

# WASH Budget Brief 2023/24

Investing in climate-resilient  
WASH services in Malawi

## Key messages and recommendations

### 1

The WASH budget has significantly declined by 61% from MK127 billion in 2022/23 to MK49.5 billion in the current year. The 2023/24 allocations are the lowest as a share of the total government budget (1.3%) and GDP (0.3%) since 2019/20 and are strongly influenced by donor funding trends for the construction of WASH infrastructures.

**Recommendation:** The Government should sustainably increase WASH allocations to a minimum of 0.5% of GDP in the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) (2024/25 to 2026/27) in line with its commitment under the African Conference on Sanitation and Hygiene (AfricaSan).

### 2

Government is commended for creating a separate sub-programme (16.63) and budget line on sanitation and hygiene under the Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MoWS), in line with its commitment under AfricaSan<sup>1</sup>. An allocation of MK31.6 million or 5.8% of the total MoWS other recurrent transaction (ORT) budget (MK542 billion) has been provided for this budget line in 2023/24.

**Recommendation:** The MoWS is encouraged to ensure timely utilization of the allocated resources in 2023/24 and progressively increase the share of allocations to sanitation and hygiene – sub-programme 16.63 – to at least 10% of the total MoWS ORT budget by 2026/27.

### 3

On average, about 90% (MK44.6 billion in 2023/24) of WASH budgets are geared towards supporting the construction of WASH infrastructure in Malawi, which is unevenly concentrated in urban areas. This arrangement leaves a meagre 1% of the total allocations to support operations and maintenance (O&M) of existing and new WASH infrastructure considering the other 9% is allocated for personnel emoluments (PE).

**Recommendation:** The MoWS should aim for a more sustainable financing mix for the WASH sector, by rebalancing available investments towards O&M as well as ORT, which are crucial to support continued functionality of water supply systems and sanitation facilities, building on the recently launched (climate-resilient) WASH financing strategy.

### 4

There are budget credibility challenges mostly affecting the implementation of WASH capital projects, as development budgets are notably cut during mid-year budget reviews (MYBRs). For example, the Government's capital contribution (DII) was substantially cut by (-) 38%, the Borehole Fund by (-) 25% and donor contributions (DI) by (-) 17% during the 2022/23 MYBR.

**Recommendation:** The Government should protect WASH budgets from significant in-year cuts during the 2023/24 MYBR while enhancing measures to improve the execution of capital projects through, for instance, strengthening planning of capital projects, procurement systems and contract management.

### 5

Households are now paying more to access water supply services, following the recent increase in water tariffs and fees across all the five Water Boards in Malawi. This development disproportionately affects poor households and their children, especially considering the increased frequency of climate-induced WASH emergencies and the challenging macro-fiscal situation facing Malawi.

**Recommendation:** While the design of cost-reflective water tariffs is important to support the financial sustainability of Water Boards, Government need to cautiously consider increases in water tariffs and fees, especially given the increasing frequency of climate-induced WASH emergencies such as cholera and the currently challenging macro-fiscal situation in Malawi.

<sup>1</sup> Commitment number 3 of the Ngor Declaration on Sanitation and Hygiene (2015) available at: [https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/ngor\\_declaration\\_print\\_version.pdf](https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/ngor_declaration_print_version.pdf)





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## Introduction

This budget brief provides a summary analysis of the trends in spending on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Malawi in the framework of the 2023/24 fiscal year (FY) budget. It provides insights on the adequacy, equity, efficiency, and effectiveness of WASH spending in Malawi. The analysis builds on previous WASH budget briefs<sup>2</sup> and is informed by Government Budget Documents, mainly the program-based budget (PBB), detailed budget estimates as well as ceilings for Local Councils from the National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC). For this brief, the WASH sector budget considers allocations to four main entities, namely the Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MoWS) (Vote 210), environmental health interventions under the Ministry of Health (Vote 310), transfers to Local Councils for other recurrent transactions (ORT) and Borehole Fund (construction of water structures) as well as subventions to the National Water Resources Agency (NWRA).

