

**MALAWI SDG ACCELERATION FUND
NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT
REPORTING PERIOD: 1st April 2021 to 31 August 2022**

<p style="text-align: center;">Programme Title</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme Title: Learning Never Stops Malawi 	<p style="text-align: center;">Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / SDGs focus</p> <p><i>(if applicable)</i> Country/Region Malawi: National level and reach all six education divisions.</p> <p>Priority area/ SDGs focus</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Participating Organization(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNESCO UNICEF 	<p style="text-align: center;">Implementing Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National counterparts (government, private, NGOs & others) and other International Organizations Ministry of Education
<p style="text-align: center;">Programme/Project Cost (US\$)</p> <p>Total approved budget as per project document: SDG-AF Contribution¹:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNESCO- \$350, 000.00 UNICEF - \$350, 000.00 <p>Agency Contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by Agency <i>(if applicable)</i> Not applicable <p>Government Contribution <i>(if applicable)</i> Not applicable</p> <p>Other Contributions (donors) <i>(if applicable)</i> Not applicable</p> <p>TOTAL: 700,000.00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Programme Duration</p> <p>Overall Duration <i>(months)</i>: 17 months</p> <p>Start Date²: 1 April 2021</p> <p>Original End Date³: 31 March 2022</p> <p>Current End date⁴: 31 August 2022</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.</p> <p>Assessment/Review - if applicable, <i>please attach</i>.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Date: <i>dd.mm.yyyy</i></p> <p>Mid-Term Evaluation Report – if applicable, <i>please attach</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Date: <i>dd.mm.yyyy</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Report Submitted By</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name: Simon Jan Molendijk Title: Chief of Education and Adolescent Participating Organization (Lead): UNICEF Email address: sjmolendijk@unicef.org

¹ The SDG-AF Contribution, refers to the amount transferred to the Participating UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#)

² The start date is the date of the first transfer of the funds from the MPTF Office as Administrative Agent. Transfer date is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#)

³ As per approval of the original project document by the relevant decision-making body/Steering Committee.

⁴ If there has been an extension, then the revised, approved end date should be reflected here. If there has been no extension approved, then the current end date is the same as the original end date. The end date is the same as the operational closure date which is when all activities for which a Participating Organization is responsible under an approved MPTF / JP have been completed. As per the MOU, agencies are to notify the MPTF Office when a programme completes its operational activities.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BTS	Breaking the Silence
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
ETP	Ending Teenage Pregnancies
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IRI	Interactive Radio Instruction
LNP	Learning Never Stops
MoE	Ministry of Education
ODEL	Open, Distance and Electronic Learning
SAMRC	South Africa Medical Research Council
SDG AF	Sustainable Development Goals Accelerated Fund
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual Reproductive Health
TV	Television
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organisation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final Learning Never Stops (NPS) project report presents key results that the Ministry of Education in Malawi with technical and financial support from UNESCO and UNICEF has achieved under the Sustainable Development Goals Acceleration Fund (SDG AF) to support the Malawi Education Sector, which was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SDG AF was provided for the period from April 2021 to March 2022 and was extended to the end of August 2022. The project aims to improve access to education for children and adolescent girls in Malawi in crisis-like situations, especially the most vulnerable children with special education needs, within a school environment to ensure learners' well-being.

In Malawi, schools remained closed mainly from March 2020 to September 2020 and from mid-February to mid-March 2021, affecting over 6.9 million school-aged children in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. The SDG AF 'never learning stops' project enabled 1.9 million learners (57 per cent females), including adolescent girls and learners with special needs to access quality learning opportunities through distance learning modalities to enhance continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project also strengthened the education system's capacity to provide psychosocial support services and social behavior change communication messaging on COVID-19 prevention and control in schools, which enabled back-to-school and safe school re-opening. As a result, 20,200 learners (50 per cent females) accessed psycho-social support services due to the improved capacity of 1,591 teachers (52 per cent females). COVID-19 social behaviour change communication messages were developed to support community awareness and engagement. In addition, information on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH), Ending Teenage Pregnancy (ETP), and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) was provided, reaching over 600,000 learners (66 per cent girls). All these interventions strengthened the resilience and sustainability of the Malawi education system to provide continuity of learning and building back better during COVID-19 recovery to provide access to quality education for all children.

