



DRAFT REPORT

IN-DEPTH POLICY ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY GAPS IN EDUCATION POLICIES AND PUBLIC BUDGETS RELATED TO GIRLS AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSEC	Civil Society Education Coalition
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
EQUALS	Equity with Quality and Learning at Secondary
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
JSR	Joint Sector Review
MANEB	Malawi National Examination Board
MERP	Malawi Education Reform Project
MIP-I	Malawi 2063 First 10-Year Implementation Plan
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
NEP	National Education Policy
NESIP	National Education Sector Investment Plan
NGES	National Girls Education Strategy
NIEP	National Inclusive Education Policy
NSIE	National Strategy on Inclusive Education
ODeL	Open Distance and e-Learning
ORT	Other Recurrent Transactions
PBB	Program-Based Budget
PE	Personal Emoluments
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIG	School Improvement Grant
SN	Special Needs
SNE	Special Needs Education
SNLCs	Special Needs Learning Centres
TLMs	Teaching and Learning Materials
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

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Benedicto Kondowe

Executive Director - CSEC

Executive Summary

This report presents findings and recommendations of an in-depth policy analysis to identify gaps in education policies and public budgets related to girls and children with disabilities. The analysis was commissioned by CSEC with financial support from the Global Partnership for Education through Oxfam Ibis. It aimed at conducting an in-depth analysis of Malawi's education policies, identifying gaps and challenges related to the education of girls and children with disabilities; reviewing public budgets over the last five financial years (2020/21 - 2024/25) to assess allocations and expenditures aimed at supporting Girls and special needs (SN) education; and providing actionable recommendations to enhance policy frameworks and resource allocation alignment for SN, gender-responsive, and equitable education.

The policy and budget analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. In particular, it consisted of; 1) a desk review of several inclusive education-related policies, strategies and legislations for Malawi; National development plans; budget documents; previous education budget analysis and

expenditure tracking reports; and other key international and local literature related to girls and inclusive education; and 2) key informant interviews with purposively sampled respondents at National level.

The desk review was the initial step of the assignment, enabling the research team to identify policy aspirations and proposals for improving the inclusion and support of girls and children with disabilities in education, including the alignment of the budget. It also highlighted gaps and challenges in the implementation of related interventions, the country's commitments to education financing, progress made, and previous budget gaps as outlined in prior reports by CSEC and key education partners. Primary data collection followed to gather in-depth information, including verifying budget data from the literature review..

Budget data was entered and analyzed quantitatively using an Excel template, while qualitative data from interviews was analyzed through content analysis and presented as anecdotes to contextualize key issues. The data was then summarized according to the thematic areas of the study. Below are the key findings and proposed recommendations from the analysis:

Key Findings

Part A: Policy Analysis

On a positive note, the country has made tremendous progress and achievement in creating and facilitating an enabling environment for an inclusive and gender balanced education system by developing a number of strategic policy and legal frameworks. The frameworks integrate inclusive education and aligns with various international education related policy frameworks, strategies and protocols such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), African agenda 2063, Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), Education for All (EFA), Jomtien (1990), Dakar (1991), Ouagadougou (1993) and Copenhagen and Beijing (1995) which recognize the importance of making education available to all regardless of gender and disability. They also provide a broader base for action and opportunity for ganging up support and resources both human and financial resource for inclusive and gender-balanced education system and programmes in the country. While these policies emphasize on inclusive education, there are still significant gaps and challenges requiring Government intervention. Below is a summary of the issues from the policy review:

- There are still significant gaps in the physical infrastructure of schools as many schools remain inaccessible to children with mobility challenges, such as inadequate ramps or accessible toilets and special resource rooms. For example, in 2024, the secondary schools had a total on 55 resource rooms against an enrolment of 15,032. This could be detrimental especially given the increasing enrolment rates.
- There are disparities in the number of teachers who are located in the rural or hard to reach schools where the Pupil - Qualified Teacher Ratio (PQTR) may be very high. In view of this, teachers may not have sufficient time to address the diverse needs of children with disabilities, particularly in large classes with limited resources. This is especially concerning for girls with disabilities, who may be overlooked or marginalized in the classroom.
- Performance disparities in special needs education (SNE) and across gender. In 2024 alone, male candidates outperformed females, with a 60.87% pass rate for males compared to 48.15% for females in 2024. The same applies for SNE candidates where the male SNE candidates performed better than their female counterparts.

- Dropout rates for females are consistently higher than those of males which highlights a potential gender disparity in primary education retention. For example, the 2024 education Joint Sector Review (JSR) Report shows that 227,102 learners dropped out of primary school, 114,791 (51%) being female against 112,311 males (49%); and 24,371 in secondary school of which 14,622 (60%) were females and 9,749 (40%) males.
- The national curriculum and learning materials are not always tailored to the needs of children with disabilities. For instance, there is a lack of Braille textbooks or materials in alternative formats, as well as a lack of sign language interpreters for deaf students. For girls with disabilities, this gap is more pronounced as there may be additional gender-specific barriers related to teaching methods or materials that are not gender-sensitive.
- While the National Inclusive Education Policy (NIEP) and National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) aim for inclusion, they do not adequately address the intersectionality of gender and disability. Girls with disabilities face both gender discrimination and discrimination based on their disabilities.
- While the Education and Gender Acts acknowledges the importance of equitable access to education and elimination of gender disparities, they fall short of clearly addressing specific needs of girls and children with disabilities. The Education Act, for example, emphasizes inclusive education and yet lacks detailed guidelines on how schools can adapt to accommodate diverse learners such as those requiring assistive devices, gender sensitive facilities and pedagogy. Without these specifications, schools are left to implement inclusive education based on general principles, which often results in inadequate support and facilities for these learners. The Gender Act on the other hand, has minimal education specific provisions including failing to address practical challenges such as menstrual hygiene management, gender-based violence in schools, and sex for grades issues in Universities.
- There is also weak enforcement of the Acts leading to inconsistent application across the country. An example is the provision for compulsory education in the Education Act of which 11 years down after its enactment it is not enforced. This lack of enforcement has led to a significant number of children, particularly girls and those with disabilities, remaining outside the formal education system.
- Despite the National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP) making significant strides in promoting access to quality education, gaps remain in the strategic framework. While it commits to enhancing primary and secondary education, there is limited focus on skills development and learning opportunities beyond formal schooling, areas that are emphasized in global and regional frameworks. Additionally, while it has a strong focus on increasing enrolment, such as expanding infrastructure and promoting free primary education, strategies to ensure retention particularly for girls are insufficiently detailed. It lacks an outline of detailed provisions for addressing key retention challenges, particularly those related to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and stigma against learners with disabilities.
- The re-admission policy reveals gaps, particularly in addressing the broader spectrum of inclusive education. While it effectively caters for barriers related to re-admission for girls and learners with special needs, it places limited emphasis on the reintegration of learners into skill-based or alternative education pathways.

Part B: Budget Analysis

- The sector was allocated MK 900 billion (up from MK 662 billion), representing a 35% and 4% nominal and real increase and 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the budget is less than the 20% United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) and 6% GDP target.
- There has been a 107% increase in development budget from MK 101 billion to MK 210 billion reflecting a commitment by Government to infrastructure development. However, 86% of the development budget is from donors raising concerns about sustainability and ownership of initiatives amid increased development expenditure.
- Department of SNE (basic) has been allocated MK 1.1 billion, an increase of 47% from the MK 0.7 billion allocated in 2023/24 financial year. MK 488 million (up from MK 400 million) has been provided for Montfort College for training SNE Teachers but remains inadequate to accommodate meaningful enrolment of SNE Teachers. An additional MK 150 million has been provided for training 150 SNE Teachers at Machinga Teachers Training College (TTC) through Open Distance and e-Learning (Odel). This may slightly improve the SNE Teacher: Pupil Ratio in some schools.
- The study also established that only 155 people with disabilities were enrolled in public universities during 2023/24, reflecting significant accessibility challenges. Lack of disability-friendly facilities further hampers their educational experience, hindering diversity and inclusivity efforts.
- There has been a huge increase (179%) in allocation for Centrally procured Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) i.e. from MK 3.2 billion to MK 8.8 billion. Of the MK 8.8 billion, MK 3 billion (up from MK 1.3 billion – 73%) is for TLMs for primary education, MK 4.8 billion (up from MK 1.2 billion – 300%) for TLMs for secondary education and MK 1 billion (MK 500 million for secondary and MK 500 million for primary) for special needs TLMs under inclusive education Department at the Ministry of Education Headquarters. However, only MK 3.2 billion (up by 33% from MK 2.4 billion) has been provided for TLMs within Local Council's Other Recurrent Transactions (ORT) budget. This highlights potential inefficiencies and the importance of transparent procurement practices, which could limit institutions' ability to tailor materials to their needs including those that relate to girls and children with disabilities.
- Malawi National Examination Board's (MANEB)'s recurrent budget surged by K5 billion (63%) from K7 billion to K12 billion. This hike should lead to scrapping Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations (PSLCE) fees for 2024/25, considering that primary education is free, and that the budget should ensure aiding for those unable to pay for Junior Certificate Examinations (JCE) or Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), especially girls.
- In the 2024/25 approved budget, Government allocated funds to two SNE and Malawi 2063 first 10-year implementation plan (MIP-I) flagship projects. The projects include construction of the SNE

Institute and Special Needs Learning Centres (SNLCs) with each project getting MK 1.5 billion. Sadly, at mid-year resources for construction of SNLCs were removed. Construction of 100 Girls hostels in Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) also saw MK 2.6 billion out of the approved MK 3 billion being removed at mid-year. The reduction of the resources targeting girls and inclusive education signal a concerning trend that jeopardizes efforts to address educational inequalities and reflect a de-prioritization of critical initiatives aimed at improving access to education for marginalized groups, including girls and learners with special needs.

Recommendations

In view of these findings, the study has made the following recommendations:

- **Focus on Skills Development and Lifelong Learning:** There is need for the policy frameworks to enhance the focus on skills development and Lifelong Learning. This could be done by developing specific programs and policies that focus on skills development beyond formal schooling, aligned with global frameworks such as the SDGs.
- **Retention Strategies for Girls and learners with special needs:** The frameworks could be enhanced by Including detailed provisions addressing retention challenges such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and stigma against learners with special needs. This can include developing comprehensive community engagement strategies that put local leaders, parents, and civil society organizations in the fore front in implementing inclusive education initiatives. In addition to this, flexible learning options could be created in partnership with community-based programs to support them.
- **Integrate Financial Commitments for Inclusive and girls Education:** It is important that there be a clear inclusion of financial commitments for the implementation of inclusive and girls' education policies, focusing on essential resources. For instance, the Ministry of Education could set up a dedicated fund within the education budget specifically for assistive devices, infrastructure improvements and teacher trainings thereby ring-fencing the resources and assuring sustainability of implementation.
- **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation systems:** To enhance the effectiveness of girls and inclusive education, it is highly recommended to develop a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation system to track outcomes and identify bottlenecks. This system should include a centralized database to monitor key indicators and education outcomes for all learners specifically those with special needs. Regular reviews should be conducted to analyze progress and provide feedback to policymakers and educators.
- **Develop communication strategy:** A nationwide sensitization campaign aimed at highlighting provisions in the various Acts and policies in relation to promoting special needs and girls' education is critical to addressing existing disparities in access to quality education. The strategy should focus on creating awareness about the importance of education, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive attitudes towards the inclusive education. Aligning the communication strategy with national

policies and global commitments to education will contribute significantly to creating a more visibility for inclusive and equitable educational environment for all learners.

