

The Bridge Programme in Malawi from the Perspective of Adult Literacy and Special Education

David Mc W. J. Mulera, Chifuniro Chikoti, George Mindano
Malawi National Commission for UNESCO

1. Introduction

Malawi is one of the beneficiaries of the Bridge Programme which is being supported by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO. The programme offers education opportunities to the marginalized communities that were left out from the formal education system or are not benefiting anything as much. Malawi is one lucky country in Africa that has been granted an opportunity to continue in the second phase of the Bridge Project. This paper discusses the Bridge Programme in Malawi from the perspective of Adult Literacy and Education and Inclusive Education.

2. Brief Background Information about Malawi

Malawi is a low-income country with a population of 19.6 million (UNFPA 2021). According to UNDP, Malawi Human Development Index (HDI)¹ for 2019 was at 0.483, positioning Malawi at 174 out of 189 countries. Malawi's life expectancy at birth is at 65 years (68 years for Female; 62 years for Male). The Mean for years of schooling is at 4.7 years (UNDP 2020).

Poverty levels in Malawi are still very high with over half (50.7 percent) of the population still living under the poverty line. Malawi's Gross Net Income (GINI) Index is at 44.7 (World Bank, 2016). There is therefore need for education and skill development that leads to increased productivity and improved levels of employment for the youth and adults.

Malawi's population is youthful with about 51 percent of the population below the age of 18 years and the population of 0-19 is projected to reach 55 percent of the total population by 2030. The rapid population growth estimated at 2.9 percent (NSO, 2018) continues to be one of the main factors affecting delivery of education services in Malawi. The high population growth rate exerts pressure on education resources as this translates into increased growth in enrolments at all levels of education in Malawi.

¹ The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: 1. A long and healthy life (measured through life expectancy); 2. Access to knowledge (measured by mean years of schooling among the adult population); and a decent standard of living (measured by Gross National Income (GNI) per capita expressed in constant 2017 international dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) conversion rates)

3. Bridge Programme in Malawi

The Bridge Malawi Programme began in 2010. The Korean National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU) sent young Korean volunteers to work with various NGOs. In 2013 the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO (MNCU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with KNCU and supervised the implementation of the Bridge Malawi project. The Bridge programme is being implemented with the goal to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 and realize the Incheon Declaration through non-formal education. The aim is to support the development of an integrated non-formal education system in Malawi towards attainment of SDG 4.6 (Numeracy and Literacy) through the strengthening of the policy-system, capacity development and provision of support to Community Learning Centres.

The targeted beneficiaries of the programme include the illiterate population aged 15 years and older; Early Childhood Development (ECD) learners (3-5years); and Primary school learners - after school support classes (6-14years).

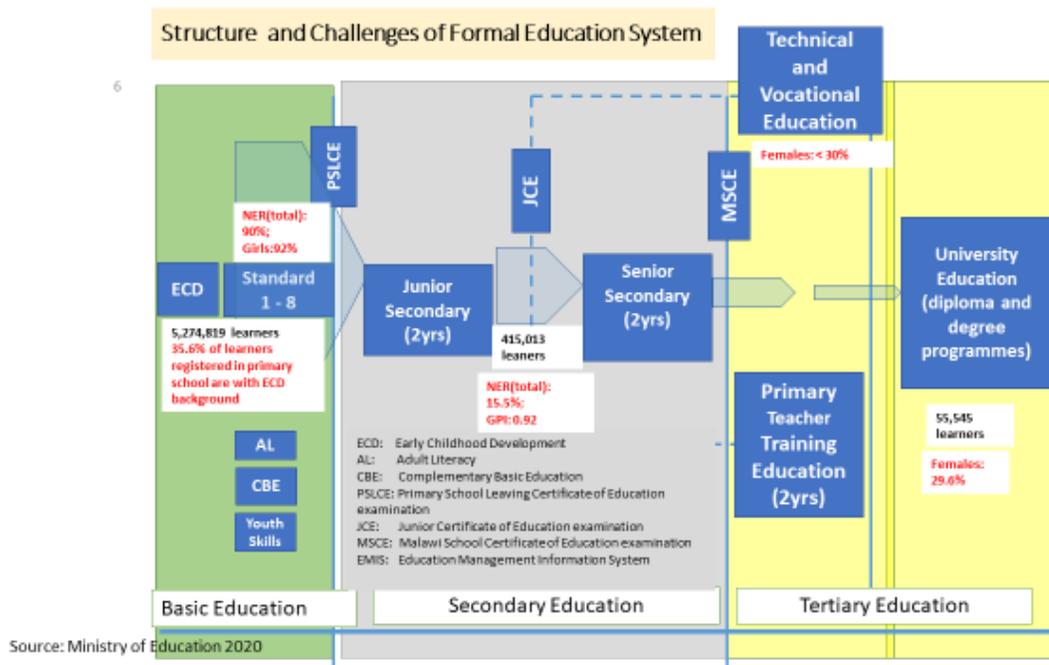
Table 1: Targeted Beneficiaries of Bridge Malawi Project II