I. Purpose

The project's purpose was to improve access to education for children and adolescent girls in Malawi in crisis-like situations, especially for the most vulnerable children with special education needs, within a school environment to ensure learners' well-being. The project had the following outputs:

- 1) Improved coverage and quality of distance learning programmes effectively supporting learning for all, including children with special needs and adolescent girls.
- 2) The education system has strengthened capacities and skills to provide psychosocial support to teachers and learners.
- 3) Vulnerable and at-risk adolescent girls have adequate support for their safe return to school.

II. Results

The LNP project enabled 1.9 million learners (57 per cent females), especially girls and those with special needs to access quality learning opportunities through distance learning programmes and materials to enhance continuity of learning using the community platforms since schools were closed during the COVID-19 emergency. Through the SDG LNP funding, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) materials which improved its readiness to ensure continuity of learning in response to COVID-19 school-related closure and for future use in the likelihood of any other emergency.

The project has also improved the education sector's capacity to provide psychosocial support services to teachers and learners. To this end, 20,200 learners (50 per cent females) accessed psycho-social support services due to the improved capacity of 1,591 teachers (52 per cent females). Further, social behavior change and communication messages were developed focusing on COVID-19 prevention, management, Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH), Ending Teenage Pregnancy (ETP), and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and used through role modelling activities with students and TV documentaries, radio drama, and jingles to facilitate community engagement and awareness. The project also availed information on comprehensive sexuality education and sexual reproductive health through developed radio lessons on Life Skills Education (LSE) for Standards 3 – 5 and Forms 1 and 2, ensuring coverage of LSE radio lessons for Standard 3 – Form 2. These programmes were aired over community radios to reach over 600,000 learners (66 per cent girls). These learners also have increased knowledge of life skills, which enhances the learners' ability to adapt to different situations.

i) Narrative reporting on results:

Outcome: Children, especially vulnerable girls and those with special needs, have improved access to quality education through distance learning programmes and school-based learning platforms.

From April 2021 to August 2022, the project made significant progress toward ensuring that learners, especially girls and those with special needs, have improved access to quality education through distance and school-based learning programmes. The project enabled 1.9 million learners (57 per cent female) to access continuity of learning programmes through developed and established distance learning programmes and materials delivered over the radio during the COVID-19 school-related closure. These learning programmes and materials have also been processed and adapted for future use in the likelihood of future emergencies. Teachers' capacity and knowledge to provide learners with mental health and psychosocial support were also strengthened. Around 20,200 learners (50 per cent females) accessed psycho-social support services due to the improved capacity of 1,591 teachers (52 per cent females).

Additionally, developing radio lessons on Life Skills Education (LSE) for Standards 3 – 5 and Forms 1 and 2 ensured coverage of LSE radio lessons from Standard 3 – Form 2, reaching 600,000 learners (67 per cent female). This contributed to improved knowledge of Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH), Ending Teenage Pregnancy (ETP), and Gender-based Violence (GBV) awareness through role modelling activities and TV documentaries, radio drama, and jingles. The project has also developed a chatbot where teachers and learners can access more information related to Life Skills Education. These interventions strengthened the resilience and sustainability of the education systems to ensure continuity of learning and build back better during COVID-19 recovery for achieving quality education for all children.

Below are the key results achieved in the reporting period under each of the three project outputs.

Output 1. Improved coverage and quality of distance learning programmes for all, including those with special needs

A total of 400 Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) programmes for standard one to eight were developed in English, Chichewa, Maths, and Science. The materials were developed to ensure that children in primary schools continued to access learning opportunities as the education system struggled to restore a sense of normalcy for all learners due to the impact of COVID-19. The IRI programmes were also transcribed into braille and saved on the memory card to be used for orbit and audio readers by learners with visual impairment. The materials were adapted and printed to benefit 1,748 learners, of whom 423 (42 per cent females) are learners with blindness, and 1,325 (45 per cent females) are low vision requiring large prints. The development of the IRI programmes has enabled the MoE to have digital content that covers the whole year of primary school through radio. This has contributed significantly to the resilience and sustainability of the education system to withstand future emergencies.

Further, print materials were developed and distributed to learners to support students' self-paced learning, especially in rural areas, where 89 per cent of school-going children could not access remote learning platforms (radio, television, and internet). Life Skills Education radio lessons for forms 1 and 2 were developed to support continuity of learning during school closures due to COVID-19. The Ministry of Education also developed radio lessons on Life Skills Education (LSE) for Standards 3 – 5 and Forms 1 and 2, ensuring that the radio lessons now cover Standards 3 – 8 and Forms 1 and 2. These lessons have been aired on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation national radio, reaching an estimated 600,000 learners (67 per cent female), whose knowledge of life skills for adapting to different situations has increased.

