

2019/20 Education Budget Brief

Investing in Quality Education: Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty in Malawi



Key messages and recommendations

1 For the past 5 years, education spending has trended upwards in absolute terms and as a share of the total Government budget.

→ **Recommendation:** The positive trend in education spending should be accompanied by efforts to ensure value for money, including through timely release of allocated resources to schools, efficient procurement and prompt financial reporting by education institutions and local authorities.

2 Pre-primary and secondary education continue to receive the lowest share of education sector resources. In FY2019/20, the Government committed 2% of total sector resources to pre-primary education, 10% to secondary education, 42% to basic education and 41% to tertiary.

→ **Recommendation:** The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) are encouraged to rebalance sectoral allocations to ensure pre-primary and secondary education get a fair share of available resources without cutting expenditures on basic education.

3 Reports of delayed disbursement of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) persist, which have negative consequences on the procurement of learning materials and other education supplies.

→ **Recommendation:** The MoEST should engage the Ministry of Finance to ensure SIG resources are disbursed according to agreed standards.

4 The removal of secondary school fees to reduce the financial burden on poor families to pay for the education of their children was a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, this has not been accompanied by a compensatory mechanism to schools for lost revenue.

→ **Recommendation:** The MoEST should engage the Cabinet with a proposal for a compensatory measure for lost school revenue.

5 The Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfer Formula (IGTF) for the education sector, dating from 2002, is not applied anymore. Allocations are based on yearly top ups of the previous allocations, raising equity concerns.

→ **Recommendation:** Working with the National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC), the MoEST is encouraged to review the formula used to guide transfer of education sector resources to District Councils.

6 Inequities have been observed in allocations to secondary schools, with some schools suffering cuts as deep as 91%, whilst others enjoyed increases as high as 752%.

→ **Recommendation:** The Parliamentary Committee on Education should investigate underlying reasons for these disparities and advocate for the creation of a framework for equitable distribution of resources amongst secondary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

This brief assesses the extent to which the National Budget for fiscal year (FY) 2019/20 addresses the education needs of all children in Malawi. Specifically, it analyses trends, composition and equity of the education sector budgets. The brief also offers recommendations on how the Government can improve transparency, efficiency and equity in the allocation and utilization of education sector resources. To establish trends and patterns, the budget brief analyses data from FY2012/13, which is the base year for all inflation adjustments. The analysis is complemented by Government, Development Partners and NGOs reports on education spending, available.

In this budget brief, the total education budget, which include Appropriation in Aid¹, is the sum of allocations to education related ministries, Local Authorities and subvented education institutions (SEIs). These are: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) (Vote 250), Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) (Vote 320), Local Authorities for other recurrent transactions (ORT) and personal emoluments (PE), Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation (Vote 370) for vocational training, and Subvented Education Institutions (Vote 275)².

1 Appropriation in Aid refers to the revenue assigned to and collected by public bodies which the Treasury allows them to appropriate against expenditures approved by Parliament.

2 These are mainly tertiary and education governance institutions namely: University of Malawi (Chanco), Malawi Institute of Education, Malawi College of Health Sciences, National Library Services, Malawi National Examinations Board, Scholarship fund, Mzuzu University, Malawi Universities Development Programme, Lilongwe University of Agriculture, Malawi University of Science and Technology, National Council for Higher Education, Technical Vocational Education Training (TEVET) Authority, Malawi National UNESCO Commission, National Commission for Science and Technology, Higher Education Students Loans and Grants Board, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences and Transitional Unit (UNIMA).

2. EDUCATION SECTOR OVERVIEW

Education and skills development form one of the five priority areas of the Government, as outlined in the Third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) III.

Through the MGDS III, the Government has committed itself to improving access, equity, quality and relevance of pre-primary, basic, secondary and tertiary education. Under SDG 4, world leaders, including Malawi, made a commitment to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In line with its national vision, the Government developed robust education policies and strategies. These include the National Educational Policy (2013) and the Second Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP) II.

Access to education has improved over the past decade, but primary school net enrolment rate declined in the last years, from 98 percent for both boys and girls in 2016 to 88% in 2017. However, net enrolment for primary school is still one of the highest in the region. Regrettably, secondary school net enrolment is very low, estimated at 15% in 2018 for both boys and girls (Education Management Information System (EMIS), 2018). Out of nearly 5,000,000 learners in primary school, only around 400,000 make it to secondary school. According to EMIS (2018), only 38.4% of children transition from primary to secondary school (40.9% for boys and 35.8% for girls). Unless reversed, low secondary school enrolment will keep on having significant impacts on social and economic development of Malawi.