Name of CLC	Population of the areas served			ECD	After School Class	Adult Literacy class
	Female	Male	Total			
Namiyango	263,200	232,450	495,650	-	110	-
Naphini	5,241	3,507	8,748	60	430	34
Mwera	762	968	1,730	105	485	42
Ibuzya - new proposed CLC in the north (estimates)	2,800	2,200	5,000	200	600	400
Total	272,003	239,125	511,128	365	1,625	476
Projected Targets (all CLCs)				3,165	9,625	3,276

4. Rationale for the Bridge Malawi Project approach

Challenges of the Formal Education system of Malawi

The latest education data available, the Malawi 2020 Education Statistics, shows that only 35.6 percent of the learners who first registered in primary schools in Malawi had an ECD background, thus implying that 64.4 percent of the learners had no ECD support. Good ECD services are mostly accessible to communities located in urban and semi-urban areas and mostly offered by private providers at a cost not affordable by many poor households. Out of the children that access ECD services, only 17.2 percent have demonstrated proficiency in literacy and numeracy expected at that level. There is high pupil dropout rate resulting in low primary school completion rates hovering around 53 percent. Survival rates for standard five and standard 8 stand at 68 and 41 percent respectively (Fig. 1). About 3.4 percent of the total enrolment are learners with special needs categorized as Low Vision, Blind, Hard of Hearing, Deaf, Physical Impairment, with Learning difficulties and Albinism.



The incidence of illiteracy in Malawi is currently estimated at 27% of the population (19% and 34% for men and women respectively), cumulatively representing over 4 million people in absolute figures. Beneficiaries of non-formal classes offering ECD, After-school-classes and Adult literacy classes are

mostly unemployed illiterate persons who largely subsist on small scale farming and piece work. The target group desperately looks for education opportunities that can empower them to actively engage in economic activities that advance their socio-economic lives.

Theory of Change

The approach adopted in Bridge Malawi Phase II project is guided by the Theory of Change (ToC) presented in figure below:

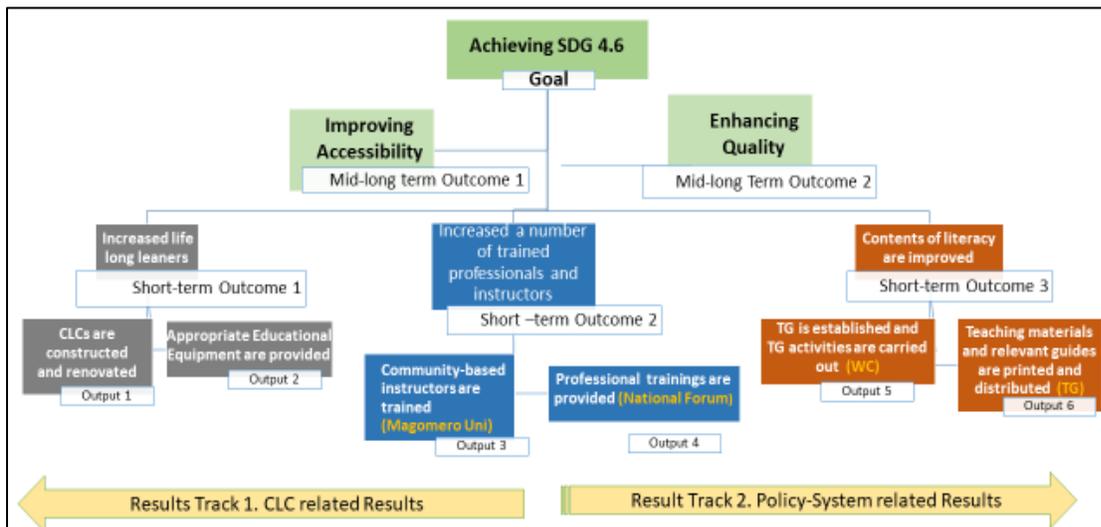


Figure 2: Theory of Change for Bridge Malawi Phase II Project

The overall goal of the project is to assist Malawi in attaining SDG Goal 4.6 on Literacy and Numeracy. The mid-long term outcomes are: 1) Improving Accessibility and; 2) Enhancing Quality.