## Overview of the WASH Sector in Malawi

The Government has renewed its commitment to improve access to quality WASH services in Malawi, as part of the recent high-level ministerial emergency meeting on cholera epidemics and climate-related public health emergencies<sup>3</sup>. The following commitments, were highlighted, amongst others:

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/esa/documents/malawi-budget-briefs-2022-2023>

<sup>3</sup> The high-level ministerial emergency meeting on cholera epidemics and climate-related public health emergencies was held in Lilongwe, 9-10th March 2023 and attended by Ministers for Health, Water and Sanitation, and Environment from the African Union (AU) Member States as well Heads of Delegations.

**Sustaining public WASH investments is key to achieve SDG 6 targets by 2030.**

### BOX 1

#### Selected Government Commitments from the High-level Ministerial Emergency Meeting on Cholera Epidemics and Climate-related Public Health Emergencies

- Improving cross-border collaboration across pillars including RCCE and timely surveillance and WASH data-sharing for public health action.
- Defining attainable SDG 6 water and sanitation milestones combined with investments (i.e., at least 70% basic water and 50% basic sanitation service levels) before the target year of 2030 in cognizance of the transformative effect of WASH on public health, economies, gender equality, and societies, particularly in the face of climate change.
- Sustaining high-level political will and commitment to prioritize and fund actions to address underlying causes of cholera through longer-term investment in WASH infrastructure, services, and behaviors, essential for preventing cholera and other climate-related health emergencies.
- Establishing agile and timely legal/regulatory processes/frameworks and logistics planning for rapid cross-border deployment and receipt of public health experts, as well as experts across WASH and the climate-related domains, and medical personnel for cholera and other public health emergency response including agreements to waive regulatory fees for emergency medical personnel supporting public health emergency response.

Currently, access to safe and quality WASH services, especially basic sanitation and hand washing facilities with soap, remains a significant challenge for many households, schools, and health care facilities in Malawi. For example, approximately 26% of households in rural areas need access to basic drinking water services, 54% lack access to basic sanitation services, and 72% need hand-washing facilities with soap. Latest available programme data from WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) (2023) reveal that over 24% of schools and health institutions lack WASH services.<sup>4</sup> This situation disproportionately affects women and girls who walk long distances to fetch water.

4 WHO and UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) (2023).

The lack of quality WASH services across the country is linked to several bottlenecks. These include frequent malfunctioning of WASH supply systems due to perpetual disasters like floods and droughts and inadequate capacity for planning and implementing climate-resilient innovative options. Additionally, the lack of households to contribute towards operations and maintenance (O&M) for WASH infrastructure key bottleneck affecting the effective delivery of WASH services in Malawi.

The increased frequency of climate change related shocks in Malawi is exacerbating Malawi’s WASH challenges, with over half of Malawi’s districts being disaster-prone. For instance, major WASH infrastructure was destroyed by the Tropical Cyclone Freddy (TCF) which affected more than ten districts in March 2023.

**Table 1: Key Bottlenecks Contributing to WASH Deprivations in Malawi**

Enabling Environment	Supply	Demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate prevention &amp; mitigation of environmental health and climate change impacts, e.g., drought, and floods.</li> <li>Weak standards, information management system at district and central level.</li> <li>Insufficient planning, coordination, monitoring and reporting on national priorities.</li> <li>Lack of functional accountability systems.</li> <li>Inadequate WASH standards and enforcement at the institutional level (health and education).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household food insecurity.</li> <li>Inadequate coverage and quality of WASH services at the district level.</li> <li>Institutions &amp; operators have inadequate capacity to maintain WASH infrastructure according to the standards.</li> <li>WASH infrastructure at the community and institutions (schools, health centres) are unsafe, unimproved, not inclusive and located very far (service quality)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor hygiene, sanitation, health-seeking behaviour &amp; inappropriate feeding practices.</li> <li>Households do not contribute towards O&amp;M for WASH infrastructure.</li> </ul>