The supply of education inputs such as teachers, classrooms and learning materials, has not kept pace with increases in enrolment. The pupil-qualified teacher ratio (PqTR) in primary school is currently 76.9, an improvement from 79.5 in FY2015/16. The national average



for pupil qualified teacher ratio in secondary school stands at 45.4. One of the biggest challenges to enrolment is the limited number of secondary schools. In the entire country, there are only 1,411 secondary schools compared to 6,065 primary schools. This, along with limited professional development, high student textbook ratio, insufficient teaching and learning materials compromises the quality of learning. Inadequate housing, particularly in rural areas, affects teacher morale. Many schools, especially Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) operate without libraries and laboratories, despite the roll out of the new curriculum.

BOX 1: KEY EDUCATION STATISTICS IN MALAWI

Attendance in Early Childhood Education (MoGCDSW, 2018 ECD Report)	45%
Net enrolment rate for primary school	88%
Net enrolment for primary school, male	87%
Net enrolment for primary school, female	89%
Net enrolment for secondary school, male	15%
Net enrolment for secondary school, female	15.5%
Qualified teacher-pupil ratio, primary	70%
Qualified teacher-pupil ratio, secondary	41%
Number of primary schools	6,065
Number of secondary schools	1,411
Pupil permanent classroom ratio- Primary	121
Pupil permanent classroom ratio- Secondary	59
Transition rate to secondary	38.4
Repetition rate- Primary	23.9

Source: EMIS, 2018

The Government is committed to improve quality and efficiency of basic and secondary education, although constrained by limited resources. Recently, the Government launched several policies to improve efficiency, equity and quality of basic education. These include the Grade Promotion Policy for Malawi Primary Schools, National Girls’ Education Strategy (2018 – 2023) and the Teacher Management Strategy. Moving forward, the focus should be on full implementation of these frameworks.

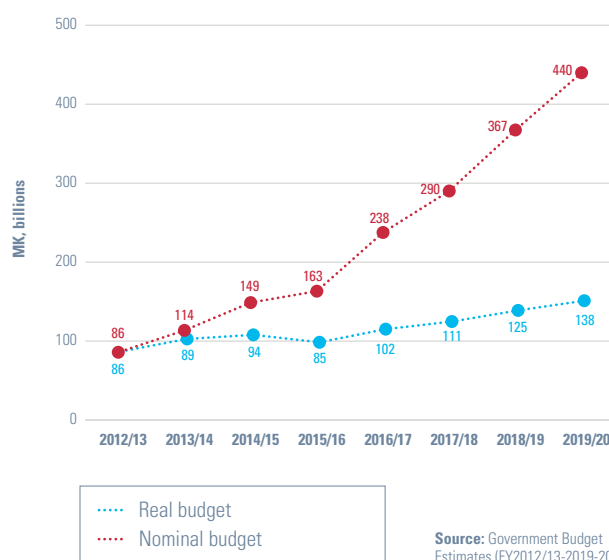
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ⊕ Unless investigated and responded to, low enrollment in secondary school will stop Malawi from reaping the demographic dividend.
- ⊕ With high access to primary education, the focus of Government should be on improving quality and increasing enrolment for secondary education.

3. SIZE OF EDUCATION SECTOR BUDGETS

The total education budget has consistently trended upwards in nominal and real terms since FY2015/16 (Figure 1). In FY2019/20, the education sector (inclusive of Appropriation in Aid for higher education institutions) was allocated a total of MK440 billion compared to MK367 billion in the previous year. The allocation represents a 19.7% increase in nominal terms and 9.8% in real terms. The education sector budget increased by the same margin as the total Government budget, an indication that it is a priority sector.

FIGURE 1 Trends in Education Budget (inclusive of Appropriation in Aid) in Nominal and Real Terms



Source: Government Budget Estimates (FY2012/13-2019-20)

In FY2019/20, the education sector was allocated a total of MK440 billion compared to MK367 billion in the previous year.

Education remains a top spending priority for the Government of Malawi for the FY2019/20. It absorbs between 25% and 18.5% of the total budget, depending on whether Appropriation in Aid is included or not. The second largest share is absorbed by Public Debt Charges, at 14.1%, increasing from the 12.7% share held in the revised 2018/19 budget. The agricultural sector has been allocated the third largest share at 10.4%, and health the fourth largest share, at 9.4%. The social welfare sector allocation reaches 3.7%.

Malawi spends more on education than most low-income countries. Education spending as share of GDP marginally increased from 7% in 2018/19 to 7.4% in 2019/20 (Figure 2). Whilst the sub-Saharan African (SSA) average spending on education as a percentage of GDP is approximately 5%, Malawi allocated an average of 6% (Figure 3).

Funding for pre-primary education, loosely known as Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Malawi, has substantially increased compared to the previous year. A total of MK10 billion has been allocated to ECD in FY2019/20, almost a threefold increase from the MK3.4 billion allocated in FY2018/19. The bulk of the ECD budget – to the tune of MK9.1 billion – is sourced from the World Bank as part of the ‘Investing in Early Years’ Project, coordinated by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). Government’s own contribution stands at MK803 million, a 50% increase in nominal terms as compared to the MK535 million allocated in the revised budget for FY2018/19, but only a 20% increase in nominal terms, from the initially approved MK669 million allocation. The total ECD budget translates to 0.58% of the total Government budget and 2.3% of the education sector

budget. In per capita terms, the 2019/20 budget translates to MK4,545 (little over USD6) per each of the 2 million children accessing ECD services per year through centers.

