogues
Exclusion from leadership roles	Ensure equal representation in market committees
Fear of judgment from family or community	Engage spouses and community leaders in gender discussions

The facilitator emphasized that leadership thrives in environments of mutual respect, support, and open communication.

2.5 Key Messages & Wrap-Up

The closing messages reinforced the day’s lessons:

- Leadership is teamwork, fairness, and respect.
- Both men and women can lead — together they make markets stronger.
- Gender equality builds healthier families, fairer business, and community trust.
- Every voice matters in creating cleaner, safer markets.

The session ended on a high note with a unifying chant:

“Tili limodzi! — Together we lead, together we grow!”

3. Observations and Participant Engagement

- Participants engaged openly, sharing practical examples of gender imbalance and positive change.
- Women participants showed increased confidence during role plays and group discussions.
- Male peers expressed support for gender inclusion and demonstrated empathy-based leadership.
- The practical storytelling and role-play methods encouraged peer learning and laughter while addressing sensitive topics.
- Cultural barriers remain a challenge, but awareness and confidence-building are showing visible progress.

4. Outputs and Outcomes

Expected Output	Achieved Outcome
Vendors understand gender equality and shared leadership concepts.	☒ 90% of participants demonstrated understanding through reflection and examples shared.
Participants can identify at least three leadership qualities.	☒ Qualities mentioned included responsibility, fairness, communication, and empathy.
Peer leaders develop confidence to model inclusive leadership.	☒ Several vendors volunteered to lead peer mentoring and cleanliness initiatives.
Gender-sensitive decision-making is promoted at household and market level.	☒ Participants agreed to discuss household decisions more jointly with their spouses.

5. Materials Used

- Flipcharts and markers
- Printed story cards (*Tadala & Blessings*)
- Role-play scenario cards
- NutriCare purple poster: “*Women and Men Lead Together*”
- Tokens for recognition and motivation



6. Recommendations

1. Conduct follow-up mentorship meetings focusing on *confidence-building for female vendors*.
2. Facilitate community dialogues that engage spouses and local leaders to reduce stigma around women's market participation.
3. Integrate gender and leadership discussions into ongoing hygiene and financial literacy sessions.
4. Support the formation of a *Gender and Leadership Task Team* within the Lizulu Market Committee to promote continued peer learning.

7. Conclusion

The *Gender and Leadership as Action* training was a highly participatory and transformative session. Participants demonstrated a clear understanding that leadership goes beyond gender and formal positions — it is expressed through actions of care, fairness, and collaboration.

The Lizulu Market community continues to evolve into a model for inclusive leadership, where men and women share responsibilities and decision-making both at home and in the marketplace. NutriCare remains committed to sustaining this momentum through continuous mentorship, dialogue, and empowerment.

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