Source: UNICEF Malawi (2023)





The effects of climate related shocks such as floods on the WASH sector are significantly huge. For instance, the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report<sup>5</sup> revealed an estimated total damage resulting from Tropical Cyclone Freddy in the WASH sector of around US\$42.64 million, linked to damages in WASH facilities for slightly over 1.3 million people. The total losses caused by TCF to the WASH sector was estimated at US\$11.2 million. The PDNA revealed how disruption of access to soap, safe water, and other hygiene items also made it difficult for people to maintain proper hygiene practices, increasing the risk of the spread of infectious diseases.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government is encouraged to implement its commitment to define attainable SDG 6 milestones and minimum investments for water and sanitation in cognizance of the transformative effect of WASH on public health, economies, gender equality, and societies, particularly in the face of climate change.
- As part of implementing one of its recent commitment, Malawi should sustain high-level political will and commitment to prioritize and fund actions to address underlying causes of cholera through longer-term investment in (climate-resilient) WASH infrastructure, services, and behaviours, essential for preventing cholera and other climate-related health emergencies.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Malawi – Malawi 2023 Tropical Cyclone Freddy Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, April 2023



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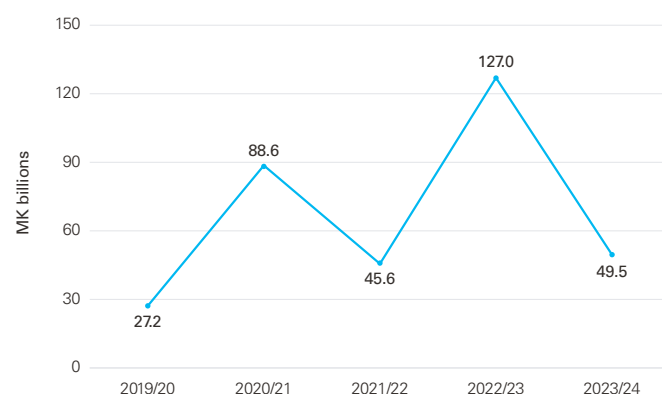
## Size of WASH Budgets

The WASH budget has significantly declined by 61% from MK127 billion in 2022/23 to MK49.5 billion in 2023/24 (Figure 1). In real terms, the WASH budget has declined by 70%, considering the average inflation of 20% between 2022-23. In per capita terms, the WASH budget has also decreased from about MK6,600 in 2022/23 to only MK2,400 in 2023/24.

The irregular trends in WASH budgets are largely linked to donor funding patterns for the creation of water supply and sanitation infrastructure. For instance, the contribution of donors to water supply and sanitation projects declined by 63% from MK122 billion in 2022/23 to MK44.6 trillion in 2023/24. Whereas Government's contribution to the construction of WASH infrastructure has increased from MK7.2 billion in 2022/23 to MK13.8 billion in 2023/24 or from 8 to 30% of total development budget.

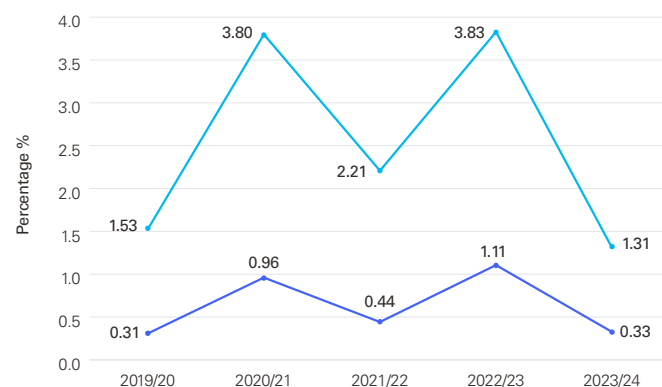
WASH budgets show irregular trends relative to the total Government budget and GDP (Figure 2). The 2023/24 allocations are the lowest as a share of the total budget (1.3%) since 2019/20 and are roughly consistent with the allocation of 2019/20 as a share of GDP as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 1: Trends in WASH Sector Budgets, Nominal MK**