In FY2019/20, basic education received a total budget of MK184 billion compared to MK171 billion in FY2018/19. This represents an 8% increase in nominal terms and 2% decrease in real terms. The nominal increase is mostly due to increased personnel emoluments, up to MK150 billion from the MK131 billion in FY2018/19 (Figure 4). This is in line with the composition of the allocations for basic education, 80% of which are for personnel emoluments. The budget for ORT, which include the School Improvement Grant (SIG) and is channelled through the Local Authorities, has marginally increased from MK9.5 billion in FY2018/19 to MK10 billion in FY2019/20.

Allocations to secondary education totalled MK42 billion, as compared to the revised allocation of MK29 billion in FY2018/19. This is equivalent to a 44% increase in nominal terms and 31% in real terms. The increase is linked to externally funded projects to build more secondary schools. It is crucial to note that the FY2018/19 revised allocation of MK29 billion is MK10 billion lower than the initially approved MK39 billion allocation, a reflection of budget credibility issues.

The tertiary education budget allocation for FY2019/20, totalling MK181 billion, has increased by 29% in nominal terms and 16.5% in real terms from the revised budget of MK141 billion for FY2018/19. Tertiary education is increasingly becoming a priority of the Government. The University of Malawi (Chanco) continues to receive the highest share of budgets to higher education institutions. In

FIGURE 2 Trends in Education Sector Spending (inclusive of Appropriation in Aid) as a Share of Govt. Budget and relative to GDP (in nominal terms)

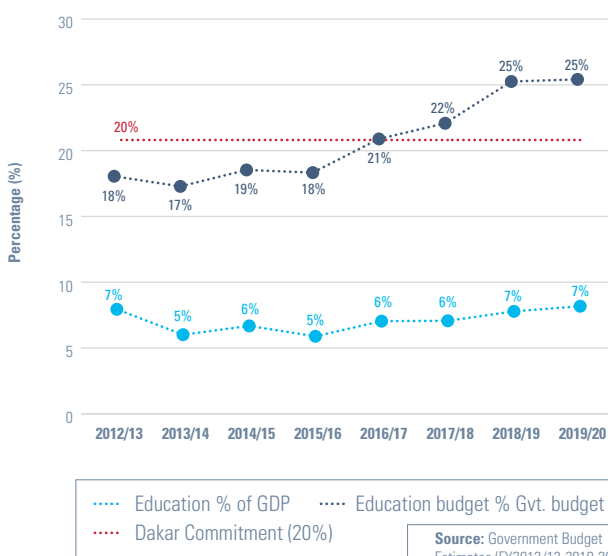


FIGURE 3 Average Education Spending in Selected Countries relative to GDP

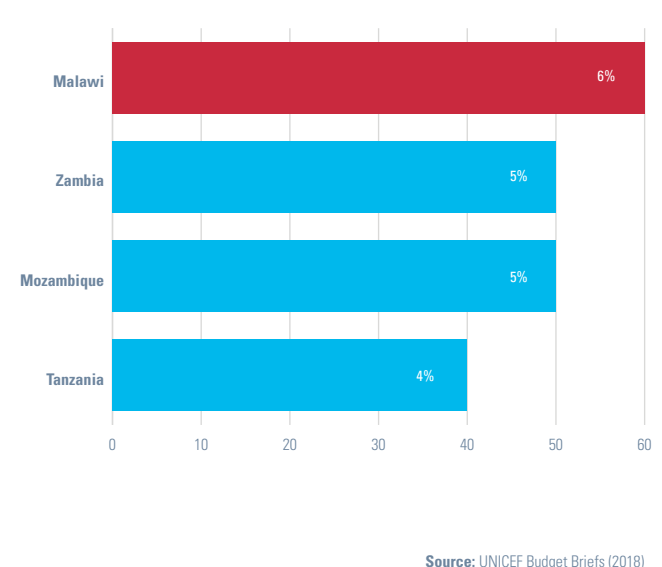
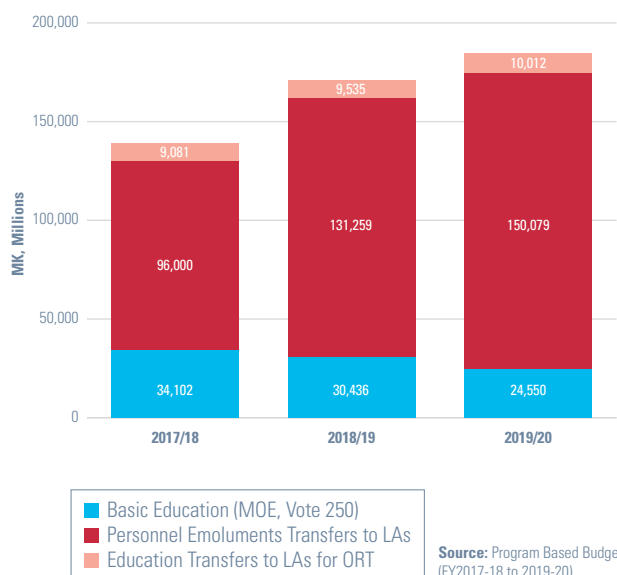


FIGURE 4 Trends in Allocations to Basic Education

Allocations to secondary education increased by 44% in nominal terms and 31% in real terms.

