PRESS RELEASE

The State of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Malawian Primary Schools

Lilongwe, 18th March 2010: The Minister of Education, Science and Technology Honourable Dr. George Chaponda (MP) will on Thursday, 18th March 2010 launch a report on the status of water, sanitation and hygiene in primary schools in Malawi. The launch will take place at Capital Hotel, Lilongwe at 8:30 am.

The Status Report on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Primary Schools is the first such comprehensive national assessment ever undertaken in Malawi. It paints a comprehensive picture of the state of water, sanitation and hygiene in our primary schools and estimates how much it will cost to ensure that all school children have access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene in their schools.

The Report’s findings are encouraging. Of the 5,379 schools surveyed (out of the country’s total of 5,460 schools), 81% provide children with water from a protected source, such as a borehole, a tap or a hand-dug well equipped with a pump. The borehole is the most common source of water, available in two thirds of our schools. However, children in 19% of schools drink water from an unprotected source, such as a hand-dug well without a pump, a stream or a spring. These children are daily exposed to the dangers of water borne diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery.

The Report also shows that while two thirds of our schools provide sanitary facilities which are deemed to be of an acceptable standard, meaning they have a solid floor and a tight-fitting lid to cover the top, are in good working order, are located at least 30 meters from a ground water source, and offer children the safety and privacy they deserve, overcrowding appears to be a problem. In 23% of schools, on average, there is one facility for every 60 pupils. In another 14% of schools, between 61 and 100 pupils share a facility and more than 100 pupils share a facility in 26% of our schools. Globally, WHO recommends a minimum standard of one facility for every 25 pupils but since Malawi provides urinals in schools, a ratio of one facility for every 60 pupils is acceptable.

The Report shows that 33% of schools have only basic sanitation, usually a hand-dug pit latrine sheltered by mud or grass thatch and lacking a solid floor and cover. Floors in these latrines cannot be hygienically cleaned with water and antibacterial detergent and often deteriorate in the course of time, making them unsafe for use. Without covers, flies easily move around transmitting bacteria and in cases where grass thatch is all that separates the user from the outside world, privacy is compromised.

The Report also reveals that about 230 schools have no sanitation facilities at all. Children in these schools therefore resort to using the bush to relieve themselves. Some don’t even bother to turn up for school. In today’s world, this situation is as unimaginable as it is troubling. Even more alarming is the finding that only 4% of our schools provide hand-washing facilities and soap. The rest either provide a hand-washing facility but without soap or provide none at all. Children in these schools not only transmit bacteria unknowingly but they are also denied the opportunity to adopt hand-washing as a regular behaviour while they are still young.
Providing good quality water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools is critical to our efforts to improve the quality of education in our schools. Where these facilities exist, children, especially girls, are less likely to drop out of school. They also make the school an attractive workplace for teachers.

Fortunately, the Report gives us a clear sense of the needs and gaps. For every primary school in Malawi to have clean and safe drinking water, 994 boreholes need to be constructed at a total cost of **US $8 million**. An estimated 600,000 pupils stand to benefit.

To ensure that every school child in Malawi has access to an improved sanitary facility, 37,142 latrines or toilets need to be constructed at a total cost of **US $18.5 million**. An estimated 2.4 million pupils stand to benefit.

To ensure that school boys and girls have their own separate hand-washing facilities, 8,600 need to be constructed at a total cost of **US $861,000**. An estimated 2.6 million pupils stand to benefit.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology realises that an investment in water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools can go a long way to improving the quality of education in our schools and securing a better future for our nation. The Status Report on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Primary Schools clearly identifies the gaps and needs and provides important baseline information which will help the Ministry and its partners to better mobilize resources to meet the water, sanitation and hygiene challenges in Malawi’s primary schools.

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