Source: Government Budget and Financial Documents, 2019-23

**Figure 2: Trends in WASH Spending as Share of Total Budget and GDP**



Source: Government Budget and Financial Documents, 2019-23



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The above trends suggest that WASH financing gaps are likely widening, especially given the additional needs created by Tropical Cyclone Freddy and the cholera outbreak. The WASH sector investments needs were estimated at US\$97 million (~MK97 billion) for basic services and an additional US\$259 million (~MK259 billion) for safely managed services using SDG-standardized cost estimates from the UNICEF-supported Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) costing exercise of 2019<sup>6</sup>. The recently launched (climate resilient) WASH financing strategy offers an opportunity for the Government to work towards improving the sustainability of WASH financing while exploring alternative and innovative funding sources and leveraging on the available donor resources.

6 <https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/tools-portal/tool/sdg-costing-tool>

#### KEY TAKEAWAY

- The ongoing climate-induced WASH related emergencies require the Government to sustain public investments in climate-resilient WASH services building on the recently launched (climate resilient) WASH financing strategy to avoid regression in WASH outcomes across the country.

## Composition of WASH Spending

The distribution of the 2023/24 WASH budget is relatively similar to that of 2022/23, as the bulk of the allocations remain largely centrally managed under the MoWS. About 94% (MK46.5 billion) of WASH allocations in 2023/24 are centrally allocated under the MoWS while around 5% is decentralized to Local Councils through the Borehole Fund

(MK2.3 billion) and intergovernmental fiscal transfers (IGFTs) for other recurrent transactions (ORT) (MK291 million) (Table 2). The remaining 1% is shared between the subvention for the National Water Resources Authority (NWRA) and environmental health interventions – sub-programme 144.6 under the new “Health Service Delivery” programme in MoH.



**Table 2: Trends in the Composition of WASH Sector Budgets by MDA**

MDA	Sub-programme / Budget Line	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	% change (2023/24 vs 2022/23)	Share of Total (Av. 2022-24)
MoWS (Vote 210)	Water Resources & Management	2,482	84,557	25,313	68,570	14,227	-89%	94
	Water Supply	21,753	465	16,964	42,276	30,580		
	Sanitation & Hygiene					31		
	Management & Admin				1,613	1,760		
MoH (Vote 310)	Environment Health	213	836.9	650	1,076	90	-92%	0.4
Subvented Organisation (Vote 275)	NWRA	200	215	161	215	237	10%	0.1
Local Councils (Vote 900 Series)	ORT	207	223	182	188	291	55%	5.5
	Borehole Fund (Construction of Water Structures)	2,316	2,316	2,316	1,737	2,316	33%	
<b>Total WASH (Current, MK millions)</b>		<b>27,171</b>	<b>88,613</b>	<b>45,586</b>	<b>126,978</b>	<b>49,533</b>	<b>-61%</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Government Budget Estimates (2021/22-2023/24)



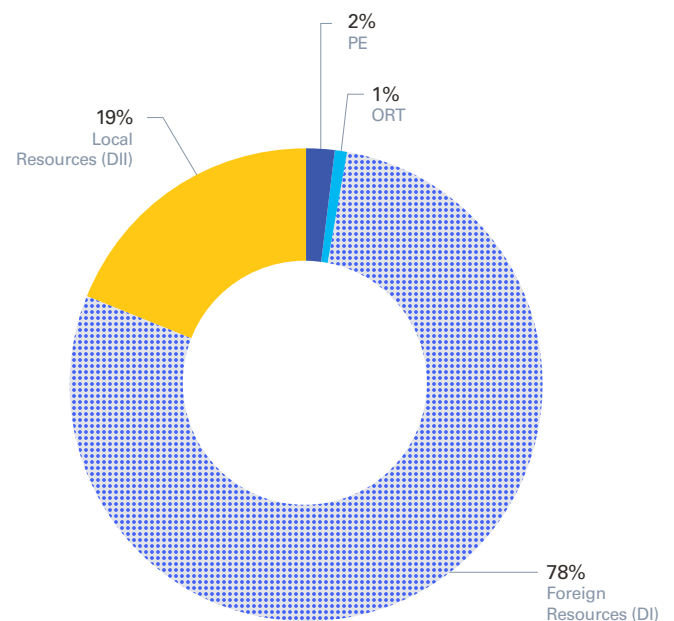
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**97% of WASH budgets directed towards infrastructure development, leaving rural areas at risk, 2% allocated to operations and maintenance.**