4. COMPOSITION OF EDUCATION SPENDING

Basic and higher education continue to get the highest share of the education budget (Figure 5). In FY2019/20 basic education has been allocated 42% of total sector resources, closely followed by tertiary education at 41%, with secondary education only getting 10%. Of all the levels of education, pre-primary received the smallest share of 2% and cross-cutting issues 5%.

The largest share of the education sector resources goes to subvented education institutions, mainly universities and colleges, followed by District Councils mainly to cover for personnel emoluments. In FY2019/20, resources to be transferred to District Councils take up 36% of the education sector budget, down from 38% in the previous year. Subvented education institutions, mainly universities and colleges, will receive 43% of sector resources up from 39% in FY2018/19. The MoEST receives 18% of the sector budget. The MoGCDSW receives 2% of the sector resources for ECD, up from 1% in FY2018/19 with the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation getting 1% of sector resources, for vocational training (Figure 6).

the current year, the University was allocated MK78 billion, which is 43% of the total budget for tertiary education. The Lilongwe University of Agriculture received the second largest share, 15%. Two new universities, formed from the disbanding of University of Malawi, namely Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHES) and Malawi University of Applied Business Sciences, received 6.5% and 5.7% of the FY2019/20 tertiary budget, respectively.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ⊕ The recognition by Government of the role of early-learning through higher investments in ECD is a step in the right direction in the development of the much-needed human capital.
- ⊕ Unless accompanied by measures to improve value for money, increases in education sector spending will not result in the much-needed changes in education outcomes. Among other measures to ensure allocated resources are used for intended purposes, there is need to ensure timely release of allocated resources to schools, efficient procurement and prompt financial reporting by education institutions.

About three quarters of the education sector budget for basic and secondary education³ is for personal emoluments. In FY2019/20, 74% of basic and secondary education resources are for personnel emoluments, up from 71% in FY2018/19, as shown in Figure 7. Between FY2012/13 and FY2018/19 personnel emoluments costs averaged 68% of the basic and secondary education budget. The share of the budget going for ORT has remained constant over the two years at 13%, but it has been steadily declining since FY2012/13, as shown in Figure 7. The share for capital projects has gone down from 16% in FY2018/19 to 13% in FY2019/20, after three years of increase.

³ The analysis of the education sector budget by economic classification excludes tertiary education as the budgets for tertiary institutions are not easily disaggregated by economic components as is the case with basic and secondary education. Rough estimates using the PBB for Subvented Organizations suggest a similar trend that the tertiary education budget weighs heavily on wages and salaries, followed by goods and services. The majority of the tertiary education budget goes to the University of Malawi and Lilongwe University of Agriculture.

FIGURE 5 Composition of Education Budget by Level of Education

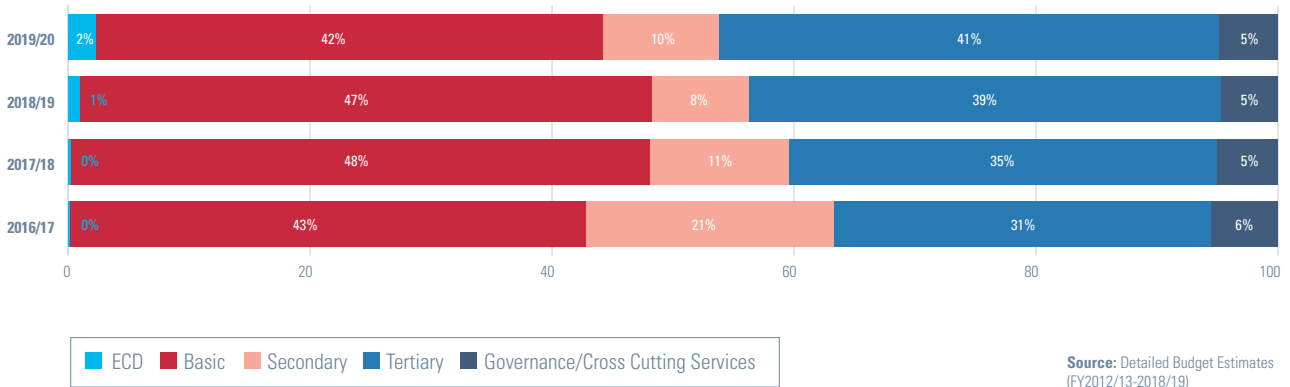
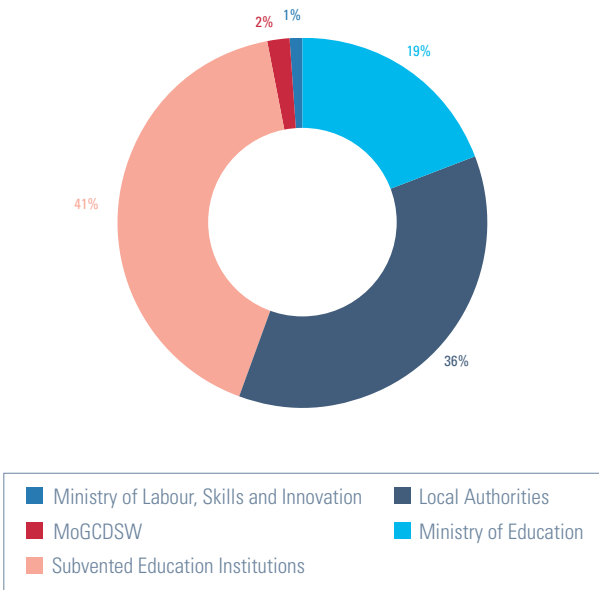