The project has two tracks. Track 1 is the continuation of Bridge Phase I CLC activities. The main aim of Track 1 is to consolidate sustainability of the CLCs. Four outputs that are categorized in two are envisaged in this Track. The first category comprises: Output (1) Construction of additional structures and renovation of existing ones; Output (2) Provision of appropriate educational equipment; - These two outputs are expected to lead to short-term Outcome 1 – Increased number of learners. The second category comprises two outputs: Output (3) - Community-based instructors are trained through courses offered by Magomero Community Development College, and Output (4) - Professional trainings are provided to a wider audience through a national forum. These two outputs will lead to short-term Outcome 2 - increased number of trained professionals and instructors.

The second Track (Track 2) is focusing on Policy-System related Results. This Track has two outputs. The

first output which is Output 5 in the overall ToC is the establishment of a Task Group (TG) and carrying out of TG activities. The second result under this track which is Output 6 of the ToC is the printing and distribution of Teaching and Learning materials and relevant guides. These two outputs will lead to attainment of short term Outcome 3, i.e. Improved contents of literacy materials.

It is intended that the impact of the project should have national dimensions in order to contribute to the reform of the non-formal education system in Malawi. The intervention will scale up the provision of non-formal education in the existing CLCs and will promote Government's intervention as well as the work of other partners working in non-formal education to adopt innovative and effective delivery programme approaches. The project expands the work of the CLCs in three existing localities of Namiyango in Limbe, Blantyre in the southern region of Malawi; Naphini situated in Domasi, Zomba in the southern region of Malawi, and Mwera in the central region, and also is establishing a CLCs in the northern part of the country in order to have representative coverage across geographical regions.

Bridge Activities in ECD

Since the inception of the Bridge Programme, there has been a lot of activities in the non-formal sector that have been positively recognized by various actors. In efforts to promote access and delivery of ECD in Malawi, the Bridge Project has established Community Learning Centres in Lilongwe at Mwera; Zomba at Naphini; Blantyre at Namiyango and the soon to be constructed in Chitipa at Ibuzya.

Bridge Project has contributed in increasing access to ECD education services through the provision of ECD classes in the Community Learning Centres. These centres operate on daily basis following the government's school calendar. The Project also provides support to the ECD caregivers in the form of honoraria, and also teaching and learning materials. These ECDs in the CLCs carry out feeding programme where learners are provided with meals on daily basis which acts as a motivation factor and promotes participation of the learners. Through the Bridge Programme, Mwera CLC in Lilongwe constructed a Cafeteria through support from Green Foods Hyundai Corporation Ltd. The structure is used to provide a safe environment for the learners.

Bridge Programme's contribution in improving quality of learning and teaching in ECD has been through capacity building training workshops organized for the volunteer teachers and caregivers in the CLCs.

Governance and management of ECD in the communities where Bridge Programme operates has been improved through capacity building activities training for the Management of the CLCs which has been facilitated by officers from the Social Welfare department under the Ministry responsible for Child Affairs.

Bridge Activities in Afterschool classes – Primary Education

Access and equity are some of the priority areas in primary education. The number of children enrolled in primary education was 5,274,819 in 2020. However, only about 400,000 transition to secondary school level. Majority of Malawians drop out at primary level.

Even though primary education falls under the formal education under basic education, Bridge promotes access to basic education by engaging school going children in remedial classes after they have attended classes in their respective public schools. These remedial classes are called afterschool classes which provide access to education to learners from Standard 1 to Standard 7. The provision of the classes is always aligned to the school calendar that is provided by the government and follows government curriculum.

In addition to the provision of classes, the project also provides support to volunteer teachers through provision of honoraria which acts as an incentive to them and motivates them. Not only does the project provide honoraria, but it also provides teaching and learning materials for both the teachers and learners.

One contributing factor to quality education is the quality of teachers or instructors. In order to promote quality, Bridge Programme trains instructors and volunteers in the delivery of lessons. The trainings are facilitated by experts in primary education from the Ministry of Education.

Bridge Activities in Adult Literacy and Education

Universal education and skills development are fundamental for the attainment of sustainable development goals. A literate and educated society is a strategic means for achieving increased productivity, income distribution and improved standards of living (Ministry of Education, 2020). High illiteracy rates, especially among the productive population, impede programme design to boost livelihoods, sustainable economic growth, environmental protection, promotion of good governance and democracy. This becomes even more critical in the context of increasingly complex contemporary development challenges characterized by, among others, severe poverty conditions, food insecurity, environmental degradation, emergencies, HIV & AIDS and COVID-19.