WASH budgets remain largely geared towards supporting the construction of water supply and sanitation infrastructure (Figure 3). For instance, an average of 97% of the MoWS budget between 2022/23 and 2023/24 was allocated to development projects, divided between Government (DII) (19%) and donors (DI) (78%). The Government's contribution to the creation of WASH infrastructure has increased from MK7.2 billion in 2022/23 to MK13.8 billion in 2023/24 or from 8 to 30% of total development budget. Over the same period, the size of donor-funded WASH projects has significantly decreased from MK114.8 billion to MK30.8 billion. This decrease might be linked to maturity of grants for some key water supply and sanitation projects funded through the national budget that are nearing completion.

The majority of the major water infrastructure projects are concentrated on improving water supply systems and services in urban areas. While this is a welcome development, there is a need to strike a balance between water infrastructure development in urban areas and sustaining the water systems in the rural areas where the majority of Malawi's population reside. Table 3 provides a list of the top five WASH projects based on donor-funding figures for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

**Figure 3: Composition of the MoWS Budget by Economic Classification, Average 2022/23-24**



Source: Government Financial Statements 2023/24

**Table 3: Major Water Infrastructure Projects, in MK millions**

Name of Project	Name of Donor	2022/23		2023/24		% change	
		DI	DII	DI	DII	DI	DII
Malawi Resilience and Disaster Risk Management Project (MRDRMP)		41,572	90	11,452	600	-72%	563%
Lilongwe Water Supply and Sanitation Project (LWSP)	World Bank	34,952	500	11,176	500	-68%	0%
Malawi Watershed Services Improvement Project (MWASIP)*		27,794	45		600	-100%	1227%
Lilongwe Water Resource Efficiency Programme (LWREP)	European Investment Bank	2,915	950	6,754	800	132%	-16%
Nkhata-Bay Town Water Supply and Sanitation Project (NTWSSP)	African Development Bank	2,692	622	911	800	-66%	29%
<b>Sub-total Top 5 Projects (A)</b>		<b>109,925</b>	<b>2,208</b>	<b>30,293</b>	<b>3,300</b>	<b>-72%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Total MoWS Development Budget (B)</b>		<b>114,813</b>	<b>7,211</b>	<b>30,836</b>	<b>13,800</b>	<b>-73%</b>	<b>91%</b>
<b>Top 5 Share of Total (A/B)</b>		<b>96%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>24%</b>		

Source: MoWS Budget Documents, 2023

\*The Malawi Watershed Services Improvement Project (MWASIP) is a World Bank grant to the tune of USD78.5 million and runs for six years from 2020 to 2026. The figures for 2023/24 are likely not captured in the MoWS approved budget. If these are included, the total on-budget WASH sector development budget is likely higher than reported.

ORT allocations to support operations and maintenance (O&M) of WASH services remain minimal, at roughly 2% of the total WASH budget. Government allocated MK542 million for ORT under MoWS and an additional MK291 million for Local Councils. The insufficient funding for O&M raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of the infrastructure investments and exposes the sector to vulnerabilities to flood-related shocks.

The MoWS has created a separate sub-programme (16.63) and budget line on sanitation and hygiene (S&H). This is a progressive step and in line with Government's commitment under the Ngor Declaration on Sanitation and Hygiene (2015)<sup>7</sup> signed by Government as part of the African Conference on Sanitation and Hygiene (AfricaSan). An allocation of MK31.6 million or 5.8% of the total MoWS ORT budget (MK542 billion) has been provided for sanitation and hygiene in 2023/24.