FIGURE 6 Distribution of Education Sector Resources by Spending Agency



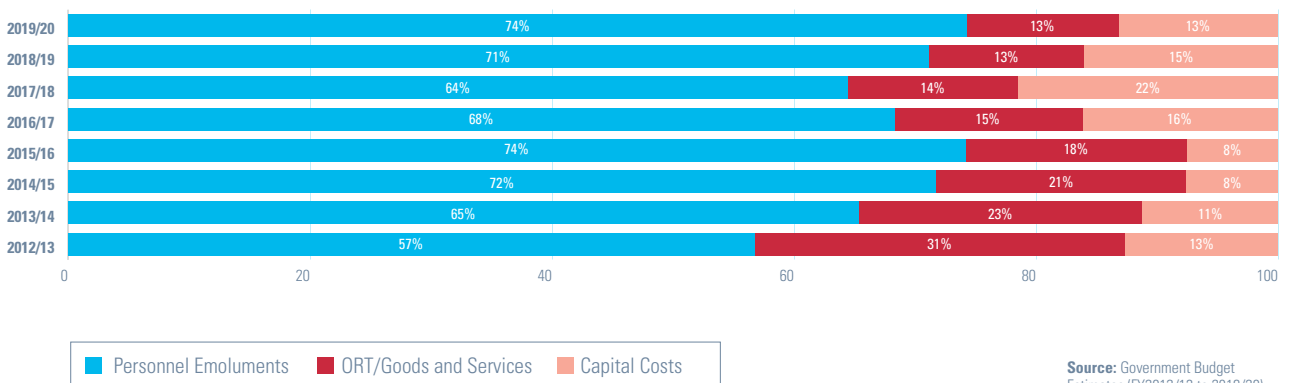
In the current year, the Government allocated about MK21 billion for capital projects, for basic and secondary.

A total of MK1.5 billion was allocated for the procurement of desks for primary and community day secondary schools, down from the MK2 billion in the previous year. The 2018 EMIS report estimated that slightly over 1,393,842 pupils' desks and 789,558 chairs will be required to improve the learning environment for basic education.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ⊕ Huge infrastructure gaps in basic and secondary education require the Government to increase its share of the education budget that goes to capital projects.
- ⊕ Under-investment in early learning and secondary education, compared to other levels of education, will hinder Malawi from fully reaping the demographic dividend.

FIGURE 7 Composition of Basic and Secondary Education Budgets by Economic Classification





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5. BUDGET CREDIBILITY AND EXECUTION

Budget credibility issues, measured by the variance between approved and revised budgets, have persisted.

At mid-year, approved budget allocations to basic and secondary education for FY2018/19 under the MoEST were reduced by 14% and 25%, respectively. The allocation to ECD under the MoGCDSW was reduced by 18%. The cuts in expenditures mainly affected capital budgets, including construction of girls' hostels.

Budget execution challenges arise from several factors.

These include late disbursements of resources, including school improvement grants, protracted procurement and bureaucracy in the implementation of capital projects, especially construction. For example, procurement of desks which started in FY2017/18 spilled over to FY2018/19. There are also reports of delayed payments of contractors. UNICEF field reports confirmed delays in disbursements of School Improvement Grants (SIG), sometimes exceeding 5 months.

A recent paper by the International Monetary Fund⁴ shows that there is room for the education sector to improve the efficiency of spending.

Inefficiencies arise from insufficient inputs, budget utilization bottlenecks, low teacher morale, absenteeism and limited professional development of teachers. As highlighted by the IMF, the education sector lacks adequate supply of inputs across multiple indicators, including but not limited to inadequate trained teachers, shortage of text books and other learning materials. About three students in standard 5 and 6 share one textbook in English, Mathematics and Chichewa.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- ⊕ Persistent delays in the implementation of capital projects and in procurement of essential inputs such as desks, impacts negatively on the supply and quality of education services.