- **Enhanced Domestic Revenue Mobilization:** prioritize efforts to enhance domestic revenue mobilization to reduce reliance on donor funding and ensure long-term sustainability of education initiatives. Address issues to do with illicit financial flows which are causing Government to lose MK 1.2 trillion annually (Tax Justice Network Africa).
- **Efficient Resource Allocation:** allocate resources in a manner that reflects the diverse needs of the education sector, ensuring adequate funding for critical areas such as ECD, SNE, and vocational training.
- **Reassessing Political Programs:** the heavy investment in AIP and CDF lacks clear prioritization. Reallocating these funds to ensure the completion of projects such as girls' hostels and SNLCs could yield more tangible benefits. Additionally, a 100% increase in CDF should translate to increased bursaries for needy students including girls.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** explore innovative financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships or education bonds, to diversify funding sources and reduce dependence on external assistance.
- **Investment in Infrastructure and Facilities:** allocate sufficient resources for the construction and maintenance of educational infrastructures, including classrooms, laboratories, and sanitation facilities, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This include making the facilities disability-friendly.
- Solve issues to do with restricted spaces for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education by among other things ensuring equitable distribution of infrastructure projects especially those targeting girls and children with disabilities.
- Scrap off PSLCE exam fees for 2024/25, considering that primary education is free and ensure aiding for those unable to pay for JCE and MSCE especially girls.
- Decentralize fully resources for bursaries and TLMS for special needs education. This also includes ring-fencing all resources for SNE.
- Advocacy for long-term investment in inclusive education should be intensified, emphasizing its critical role in achieving gender equity, reducing educational disparities, and fostering sustainable development.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This report presents findings and recommendations of an in-depth policy analysis to identify gaps in education policies and public budgets related to girls and children with disabilities. The analysis was commissioned by CSEC who are implementing a project with financial support from the Global Partnership for Education through Oxfam Ibis. The project aims at enhancing Civil Society Organizations' participation in improving access and equity of girls and children with disability. The policy and budget analysis is therefore one of the key interventions under the project.

1.2 Overall Objective of the Analysis

The main objective of the policy and budget analysis was to conduct an in-depth policy analysis to identify gaps in education policies and public budgets related to girls and children with disabilities.

1.2.1 Specific objectives

Specifically, the analysis sought to address the following objectives:

- Conduct an in-depth analysis of Malawi's education policies, identifying gaps and challenges related to the education of girls and children with disabilities.
- Review public budgets over the last five financial years (2020/21 - 2024/25) to assess allocations and expenditures aimed at supporting Girls and SN education.
- Provide actionable recommendations to enhance policy frameworks and resource allocation for SN, gender-responsive, and equitable education.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The report is organized into five chapters. Chapters one and two provide an introduction to the assignment and the methodology used in conducting the policy analysis, respectively. An overview of key findings emanating from the policy analysis has been provided in chapter three. Further, chapter four contains findings on the budget analysis. Conclusions and recommendations for the study have been provided in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, targeted participants, and analytical approach employed to review the education policies and budgets.

2.1 Design

The assignment was largely designed as a desk research. It involved review of several education and gender-related policies, strategies and legislations for Malawi; National development plans; budget documents; previous education budget analysis and expenditure tracking reports; and other key international and local literature related to girls and inclusive education. Additionally, the review was complemented by input from the various stakeholders that were consulted and participated in the national validation workshop. In terms of detailed methodology, the subsequent sections highlight the step-by-step approach that were employed.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Budget Analysis

On budget analysis, the research team collected a number of documents broadly categorized as budget documents, national development plans, international education and gender related frameworks and resolutions/instruments as well as previous education budget analysis reports. The budget documents, which included State of National Address (SONA), broad budget speech (budget document number 1), annual economic report (budget document number 2), financial statement (budget document number 3), detailed estimates book – Volume II (budget document number 4), Program Based Budget (PBB) – budget document number 5, Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP) – budget document number 6, and the 2024/25 mid-term budget review document. Other documents to complement the analysis included; MW Vision 2063 and its first 10-year implementation plan (MIP-I), National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP, 2020 – 2030), education budget analysis and expenditure reports produced by CSEC and other partners like UNICEF, education Joint Sector Review Reports, among others.

The team then reviewed the documents to establish the overall national budget and other fiscal proposals/developments within the budget. Of specific interest was how the national budget has funded the education sector budget in general and specific programs of interest including SNE and girls' education, in particular – over the past 5 years; gaps in sectors financing and other challenges related to girls and inclusive education.

2.2.2 Policy Analysis

On policy analysis, the team collected and reviewed various local and international education related legislations, policies and strategies including their implementation plan and monitoring and evaluation (M & E) frameworks in order to identify gaps and challenges regarding the inclusion and support of girls and children with disabilities; evaluate how well such policies align with international and national commitments; and assess their effectiveness in addressing barriers to access, retention, and quality education. Such legislations, policies and strategies included; Education Act of 2013, Gender Equality Act of 2015, Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, Continental Education Strategy for Africa, Malawi Agenda 2063,

MIP-I, National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP) 2020-30, National Strategy on Inclusive Education Strategy 2017-2021, Re-admission Policy, National Inclusive Education Policy, National Education Policy, National Girls' Education Strategy (NGES) 2018–2023, Re-Admission Policy (201-2022), National Gender Policy 2015, among others.

Throughout the analysis consistency, coherency and efficiency was used as a framework. Consistency in terms of how the goals set in the documents reviewed are linked to the global and national protocols, and policy statements. Coherence in terms of whether there is rationality in the way the policy documents were organized to achieve their goals. Efficiency in this case focused on whether both qualitative and quantitative outputs were achieved within the implementation period.

The collection of the budget and policy documents, therefore, extended to Ministry of Finance (source of funding), National Local Government Finance Committee (coordinating institution for all District Councils as regards budget formulation, implementation and monitoring including disbursement of resources for procurement of TLMS), Ministry of Education (line Ministry), Ministry of Gender (disability and gender responsiveness of the education budget), Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (policy holder of local governance and management of local funds), among others.

2.3 Sampling

Some respondents were purposefully sampled to validate/triangulate findings, verify some of the budget figures obtained from the budget documents and complement the results from the policy review. The respondents were drawn from the line Ministries Departments and Agencies key for this assignment as presented in section 2 above and other key stakeholders in the gender and disability sectors. Such respondents included: Budget Officers from the Ministries of Finance and Economic Affairs, Education, Gender, and Local Government; Economist from Ministries of Education and Gender; Gender Officer from the Ministry of Gender; and an official from Malawi Council of Disability Affairs (MACODA – formerly MACOHA).

2.4 Data Collection Tools

The main data collection instrument was an interviewer-administered semi-structured key informant questionnaire which was administered to the respondents highlighted above.

2.5 Data Collection & Quality Assurance

Primary data was collected using the semi-structured questionnaires highlighted above for about 3 days whilst budget data sourced from the various budget documents was collected using an excel template designed to fit this purpose. Before initiating the discussions, participants were briefed on the purpose and objectives of the study. Verbal consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity provided to all participants. This ethical approach fostered a safe environment for participants to share their perspectives and experiences freely. The key informant interviews offered valuable insights into the unique challenges and solutions related to education targeting girls and children with disabilities.

To ensure quality of the data and processes for the assignment:

- a) The team ensured that each team member participating in the assignment will be a member who has been trained and is conversant with the study and data collection procedures.
- b) The team designated an Internal Quality Assurance person to review questionnaires submitted in the excel matrix not later than a day after the field work.
- c) The team regularly provided feedback and sought policy and technical direction from the Technical Team that was assembled by the Client.
- d) The process of compiling reports was automated as much as possible to ensure: standardization, curb mistakes, make the process easier, allow for deeper analysis, and to avoid manipulation of report.

These measures were complemented by other measures that were implemented by the Client including data review and update sessions with CSEC, validation of the reports by the Client, and assigning a technical team to support the process.

2.6 Data Analysis and Report Writing

The collected budget data was entered and analyzed using an excel template which was populated with information collected through the various budget documents highlighted and from the two districts. The data was summarized according to the thematic areas that the study sought to assess. Normative views and perceptions were analyzed manually through content analysis and reported as anecdotes to contextualize quantitative results. The narrative report has been developed in Microsoft word and prepared based on analytical information made from the analysis highlighted above.

2.7 Presentation of the Report to Key Stakeholders

The research team presented preliminary findings of the study to various stakeholders in the education and gender sectors including Members of Parliament. The objective of the presentation was to lobby with the key stakeholders, especially MPs, on the notable budget and policy gaps/shortfalls and also afford the stakeholders an opportunity to understand results of the assignment, comment on and input into the report before further action is taken by the contracting authority. After getting feedback, the Consultants incorporated the same into the document. The final report, thus after validation, has been submitted to CSEC as the final output of the assignment.

2.8 Ethical Consideration

The following ethical issues were considered when carrying out this study:

- The team obtained approval from relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Education;
- There was a verbal informed consent;
- To reduce risk of response bias, Government respondents were informed that the purpose of the interviews will not be to assess their performance or contributions, but to describe the overall implementation of the budget and policies, so that their social risk from participation should be minimized;
- During data analysis and report writing, areas captured verbatim have been kept anonymous;

- Using the data solely for the purpose of informing the review and development of nutrition strategies; and
- No material/financial benefits will be promised to the participants.

2.9 Limitations

There were no serious limitation in this study except the failure by the research team to collect detailed work plans and budgets from the Ministries of Gender and Education including their revised budgets in view of the mid-year budget revisions. The team therefore relied on the approved budget and mid-year budget review report to provide insights regarding general mid-year budget changes and implications on implementation of policies and interventions related to girls and children with disabilities.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS FROM THE POLICY ANALYSIS

3.1 Historical Context of Special Needs Education in Malawi

Formal education in Malawi for special needs specifically focussed on Visual impairment, started in 1950 when the Dutch Reformed Church established Chilanga School for the Blind in Kasungu and the African Evangelical Fellowship established Lulwe School for the Blind in Nsanje. In 1965, Education Centre for the Blind was established by the Brothers of Immaculate Conception of the Roman Catholic Church to support the education of learners with visual impairment. In 1968, the Brothers of Immaculate Conception established a Special Needs Education Teacher Training College at Montfort Campus in Chiradzulu district where the college has been training specialist teachers for learners with hearing impairment. In addition to this, Maryview School for the Deaf was established in 1971.

The Government's commitment to embracing inclusive education was enhanced through the Education Development Plan from 1962 to 1967 which planned for Universal Primary Education subsequently culminated in the introduction of Free Primary Education in 1994. Formal education for learners with learning difficulties however, started in 1996 by the Government of Malawi with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 5th Country Programme after noting that some learners with disabilities were not attended to because they were not physically manifested.

As of now, the provision of SNE services for learners is done primarily through special schools and resource centres and through itinerant teaching programmes across all levels of education in the country.

3.2 Education System in Malawi

The education system in Malawi comprises Basic Education, Secondary Education, Teacher Education, and Tertiary Education. Basic Education consists of Early Childhood Development (ECD), Complementary Basic Education (CBE), Adult Literacy (AL) and Primary Education; and Tertiary Education consists of Universities, Colleges, Technical and Vocational Education.

Primary education is an eight-year cycle and runs from Standard 1 through Standard 8 where learners sit for PSLCE after which upon passing allows them entry into Secondary education. Secondary education lasts four years and students sit for the MSCE in form 4 and this allows them entry into tertiary education. The number of years to complete tertiary education varies depending on the course or programme being pursued and ranges from one year to five years.

3.3 Policy Frameworks

Malawi Education system is governed by a range of legislations, policies and strategic frameworks aimed at fostering equitable and inclusive education. Regardless of the numerous frameworks in the sector, the assignment went to specifically review key policy documents namely: Education Act of 2013, Gender Equality Act of 2015, Continental Education Strategy for Africa, Malawi Agenda 2063, MIP-I, NESIP 2020-30, National Strategy on Inclusive Education 2017-2021, National Inclusive Education Policy, National Education Policy, NGES 2018–2023, Re-Admission Policy (201-2022), and National Gender Policy 2015.

Inclusive Education (IE) and gender are crosscutting issues that impact all levels of education. Learners with special educational needs, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and girls continue to face significant barriers to equitable access to quality education, which contradicts the commitment to leaving no one behind as outlined in SDG 4. It is however very crucial to recognize that the educational needs of these three groups differ significantly, and each group requires targeted interventions tailored to their unique circumstances.

All these are aligned to Malawi 2063 and most specifically in MIP-1 under the Human Capital Enabler. NESIP includes SNE in the cross-cutting category.

3.4 Legislations

3.4.1 Malawi Education Act 2013

The Malawi 2013 amended Education Act establishes a legal framework for ensuring universal education, with provisions that theoretically promote inclusivity. The Act underscores the importance of addressing barriers to education through legislative reforms and policies that promote inclusivity. It places a strong emphasis on creating a supportive environment for girls' education, aiming to reduce gender disparities by implementing measures to combat cultural and systemic barriers that hinder girls' access to education. The Act recognizes the need for inclusive practices to support learners with special needs, advocating for mainstreaming these learners into regular schools rather than segregated institutions.

