Basic Education Programme in Malawi (BEP)

Improving the quality of basic education

The German Government has been supporting the primary education subsector in Malawi since the 1990s. Despite considerable progress made in access to education (GER-135% and NER-103; EMIS 2014); major challenges remain in order to reach regional and international quality standards. In general, education management has to cope with a serious shortage of materials, people, skills and institutional capacity. There are too few qualified teachers (average pupil qualified teacher ratio in 2014 was 78:1). Class sizes are too large at an average of 111 learners per classroom (EMIS 2014) and most class-rooms usually lack basic furniture. Drop-out rates remain high in primary schools (average dropout rate between 2011 and 2013 was 10.75%) and the basic education subsector is highly inefficient because limited resources are wasted due to the large number of students that repeat academic years (average 2014 repetition rate was at 19%). Furthermore teacher management remains weak and highly centralized as the changes suggested in the recently revised ‘Guidelines for the Management of Education functions Devolved to District Councils’ wait to be implemented. There are also problems with teachers’ professional career prospects which affect teacher motivation. Teachers’ salaries are low and frequently paid late and the general working conditions of a teacher in schools are poor. With the persistent shortage of teaching and learning materials and the cited challenging conditions operating in the school system, it is not surprising that the standard of classroom teaching leaves a lot to be desired and the performance of Malawian learners in comparative regional measures such as the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) is remarkably poor. This poses a big threat to Malawi’s future.

For the coming years, Germany is one of the development partners who has pledged to provide more technical support and has increased funding to the education sector in order to improve the quality of basic education during the period from November 2014 to October 2018.

Approach

The current overall objective of the GIZ’s Basic Education programme is to ‘improve the quality of teaching in primary schools in Malawi’.

This objective is highly relevant to the national education policy of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology and closely matches the central goal of the current Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP II) to improve learning outcomes. GIZ is contributing to four of the seven key themes of ESIP II, namely early grade learning, teacher management, decentralization and teaching and learning materials in basic (primary and complementary basic) and secondary education.

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1 A pupil enthusiastically taking part in a ‘card collecting and clustering exercise’.

2 Standard 3 children at a Teacher Training Demonstration School.

3 Standard 5 children engage in a group work as part of a shift away from teacher-centred lecturing towards methods that give learners more independence to come up with ideas for themselves.

4 Two teachers lead in a continuing professional development (CPD) session on tempo and dynamics in music. The teachers themselves identify where they have professional skills and knowledge gaps and specialists who have had musical training are asked to help them fill these gaps.

Photos: © GIZ / Robin Wyatt, 2014
The focal areas in the current programme are:

- Improving institutional framework conditions to improve the quality of basic education;
- Supporting Initial Primary Teacher Education (IPTE);
- Supporting the organization and execution of Continuing Professional Development (CPD);
- Revision of the Primary School Curriculum and related materials.

In the focal area of improving framework conditions, the overall objective is to realize holistic improvements of conditions that hinder effective teaching and learning. Under this reform GIZ will support the Ministry in tackling the management and supervision of teachers in schools in order to reduce teacher absenteeism and hence increase time spent on task.

Decentralization, a priority reform area under basic education (ESIP II, page 48), will be supported to help bring the payment of salaries closer to teachers in order to eliminate frequent delays in the payment of salaries to teachers.

In Initial Primary Teacher Education the current programme will build on earlier work on materials. The project will also focus on supporting both lecturers and student teachers in using effective ways of teaching under difficult conditions. The revision of first year IPTE syllabi and associated materials will continue to be an area of focus with emphasis placed on mathematics and foundation studies.

Another critical area of support for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology will be the organization of continuing professional development (CPD) so as to ensure the continued focus on teachers' demonstrating improved teaching methods.

Finally, the revision of the primary school curriculum and related materials will be another important focus area that will guarantee the relevance and application of the curricula and materials in the classroom. This will involve working with appropriate stakeholders and the department of the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE); a partner institution of the MoEST mandated to develop curricula and syllabi for schools and colleges.

Expected impact and results achieved so far

In recent years, GIZ has worked jointly with MoEST to train and produce skilled teachers. The second year of the Initial Primary Teacher Education programme (IPTE) underwent a significant reform that included the introduction of structured course materials and a student support system that created extensive professional learning opportunities for student teachers. Since 2012, approximately 4,500 students benefit from this programme.

With the establishment of the complimentary basic education programme (CBE), children who have never been to school or dropped out now have the opportunity to complete their primary school education in one of the 1,140 centres across Malawi. By 2014, approximately 70,000 children had completed their primary school certificate in this way.

The current programme began its operations in November 2014 and will contribute to capacity development in various departments of our major partner institution, the MoEST. Departments such as the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), the Department of Teacher Education (DTED), all Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), the Basic Education Directorate, the Finance and the Human Resource Management sections, etc. will benefit especially in areas of finance, human resource management, teacher management and in continuing professional development with a view to enhance the quality of work in these institutions. In order to reach the desired impact in these areas, the programme will adopt a systemic approach and will exploit interlinkages between directorates and departments and with other relevant development partners, such as DFID and KFW.