The project also supported the development of a package of COVID-19 prevention and control, Sexual Reproductive Health, Ending Teenage Pregnancy, and Gender Based Violence messages to enhance information and knowledge acquisition on COVID-19 prevention, management, and Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH), Ending Teenage Pregnancy (ETP), and Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

Output 2. Strengthened the education system's capacities to provide psychosocial support to teachers and learners

The effects of COVID-19 further worsened the situation of children in Malawi, with schools having positive cases among learners and teachers during the third wave in July and August 2021. As an attempt to address some of these issues, 1,711(866 females) school level officials, including headteachers, PEAs, and teachers, were trained from 80 primary schools in five targeted districts of Lilongwe, Mzimba, Mwanza, Nkhatabay, and Blantyre to be able to provide psychosocial and mental health support to learners and teachers.

This training provided teachers with increased knowledge and skills to provide psychosocial support to 20,200 learners. To ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities in learning, the department of inclusive education in the MoE has organized capacity development workshops to support 128 Ministry of Education officials (38 per cent female) to support teaching and learning for children with disabilities. Table 1: Participation in capacity development on inclusive methods

	MWANZA		BLANTYRE		MZIMBA N		NKHATABAY	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
DEMs	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
IE Coordinators	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
PEAs	2	1	4	5	1	4	11	3
Headteachers	15	0	6	9	7	1	14	6
Specialist teachers	1	3	2	8	10	5	2	2
Total	19	5	12	22	20	10	29	11

Other interventions to reach learners with disabilities were also implemented, including a training of trainers' workshop for 38 specialist teachers (42 per cent female) of learners with disabilities who were trained on inclusive methods of delivering lessons for learners with disabilities. Further, a hands-on training was conducted by the South Africa Medical Research Council (SAMRC) using an approach called Breaking the Silence (BTS), an evidence-based curriculum-implementation approach targeting the delivery of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), parenting support, and community engagement for learners with disabilities in and out of schools. UNESCO will continue to collaborate with SAMRC and MoE to scale up this innovative approach for improved knowledge of adolescent girls on CSE.

Output 3. Vulnerable and at-risk girls have adequate support for their safe return to schools

The Malawi 2063 Vision recognizes that the education of a girl child is a catalyst for development in Malawi. However, education indicators for girls remain low. Girls' survival rate to Standard 8 at the end of

the primary school cycle is 40 per cent, while the primary completion rate is 50 per cent.⁵ Girls are at high risk of quitting school too early due to early pregnancy and marriages fueled by poverty, harmful cultural practices, and community indifference. This project developed a radio drama on early and unintended pregnancy. The programme is currently being aired on three national radio stations to encourage young people to stay in school and avoid behaviors that will place them at risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Response to the radio drama has been outstanding, as shown through social media comments from both young and old. It has generated community discussions around comprehensive sexuality education and its role in helping young people to avoid early and unintended pregnancy.

As part of the back-to-school campaign, the project has produced 21,600 posters to be distributed to 6 education divisions and 400 zones and their schools. There are six different posters, and each division has received 600 copies of each of the six posters. In three districts, Machinga, Mchinji, and Nkhatabay, Primary Education Advisors have used the posters to engage communities to support girls returning to school. This intervention's results will be further realized in the coming academic year (2022/2023), when more girls are expected to return to school.

High-level role modeling and role-playing sessions were conducted in primary and secondary schools in the target districts to empower and motivate girls to remain in school. Approximately 3,200 adolescent girls were empowered. Over 105,000 people (80 per cent females) were reached with the readmission policy, continuity of education, gender equality, sexual gender-based violence, and COVID-19 prevention information.

Over one million people (70 per cent of school-age children) in the targeted districts were reached with Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials, such as posters, flyers, radio jingles, short videos, radio drama adapted to local languages to scale up awareness activities around the safe return to school and the importance of education for adolescent girls.



Learners sharing Covid-19 messages and the importance of keeping girls in school through song at Katoto Primary in Mzuzu

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Boys' involvement in messaging to keep girls in school

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⁵ Education Management Information System, 2021



#ManaNews

Primary school learners in Mzuzu City celebrate LNS initiative

Mzuzu, September 15: About 700 learners drawn from eight primary schools in Mzuzu City on Wednesday gathered at Katoto Primary School for an open day in celebrating Learning Never Stops (LNS) initiative.