3.4.2 Gender Equality Act 2013

The Gender Equality Act provides a strong legal framework for promoting gender equity across various sectors including Education. Ministry of Gender are the policy holders and they provide that oversight function to ensure that its provisions and implemented by different sectors. The Act aims to completely eliminate gender discrimination and foster equal opportunities for girls and boys. Part V of the act i.e. education and training, emphasizes equality in access to education and training. Among the provisions under this part of the act include that, except in the cases of special need, the Government shall take active measures to ensure that educational institutions provide equal access to girls and boys and women and men, to i) the same curricula and examination, ii) teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard, iii) institutional premises and equipment of the same quality, irrespective of sex of students at the same level, and iv) provision of sanitary facilities that take into account the specific needs of the sex of students. Additionally, the act provides for equal access to scholarship; enrollment at tertiary education institutions of either sex to a minimum of forty per cent and a maximum of sixty per cent of students; integration of gender issues and human rights issues in the curriculum at all levels; addressing the special needs of female students by incorporating life skills, including sex education, in the curriculum; and introducing subjects that enhance the integration of female students in disciplines that are traditionally male-dominated.

3.5 Policies and Strategic Frameworks

3.5.1 International Education Policies, Strategic Frameworks and Commitments

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (of 1948) emphasizes that education should be free and compulsory; with each and every individual attaining a minimum level of education. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR) also recognizes that the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Specifically article 13 of the covenant state that: (a) primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all; (b) secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education; (c) higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education; (d) fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education; (e) the development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

The African Charter on the rights of the child also points out that basic education should be free and compulsory. In essence, these three conventions have specifically isolated basic education as the minimum level of education designated for free and compulsory attendance.

In addition, Article 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) mandates member states to make primary education compulsory and available free to all.

More importantly, Sustainable Development Goals, specifically goal number four, compels member states to provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all.

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa also offers a comprehensive framework for transforming education system across the African continent. It emphasizes on access, equity, and quality.

Malawi just like any country in the region utilizes these frameworks as a guiding document to align its national policies with global and regional standards.

3.5.2 Malawi 2063 and MIP-I

The country's development agenda is driven by the Malawi 2063 (MW2063) vision which aspires to foster youth-centric "inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance" to propel the country to an industrialized upper middle income country by 2063. The income status shall be inclusive for all citizenry without leaving anyone behind to enjoy a good quality life. As a blue print for national development, it positions education as a cornerstone of the Country's long-term development agenda. It highlights human capital development and social inclusion as a key priority. Key to mention that among the game changer interventions for developing human capital in the agenda is intensifying education of the girl child and economically empowering women.

The MIP-I, on the other hand, which is meant to operationalize MW2063 in the first 10 years up to 2030 also stresses the importance of inclusive education. The plan has proposed various key interventions targeting

human capital development, and most importantly promoting inclusive education. The following are some of the key interventions:

- Strengthening child policies and legislative frameworks that provide an enabling environment for children to grow into full potential;
- Construct standardized gender and disability-friendly ECD infrastructures;
- Support marginalized students across all levels of education;
- Build Special Needs Learning Centres in every education zone;
- Train a critical mass of teachers for special needs education;
- Construct a special needs education institute;
- Establish an inclusive non-formal education program; and
- Provide adequate and relevant TLMs such as textbooks, teachers guides, lab equipment, desks including special needs TLMs for all primary, secondary and tertiary schools.

3.5.3 National Education Sector Investment Plan 2020 - 2030

The National Education Sector Investment Plan 2020–2030 incorporates inclusive education as a crosscutting theme, highlighting various priority actions under the following strategic objectives across all levels of the education system: i) improve access and equity to quality education through the implementation of inclusive education, ii) improve the quality-of-service provision in inclusive education, and iii) improve governance and management of inclusive education. It outlines plans to construct disability-friendly infrastructure and provide learning materials tailored to children with special needs. The NESIP also prioritizes teacher training programs that include methods for inclusive education, aiming to foster a supportive learning to reduce gender inequalities and enhance participation of women, men, girls and boys in socio economic development processes.

3.5.4 Re-admission policy for primary and secondary schools (2018 – 2023)

The Re-admission policy for primary and secondary schools aims to guide the re-admission of learners who drop out of school due to various factors including pregnancy, disability, or other socio-economic challenges. Its objective is to improve equitable access, retention, and completion of education, among girls and boys. It aligns with the principles of the National Education Policy of 2016 and responds to strategies outlined in the NESIP 2020–2030. Specifically, the policy focuses on reforming education access by enabling all learners, including girls and those with special needs, to continue learning in the same environment without stigma or discrimination.

3.5.5 National Gender Policy 2015

The purpose of the policy is to strengthen gender mainstreaming and women empowerment at all levels in order to facilitate attainment of gender equality and equity in Malawi. Its goal is to reduce gender inequalities and enhance participation of women, men, girls and boys in socio economic development processes. The policy therefore outlines the strategies for mainstreaming gender across all sectors by emphasizing the empowerment of women and girls.

3.5.6 National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017 – 2021)

The National Inclusive Education Strategy 2017-2021 vision was to have an education that promotes access, participation, and achievement of diverse learners at all levels by 2022. The goal of the strategy was to implement the Inclusive policies stipulated in the National Educational Policy of 2016 and respond to the strategies provided in the National Education Sector Plan of 2008 to 2017. Most specifically, the strategy focused on reforming Inclusive Education in the country by striving to enable all children and young people to learn together in the same environment without discrimination rather than in segregated schools and colleges. This demonstrates a strong commitment to integrating inclusive education at all levels of the education system. It also emphasized on building capacity for teachers and education leadership to implement inclusive practices effectively. Furthermore, the policy addresses key issues such as gender equity and child protection by proposing strategies to reduce cultural barriers and eliminate harmful practices that hinder education access.

3.5.7 National Girls' Education Strategy (2018 – 2023)

The National Girls' Education Strategy 2018–2023 sets a clear goal to remove barriers that hinder girls' education, enabling them to access, excel in, and complete their education. The strategy effectively addresses socio-cultural, economic, and systemic challenges through initiatives such as girl-friendly school infrastructure and menstrual hygiene management. In summary, the objectives of the policy framework, hinge on access to quality education to both SNE and girls.

3.5.8 National Education Policy 2013

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2013 spells out government policy on education. It outlines the sector's priorities and defines the country's education policies that will guide the development of the education sector in Malawi. The NEP acknowledges government's commitment to related international protocols such as the EFA, Jomtien (1990), Dakar (1991), Ouagadougou (1993) and Copenhagen and Beijing (1995) which recognize the importance of making education available to all. The NEP is framed on five priority areas namely: i) quality, accessible and equitable basic education; ii) accessible and quality secondary education; iii) quality teacher education (Primary and Secondary); iv) quality and equitably accessed technical, entrepreneurial and vocational education and training; and v) quality and equitably accessed higher education.

3.6 Alignment: Policies Versus SDGs and Other Commitments

The NEP aligns significantly to SDG 4 and SDG 5 through its commitment to improving access to education for all learners, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, or disability. It aims for gender equality in access to education and the removal of socio-economic and gender barriers.

The NESIP demonstrates strong alignment with SDG 4 and SDG 5 by incorporating themes of access, equity, quality, and governance. It explicitly integrates global and regional commitments such as the CESA and the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, which emphasize gender equality and inclusive education. Furthermore, the NESIP's strategic objectives resonate with Malawi 2063 and MIP-1, particularly its focus on using education to drive socio-economic development. However, the NESIP's emphasis on enrolment

overshadows retention strategies, which are critical for sustaining alignment with SDG 4. Additionally, the plan's financial projections reveal gaps in funding, which could jeopardize its ability to achieve these commitments.

The NIES aligns significantly with SDG 4, particularly the goal to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. In line with SDG 5, it ensures women and girls with disabilities have access to equal educational resources. It recognizes education as a human right and incorporates strategies to accommodate children with disabilities and marginalized groups. The policy also echoes the principles of the CRPD by advocating for the removal of systemic barriers in education and fostering environments that support all learners. However, its alignment falters in the absence of measurable targets and timeframes for achieving its objectives. While it references international commitments, the lack of a robust implementation framework undermines its potential to meet these global standards fully.

The NGES demonstrates alignment with the SDG 4 and 5 by addressing key education themes of access, equity, and quality, specifically targeting barriers to girls' education such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and socio-economic challenges. The NGES explicitly integrates global and regional commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the African Continental Education Strategy for Africa CESA, which prioritize gender equality and inclusive education. Furthermore, the NGES's focus on promoting girls' retention and completion of education resonates with the Malawi 2063 and MIP-1, particularly its emphasis on empowerment of girls through education and subsequently, human capital development.

The Re-admission Policy alignment with SDG 4 can be isolated through the policy priority areas which address equitable access, retention, and completion of education for all marginalized learners. It resonates with commitments to the CESA and the AU Agenda 2063, which underscore inclusive education and gender equity. The policy focuses on creating stigma-free, supportive environments for re-admitted learners and provides mechanisms for counselling, psychosocial support, and community engagement. It also aligns with the National Education Policy of 2016 and the National Education Sector Plan by emphasizing inclusivity, ensuring no learner is left behind, and promoting equal opportunities for all to complete their education.

The National Gender Policy is aligned to SDG 4 as it focuses on inclusive education for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, and tackling gender inequalities in education. It also aligns to SDG 5 as it ensures that gender discrimination in education is addressed, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Table below provides a summary of how each of the legislations, policies and strategic frameworks aligns to the various local, international and regional gender and education commitments to which Malawi is a signatory to.

Table 1: Alignment of Malawi's Education and Gender policies to SDGs and other commitments

	Policy/framework	SDG 4 Targets	SDG 5 Targets	Other Commitments
1	NESIP 2020-30	Target 4.1: Ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education.	Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.	Malawi 2063, MIP-1: Education for all as a key investment area
		Target 4.c: Increase the supply of qualified teachers.	Target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls	AU Agenda 2063: Aspiration 1
2	Re-admission Policy	4.1: Ensure free and equitable quality education.	Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.	Constitution of Malawi (Right to Education) and Education Act (2013)
		4.a: Build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools.	Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres.	NESIP and NGES.
		4.5: Eliminate education disparities.	Target 5.5: Ensure women's full participation in leadership and decision-making.	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, CRC, CEDAW.
		4.c: Increase the supply of qualified teachers.	Target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.	United Nations SDG Commitments, National Gender Policy (2011).
3	National Gender Policy 2015	Target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities and ensure access for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities.	Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.	CEDAW and CRPD.

4	NIES	Target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities and ensure access for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities.	Target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources.	CRPD: Articles 24 (Education)
		Target 4.a: Build inclusive and safe schools.	Target 5.b: Enhance the use of enabling technology, particularly information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.	Malawi 2063, MIP 1: Human Capital Development Enabler
5	NGES	Target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities.	Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.	CRPD: Rights of girls with disabilities.
		4.a: Build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools.		NESIP

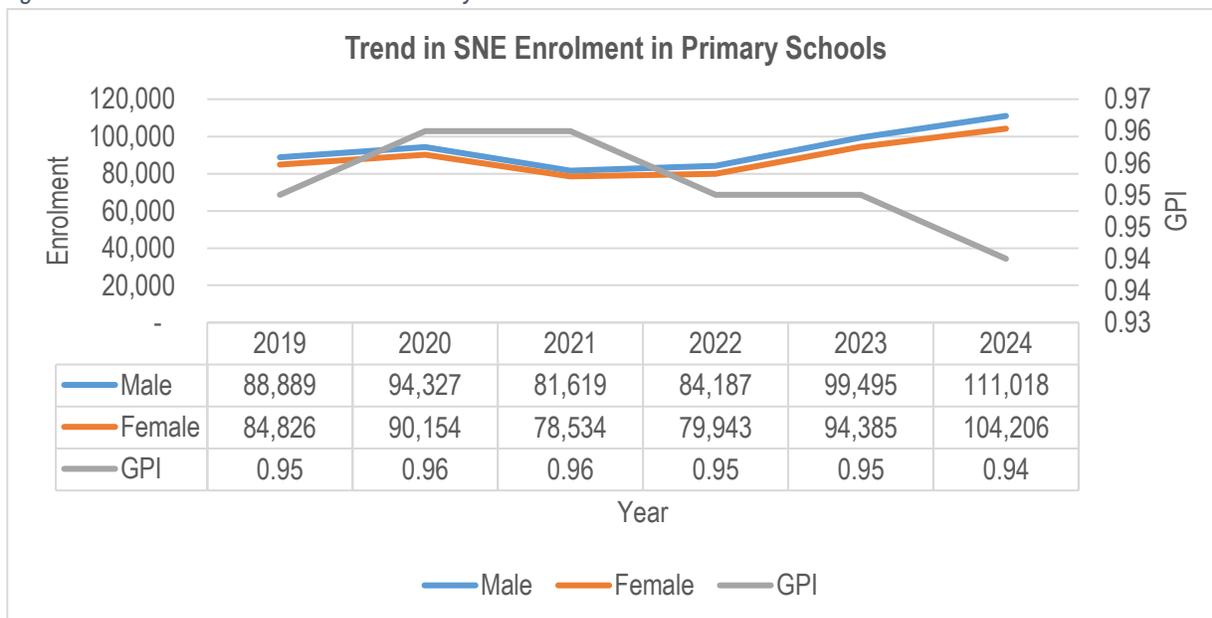
3.7 Implementation Status of Policies, Strategic Frameworks and Legislations

3.7.1 Access to Education

SNE enrolment gives a measure of access to education can give a broad idea of the efforts being implemented in order to ensure that learners with SNE are not left behind in accessing education. On the other hand, Gender Parity Index (GPI) which is the ratio of female to male learners gives a further glimpse to the participation at all levels of education. A GPI equal to 1 indicates parity between females and males whilst a value less than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of males; and a value greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of females.

