Bridging AGEE

National report summary 2024-2025: Malawi



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The Bridging Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (henceforth, 'Bridging AGEE') project is a three-year initiative (2024–2027) implemented in Indonesia, Kenya and Malawi by University College London (UCL) in partnership with UNESCO and the University of Malawi (UNIMA). ***Bridging AGEE*** **seeks to bridge the gaps between global, national, and local data processes on gender equality in and through education.** It aims to strengthen accountability for gender equality in and through education by improving how and what data are generated, shared, and used within and across these different levels. The project uses the AGEE Framework (gendereddata.org) and participatory process to identify data gaps, facilitate participatory reflection on needs and priorities, and build the capacity of government ministries, civil society, and women's rights groups through developing innovative dashboards, new measurement tools, and enhancing data flow and awareness between stakeholders[1].

This report highlights the key results, opportunities, and challenges from the first year of activities in Malawi (from March 2024 to March 2025), with a particular focus on the initial meetings of the National Advisory Group (NAG) and the first national workshop, held in Lilongwe on 20-21 February 2025.

1. Background

Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite making significant economic and structural reforms to sustain economic growth. The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, which employs over 40% of the population, and it is vulnerable to external shocks, particularly climatic shocks.

Malawi has enjoyed sustained peace and stable governments since independence in 1964. One-party rule ended in 1993. Since then, multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections have been held every five years.

The economy of the country has endured persistent macroeconomic instability over the past decade due to unsustainable fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate policies, resulting in high inflation and declining living standards. In the past four years, Malawi's economy has been marked by negative per-capita growth, persistent trade imbalances, elevated inflation, and chronic foreign exchange distortions.

In the education sector, according to the 2023/24 Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) report, the gross enrollment at primary school is high, but the net enrollment rate for primary education was only 89% in the 2023/24 academic year. In 2024 gender parity indicators for enrolment in primary school were 1.03 and 0.99 for secondary school. The transition rate from primary to secondary education is improving, reaching 49.7% in 2023/24, up from 47.2% in 2022/23 with no gender differentials. However, the net secondary school enrollment rate remains low at only 16.8%, with a drop in the girls' enrolment rate - from 17.1% in 2022/23 to 16.6% in 2023/24. Girls' completion rate falls below that of boys in upper secondary school, linked with high rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy. There are also many

[1] The AGEE Framework was developed with funding from the UK ESRC between 2018-22, as part of the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme (grant number 172694).

challenges, including low primary school completion rates (56%), and high rates of grade repetition (25%). Poverty and rurality exacerbate these trends.

Since 1994, the Government of Malawi has enacted policies to improve education and promote gender equality. However, Malawi faces a low rate of transition from primary to secondary school (42%), although there are no gender differentials amongst girls and boys in this transition (UNICEF, 2024; Namfuko, 20205). A UNICEF overview notes girls have higher school enrollment and completion rates compared to boys in primary and lower secondary school, although their completion rate falls below that of boys in upper secondary school, linked with high rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy. Poverty and rurality exacerbate these trends.

Malawi's national vision document, *Malawi 2063*, released in 2020, underscores education and gender equality as key enablers for transforming the country into "an inclusively wealthy and self-reliant nation". The National Education Sector Investment Plan 2020-2030 gives prominence to girls' education and notes girls as a special category to be supported in all levels of education. In 2022, Malawi submitted a National Statement of Commitment at the UN Transforming Education Summit that listed the country's educational goals, which included providing a minimum of 12 years of education for all children, achieving completion and transition rates of 100% for all children, and intensifying focus on girls' education.

2. Building a community of practice

Prior to the launch of the *Bridging AGEE* project, early consultations were conducted in Malawi between 2020 and 2022. These consultations informed the development of the AGEE Framework. However not much follow up work took place between 2022 and 2024. An Advisory Committee in Malawi guided this first phase of work.

When the *Bridging AGEE* project began in 2024, several members of the initial Advisory Committee joined the National Advisory Group (NAG). The NAG aims to guide the work of the *Bridging AGEE* project and its members met several times, between March 2024 and March 2025, to introduce the project, its aims and planned activities, and to discuss and review the Terms of Reference for the NAG.