Delivering a motivational talk during the event, a girl learner at Mchengautuba I Primary School who was once married and returned back to school, Unice Kafodya, 19, said she was encouraged by her parents to go back to school after delivery saying neither physical outlook nor age can hinder a girl to return to school.

She also shared her experience in marriage saying her husband could leave her home without any money and at times beat her up.

Chief Education Officer in the Directorate of Basic Education under the Ministry of Education, Esnart Chapomba, said the open day was conducted to raise awareness on girls rights to education through LNS initiative.

She said government recognizes that girls continue to miss out on education due to a number of challenges that they encounter right away from their homes, communities and at school.

Consequently, their learning outcomes keep on dwindling and most of them end up dropping out of school, said Chapomba.

Ministry of Education initiated the LNS with financial support from United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) through Sustainable Development Goals Acceleration Fund.

Reported by George Bulombola



- **Linkages with SDGs:** The project contributed to SDGs 4 and 5 related to quality education and gender equality as it targeted disadvantaged adolescent girls severely impacted by the COVID-19-related school closure with the notable increase of early and teenage marriage cases. Addressing specific learning needs of adolescent girls and other disadvantaged children to ensure the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and effectively preventing the cases of gender-based violence and other social inequalities in education was an essential contribution of the project. The budget allocated was 70%. Radio

programmes were developed based on the existing curriculum, ensuring that learners continued to access education through the continuity of learning programmes and materials. Back-to-school interventions, including adapting and disseminating messages, were also developed. The Chatbot for LSE was also designed to ensure that learners have access to quality education. For SDG 5, the Budget allocated was 30%. The project targeted disadvantaged female learners, especially adolescent girls negatively impacted by early and forced marriages. Addressing specific learning needs of adolescent girls and other disadvantaged children would ensure the principle of leaving no one behind and effectively decrease gender-based violence and other social inequalities in education.

- **Describe any delays in implementation, challenges, lessons learned & best practices:** While UNESCO implemented most activities, there were significant delays mainly due to the modality of implementation where activities are funded directly to the service provider. This means that after the work plan is agreed upon with the Ministry of Education, UNESCO does the procurement for activities and services. All activities are implemented in collaboration with the MoE, who had to approve the resources before they could be printed or uploaded onto the chatbot.
- **Lesson Learned:** The lesson learned is that the COVID-19 school-related school closure and the response in terms of continuity of learning required new ways of delivering learning, mainly through radio, digital learning, and internet-enabled learning platforms. This called for urgent action for the education system to adjust to digital transformation and the application of technologies in teaching and learning. To this end, MoE has also strengthened the policy and practice on digital transformation and established a department of open and distance education to realize the new vision for education, in which learning happens for everyone, everywhere, for all children. A lesson from UNESCO is that expertise in CSE delivery for learners with disabilities is limited. Therefore, the few available experts pose restrictions on their programmes, impacting the scale-up of training activities. UNESCO is continuing to work with experts to resolve the situation.
- **Gender Specific Results.** The project responded to gender equality, allowing adolescent girls with multiple roles to access education materials and continue their education using print or online learning materials, thereby increasing girls' access to learning. Further, the back-to-school campaigns empowered adolescent girls, especially those who drop out, to return to school, contributing to gender equality. Moreover, the activities contributed to changing negative norms among the communities to support girls' education effectively, thereby contributing to the readmission policy.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The Ministry of Education, UNESCO, and UNICEF jointly monitored the project.

ii) Indicator Based Performance Assessment:

Using the **Programme Results Framework from the Project Document** - provide an update on the achievement of indicators at both the output and outcome level in the table below. Where it has not been possible to collect data on indicators, a clear explanation should be given explaining why and plans on how and when this data will be collected.

	<u>Achieved</u> Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)	Source of Verification
Outcome 1⁶ Indicator: 1.1a Percentage of children who benefited from distance learning programmes Baseline: 36 % Planned Target: 45%	37%	The school academic calendar for 2021 was not disrupted during the project; the distance learning programmes were not aired.	Education Cluster Minutes
Indicator: 1.1b Percentage of children safely returned to school after school reopened Baseline: 96% Planned Target: 98%	96%	Schools didn't close in the project period.	Education Cluster Minutes
Output 1.1 Improved coverage and quality of distance learning programmes, effectively supporting learning for all, including those with special needs. Indicator 1.1.1.a Number of children who have access to a distance learning programme, including children with special needs (UNICEF and UNESCO) Baseline: 1.9 million Planned Target: 2.4 million	1.9 million	The distance learning programmes were not aired as the schools did not close during the project timeframe.	