According to the Ministry of Education Annual School Census reports, the trend in enrolment rates for SNE has been steadily increasing over the years simultaneously to the net enrolment rates. In 2016, the primary school subsector registered a total enrolment of 4,901,009 learners of which 120,027 were SNE learners representing 2.4% of the total enrolment. In the same year, the Secondary subsector registered 260,064 learners of which 1.5% were SNE (Ministry of Education, 2016). The enrolment rates for learners with special needs increased to 215,224 representing 4.0% of total primary school enrolment in 2024. on the other hand, the SNE enrolment rates for the secondary schools increased to 15,032 representing 2.8% of the total secondary school enrolment. Concurrently, this is the period during which the NIES was been implemented and therefore, we can attribute that all things being constant, the interventions have assisted in increasing access to SNE learners as evident by the increase of the enrolment of SNE learners. The figures below provide a trend analysis of SNE enrolment and GPI for the past 5 years in both the primary and secondary schools.

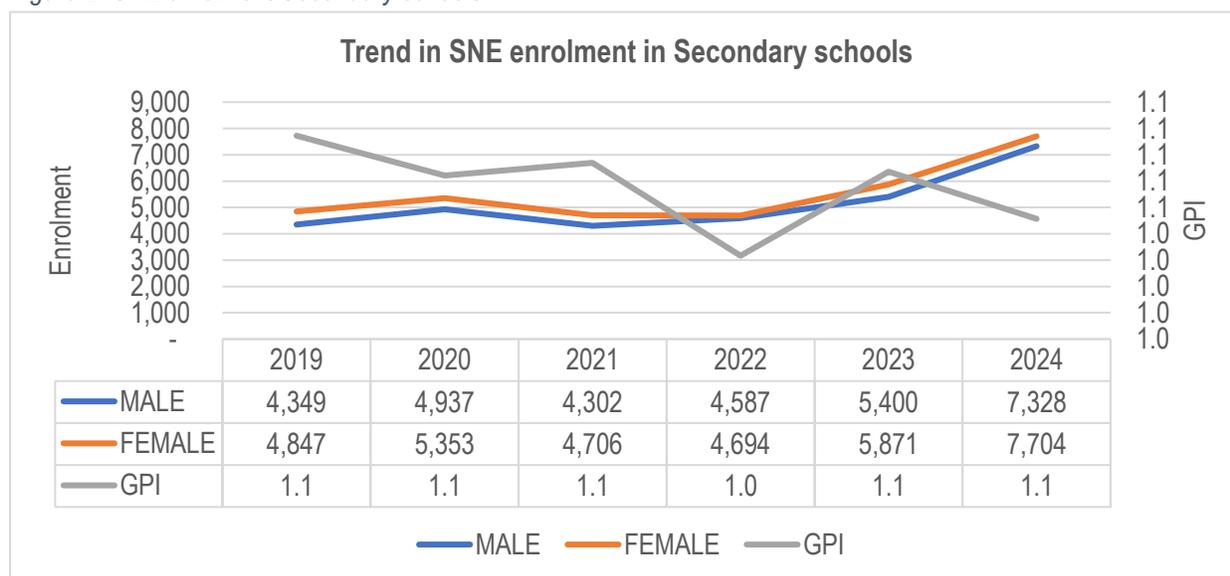
Figure 1: Trend in SNE Enrolment in Primary schools



Source: MoE EMIS data

It can be seen that in primary schools, enrolment of male SNE learners has been above the enrolment for female SNE learners. Even though this is the case, the levels of participation have been decreasing over the years in terms of GPI from a high on 0.96 in 2020 and 2021 to a low of 0.94 in 2024. Since the index still stands at less than 1, there is more that has to be done to ensure that there is equal number of girls and boys learners accessing primary school education.

Figure 2: SNE enrolment Secondary schools



Source: MoE EMIS data

The secondary schools on the other hand have experienced slightly higher the enrolment for female SNE learners than those of the male SNE learners. it shows that the sector achieved parity in 2022 but however,

the participation levels have fluctuated between 1.1 and 1 indicating a disparity to the female learners. There is therefore more that has to be done to address this disparity and ensure that there is equal number of special needs girls learners accessing Secondary school education.

3.7.1.1 Gaps affecting access to education for SNE and girl learners

Infrastructure Barriers

While the policies that have been put in place emphasize inclusive education, there are still significant gaps in the physical infrastructure of schools. Many schools remain inaccessible to children with mobility challenges, such as inadequate ramps or accessible toilets and special resource rooms. For example, in 2024, the secondary schools had a total on 55 resource rooms against an enrolment of 15,032 (2024 Education Sector Performance Report). This could be detrimental especially given the increasing enrolment rates. Resource rooms play a vital role in delivering inclusive education by providing tailored support to students who require additional assistance particularly for special needs girls with who often face additional social barriers, such as the fear of stigma or safety concerns when accessing education in an inclusive environment.

Geographical Barriers

In the rural areas, where a proportion of girls and children with disabilities reside, there is often a lack schools that equipped to support children with special needs. Inadequate transportation options and the high cost of sending children to schools in urban areas limit their access, especially for girls with disabilities, who may face cultural or familial restrictions on travel.

Human Resource

There are disparities in the number of teachers who are located in the rural or hard to reach schools where the PQTR may be very high. A 2024 study by CSEC that was conducted in Machinga, Dowa, Phalombe, Dedza and Nkhata-bay established that only 5% of teachers are working in hard-to-reach areas than in peri-urban and urban areas in Machinga and Phalombe districts. In Machinga, for example, 135 of 2,958 Teachers are in hard-to-reach areas whilst in Phalombe 99 of 1,935 Teachers are in hard-to-reach areas. In Nkhatabay, only 14% (221 of 1,557 Teachers) are deployed to hard-to-reach areas. In Dowa, 33% (1,011) of the total Teachers (3,042) are in rural areas with the remaining 67% (2, 031 Teachers) split between urban (1,106 Teachers – 36%) and semi-urban (925 Teachers – 31%). In all the districts several reasons were cited as to why less teachers prefer working in urban or semi-urban than hard-to-reach areas. Among such reasons included: lack of basic amenities in rural areas, shortage of staff Houses, shortage of teachers, teacher preference, safety concerns, transportation issues, limited resources in such Schools and Marriages.

In view of this, teachers may not have sufficient time to address the diverse needs of children with disabilities, particularly in large classes with limited resources. This is especially concerning for girls with disabilities, who may be overlooked or marginalized in the classroom.

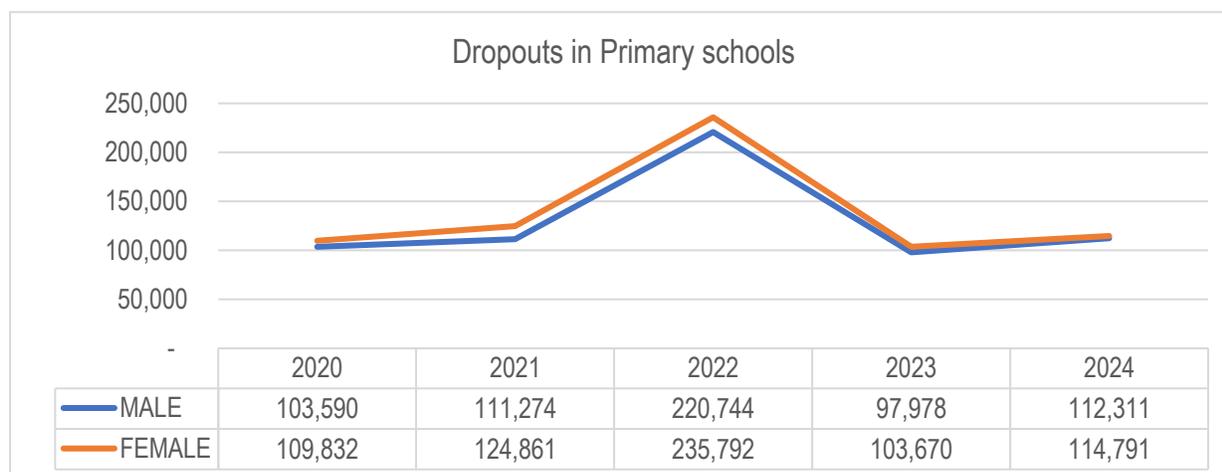
Quality of Education

In terms of performance, it is evident of some performance disparities in SNE and across gender. In 2024 alone, it was evident that the male candidates outperformed females, with a 60.87% pass rate for males compared to 48.15% for females in 2024. On the other hand, the SNE candidates even though the male SNE candidates still perform better than their female counterparts, there is a slight improvement in pass rates as evidenced by SNE candidates outperforming the national average with a pass rate of 55.99%.

Drop-outs

A student that leaves school before completing a particular academic year is regarded as drop-out. This data is found by comparing results from previous school year to the year in focus. Based on statistics from MoE, it has been established that in the primary schools, the overall number of dropouts has fluctuated significantly across the years. As presented in the figure below, the number of drop-outs increased sharply in 2022 from 236,135 (111,274 Male and 124,861 Female) in 2021 to 456,536 (220,744 Male and 235,792 Female) followed by a sharp decline to 201,648 in 2023. Across all years, the dropout rates for females are consistently higher than those of males, which highlights a potential gender disparity in primary education retention. The data is however not disaggregated by category of learners hence unable to show the number of special needs learners who dropped out. The main reasons reported for drop outs in primary schools over the years has remained as financial challenges/poverty, family responsibilities and truancy.

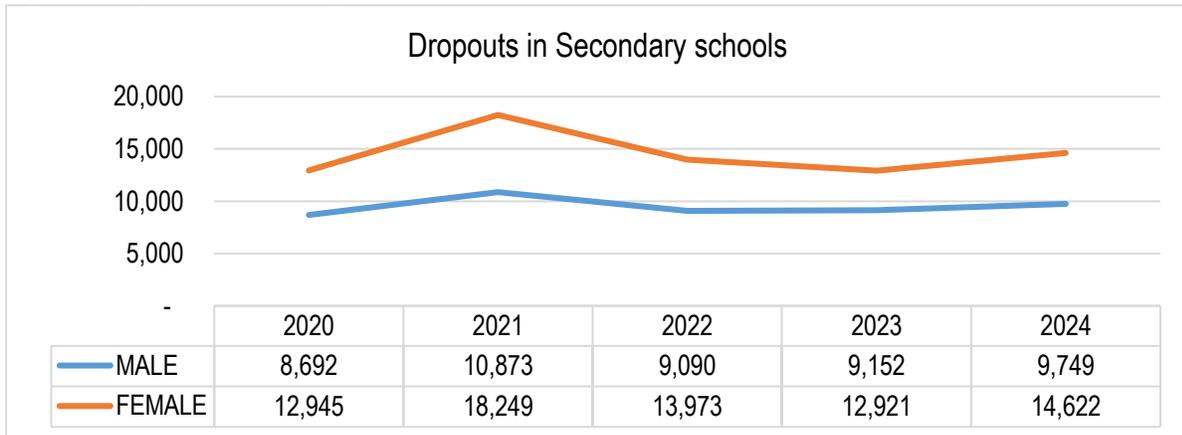
Figure 3: dropouts in primary schools



Source: MoE EMIS data

In secondary schools, the total dropout numbers are considerably lower than in primary schools, lower enrolment figures at this level are attributed to low transition rates which currently stand at 49.71 (MoE, 2024). Similar to primary schools, female dropout rates surpass those of males across all years, underscoring a persistent challenge in retaining female students at the secondary level. The main reasons reported for drop outs in secondary schools over the years has remained as financial challenges/poverty, marriage and pregnancy.