4 IMF, (2018), Selected Issues Paper: Efficiency of Public Spending on Health and Education in Malawi [2018 Article IV Consultations], International Monetary Fund (IMF).

6. DECENTRALIZATION AND EDUCATION SPENDING

The education sector is extensively decentralized. A total of MK160 billion will be transferred to District Councils in 2019/20, 14% up from MK140 billion in 2018/19. The 2019/20 allocation to District Councils represent about 36% of education sector resources. The bulk (93%) of the district budget is for PE, mainly for basic education while the remainder 7% (MK10 billion) is for other recurrent transactions. Compared to other sectors, education received the largest share (30.4%) of ORT transfers to District Councils in FY2019/20, followed by the health sector (27%).

Although the ORT budget to District Councils modestly trended upwards in nominal terms, it has been declining in real terms since FY2012/2013, (Figure 8). The ORT budget to District Councils marginally increased from MK9.5 billion in FY2018/19 to MK10 billion in FY2019/20. This is equivalent to a 5% change in nominal terms and a 4% decline in real terms, once inflation is considered. The persistent decline of ORT budgets in real terms has far reaching implications on the ability of schools to procure education supplies needed for the effective delivery of quality basic education services. The largest share of the ORT budget to District Councils is for the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP).⁵

5 The PSIP comprises the following elements: School Improvement Grant (SIG), Zone Improvement Grants (ZIG), Zonal Training Funds (ZTF), and District Training Funds (DTF). The criteria governing the allocation of the SIG include enrolment, number of teachers, availability of electricity and water, pupil-teacher ratio as well as pupil-classroom ratio.

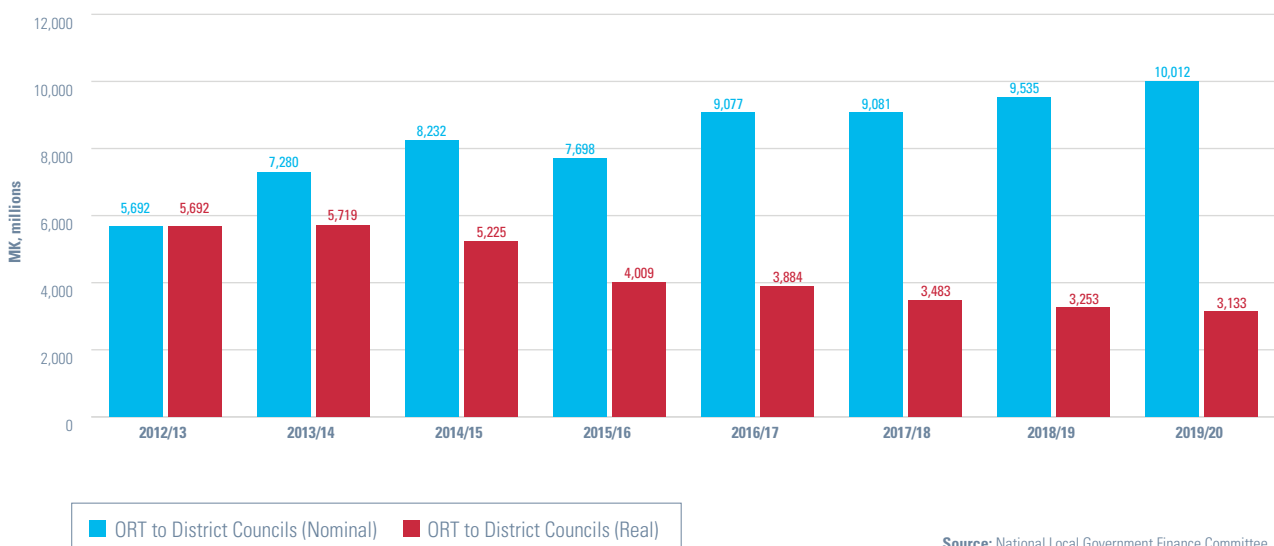
KEY TAKEAWAY

- ⊕ The decline in ORT allocations to District Councils has far reaching consequences on the capacity of education institutions to supply adequate education and learning materials, especially to poorest and most marginalised schools.



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FIGURE 8 ORT Transfers to District Councils (2012/13-2019/20)



Source: National Local Government Finance Committee

7. EQUITY OF EDUCATION SPENDING

Despite commitments to leave no child behind, the reality on the ground shows that human, financial and technical resources in the education sector are not equitably distributed. For instance, disparities have been observed in the deployment of both primary and secondary school teachers. Data from EMIS (2018) show that pupil qualified teacher ratio ranges from 1:46 in Zomba Urban to 1:84 in Machinga (Figure 9). The most remote and rural schools often struggle to attract qualified teachers.