⁶ Note: Outcomes, outputs, indicators, and targets should be **as outlined in the Project Document** so that you report on your **actual achievements against planned targets**. Add rows as required for Outcome 2, 3 etc.

<p>Indicator 1.1.1 b Number of teachers and learners who assessed chatbot for teaching and learning materials (UNESCO)</p> <p>Baseline: 0</p> <p>Planned Target: 30,000 teachers and 1.7 million learners.</p>		<p>The chatbot is under development. Numbers will be reached once it is rolled out.</p>	
<p>Output 1.2 Education system has strengthened capacities and skills to provide psychosocial support to teachers and learners.</p> <p>Indicator 1.2.1 Number of teachers who benefited from psychosocial support (UNICEF and UNESCO)</p> <p>Baseline: 0</p> <p>Planned Target: 1,000</p>	<p>1,591 (822 females, 769 Males)</p>	<p>To support safe school re-opening, the Ministry of Education prioritized improving teachers' capacity to provide psychosocial support to learners.</p>	<p>MoE Activity Reports</p>
<p>Indicator 1.2.2 Number of learners who benefited from psychosocial support (UNICEF and UNESCO)</p> <p>Baseline: 0</p> <p>Planned Target: 5, 000</p>	<p>20,200 (10,100 secondary and 10,100 primary school learners)</p> <p>50 percent are girls</p>	<p>To support safe school re-opening, the Ministry of Education recommended support to the number of learners affected by COVID-19-related school closures with psychosocial services.</p>	<p>MoE Activity Reports</p>
<p>Output 1.3 Vulnerable and at-risk girls have adequate support for their safe</p>			

<p>return to school.</p> <p>Indicator 1.3.1 Number of vulnerable girls reached through sensitization through back-to-school campaigns and radio drama (UNESCO)</p> <p>Baseline: 0</p> <p>Planned Target: 1,000,000</p>	<p>680,000 girls were reached.</p>	<p>Adolescent girls have been reached and empowered with information on returning to school.</p>	<p>MoE Activity Reports</p>
<p>Indicator 1.2.2 Percentage of girls who have increased awareness of readmission for pregnant girls (UNESCO)</p> <p>Baseline: 0</p> <p>Planned Target: 70%</p>	<p>44%</p>	<p>The radio programme is not yet out; however, a campaign on early and unintended pregnancy was conducted under UNESCO.</p>	<p>End line report on the Early and Unintended Pregnancy campaign</p>

iii) Life Story

Why Alefa keeps learning amid COVID-19 - By James Chavula



Alefa in class with her best friend © UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chavula

The discovery of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019 left Alefa Banda confident that it was too remote a threat for her.

Like many of her peers, the 13-year-old Standard Seven learner at St John primary school in Mwanza, Southern Malawi, continued to live normally as COVID-19 spread worldwide at the speed people travel and interact.

However, the reality hit home on 23 March 2020 when the Government of Malawi closed all schools to limit the outbreak fuelled by overcrowding and frequently touched surfaces.

“When I heard the announcement on the radio, I couldn’t tell when we would return to school and continue to learn normally. I thought we would be back in a day or a week but ended up losing several months of learning,’ she recalls.

Laboratory scientists in Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi, confirmed the country’s first three COVID-19 cases on 2 April, ten days into the emergency school closure.

Alefa says she feared for her future. Like nearly five million children in Malawi, the girl would spend six months out of school amid uncertainties.



Alefa with her teacher Enless and her classmate © UNICEF Malawi/2022/Chavula

“I was afraid of dying if I caught the virus,” she explains. “I was hearing about people dying from breathing difficulties. Schools were closed, and I couldn’t go out to play with my peers. My parents ordered me to stay home and study, warning that the disease spreads fast in crowded settings.”

Alefa happily returned to school in September 2020, but the thrill was short-lived. In January 2021, the COVID-19 second wave, the country’s deadliest, forced the government to order another school shutdown spanning five weeks.

A year on, Alefa feels lucky to be back in school and reunite with her friends, such as Chimwemwe Singano, who wants to be a banker. On 16 September 2022, the two passed their Standard Seven examinations in readiness to go into Standard Eight.

“When schools closed, because I couldn’t wait to return to class,” she declares. “I was bitter because, without COVID-19, I would have been going to secondary schools now.” What inspired her to return to school after the school closure necessitated by COVID-19? Alefa flinches, explaining: “My mother told me COVID-19 isn’t the end of life, so I was motivated to get back to school and continue to pursue my dream of becoming a nurse. “Mom loves me; she wants me to succeed. If I learn without disruption, I’ll become what I want, get a decent job, earn a better income than those who drop out, and uplift myself, my family, and the nation.”