Figure 4: dropouts in Secondary schools



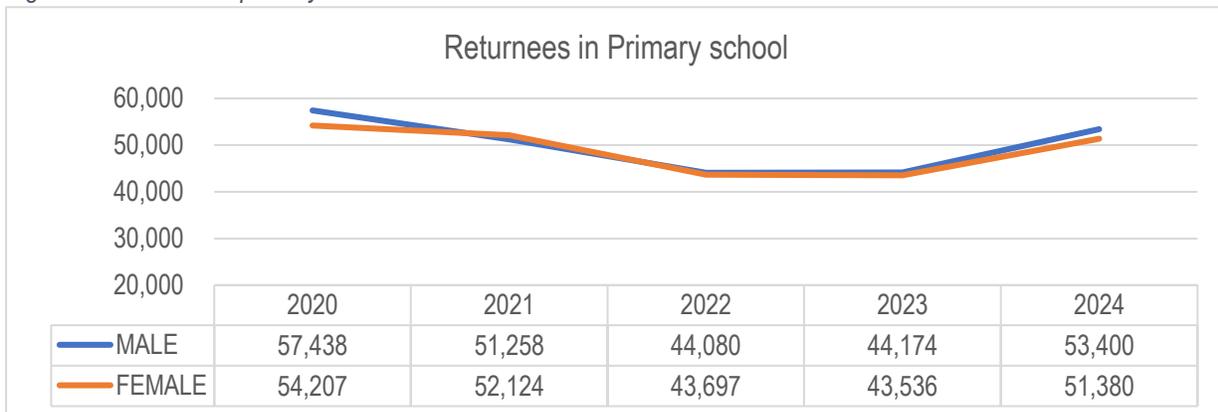
Source: MoE EMIS data

Readmission rate

This is measured as percentage of students who return to an education level in the subsequent year after dropping out of school. In primary school, these are referred to as returnees whilst in secondary schools, they are referred to as re-admitted students.

Despite the variations in drop-out rates as presented previously, there has been significant improvement in readmission rates, with female readmission increasing over the years. As illustrated in figure 5 below, 111,645 students (57,438 Male and 54,207 Female) in primary schools across the country returned to school in 2020 before the figures decreasing to 87,710 students (44,174 Male and 43,536 Female) in 2023. The figures have, however, increased sharply in 2024 with 104,780 students (53,400 Males and 51,380 Females) recorded to have returned to schools. The male learners' returnees have consistently exceeded those of female learners across all years, although the gap between genders remained relatively narrow.

Figure 5: returnees in primary schools

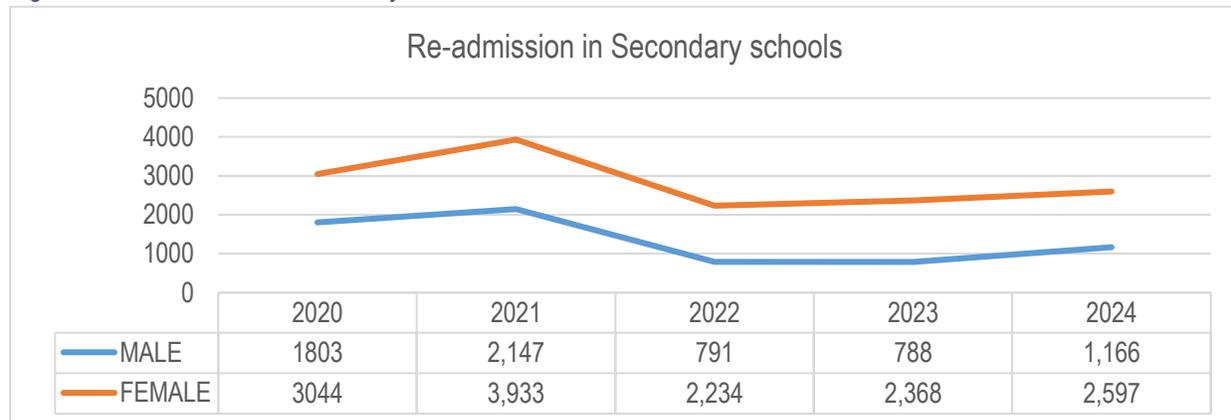


Source: MoE EMIS data

Secondary schools on the other hand exhibit fluctuating re-admission numbers, though the total figures are much lower than those in primary schools. In addition to this, the female students readmitted are more than the male students during the period under review. This could be attributed to targeted efforts to re-enrol girls in secondary education which are the NGES and re-admission policies.

However, in both primary and secondary schools, the data presented is limited in scope as it does not disaggregate further to indicate how many of the re-admitted learners were students with special needs. This gap makes it difficult to assess the inclusiveness and effectiveness of re-admission policies for this vulnerable group.

Figure 6: re-admissions in secondary schools



Source: MoE EMIS data

3.7.1.2 Gaps affecting quality education for SNE and girl learners

Curriculum and Learning Materials

The national curriculum and learning materials are not always tailored to the needs of children with disabilities. For instance, there may be a lack of Braille textbooks or materials in alternative formats, as well as a lack of sign language interpreters for deaf students. For girls with disabilities, this gap is more pronounced as there may be additional gender-specific barriers related to teaching methods or materials that are not gender-sensitive.

Cultural and Social Barriers

Despite the policies' commitment to inclusive education, social and cultural norms can still discourage girls with disabilities from attending school. In some cases, families may prioritize the education of boys over girls, or may not consider girls with disabilities as deserving of education. The lack of awareness and advocacy within communities about the rights of girls with disabilities further exacerbates their exclusion.

Gender Sensitivity

While the NIEP and NSIE aim for inclusion, they may not adequately address the intersectionality of gender and disability. Girls with disabilities face both gender discrimination and discrimination based on their disabilities. Policies need to more explicitly recognize the unique challenges faced by girls with disabilities, including in relation to sexual and reproductive health education, menstrual hygiene management, and protection from violence and abuse in schools.

Limited Post-Secondary

There is often limited and lack of post-secondary support after the girls successfully complete their tertiary education which may exacerbated to lack of information in success stories for SNE and girl learners. This demotivates the other girls in secondary schools who will need guidance and support for their tertiary education upon completion of secondary education.

The graduates from secondary schools, usually female, act as role models and provide female learners with a support mechanism that provides them with confidence building support to help them improve their learning outcomes and hence complete their education.

3.8 Gaps in Policies, and Strategies and Legislations

3.8.1 Gender Equality Act 2013

The thorough review of the policy reviewed that, even though the Act aims to eliminate gender disparities, education specific provisions are minimal, failing to address practical challenges such as menstrual hygiene management, gender-based violence in schools, sex for grades issues in Universities, and lack of role models for girls in STEM fields. Just like the other reviewed policies and Acts, the Gender Act has limited publicity thereby limiting its impact as most Ministries and stakeholders who are supposed to implement the Act are not aware of its provisions.

3.8.2 Amended Malawi Education Act 2013

While the Act acknowledges the importance of equitable access, it falls short of clearly addressing specific needs of girls and children with disabilities. The Act emphasizes inclusive education and yet lacks detailed guidelines on how schools can adapt to accommodate diverse learners such as those requiring assistive devices, gender sensitive facilities and pedagogy. Without these specifications, schools are left to implement inclusive education based on general principles, which often results in inadequate support and facilities for these learners.

The act also is weak on its enforcement leading to inconsistent application across the country. The critical example is the provision for compulsory education of which 11 years down after its enactment it is not enforced. This lack of enforcement has led to a significant number of children, particularly girls and those with disabilities, remaining outside the formal education system.

Furthermore, cultural barriers, such as entrenched gender biases and stigmatization of disabilities, exacerbate the challenges in implementation. These cultural norms, coupled with a lack of awareness and sensitivity towards gender and disability inclusion, exacerbate the challenges in the implementation of the Education Act.

In order to strengthen the provisions of the revised act, the Ministry of Education should ensure that, the Act's provisions are considered in the review or development of new policies while making them gender-sensitive and disability inclusive.

3.8.3 National Education Sector Investment Plan 2020 - 2030

Despite making significant strides in promoting access to quality education, gaps remain in the strategic framework. While it commits to enhancing primary and secondary education, there is limited focus on skills development and learning opportunities beyond formal schooling, areas that are emphasized in global and regional frameworks.

While there is a strong focus on increasing enrolment, such as expanding infrastructure and promoting free primary education, strategies to ensure retention particularly for girls are insufficiently detailed. It lacks an outline of detailed provisions for addressing key retention challenges, particularly those related to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and stigma against learners with disabilities. Without such specific provisions, many of the girls and learners with special needs who initially enrol are at risk of dropping out before completing their education. This gap highlights the need for more comprehensive retention strategies, aligning NESIP more closely with SDG 4's focus on equitable education and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

Furthermore, while it mentions of developing and investment plan for the implementation of inclusive education policy, the NESIP 2020-30 implementation plan does not outline specific provisions or guidelines dedicated to provision of resources for inclusive education. This oversight creates a significant gap in translating policy into practice, as there are no clear financial commitments or targeted funding to support necessary infrastructure, specialized teaching resources, or training programs for educators.

Collaboration with local stakeholders is another area that needs greater emphasis to ensure practical application at the community level. The plan mentions of sensitizing communities in inclusive education who play a critical role in ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups at the grassroots level but fails to detail the clear strategy of engagement with the various stakeholders. Without effective engagement at the community level, the practical implementation of inclusive education initiatives will likely face challenges, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

3.8.4 Re-admission Policy

The policy framework reveals gaps, particularly in addressing the broader spectrum of inclusive education. While it effectively caters for barriers related to re-admission for girls and learners with special needs, it places limited emphasis on the reintegration of learners into skill-based or alternative education pathways. Specifically, the policy focuses on retaining learners in primary and secondary schools but does not provide clear strategies for attaching the re-admitted learners, especially those unable to continue formal education, with vocational training or skills development programs. This is a critical oversight, given the increasing importance of non-formal education and skills development emphasized in promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

3.8.5 National Gender Policy 2015

The Policy primarily addresses gender disparities in education at a general level, focusing on ensuring access for girls. However, the policy's main weakness is in its limited focus on Girl's education and weak accountability mechanisms. The policy identifies Education as an important area for interventions but falls

short in addressing system barriers such as patriarchal norms and resource disparities. Additionally, even though the Policy strategies that seek to address all socio-economic factors that undermine retention of girls in school, the policy does not adequately tackle the intersectionality of gender and disability, leaving girls with disabilities in a double tragedy. Intersecting factors such as geographical barriers and cultural norms compound barriers to education for girls specifically those with special needs.

3.8.6 National Inclusive Education Strategy 2017 – 2021

Even though the NIES underlines ‘including children who are likely to be excluded from and within the education system and has had positive impact on SNE, the strategy has some notable gaps. For instance, it did not sufficiently prioritize the allocation of resources for essential items such as assistive devices, for example, wheelchairs, hearing aids, braille materials, and infrastructure adaptations of ramps, accessible classrooms, adapted toilet which are needed to accommodate learners with special needs. As a result, many schools lack the necessary physical and material resources to support these learners effectively, hindering their full participation in the education system. Data indicates that between 2020 and 2024, the number of classrooms in primary schools with ramps grew from 18,567 to 25,519 which is still not sufficient against a 2024 SNE enrolment of 111,018 learners.

In 2020, there were a total of 60 permanent and 28 temporary resource rooms which were complete and in use against a total enrolment of 184,481 learners with special needs (EMIS, 2020). In 2024, the number of resource rooms decreased to 55 highlighting the urgent need of sufficient resource allocation to SNE.

Another significant gap is the difficulty in reaching marginalized rural areas, a challenge that disproportionately affects girls with disabilities. There is absence of options on mobile or community-based education options in hard-to-reach areas which further exacerbates the exclusion of vulnerable groups, leaving many children without the opportunity to attend school or access necessary support services.

