Education Program Overview

“Before the early grade reading activity, our Standard 1 (first grade) students were not reading, even at the end of the year. Now there are many students in my class who are reading…and we are barely halfway through the school year.” – Melia Swaleyi, Standard 1 Teacher

CONTEXT

Primary Education: In 1994, Malawi introduced free primary education. This major education reform resulted in an explosion in student enrollment, straining the entire system. Huge class sizes and an inadequate supply of infrastructure, teachers, and teaching and learning materials led to extremely poor student performance, particularly in the area of literacy. In 2010, a staggering 97 percent of Standard two learners and 69 percent of Standard four learners were unable to answer a single Chichewa comprehension question correctly. By 2018, following intensive investment by the Government of Malawi (GoM) and USAID to support the National Reading Program, the percentage of fourth grade learners reading vernacular grade-level text with comprehension almost doubled to 15 percent (from 7.8 percent in 2017). These improvements indicate the beginning of a solid foundation for early grade learners in Malawi, though more needs to be done. While the net primary enrollment rate has remained stable and high at around 90 percent, which is among the highest in the Eastern and Southern African region, student retention in primary education remains a major problem. Only 41 percent of Malawian students complete their schooling through Standard 8 (eighth grade).

Secondary Education: In 1999, the Government of Malawi expanded access to the secondary level by rapidly creating Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs), which account for three quarters of all current secondary students. In the effort to expand access to secondary school quickly, challenges of understaffed schools, lack of basic infrastructure, and lack of teaching and learning materials persisted. The quality of teaching, learning, and access to secondary school continue to be an issue. While primary to secondary transition rates are improving and now stand at 37.6 percent, net enrollment rates at the secondary level (the measure of secondary school access for the appropriate age group) are low at only 16 percent. This means that only 16 of every 100 children of secondary school age actually start secondary school and 84 out of every hundred do not. Furthermore, only a quarter of those who start secondary school complete their schooling without delays. Of those who complete secondary school, only half pass their Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations.

Tertiary Education: When Malawi became independent in 1964, it had no higher education institutions. Since that time, Malawi has built two dozen public and private universities catering to approximately 62,000 students today. However, enrollment rates in tertiary education remain at less than 1 percent, lower than averages in Africa and the rest of the world. Further, students from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to access tertiary education. Though the government offers a progressive funding subsidy at the primary and secondary levels, it only spends 3 percent of education funding on the two lowest quintiles of students (the poorest 40 percent) at the

QUICK FACTS

Total Education Portfolio
$200 Million

Implementing Partners
Malawi Institute of Education, Abt Associates, Juarez and Associates, Save the Children, Arizona State University, Florida State University, TetraTech

Geographical Focus
Country-wide (34 education districts)

USAID Contact
Christine Veverka, Education Office Director
Email: ceverka@usaid.gov
tertiary level. Eighty-two percent of spending on higher education goes to the highest quintile (the top 20 percent).

**USAID's APPROACH**

USAID works with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other development partners to address these challenges and help students acquire the essential skills they need to succeed and lead Malawi towards greater economic prosperity. USAID works at each level of education, focusing on: reading in the early grades; access to secondary education, especially for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) and marginalized and vulnerable youth; and strengthening higher education institutions in Malawi to create the next generation of Malawi’s leaders and a workforce to spur industry and socio-economic growth.

**IMPACT**

Primary Education

By the conclusion of the 2017-2018 academic year:

- Standards 2 and 4 students nationwide improved on 22 out of 24 key reading indicators in Chichewa and English after only one year of National Reading Program Implementation.
- The number of Standard 2 students who scored zero on the National Reading Assessment letter sound identification subtest fell by 10.1 percentage points (from 84.2 percent in 2017 to 74.3 percent), and students who received a zero score for English oral reading fluency fell by 8.3 percentage points (from 86.9 percent in 2018 to 78.6 percent in 2018).
- In Standard 4, the national average for reading comprehension in Chichewa increased by 9 percentage points (from 28.8 percent in 2017 to 37.8 percent in 2018).
- The number of Standard 4 learners reading Chichewa at grade level nearly doubled after one year of National Reading Program implementation (from 7.8 percent in 2017 to 15 percent in 2018).
- In targeted districts from 2015 to 2018, the transition rate to secondary school improved from 39 percent to 60 percent; pass rates on the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination increased from 60 percent to 82 percent; and repetition rates decreased from 23 percent to 16 percent.

Secondary Education

- USAID built 11 CDSSs and an additional five CDSSs in coordination with the United States Department of Agriculture and World Food Programme that enable an additional 3,600 students to access secondary education.
- USAID and PEPFAR, in collaboration with the GoM, expanded 33 urban secondary schools with 96 newly constructed classrooms to decongest these overpopulated schools with an additional 5,760 seats.
- USAID and PEPFAR, in collaboration with the government of Malawi, launched the construction of up to 200 new secondary schools in Malawi that are expected to expand secondary school education access by at least 14 percent nationwide.

Tertiary Education

- Since 2018, USAID has strengthened five Malawian Public Universities (MUST, Polytechnic/MUBAS, CHANCO, LUANAR and MZUNI) to expand youth access to higher education through delivery of Open Distance E-Learning (ODeL) programs and scholarships. So far 1,333 students enrolled/completed various programs with 218 receiving scholarships.
### SELECTED MAJOR USAID-FUNDED EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>TIMEFRAME</th>
<th>FUNDING</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading for All Malawi (REFAM)</td>
<td>2/6/2019-7/11/2021</td>
<td>$2,962,474 Juarez &amp; Associates</td>
<td>This activity supports inclusive education as a component of the National Reading Program in Malawi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Reading Program Implementation and Expansion (NRPIE)</td>
<td>11/25/2019-9/24/2021</td>
<td>$596,521 Florida State University (FSU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YESA Activity (Assess the Learners)</td>
<td>2/22/2018-2/21/2022</td>
<td>$15,390,272 Abt Associates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Primary Reading Activity (UPREAD)</td>
<td>6/22/2021-6/21/2026</td>
<td>$4,000,000 Malawi Institute of Education (MIE)</td>
<td>This activity is a local award made directly to the Malawi Institute for Education to develop curriculum and essential teaching and learning materials to support reading in upper primary, standards 5-8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education Expansion Development Construction Management Contract (SEED CMC)</td>
<td>4/15/2019-9/30/2022</td>
<td>$8,798,853 Tetra Tech</td>
<td>The activity provides targeted support to adolescent girls and young women in upper primary and secondary school through life skills education, science and math, and school construction. The activity provides engineering oversight services for construction work under both SEED Urban and SEED Rural school activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apatseni Mwai Atsikana Aphunzire (AMAA)</td>
<td>12/15/2018-09/30/2021</td>
<td>$11,199,806 Save the Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening Higher Education Access in Malawi (SHEAMA)</td>
<td>12/4/2018-12/3/2022</td>
<td>$9,572,725 Arizona State University</td>
<td>The activity aims to increase Malawi’s skilled and employable workforce by building the capacity of and fostering collaboration between five Malawian universities and enabling an additional 14,940 students to attend tertiary education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>