But Alefa is worried that some children, especially girls, did not return after the COVID-related school closure. “Many learners, mostly in Standard Eight, married and became mothers young. As children, we weren’t safe at home. Some parents weren’t encouraging their children to study and avoid risky sexual activities,” she states.

In Malawi, widespread teen pregnancies and child marriages disrupt efforts to ensure every child learns.

The 2015 Malawi Demographics and Health Survey shows that nearly half of girls marry before their 18th birthday, and a third get pregnant before reaching 19.

During the protracted school closure, rapid assessments by the Government with support from UNICEF revealed an 11 percent rise in teen pregnancies compared to the 2019 count. The findings announced by the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare show that over 13, 000 teenagers fell pregnant and 40,000 married between March and July 2020. Alefa thanks her teachers for tirelessly giving learners pep talks on the importance of staying in school amid the COVID-19 pandemic. She states: “When we returned to school, we had to mask up, frequently wash hands with soap, sit far apart and desks that sat three learners now took just two.

“Regularly, our teachers give us talks, encouraging us to keep learning because COVID is not the end of life. They encourage us to open up, share our fears and support us, so we don’t drop out.” Eneless Kadammanja, the deputy headteacher at St John’s primary school, thanks the government and partners for training teachers to support learners with remedial learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The training was done through UNICEF with funding from the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund. She explains: “The public and one-on-one sessions have helped us understand learners’ fears and confront myths that may compel them to quit school. We help them remain in school. We don’t want to lose them like thousands who married and got pregnant during the school closure. Then many children, especially girls, quit school because the future looked uncertain for some, and others were discouraged by their peers that schools would not reopen.”

Six girls got married at St John’s primary school, and four were pregnant, the highest count Kadammanja has seen in her teaching career spanning 14 years. She has spent five of those at her current school.

“I am grateful for training to motivate, counsel, and support the children not to drop out. Although COVID-19 remains in our midst, we must ensure that every child stays in school. This is crucial to ending poverty.”

iv) Programmatic Exit Strategies

Building on the work supported by the SDG ‘learning never stops’, the MoE, with support from UNICEF and other Education Development Partners, plans to sustain the gains made to date through continued support to

- a) The COVID-19 crisis drove unprecedented innovations in remote learning through leveraging and harnessing digital technologies. Continuity of learning interventions through adaptation of emergency radio lessons for all children, including those with disabilities for primary, was initiated. MoE plans to officially launch the emergency radio programme as one innovation demonstrating the sector's resilience and sustainability to withstand future emergencies. All the developed radio lessons will be put to use for the benefit of learning for all children.
- b) MoE also plans to digitize the entire education curriculum, building on the latest development for establishing departments for online and distance and online learning as well as science, technology, and innovation. However, digital transformation requires harnessing technology as part of more considerable systemic efforts to transform education, making it more inclusive, equitable, effective, relevant, and sustainable. Through UNICEF support, MoE finalized the assessment of the Edu Tech/ digital education landscape in Malawi. The study will inform MoE in their development of policies and strategies in digital learning, which are key to the resilience and sustainability of the education system.

v) Emerging Issues

- a) Reimagine education and accelerate change in teaching and learning: Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning crisis has increased young learners' need for foundational learning, literacy, and numeracy skills. This impact of COVID-19 also brought the discussion on alternative modes of education deliveries such as radio, television, and online learning platforms in resource-constrained contexts like

Malawi. The availability of existing teacher-led radio instruction helped MoE quickly adapt child-centered learning programmes and materials delivered through radio. The development and airing of the radio programmes ensured the continuity of learning through digital platforms and contributed significantly to the resilience and sustainability of the education system to withstand future emergencies. The Ministry of Education established the departments of Science Technology and Innovation and Open, Distance, and Electronic Learning (ODEL), whose mandate is to promote innovative learning models by leveraging and harnessing digital tools.

- b) Remediation in schools: COVID-19 disrupted learning for over six months leading to learning losses. The MoE has introduced remedial learning to bridge the learning gaps created due to COVID-19 school-related closure. With support from UNICEF, the remediation programme will be continued and brought to scale through the Joint Programme on Girls' Education, the USAID project on National Reading Project, and the GPE/World Bank Malawi Education Reform Project.