Additionally, the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for tracking inclusive education outcomes were underdeveloped, making it challenging to measure progress in this area and identify bottlenecks. While there are data collection efforts, there absence of a comprehensive system that keeps track of all the relevant indicators in relation to SNE makes it difficult to assess the true impact of the strategy or identify specific bottlenecks in implementation.

Furthermore, it also shows some gaps in terms of post-secondary education opportunities for persons with disabilities. Although it emphasizes inclusive education at the primary and secondary levels, it lacks sufficient provisions for expanding access to tertiary education and vocational training for this group, which is critical for long-term socio-economic inclusion.

3.8.7 National Girls’ Education Strategy 2018 - 2023

The NGES effectively targets gender disparities in education, with a strong focus on rural areas and marginalized groups. However, it misses integrating digital literacy and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education for girls, which is increasingly essential in the modern world.

While it aligns with SDG 4.5 on gender equality and the CRPD's provisions for the rights of girls with disabilities, there is room for improvement in the way it incorporates ICT and other 21st-century skills to prepare girls for future careers in technology and innovation.

In addition to this, its focus on girls with disabilities is limited, resulting in weak integration with broader inclusive education policies. Specifically, it does not specify how inclusive education policies will be tailored to ensure that girls with disabilities benefit from the same opportunities as their peers. This gap leads to a disjointed approach resulting in inconsistent and incomplete support.

Long-term monitoring of the impacts of these initiatives, such as how education translates to labor market outcomes for educated girls, is also insufficiently addressed. It can be seen that there is little emphasis on in-built mechanisms for tracking whether educated girls with disabilities are successfully entering the workforce or gaining economic independence. Without such monitoring mechanisms, it becomes challenging to assess whether educational interventions are truly empowering girls with disabilities and whether they are accessing meaningful employment opportunities or facing ongoing barriers.

Finally, the strategy's connection to financial planning is underdeveloped, with limited provisions to ensure sustained resource allocation for achieving its objectives. The NGES does not include a detailed financial plan that outlines specific resource allocations to achieve its objectives. Without clear budgetary provisions or dedicated financial commitments, it becomes difficult to ensure that the strategy's goals are actually implemented and sustained over time.

In addition to this, even though the NGES has a costed action plan as a clear framework for financial monitoring or accountability to track the allocation and use of resources in relation to its objectives, it does not clearly specify the sources of funding. Without assigning both domestic and partner funding sources, the action plan might struggle to sustainably implement its initiatives.

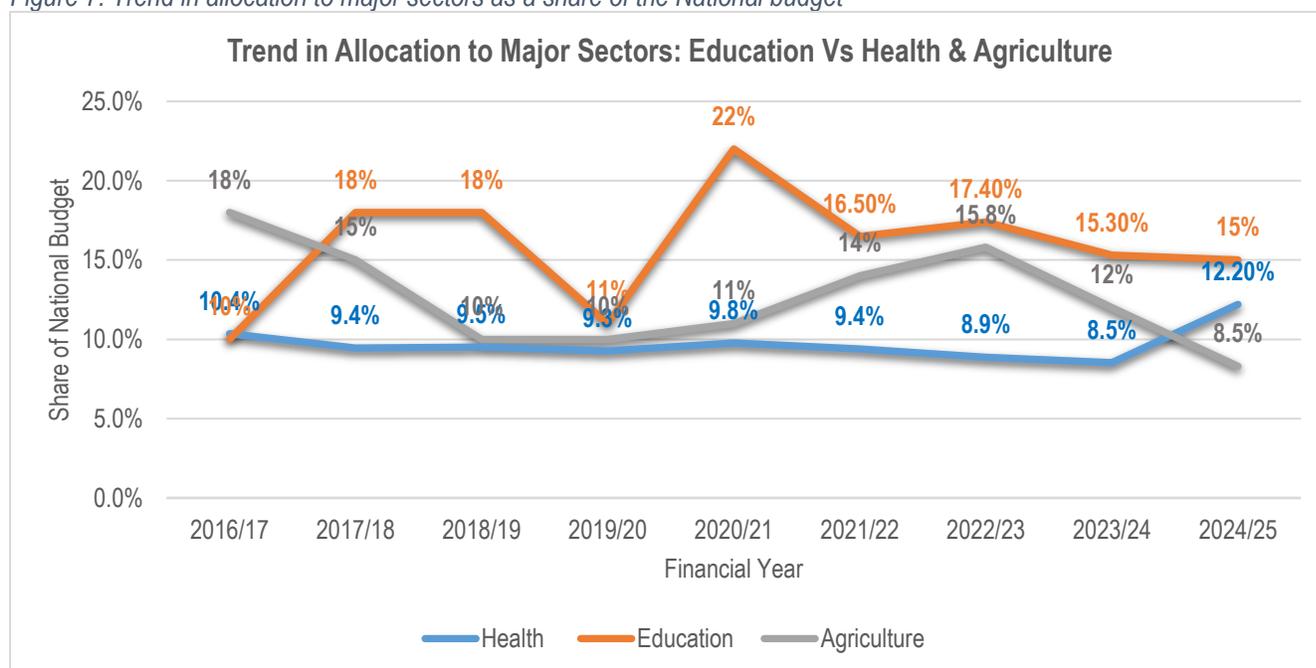
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS FROM THE BUDGET ANALYSIS

4.1 The 2024/25 Approved Education Sector Budget

4.1.1 Overall Sector Budget

The sector has been allocated MK 900 billion (5% of GDP), a 36% nominal increase from the MK 662 billion mid-year revised allocation – making the sector the most prioritized sector if compared to other sectors, a trend that has been maintained for the past 7 years – see figure below. In real terms, the budget has, however, increased by only 4% i.e. from MK 662 billion to MK 689 billion. The 2024/25 sector budget is 15% (down from 15.3% at mid-year) of the National budget and barely at the minimum of the 15% – 20% UNESCO’s target which is worrisome in view of demands from the sector. The budget is also above the MK 627 billion average NESIP targets for 2024 and 2025 though the NESIP estimation is inadequate as it omits other critical interventions related to girls and children with disabilities as previously highlighted.

Figure 7: Trend in allocation to major sectors as a share of the National budget

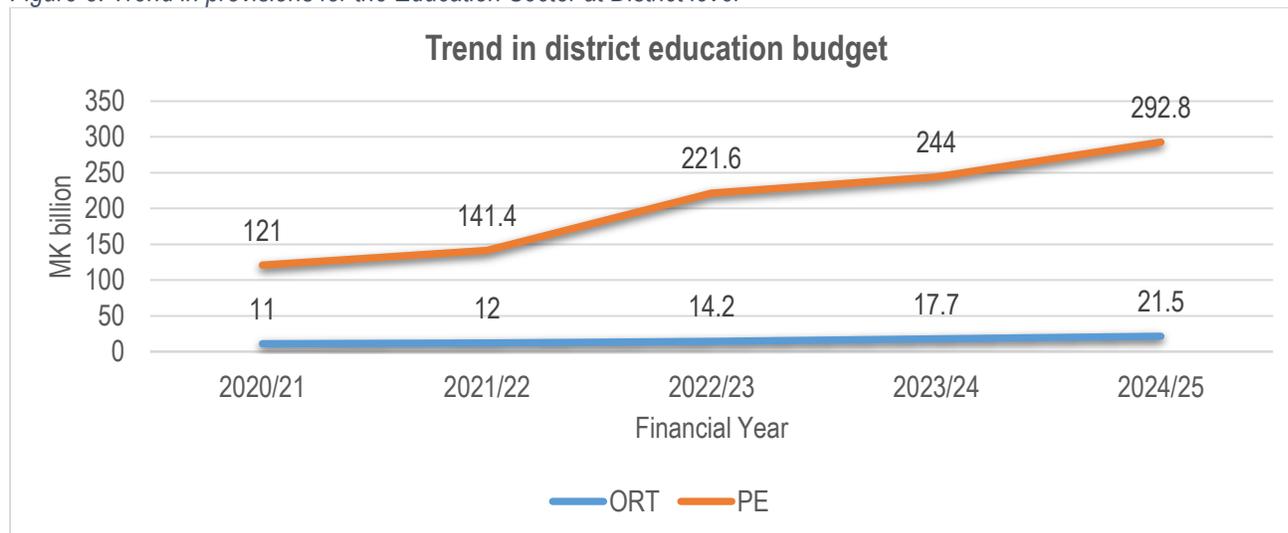


Source: Authors own computation using data from various sources

Ministry Headquarters budget is at MK 338.4 billion, up by 60% from the MK 261 billion mid-year provision. Of the MK 338.4 billion, MK 209 billion (up by 107% from MK 101 billion) is for development. Donor-funded projects are the main reason for the increase as they have increased by 112% i.e. from MK 85 billion to MK 180 billion. Malawi Education Reform Project (MERP) and Equity with Quality and Learning at Secondary (EQUALS) are among donor-funded projects that have seen significant increases of MK 32 billion (from MK 52.9 to MK 85.2 billion) and MK 15 billion (MK 23.6 billion to MK 38 billion), respectively. PE for the Ministry Headquarters is at MK 77.2 billion, an increase of about 2% from the MK 75.9 billion allocated in the previous financial year. ORT is at MK 51.5 billion up from MK 34.5 billion, representing 49% increase. Of the MK 51.5 billion for ORT, MK 8.8 billion (up from MK 3.2 billion) is for centrally procured TLMs.

Local Council budget is at MK 314 billion, a 20% increase from the MK 262 billion mid-year provision for 2023/24 FY. Salaries have increased by 20% i.e. from MK 244 billion to MK 293 billion – see figure below. The increase is due to the increase in salaries for civil servants and recruitment of additional 10,000 primary teachers in the 2024/25 financial year. ORT has increased by 22% i.e. from MK 17.7 billion to MK 21.5 billion partly due to the MK 1.2 billion increase in School Improvement Grants (SIG). Despite the nominal increases in ORT provisions, the resources are inadequate to implement the various programs including girls and inclusive education. For example, SIG funds and provisions for such programs as School Feeding are significantly low and therefore cannot make meaningful impacts. The report therefore recommends that the central government, particularly Ministry of Education, should consider devolving other small-scale projects to districts in order to allow the districts implement the same and consequently improve the various education related indicators and address the challenges being experienced in the sector at district level.

Figure 8: Trend in provisions for the Education Sector at District level



Source: Author's own computation based on data from Ministry of Education

In terms of allocation to Government-funded projects at local level, MK 95.1 billion has been provided. This will go towards maintenance and upgrading of city roads (MK 26.1 billion – up from MK 18.6 billion); Constituency Development Fund (MK 38.6 billion – up from MK 19.3 billion) translating to MK 200 million per constituency with 5% of the funds (MK 10 million) going towards education bursaries; construction of water structures (MK 2.3 billion – same as last year); District Development Fund (MK 6.2 billion – up from MK 4.8 billion); Dualization of Chileka-Blantyre Road (MK 1 billion – same as last year); Infrastructure Development Fund (MK 0.9 billion – up from MK 0.8 billion); and Rehabilitation of District Hospitals (MK 20 billion – up from MK 13.6 billion). Construction of Teachers' Houses, an education project, which was devolved in the 2023/24 FY has not been allocated any resources as resources have been centralized again.

Education Subventions is at MK 219.5 billion from MK 169 billion, representing a 30% increase. Recurrent expenses for education subventions have increased by 34% from MK 134.8 billion to MK 180.1 billion on account of increase in salaries and students' loans (MK 16 billion to MK 24 billion). Development budget for sub-vented organizations under education have increased by 14% i.e. from Mk 35 billion to Mk 39 billion. ECD (IEYP Project) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) budgets have increased

by 26% and 7%, respectively. MK 0.9 billion of MK 3.2 billion for TVET is for establishment of Community Colleges demonstrating Government commitment to enhancing vocational education and widening skills training access. An additional MK 4 billion has been provided for Magomero College of Community Development (MK 0.73 billion from MK 0.42 billion – covering MK 0.1 billion for recurrent expenses and MK 0.6 billion for construction of a Library and Lecture Theatre at the College), adult literacy (MK 0.13 billion from MK 0.1 billion), and ORT for ECD (MK 1 billion) under Vote 350; and youth skills development (MK 2.1 billion) under Vote 180 – see table below.

