UNICEF’s Basic Education Youth Development (BEYD) programme focuses on the development and education of children from early childhood (0-9 years) through adolescence to young adulthood (10 – 18 years). In partnership with the Government of Malawi, the programme focuses on three key stages of a child’s life. First, it aims to ensure that all boys and girls are exposed to stimulation and learning, which promote early childhood development. Second, it works to increase the number of students that have access to equal and inclusive primary education, leading to quality learning outcomes. Third, the programme aims to increase access to secondary school, and provide alternative learning pathways for out-of-school adolescents.

Early Childhood Development (ECD)
The ECD component of BEYD aims to improve access to quality early learning, and foster care and development opportunities for children up to 9 years old. UNICEF focuses on improving coordination among stakeholders involved in ECD, and supports scaling up ECD services through community-based care centres, improving policies and learning frameworks. One such framework is Care for Child Development, developed by UNICEF and the World Health Organization, which has improved services for parents and strengthened links between ECD and other development areas including health, nutrition, adolescent for child early care, learning and development services.

Basic Education
The basic education element of BEYD improves learning outcomes and increases the number of children who are completing primary education and transiting to post-primary education. One of the Government’s key priorities is to improve the quality and relevance of education, keeping children in school. UNICEF Malawi supports this priority through advocating for policies and legal frameworks that promote inclusive, quality education, teacher education, continued professional development for teachers, curriculum review, increased numbers of students and community participation in school management. UNICEF also supports the integration of the Child Friendly Schools model within the National Education Standards, transforming schools into safe, child-centred, gender-sensitive places of learning. During emergencies, UNICEF works with the Government to ensure child rights, such as the right to education, are respected by carrying out emergency response activities and by building the capacity of governments and communities, making them more resilient.

Adolescent and Youth Development
BEYD’s youth and adolescent development component focuses on increasing access to youth-friendly social services, particularly for girls. It uses education as an entry point and focuses on the three key areas: (i) increasing access to secondary education for adolescent girls through scholarships, creating links with social cash transfer programmes and through reviewing policy and strengthening institutions; (ii) increasing access to alternative pathways of learning for out of school adolescents, and focusing on basic numeracy and literacy, information technology, vocational training and performing arts; and (iii) increasing access to participation structures, such as youth clubs, student councils, district coordination structures and youth networks, for both in and out of school youth.
It's three o'clock in the afternoon at Mpingwe Primary School, long after regular classes have ended. Some 30 girls sit in a classroom in four groups. Some have babies on their backs as they focus on the teacher in front. The girls are taking part in a literacy and numeracy programme, ordinarily taught to much younger students. They read out letters and numbers, written on a blackboard, and take turns writing them.

Eighteen-year-old Daima Bwanali sits in one of the groups. "I stopped going to school so I could help my mother," explains Daima, whose parents are subsistence farmers. "Sometimes we only have one meal all day."

Daima dropped out of school when she was 9 years old, before she learned to read or write. For three years, she followed behind her mother as they looked for work and occasionally sold vegetables at the market.

At 12 Daima travelled to Chowe township to start her first job as a housemaid for a family of four. She washed, cleaned, cooked and took care of a 5-year-old, earning about 2,000 Kwacha a month, just under US$3. She saved up money, sending it to her mother every couple of months.

After losing her job because she didn’t get along with a family member, she returned home at 15. She met a 22-year-old man and started spending a lot of time with him. "My mother encouraged me to get married, to avoid a pregnancy out of wedlock. So, we did our nikah (marriage) and I moved in with him."

Together they make a living farming, but it troubles Daima she is unable to read. She is particularly concerned because she can’t understand signposts. "There are signposts everywhere I go and I’d like to know what they say."

So, when the village chief announced a programme for girls who had dropped out of school to learn to read and write, Daima decided to enroll. The programme runs for nine months and classes are held from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday.

Since the programme started, more than 6,000 girls have completed the course, and some of them have returned to regular school.

The programme is one of the interventions within the UN Joint Programme for Girls Education (UNJPGE) funded by the Norwegian Government. UNICEF and its partners run the programme in Malawi’s Mangochi, Dedza and Salima districts.