



MINISTERIAL REMARKS FOR SMP EDUCATION FORUM

By Hon. Agnes NyaLonje, Minister of Education

3rd December, 2020

1. Greetings from Malawi. It is an honour and pleasure to be at this virtual gathering. Scotland was my home for six memorable years back in the 80s so I appreciate Scottish issues and hope that we can assist our bilateral partnership to grow and develop further.
2. In October when His Excellency Dr Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera opened your AGM by video-link he expounded on our joint history and friendship. There is therefore no need for me to repeat the fundamentals of our partnership as we are all very much aware of its origins and history. Instead, I would like to build on his three propositions for developing our partnership and place Education as a central component of them.
3. First, His Excellency the President spoke about increasing our partnership network participation from 300,000 individuals to 500,000 and the number of activities on the ground from 1,000 to

1,500. Education, whether at early childhood, primary, secondary, technical and vocational or at higher education level is already the basis for a large number of our partnership interactions. I would wish to help promote and increase this partnership network in Education to develop further in the coming years.

4. We seek to develop an expanded and cohesive education system in Malawi that seamlessly interconnects the different sub-sectors in a way that delivers for our young Malawian population and is fit for purpose to help us develop into a middle income country in the coming decades.
5. His Excellency secondly spoke about the fact that Malawi and Scotland have already signed an agreement to further the joint achievement of the SDGs and he proposed that we should convene a conference within the next 5 years to assess progress on this agreement. I would wish the SDG 4 on education and our partnership activities in education to be a core component of the analysis that feeds into that conference and the actions that emanate from the conference. I would wish for our young academics and entrepreneurs, with their Scottish counterparts, to assist in that analysis and subsequent actions.
 - I would encourage you to discuss between yourselves, Scots and Malawians, on issues of policy and how education should

develop in the 21st century given our national needs and the technological opportunities that are now at our disposal.

- I would like you to discuss ways in which SMP might support Malawi to innovate and transform our education system so as to expand access and improve the quality of our education.
- Here in Malawi, I will be initiating an internal debate on these issues involving as many stakeholders as possible, including teachers.

6. His Excellency finally noted the upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 26th Conference of Parties (CoP26) on climate change taking place in Scotland and that we should commit to action on climate change.

- Climate change issues need to be embedded in our school curricula
- With respect to action on climate change we need our Malawian and Scottish Higher Education institutions, in particular, through our scientists, technologists and entrepreneurs, to engage in innovation to help mitigate, build resilience against, and ultimately reverse, the dangerous climate trends we see under way across our vulnerable planet.
- I would like to see the CoP26 act as a stimulus to improved research and innovation-driven activity between our two education systems to address climate change and environmental issues.

7. I have been asked to share my priorities for improving education in Malawi. First, let me highlight the need to think through long-term priorities against a backdrop of limited, informal ECDE provision, poor quality primary education, low secondary, TEVET and higher education enrolment, generally non-equitable delivery of education and inadequate and poor school infrastructure. The data illustrates this very well.
8. Malawi's population stands at around 19 million, and it is increasing at around 3% per year. Furthermore, the growth reflects a young population, with 46% aged under 15 years and 67% under the age of 25. This represents a large child, youth and young adult population requiring good quality education. We, therefore, have to increase our capacity to expand our education system, and increase expenditure, by 3% per year just to keep up with the population growth.
9. The following figures indicate where we stand as a country, the scale of our challenge and the huge amount of work that is needed from all sections of society if we are to succeed in developing a well-educated nation.
10. The figures I am providing represent the numbers of students who pass through our schools at the appropriate age. This is the international standard way of reporting on educational data.

11. If our system was working properly then we would expect children to be enrolled in Early Childhood Development Centres between the ages of 1 to 5 years. At 6 years, we would expect them to begin eight years of primary school. At 14 years we would expect them to enter four years of secondary school and at 18 years we would expect them to continue their education either through technical and vocational training or in higher education.
12. Our enrolment in Early Childhood Development stands at 49%. However, this sub-sector is largely informal with mainly volunteer caregivers, of whom approximately 50% are trained. There is a large pupil to caregiver ratio of around 69:1 and the curriculum is not aligned to primary education in terms of school readiness.
13. Our net enrolment in Standard 1 is 84%, which is commendable and among the highest in the Eastern and Southern African region.¹
14. However, student retention in primary education is a major problem. By Standard 8, only 58% of those who started in standard 1 complete their primary education on time.
15. This worsens when we move to secondary education, where the net enrolment of students of the appropriate school age is only

¹ <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/topics/education>

16%. That means that only 16 children of every 100 children of secondary school age, actually start secondary school.

16. Furthermore, only a quarter of those who start secondary school complete their secondary schooling without delays. Of those who complete secondary school, only half pass their Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations.
17. A smaller proportion of those that pass their MSCE have grades good enough for university and, of these, only half are able to attend university due to limited university education spaces. A similarly low number enrol in technical colleges.
18. Taking into account students who enter university later as mature students, the gross enrolment figure for Malawian students entering both technical and higher education is less than 1%. This is amongst the lowest in the world.² The average for low income countries is 10%; for middle income countries is 37% and for high income countries is 76%.
19. This situation and how to resolve it needs further reflection and long-term planning. However, such planning needs to be complemented by immediate action

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>

20. For the immediate and medium-term we are going to be focusing on the following reform areas:
- i. **Promote evidence-informed policy and data-driven decision making**, based on a detailed analysis of our education system at the levels of the individual schools, education districts and divisions, and the country as a whole. This will allow us collectively, by ourselves and with our development partners, better plan the type of investment required, and how much and where it should be allocated
 - ii. **Strengthen school and teacher training college governance and management through establishment of local boards and formal school management committees** that will enhance accountability, transparency, and local ownership of the education institutions.
 - iii. **Enhance teacher welfare and development; and professionalize the teaching workforce**. This will include setting up a Teachers' Council and setting Diploma-level as a minimum qualification for teachers.
 - iv. **Establish the Malawi Qualifications Authority** so that the country can develop a National Qualifications Framework. This will bring credibility to the quality of national and international qualifications provided through our education institutions and will bridge Academic and TEVET teaching and learning.
 - v. **Review and revise the selection policies for secondary schools and universities** to make sure that they are equitable and based on performance and merit.

- vi. **Develop and introduce a policy on an essential school infrastructure package.** This will provide a holistic approach to school construction and rehabilitation and lead to a more efficient and cost-effective approach to renovating and constructing schools.
- vii. **Improve the efficiency of the Ministry itself, through strengthening several directorates,** notably the Directorate of Inspectorate and Advisory Services and the Directorate of Inclusive Education; **and establishing two new directorates,** the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the Directorate on Open Distance and e-Learning).
- viii. **Develop a concerted, strategic and professional approach to ‘communication for transformation’** so that we can better inform Malawians and educational professional about what is happening and why, and better enable a dialogue within Malawi about how we should best develop our education system

I look forward to the rest of this meeting today and to learning more about the partnership plans in Education and beyond.

Thank you.