Table 2: Summary of the 2024/25 education sector budget

Budget Category	2023/24 Approved	2023/24 Revised	2024/25 Estimates	Change
Vote 250				
PE	74.7	75.9	77.2	2%
ORT	34.6	34.5	51.5	49%
Of which TLMs	3.2	3.2	8.8	175%
Vote 250 Recurrent Total	109.3	110.4	128.8	17%
Development				
Development Part I	43.2	84.8	180.1	112%
Development Part II	13.2	16.3	29.5	81%
Development Budget Total	56.4	101.2	209.6	107%
Vote 250 Total	109.2	211.5	338.4	60%
Vote-900: Local Councils				
PE	244	244	292.8	20%
ORT	17.7	17.7	21.5	21%
Total Local Councils	261.7	261.7	314.3	20%
Vote 275: Educ Subventions				
Recurrent	134.8	134.8	180.1	34%
Development	34.6	34.6	39.4	14%
Total Subventions	169.4	169.4	219.5	30%
Vote 320: MGCDSW				
ECD (IEYP)	16	16	21.3	33%
ECD (ORT)	-	-	0.8	-
Magomero (ORT)	0.12	0.12	0.13	8%
Magomero (Development)	0.3	0.3	0.6	100%
Adult Literacy & Education	0.15	0.15	0.14	-7%
Total MGCDSW	16.57	16.57	22.97	39%
Vote 180: Youth Skills Development	-	-	2.1	-
Vote 370: TVET – Min of Labour	2.98	2.98	3.2	7%
Total Education Sector	616	662.15	900.47	35%

Source: Ministries of Education, Gender and Sports

4.1.2 ORT Key Issues & Gaps

A review of the ORT budget for the sector has revealed a number of shortfalls/gaps within the sector which must be addressed for the sector to register desired outcomes. Key as per CSEC interest are issues bordering around SNE including TLMs, girl's education, and support to needy students, among others. Centering on these key focus areas, the study has established the following:

Teaching and Learning Materials: there has been a huge increase (179%) in allocation for centrally procured TLMs i.e. from MK 3.2 billion to MK 8.8 billion. Of the MK 8.8 billion, MK 3 billion (up from MK 1.3

billion – 73%) is for TLMs for primary education, MK 4.8 billion (up from MK 1.2 billion – 300%) for TLMs for secondary education and MK 1 billion (MK 500 million for secondary and MK 500 million for primary) for special needs TLMs under inclusive education Department at the Ministry of Education Headquarters. However, only MK 3.2 billion (up by 33% from MK 2.4 billion) has been provided for TLMs within Local Council's ORT budget. This highlights potential inefficiencies and the importance of transparent procurement practices, which could limit institutions' ability to tailor materials to their needs including those that relate to girls and inclusive education.

SNE: Department of SNE (basic) has been allocated MK 1.1 billion, an increase of 47% from the MK 0.7 billion allocated in 2023/24 financial year. MK 488 million (up from MK 400 million) has been provided for Montfort College for training SNE Teachers but remains inadequate to accommodate meaningful enrolment of SNE Teachers. An additional MK 150 million has been provided for training 150 SNE Teachers at Machinga Teachers Training College (TTC) through Open and Distance Education Learning (ODeL). This may slightly improve the SNE Teacher: Pupil Ratio in some schools.

The study also established that only 155 people with disabilities were enrolled in public universities during 2023/24, reflecting significant accessibility challenges. Lack of disability-friendly facilities further hampers their educational experience, hindering diversity and inclusivity efforts.

Support to Needy Students: MK 24 billion (up from MK 16 billion) has been provided for university loans targeting 26,000 students (up from 25,265) and MK 1 billion as bursaries targeting 45,000 secondary students which is commendable as it enhances access to higher and secondary education by the vulnerable including girls.

MANEB subvention: MANEB's recurrent budget surged by K5 billion (63%) from K7 billion to K12 billion. This hike should lead to scrapping PSLCE exam fees for 2024/25, considering that primary education is free, and that the budget should ensure aiding for those unable to pay for JCE/MSCE, especially girls.

ODeL/Edu-Tech: MK 2 billion (up from MK 0.1 billion) has been provided for EDU-SPACE, Computers for Schools, Smart Learning Centres, ODeL, and Inspection under Secondary Education. However, funding for other digital education initiatives, notably in ODeL department at Headquarters, has decreased by 67%, from MK 1.5 billion to MK 0.5 billion at a time digital education needed to be prioritized. The resources are said to have been moved to the MCDE. However, the Department which equally coordinates and implements other ODeL interventions requires sufficient resources. Some of the resources could be used for procurement of advanced TLMs for learners with SN.

Recruitment of Teachers and Teachers Welfare: 20,000 Teachers (10,000 primary & 10,000 secondary) are expected to be recruited in the 2024/25 financial year. This is encouraging as it will help absorb most of the Teachers who were unemployed for years. Priority must also go towards recruitment of SN teachers considering that Pupil-Specialist Teacher Ratio for special needs students in Primary schools is still high (now at 95:1). Government has further provided MK 12 billion under basic education for primary Teacher training and MK 2 billion (from MK 16 billion) for secondary Teacher training. This will help enhance teachers' capacity. A salary increment for Teachers and other civil servants is also being proposed which if significant

will help increase their disposable income. The revision of the tax-free bracket from MK 100,000 to MK 150,000, a category in which most primary teachers also fall, is also a positive development.

DEM Provision (ORT): The 20% increase in Local council budgets reflects a commitment to decentralized education management and service delivery. Additionally, the budget for SIG has increased from MK 7 billion to MK 8.4 billion and may partly help reduce challenges schools are facing including those that relate to girl's education.

Gender, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Inclusivity Issues: efforts have been made to address gender disparities and inclusivity issues, with specific allocations for interventions targeting vulnerable groups and initiatives aimed at improving access to education for all. However, there are still some gaps requiring attention. These include: low equitable access to higher education (especially the vulnerable due to high costs of fees); Pupil-Specialist Teacher Ratio for special needs students in Primary schools is still high (now at 95:1); WASH indicators have been removed in the 2024/25 Vote 250 PBB making it difficult to track the same; unavailability of smart change rooms for girl learners in most schools especially Primary Schools & CDSSs (less than 700 change rooms); Indicators in the PBB budget document not disaggregated by gender and disability.

4.1.3 Development Budget

MK 210 billion, up from MK 101 billion (107%) has been provided for development reflecting a commitment by Government to infrastructure development and capacity building. However, 86% (MK 180 billion) of the total development budget, is allocated to donor-funded projects, raising concerns about sustainability and ownership of initiatives amid increased development expenditure. Major projects funded by donors in the 2024/25 financial year include: MERP which has been allocated MK 85 billion (up from MK 53 billion); EQUALS which has been allocated MK 38 billion, an increased from MK 23.6 billion; Skills for a Vibrant Economy, allocated MK 49 billion up from the MK 1.9 billion allocated under PPA; and Education Service Joint Fund, allocated MK 8 billion – see table 3 below.

Of the MK 16 billion for Government-funded projects, MK 10 billion (63% of allocation for government-funded projects) has been provided for construction of 34 secondary schools of excellence across the Country. Construction of Girls Hostels, which only received 20% (MK 316 million) of its allocated MK 1.6 billion in the 2023/24 financial year, has received MK 3 billion. It is CSEC's hope that the MK 3 billion for the project will be disbursed fully in the upcoming financial year as the project has also delayed. Inkosi Mmbelwa University allocated MK 500 million, down from MK 1.6 billion. The drop in the resources for the project is however not worrisome as the project is among the projects considered for bond financing. Commendable to note that most of MIP-I flagship projects for the sector which are also pro-inclusive education have been funded signalling Government commitment to fulfilling MIP-I goals for the sector. Such projects include: SNE Institute which has been allocated MK 1.5 billion; SNLCs which has been allocated MK 1.5 billion; and Construction of Teacher Houses and Classrooms which has been allocated MK 1 billion. The provision for Construction of Teacher Houses, however, is very inadequate if compared to MK 50.6 billion MIP-I target for 2024. Key to note that Government has also provided Mk 2 billion for rehabilitation of disaster affected schools – see table below.

Table 3: 2024/25 projects for the education sector.

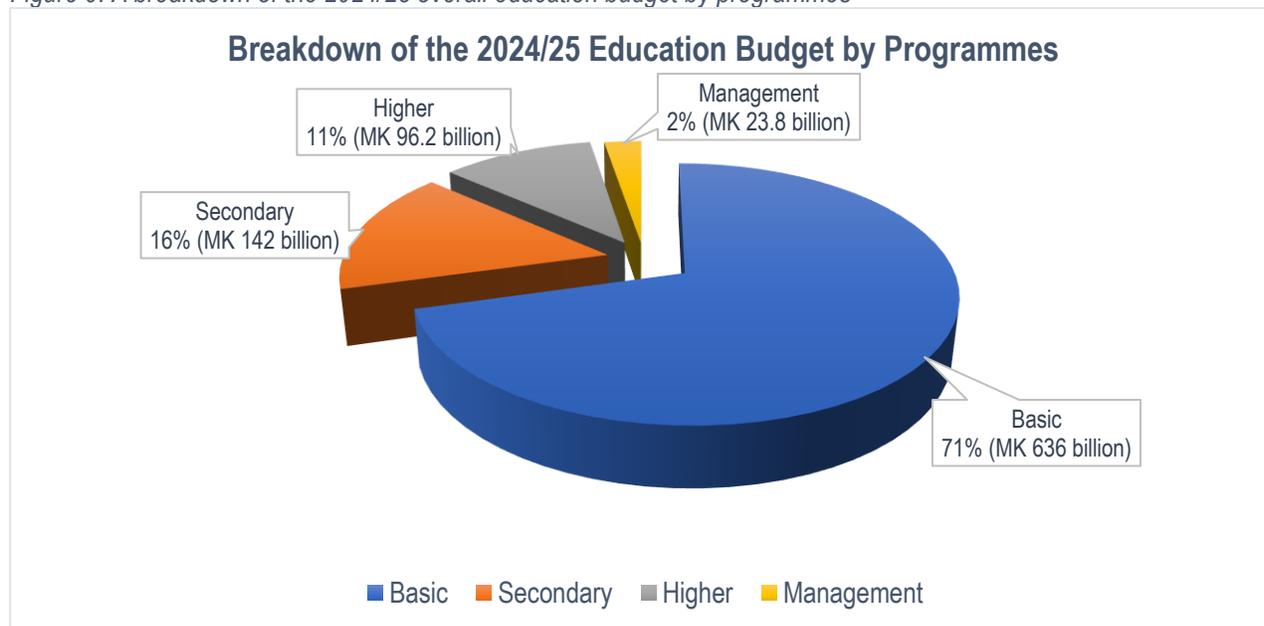
Project	2023/24 Budget	2023/24 Revised	2024/25 Budget	% Change
Education Service Joint Fund	-	-	8,039.0	-
Skills for a vibrant Economy	-	-	48,908.0	-
Improving Secondary Education in Malawi	-	386.2	-	-100%
Equity with Quality and Learning at Secondary	23,618.0	23,618.0	37,976.0	61%
Malawi Education Reform Project	19,571.0	52,884.0	85,178.0	61%
Expansion and Upgrading of Domasi College of Education	-	3,706.0	-	-100%
Programme for Primary School Education	-	513.0	-	-100%
Strengthening Teacher Education and Practice (STEP)	-	1,828.0	-	-100%
Skills for a Vibrant Economy Project (PPA)	-	1,898.0	-	-100%
Total Development Budget Part I	43,189.0	84,833.0	180,101.0	112%
Construction of Girls' Hostels	800.00	1,600.00	3,000.00	88%
Rehabilitation of Secondary Schools	800.00	800.00	1,500.00	88%
Construction of Primary Schools and Rehabilitation of Education Facilities	2,500.00	2,500.00	1,500.00	-40%
Construction of 3 TTCs for Primary School	1,700.00	2,700.00	1,500.00	-44%
Construction of Machinga Secondary School	200.00	100.00	-	-100%
Construction of Science Laboratories and Libraries	1,500.00	500.00	2,000.00	300%
Construction of Inclusive Education Resource Centres	-	0.00	1,500.00	-
Construction of Thumbwe Secondary School	800.00	1,300.00	1,500.00	15%
Construction of Luranga Secondary School	-	-	2,000.00	-
Gwanda Chakwamba Centre of Education Excellence	-	-	500.00	-
Rehabilitation of Infrastructure of Disaster Affected Schools	-	-	2,000.00	-
Rehabilitation of TTCs	-	-	1,000.00	-
Expansion and Upgrading of Domasi College of Education	100.00	100.00	500.00	400%
Construction of teachers houses and classrooms	800.00	147.00	1,000.00	580%
Construction of 34 Secondary Schools of Excellence Programme	4,000.00	5,000.00	10,000.00	100%
Construction of Inkosi Mmbelwa University	-	1,593.00	-	-100%
Total Development Budget Part II	13,200.00	16,340.00	29,500.00	81%
Total Development Budget Part Vote 250	56,389.00	101,173.00	209,601.00	107%

Source: Ministry of Education, Budget Division.