There are also significant differences in the quality of infrastructure within and amongst districts. Rural schools have been the most disadvantaged. The learning environment for most CDSS is not conducive for quality learning. Most of them operate without libraries or laboratories despite the roll out of the new curriculum which demands them. The fact that there are classes with as many as 130 pupils (against the recommended 60), especially in rural areas, creates overcrowding and forces teachers to deliver lessons under trees.

Huge variations in allocations to secondary schools suggest lack of a robust inter-sectoral allocation formula. An analysis of allocations to 265 secondary schools done by UNICEF shows very wide variations in percentage change in allocations per school compared to the previous year. Mwansambo CDSS, for example, has benefited from a 752% increase in its budget from last year whilst allocations to Bolero and Domasi Demo secondary schools went down by 91%. This may point to inequitable budget allocations.

Table 1 shows top and bottom five winners and losers, respectively, in the sample of secondary schools reviewed by UNICEF.

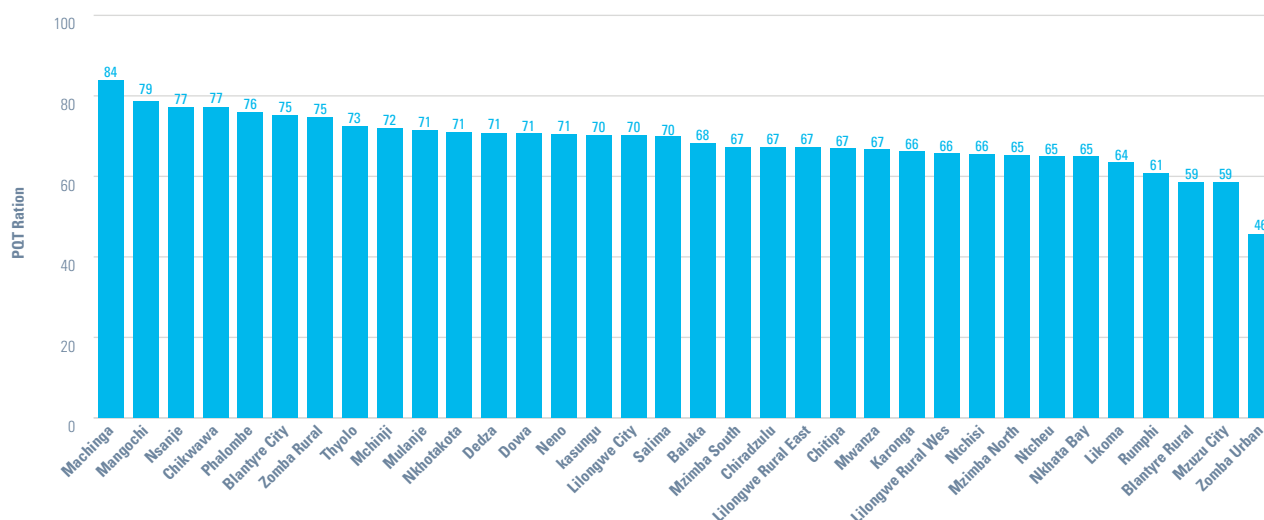
TABLE 1 Allocations to selected secondary schools

Name of School	2018-19	2019-20	Percentage Change
Five highest increases			
337 -Mwansambo CDSS	5.35	45.56	752%
608 -Mountain View Secondary School	11	60.44	449%
248 -Mphunzi CDSS	6.98	31.19	347%
614 -Thyolo Secondary School	99.34	399.4	302%
623 -Nampingo CDSS	3.3	12.62	282%
Five highest decreases			
106 -Katoto Secondary School	157.35	26.62	-83%
528 -Katema CDSS	21.48	3.63	-83%
615 -Bvumbwe CDSS	33.59	3.63	-89%
102 -Bolero Secondary School	85.3	7.87	-91%
504 -Domasi Demo Secondary School	90.19	7.87	-91%