Going forward, the MoWS is encouraged to consistently increase this allocation in line with increases in its annual ORT provision and consistent with the AfricaSan commitment to consistently increase Government's allocations to S&H. In addition, and considering the significant S&H needs facing Malawi, the MoWS is encouraged to consider doubling the share of its ORT budget allocated to the S&H budget line in the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) for 2024/25 – 2026/27.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/ngor\\_declaration\\_print\\_version.pdf](https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/ngor_declaration_print_version.pdf)

**The Government of Malawi has created a separate budget line on sanitation and hygiene, with an allocation of MK31 million.**

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government should still aim for a more sustainable financing mix for the sector, by rebalancing WASH investments towards operations and maintenance as well as ORT, with the aim of ensuring continued functionality of water and sanitation facilities, building on the recently launched WASH financing strategy.
- The creation of a separate sub-programme and budget line on sanitation and hygiene is a progressive step towards improving the financing and delivery of S&H services across the country.
- Linked to the above, the MoWS should also consider creating a separate S&H budget line at Local Council level to better improve the financing and delivery of S&H services at local level, especially given the ongoing WASH related emergencies such as cholera affecting most of the communities.

# Budget Credibility and Execution

There are some budget credibility challenges affecting the implementation of WASH budgets. For instance, the 2022/23 MoWS budget revised downwards by 18% at mid-year budget review (MYBR) from the approved MK151 billion to MK123 billion. This was mostly on account of a 17% reduction in donor resources, from the approved MK137.5 billion to MK114.8 billion as shown in Table 4. The Government's own contribution (DII) was substantially cut by 38%. At local level, the Borehole Fund and ORT transfers were also cut by around 25% of their approved allocations. The significant MYBR revisions, beyond the +/-5% recommended variance for a budget to be deemed credible by the public expenditure and financial accountability (PEFA) framework, across all line items undermine the credibility of WASH budgets.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The significant MYBR revisions, of over 10% in 2022/23, across all WASH budget line items undermine the credibility of WASH sector budgets.
- The Government should protect WASH budgets from significant in-year cuts in 2023/24, which negatively affect the implementation of planned WASH activities, especially in the context of ongoing cholera outbreak.
- It is important for Government to ensure actual and timely disbursement of the approved development budget to support timely and effective implementation of planned WASH projects.

**Table 4: Performance of the 2022/23 MoWS Budget**

Category	Approved	Revised Estimate	% Variance
Total MoWS	151,271	123,762	-18%
PE	1,567	1,400	-11%
ORT	541	413	-24%
DI	137,514	114,812	-17%
DII	11,648	7,211	-38%
Borehole Fund	2,316	1,737	-25%
ORT Transfers to Local Councils	243	188	-23%

Source: MoWS PBB, 2023/24

**Budget Credibility Challenges: 2022/23 WASH budget revised downwards by 18%, donor resources reduced by 17%, undermining implementation.**



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# Fiscal Decentralization and WASH Budgets

Considering current inflation trends (averaging 20% as of 2022/23), the district WASH budget has declined in real terms in relation to the allocation of 2019/20 (Figure 4). This is mainly because the allocation to the Borehole Fund has remained unchanged at MK2.3 billion since 2019/20 while ORT transfers have remained low considering growing WASH needs in communities, amidst ongoing climate-induced WASH emergencies.