4.1.4 Analysis of the Education Budget by Programmes

Analysis of the sector budget by programmes shows that basic education is the most funded programme claiming 70% (MK 640 billion) of the total budget. The majority of the resources under the program are to cover for basic education interventions at local councils (MK 314 billion) including salaries for Teachers which claim the largest portion; projects (MK 100 billion – MK 97 billion for donor funded and MK 7 billion for Government funded); ECD interventions through the Ministry of Gender (MK 22 billion) and other sub-vented interventions. Secondary education comes second with a 16% share, MK 162 billion in monetary terms. Most of the resources under the programme cater for implementation of projects which are estimates at MK 60.7 billion (MK 38 billion donor funded, MK 20 billion Government funded and MK 0.8 billion through sub-vented organizations) and payment of salaries (MK 55 billion). Higher education comes third at 11% (MK 98 billion) of which projects are estimate at MK 87.2 billion (MK 49 billion donor funded, MK 0.5 billion Government funded and MK 38 billion through sub-vented organizations). Management and support services is the least funded program at 2% (MK 23.8 billion), which is commendable as most of the resources are in technical programmes – see figure below.

Figure 9: A breakdown of the 2024/25 overall education budget by programmes



Source: Author's own computation using data from Ministry of Education

4.2 The 2024/25 Mid-Year Education Budget

The team intended to review overall education sector budget at mid-year to assess the sector's budget performance including challenges related to the same. However, as indicated in the study limitations, the team failed to collect data from the Ministry of Education and other Departments and Agencies as the study was done during festive season holiday. The team, therefore, reviewed the Ministry of Education Headquarters budget only.

Based on the review, the study has established that the Ministry Headquarters budget has increased by 2% i.e. from the approved MK 338.4 billion to MK 345.8 billion at mid-year. The increase is largely because of a 37% increase in PE, from MK 77.2 billion to MK 106 billion, in view of the salary adjustments that took place in November 2023. Despite this overall increase, ORT and Government-funded projects have seen some cuts at mid-year. ORT has been reduced by MK 1 billion i.e. from MK 51.5 billion to MK 50.5 billion. Government-funded projects on the other hand have seen over MK 20 billion cut. The provisions for these projects are now at MK 8.9 billion down from the MK 29.5 billion that was approved – see table below. Among the affected projects are those targeting girls and SNE including the construction of 100 Girls hostels in CDSSs which has seen MK 2.6 billion out of the approved MK 3 billion removed and construction of Inclusive Education Resource Centre which has seen the whole of the MK 1.5 billion that was provided being cut – see annex 1. The reduction of the resources targeting girls and inclusive education signal a concerning trend that jeopardizes efforts to address educational inequalities and reflect a de-prioritization of critical initiatives aimed at improving access to education for marginalized groups, including girls and learners with special needs.

Table 4: MoE Headquarters mid-year budget adjustments by category

Category	2024/25 Approved (MK)	Mid-Year Adjustment (MK)	2024/25 Revised (MK)	% Change
Personal Emoluments	77,223,827,352.41	29,070,823,210.00	106,294,650,562.41	37.6%
Other Recurrent Transactions	51,531,609,365.83	(1,006,528,766.72)	50,525,080,599.11	-2.0%
Total Recurrent	128,755,436,718.23	28,064,294,443.28	156,819,731,161.51	21.8%
Donor Funded Projects (Part 1)	180,101,733,163.40	-	180,101,733,163.40	0%
Locally Funded Projects (Part II)	29,500,000,000.00	(20,601,962,488.55)	8,898,037,511.45	-70%
Total Capital	209,601,733,163.40	(20,601,962,488.55)	188,999,770,674.85	-10%
Total Vote	338,357,169,881.63	7,462,331,954.73	345,819,501,836.37	2%

Source: MoE – Budget Division

In terms of mid-year performance, the study has established that overall utilization of resources for the Ministry Headquarters is low with only 62% of the funds (MK 109 billion) used against the mid-year projections (MK 178 billion). In terms of utilization by budget category, the lowest (25% - MK 22 billion of the projected MK 90 billion) is donor-funded projects. This is seconded by Government-funded projects which has a 39% utilization rate i.e. MK 5.8 billion against the projected MK 14.8 billion. Utilization of PE is however impressive as about MK 51.6 billion of the projected MK 38.6 billion has been spent, representing a 134% utilization rate. On ORT, the Ministry Headquarters spent MK 29 billion of the projected MK 34 billion, representing an 83% utilization rate. However, the lack of detailed expenditure report made it difficult to assess how the various girls and SNE interventions being implemented under ORT have fared at mid-year.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The report presented findings and recommendations of an in-depth policy analysis to identify gaps in education policies and public budgets related to girls and children with disabilities. The analysis which is part of CSEC's lobby and advocacy efforts aimed at conducting an in-depth analysis of Malawi's education policies, identifying gaps and challenges related to the education of girls and children with disabilities; reviewing public budgets over the last five financial years (2020/21 - 2024/25) to assess allocations and expenditures aimed at supporting Girls and SN education; and providing actionable recommendations to enhance policy frameworks and resource allocation for special needs (SN), gender-responsive, and equitable education. Findings from the review will support key stakeholders such as Members of Parliament, development partners and Civil Society Organizations working in the education sector to engage with evidence on budget and policy scrutiny, monitoring and tracking in order to inform future policy development and advocacy efforts to create a more inclusive and gender-responsive education system. Below are some of the key findings emanating from this review:

- Several policies, strategies and legislations have been developed that integrate inclusive education and aligns with various global and regional education policy frameworks and protocols that recognize the importance of making education available to all regardless of gender and disability.
- Despite the existence of these policies, strategies and legislations there are still significant gaps and challenges in provision of inclusive education including physical infrastructure; low and unequitable distribution of SNE teachers; performance disparities in SNE and across gender; high female drop-outs at all levels; and policies failing to adequately address the intersectionality of gender and disability, among others.
- The 2024/25 approved education budget has increased by 35% but is below the 6% GDP and 20% UNESCO target.
- 86% of the 2024/25 education development budget is from donors with only 14% from Government and therefore unsustainable.
- MK 8.8 billion (central) against MK 3.2 billion (local councils) has been allocated for TLMs signaling inefficiencies at local level. MK 1 billion (MK 500 million for secondary and MK 500 million for primary) has been provided for special needs TLMs under inclusive education Department at the Ministry of Education Headquarters.
- Mid-year cuts on gender and inclusive education related projects in the 2024/25 budget. MK 1.5 billion for construction of SNLCs has been completely removed whilst MK 2.6 billion out of the approved MK 3 billion for Construction of 100 Girls hostels in CDSSs has been removed at mid-year.

- There's low access to tertiary education for Children with Disabilities coupled with unavailability of disability-friendly infrastructures.
- Delays in gender related projects e.g. change rooms and hostels for Girls.

5.2 Recommendations

To address these gaps and ensure effective utilization of resources, CSEC recommends the following:

- **Focus on Skills Development and Lifelong Learning:** There is need for the policy frameworks to enhance the focus on skills development and Lifelong Learning. This could be done by developing specific programs and policies that focus on skills development beyond formal schooling, aligned with global frameworks such as the SDGs.
- **Retention Strategies for Girls and learners with special needs:** The frameworks could be enhanced by Including detailed provisions addressing retention challenges such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and stigma against learners with special needs. This can include developing comprehensive community engagement strategies that put local leaders, parents, and civil society organizations in the fore front in implementing inclusive education initiatives. In addition to this, flexible learning options could be created in partnership with community-based programs to support them.
- **Integrate Financial Commitments for Inclusive and girls Education:** It is important that there be a clear inclusion of financial commitments for the implementation of inclusive and girls' education policies, focusing on essential resources. For instance, the Ministry of Education could set up a dedicated fund within the education budget specifically for assistive devices, infrastructure improvements and teacher trainings thereby ring-fencing the resources and assuring sustainability of implementation.
- **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation systems:** To enhance the effectiveness of girls and inclusive education, it is highly recommended to develop a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation system to track outcomes and identify bottlenecks. This system should include a centralized database to monitor key indicators and education outcomes for all learners specifically those with special needs. Regular reviews should be conducted to analyze progress and provide feedback to policymakers and educators.
- **Develop communication strategy:** A nationwide sensitization campaign aimed at highlighting provisions in the various Acts and policies in relation to promoting special needs and girls' education is critical to addressing existing disparities in access to quality education. The strategy should focus on creating awareness about the importance of education, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive attitudes towards the inclusive education. Aligning the communication strategy with national policies and global commitments to education will contribute significantly to creating a more visibility for inclusive and equitable educational environment for all learners.

- **Enhanced Domestic Revenue Mobilization:** prioritize efforts to enhance domestic revenue mobilization to reduce reliance on donor funding and ensure long-term sustainability of education initiatives. Address issues to do with illicit financial flows which are causing Government to lose MK 1.2 trillion annually (Tax Justice Network Africa).
- **Efficient Resource Allocation:** allocate resources in a manner that reflects the diverse needs of the education sector, ensuring adequate funding for critical areas such as ECD, SNE, and vocational training.
- **Reassessing Political Programs:** the heavy investment in AIP and CDF lacks clear prioritization. Reallocating these funds to ensure the completion of projects such as girls' hostels and SNLCs could yield more tangible benefits. Additionally, a 100% increase in CDF should translate to increased bursaries for needy students including girls.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** explore innovative financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships or education bonds, to diversify funding sources and reduce dependence on external assistance.
- **Investment in Infrastructure and Facilities:** allocate sufficient resources for the construction and maintenance of educational infrastructures, including classrooms, laboratories, and sanitation facilities, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This include making the facilities disability-friendly.
- Solve issues to do with restricted spaces for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education by among other things ensuring equitable distribution of infrastructure projects especially those targeting girls and children with disabilities.
- Scrap off PSLCE exam fees for 2024/25, considering that primary education is free and ensure aiding for those unable to pay for JCE and MSCE especially girls.
- Decentralize fully resources for bursaries and TLMs for special needs education. This also includes ring-fencing all resources for SNE.
- Advocacy for long-term investment in inclusive education should be intensified, emphasizing its critical role in achieving gender equity, reducing educational disparities, and fostering sustainable development.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Mid-year adjustments for Vote 250 Government-funded projects

Project Description	2024/25 Approved	Mid-Year Adjustment	2024/25 Revised
Vote 250-Ministry of Education	29,500,000,000	(20,601,962,489)	8,898,037,511
Development Part 2	29,500,000,000	(20,601,962,489)	8,898,037,511
Construction of 3 TTCs for Primary School Teachers	1,500,000,000	(194,163,370)	1,305,836,630
Construction of 34 Secondary Schools of Excellence Programme	10,000,000,000	(6,288,083,226)	3,711,916,774
Construction of Inclusive Education Resource Centre	1,500,000,000	(1,500,000,000)	-
Construction of Luranga Secondary School	2,000,000,000	(2,000,000,000)	-
Construction of Primary Schools and Rehabilitation of Education Facilities	1,500,000,000	(94,720,127)	1,405,279,873
Construction of Teachers' Houses	1,000,000,000	-	1,000,000,000
Construction of Thumbwe Secondary Schools	1,500,000,000	(761,725,891)	738,274,109
Expansion and Upgrading of Domasi College of Education	500,000,000	(482,054,956)	17,945,044
Gwanda Chakwamba Centre of Education Excellence	500,000,000	(389,300,000)	110,700,000
Programme of Construction of 100 Girls Hostels in CDSSs	3,000,000,000	(2,622,470,890)	377,529,110
Programme of Construction of Science Laboratories and Libraries - Phase 1	2,000,000,000	(1,953,083,189)	46,916,811
Programme of Rehabilitation of Conventional Secondary Schools - Phase 2	1,500,000,000	(1,316,360,839)	183,639,161
Rehabilitation of Infrastructure for Disaster Affected Schools	2,000,000,000	(2,000,000,000)	-
Rehabilitation of TTCs	1,000,000,000	(1,000,000,000)	-
Grand Total	29,500,000,000	(20,601,962,489)	8,898,037,511