Source: 2019/20 Program Based Budget

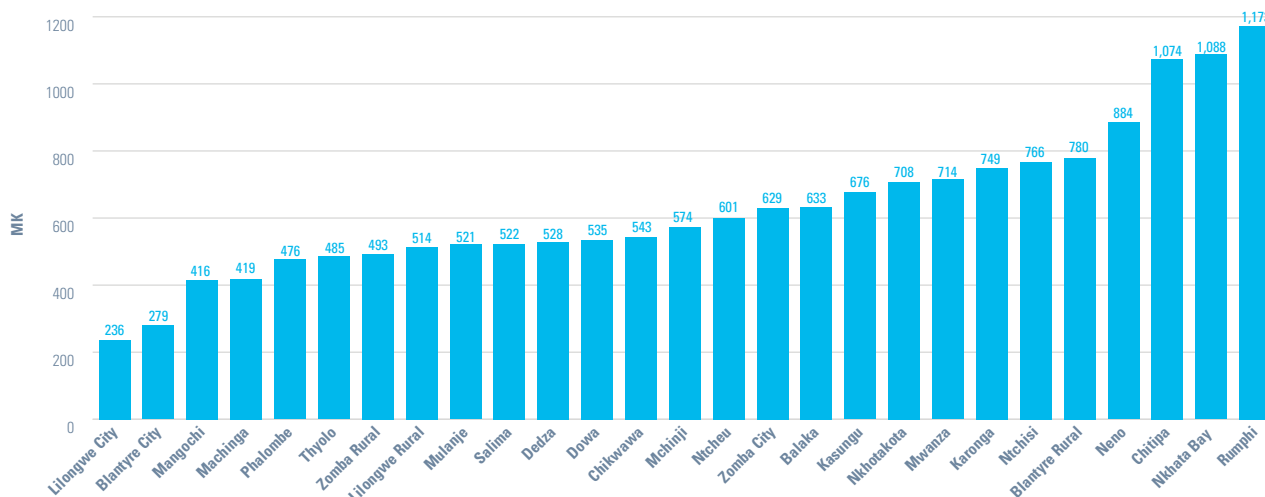
Disparities have been observed in the deployment of both primary and secondary school teachers.

FIGURE 9 Primary Pupil Qualified Teacher Ratio (PqTR)



Source: EMIS, 2018

FIGURE 10 Per Capita ORT Transfers to District Councils in FY2019/20



Source: NLGFC, Approved Ceilings for 2019-20

Additionally, considerable variations have also been observed in per-capita allocations to District Councils.

In FY2019/20, per capita allocations ranged from MK236 in Lilongwe City to MK1,173 in Rumpfi (Figure 10). One possible solution is to review the Intergovernmental Transfer Formula (IGTF) to District Councils for the education sector, an issue that has been raised by several stakeholders. The National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC) and other education stakeholders agree that the education formula needs to be revised given changing context. The education sector formula, dating 2002, is not applied anymore as allocations are now based on yearly 5% top-ups from previous year, raising equity concerns.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ⊕ The intergovernmental fiscal transfer formula for the education sector, dating 2002, is not applied anymore, raising equity concerns in the distribution of education resources to District Councils.
- ⊕ Equitable deployment of teachers to all schools, especially to the remotest areas, is key to increasing access to education by all children.
- ⊕ Facilities such as laboratories and libraries, which are glaringly missing in most CDSS, are required to ensure every child has an equal chance to learn.

8. FINANCING OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The education sector budget, especially the recurrent part, is largely financed from domestic resources.

Between fiscal year 2015/16 and 2019/20, over 90% of the education sector resources were mobilized from within the country. Nearly all resources for personnel emoluments are financed from domestic sources.

Donors are however contributing substantial resources to the development budget.

In FY2019/20, donors will contribute MK21.9 billion for development projects under the MoEST. This is equivalent to 70% of the MoEST 2019/20 development budget of MK31.2 billion. Moving forward, the challenge for the Government is to increase absorption capacity in spending capital projects.

Households also play a role in financing education services, especially at secondary and tertiary level.

Primary education is free in Malawi. In 2018, the Government removed tuition fees, textbook fees and the general-purpose fund for secondary schools. This is a welcome development because it reduces the burden of cost of education, particularly for the poorest students. However, to compensate for lost revenue, the Government is called upon to come up with a financing instrument, which could be equivalent to the SIG, to ensure that all schools have some resources for day-to-day operations and supplies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ⊕ In the short-term, international donor resources will continue to be needed to finance capital projects, given fiscal space constraints.

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9. KEY POLICY ISSUES

a) Teacher Motivation and Morale

The Teacher Management Strategy approved in 2018 is a key step to guide deployment, motivation and retention of teachers. The strategy aims to provide a uniform and comprehensive human resource management system for primary school teachers that will improve teacher distribution and deployment across Malawi. Deployment of teachers to rural, remote and disadvantaged schools continues to be a big challenge. Other challenges include poor teacher distribution between regions, districts and even within a school where preference is given to upper classes. In addition, schools face a great shortage of specialist teachers and female teachers. All these negatively impact on learning.

b) Implementation of policies to improve efficiency, equity and quality of education

In 2018, the Government developed several policies to improve efficiency, equity and quality of education. These include the Grade Promotion Policy for Malawi Primary Schools, National Girls' Education Strategy (2018 – 2023) and the Teacher Management Strategy. The aim of the

Grade Promotion Policy is to reduce repetition and dropout rates and enhance completion rates at primary school level. Repetition is highest for Standard 1, at about 30%. It drops to about 23% for Standards 2 and 3, and again further for Standard 4, to then reach an average level of 20% that is held through to Standard 8. For these policies to make the desired impact, the Government should monitor their implementation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ⊕ Equitable deployment of teachers, especially to rural areas, accompanied by effective retention strategies is key in ensuring no child is left behind in accessing education.
- ⊕ Unless implemented, newly developed education policies and strategies to improve quality, efficiency and equity of education will remain empty promises.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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