There are significant funding gaps for delivering basic water supply and sanitation services at local level. Latest available evidence from UNICEF<sup>8</sup> estimated the annual average operational cost (excluding salaries and wages) of delivering a minimum package of water supply and sanitation services at local level amounts to MK4.2 billion (~US\$4 million). Yet, the annual allocation averaged MK2.3 billion between 2017-21, resulting in a significant funding gap of about MK1.9 billion (45%), as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Funding Gap per Sector, Average Sectoral Funding Gaps for Period 2017-21, Amounts in MK millions**

Sector	Funding	Requirement	Funding Gap	Funding Gap (%)
Education	9,206	35,778	(26, 572)	-74%
Social Welfare	394	9,521	(9,128)	-96%
<b>Water</b>	<b>2,324</b>	<b>4,263</b>	<b>(1, 939)</b>	<b>-45%</b>
Agriculture	1,674	18,683	(17,009)	-91%
Health	9,243	36,771	(27, 528)	-75%

Source: NLGFC and UNICEF (2022): Costing of Social Service Delivery at Local Level in Malawi, UNICEF Lilongwe

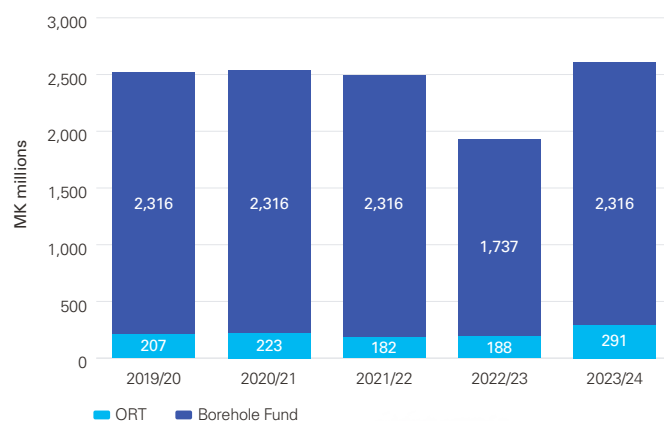
<sup>8</sup> NLGFC and UNICEF (2022): Costing of Social Service Delivery at Local Level in Malawi, UNICEF Lilongwe

**Funding gaps for delivering basic water supply and sanitation services at local level are significant, with a shortfall of about MK1.9 billion (45%) compared to the estimated annual operational cost.**



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**Figure 4: Trends in Composition of Local Councils Water Sector Budget**



Source: Government Budget Documents (2019/20-2023/24)

## KEY TAKEAWAY

- The ongoing cholera outbreak and the recurrent flooding due to cyclones are a reminder for the Government to prioritize WASH financing at local level. Special considerations should be made in allocating funding for preventive WASH interventions, such as environmental health and hygiene, while addressing the currently low functionality rates (75%) for traditional water systems.

# Financing of WASH Services in Malawi

Donor funding remains significant in sustaining Malawi's WASH sector. Donor funding constitutes an average of 80% of on-budget WASH development projects over the past five years. In 2023/24, approximately 70% of the water infrastructure projects are being financed by donors (DI), with the remaining 30% financed by the Government (DII). The World Bank remains the largest funding source for on-budget development projects, contributing up to an average of 80% to the funding for key water supply and sanitation projects funded through the national budget, as presented in Table 3.

If off-budget resources are considered, the proportion of donor funding to the WASH sector is even more significant as highlighted in the 2020 WASH public expenditure review (PER)<sup>9</sup>. Government's own contribution to the funding of the sector remains comparatively low at below 10% of the total (on- and off-budget).

Households' and institutions shoulder significant costs to access WASH services across the country, estimated at over 60% of total WASH spending between 2015-19<sup>10</sup>. The Government has recently increased water tariffs across all the Water Boards. This means households are required to pay more for water supply services, a development which disproportionately affects poor households and their children.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6491/file/UNICEF-Malawi-WASH-Public-Expenditure-Review-2020.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6491/file/UNICEF-Malawi-WASH-Public-Expenditure-Review-2020.pdf>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government should continue lobbying for sustained support from development partners on WASH financing while considering alternative domestic financing mechanisms building on WASH Financing Strategy.
- Considering the challenging macro-fiscal situation facing Malawi, the increase in water tariffs and fees could potentially affect access to quality water services, especially for poorer households and children

**Recent increases in water tariffs could potentially affect access to quality water services, especially for poor households and children.**



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