It has been observed that more women (90%) than men attend adult literacy classes. This is attributed to cultural barriers, and the question of relevance of the curriculum, among other factors.

In the area of access, Bridge Programme established adult literacy classes in all its CLCs. The classes target to reach out to illiterate men and women who live in marginalized communities. The provision of the classes

is always aligned to the school calendar that is provided by the government. The calendar runs from March to November.

In addition to the provision of classes, the project also provides support to the instructors through the provision of honoraria which acts as an incentive to them and motivates them. Not only does the project provide honoraria, but it also provides teacher and learning materials for both the instructors and the learners.

The programme trains instructors in the provision of teaching and learning process. The trainings are facilitated by experts in adult literacy from the relevant ministry responsible for adult literacy and education under the supervision of the District Community Development Officers at the district level.

Bridge Activities – Strengthening Management Systems and Inter-ministerial Collaboration

The management of the Bridge Project is strengthened at all levels, i.e., community, district, and national level. The programme builds capacities for the community and CLCs management in carrying out their daily activities for an effective and well-coordinated programme delivery. There has been strengthened inter-ministerial collaboration through the Bridge National Committee (BNC). The BNC is composed of key Ministries and is represented by high level senior government officials.

At national level, the project envisages a well-coordinated and managed adult literacy system. In this regard, the programme intends to develop a Management and Information System (MIS) which will assist in providing relevant data for well informed decisions. The programme is also supporting the revision of the teaching and learning materials of the Adult Literacy and education functional adult education. The materials that are currently in use are obsolete and do not effectively address emerging issues affecting the learners, the nation and the world. The Bridge Programme is also supporting the development of a diploma course in Adult Literacy and Education at Magomero Community Development College.

At district level, the programme is strengthening capacities for District Community Development Officers (DCDO), Community Development Officers (DCOs), and District Community Assistants (DCAs). The last level, the community, is capacitated in carrying out their daily activities for an effective and well-coordinated management system.

5. Bridge Activities in Special Education

Inclusive Education (IE), and Gender are considered to be crosscutting issues affecting all levels of education. Learners with special educational needs, orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC), and girls

still remain marginalised in terms of equitable access to quality education contrary to the aspirations of leaving no one behind enshrined in the SDG 4. According to NSO, Housing and Population Census of 2018, the population of persons with disabilities from the age groups ranging from 5-14 and 15-19 is 227,814 and 105,176 respectively. It is estimated that children with special educational needs are in the range of 15 to 18 percent of total number of children in Malawi (Ministry of Education, 2020).

To comprehensively address Special Education, the Bridge Programme is implementing its activities at Namiyango CLC. Namiyango CLC provides education opportunities to learners with disabilities. At the centre, the learners are offered basic literacy skills in reading, writing and numeracy. The teachers at the CLC are trained from time to time on disability related issues that capacitate them in inculcating skills and knowledge to the learners with disabilities. The CLC has partnered with a university, Catholic University, in strengthening its capacity on offering learning experiences to the learners.

The CLC registers learners with different learning needs. Some of the registered learners have disabilities such as down syndrome, emotional behavioural disorders, physical disabilities, mental health, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), Hyperactive disabilities, Hydrocephalus, those with epilepsy, Autism, Hyper compulsive disorder, Hearing impairment visual impairment, deaf-blindness, Gifted and talented, among others.

Namiyango CLC is well linked with other Special Needs Education institutions that offer assistance to the CLC. When the learners reach an advanced level in their skills they are sent to other Special Needs Education Institutions such as Maryview School for the Deaf, Mulanje Mountview School for the Deaf, Chisombezi School for the Deaf-Blind, and Montfort Demonstration Mainstream School. The CLC also carries out community sensitization meetings on disability issues and promotes advocacy.

6. Conclusion

Bridge Programme in Malawi is a programme that is reaching out to segments of Malawi's population that are becoming excluded from the privileged sections of the society. Challenges of the formal education system at primary level such as overcrowding, high pupil teacher ratios, high repetition rates, very low transition rates due to limited access at secondary and tertiary levels, are creating a segmentation of the population into a class system of the 'elites' vs the 'have not'. The reality that is slowly emerging, but is surely becoming the reality is that majority of the privileged lot are not sending their children to the overcrowded primary schools. They are sending them to expensive private schools. The poor have become segregated. That privilege pervades them. There is need for more interventions like the one by the Bridge

Project through non-formal approaches, approaches that are not fixated by the chains of bureaucracies to bridge the gap between the haves and the have not.

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