Led by the country team in Malawi – the University of Malawi with the support of UNESCO's regional office in Harare – the inaugural NAG meeting was held on 20 February 2025, and the first national workshop for *Bridging AGEE* was held on 21 February 2025. The first national workshop aimed at building on earlier discussions on the AGEE Framework held in Malawi in 2022. It set out to chart concrete steps

on developing a national indicator dashboard for monitoring and evaluating gender equality in education, including reflections on existing data on gender and education, and what data improvements are needed.

The workshop was attended by a total of 11 participants. Several key sectors were represented: Ministry of Education (4), National Statistical Office, or equivalent (3), Research Institution (2), women's rights organization (1), and civil society organization (1). Among the participants, 45% (5) were female and 55% (6) were male. A summary of the gender participation is provided in Table 1. :

Table 1: Summary of gender participation in first national workshop, Malawi

Organisation type	Female	Male
Ministry of Education	2	2
National Statistical Office, or equivalent	1	2
Research Institutions	1	1
Women's Rights Organisations	1	-
Civil Society Organizations	-	1
Total by sex	**5**	**6**



©UNIMA: Group discussion of the AGEE framework, Ufulu Gardens Lodge, Lilongwe, 22 February 2025. In the picture: Joel Kanjunju, Shelton Kanyanda, Esme Kadzamira, Benedicto Kondowe, Mercy Kanyuka, Nicholas Phiri and James Namfuko

Discussions highlighted that information and data on gender and education in Malawi are held by different governmental departments and are not always easily accessible. For example, some data on learning outcomes generated by the Ministry of Education are not captured through the Education management information systems ('EMIS') system. This lack of accessibility results in data that are already available being collected multiple times by different stakeholders.

Participants found value in bringing together different stakeholders and suggested future workshops should include representatives from the Ministry of Gender and more technical personnel, such as data analysts and statisticians, who would be familiar with specific data sources and indicators.

3. Reflecting on gender equality in and through education in Malawi

Most participants in the workshop had not previously engaged with the work of AGEE. As a result, the first national workshop sessions were primarily informative, focusing on introducing the project aims and planned activities. Participants viewed the AGEE Framework as a valuable opportunity to consolidate gender and education data in a single platform and reflected on a range of issues related to gender equality in and through education in the Malawian context (see **Table 2**).

Table 2: *Summary of reflections on gender equality in and through education in Malawi*

Key ideas about gender equality in and through education	• Boys and girls, men and women having equal opportunities to participate and learn in education and be treated with respect and dignity. • Remove barriers that impede boys' and girls' participation in education. • There are gaps in learning outcomes at all levels. • Girls disproportionately subjected to all forms of violence at school. • Gender inequality persists because it is systematic and change is gradual. • Implementation of policies has not always been at the right level.
Values emphasised	• Human rights, respecting cultural/religious values. • Equal opportunities regardless of gender. • Inclusivity, empowerment, social justice, free education.
Areas of practice to develop	• National gender policy looking at gender-disaggregated school participation data; readmission policy for pregnant schoolgirls. • Need to publicize and analyse gender data through e.g., Media. • Need for a more integrated data system.
Networks to be built	• Stakeholders identified to include in discussions of data: parents, teachers, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), small and medium-sized companies (SMCs), police, media, Ministry of Gender, community leaders, development partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local assemblies /councils, higher

	education institutions, church leaders, student and youth leaders, and legislators.

Additionally, participants noted that a focus on gender should not overlook experiences of boys as well as girls. They also emphasized the need to consider how to strategically position the project, suggesting it could be linked with other development initiatives and groups. The AGEE Framework was seen as a useful tool to complement other efforts addressing gender and education data.

4. Building the AGEE national dashboard: data concerns and supporting good practice

Workshop participants identified several areas where gender-disaggregated data remain necessary, particularly in relation to school participation and dropout. They also emphasized the importance of more holistic and integrated uses of data (see Table 3).

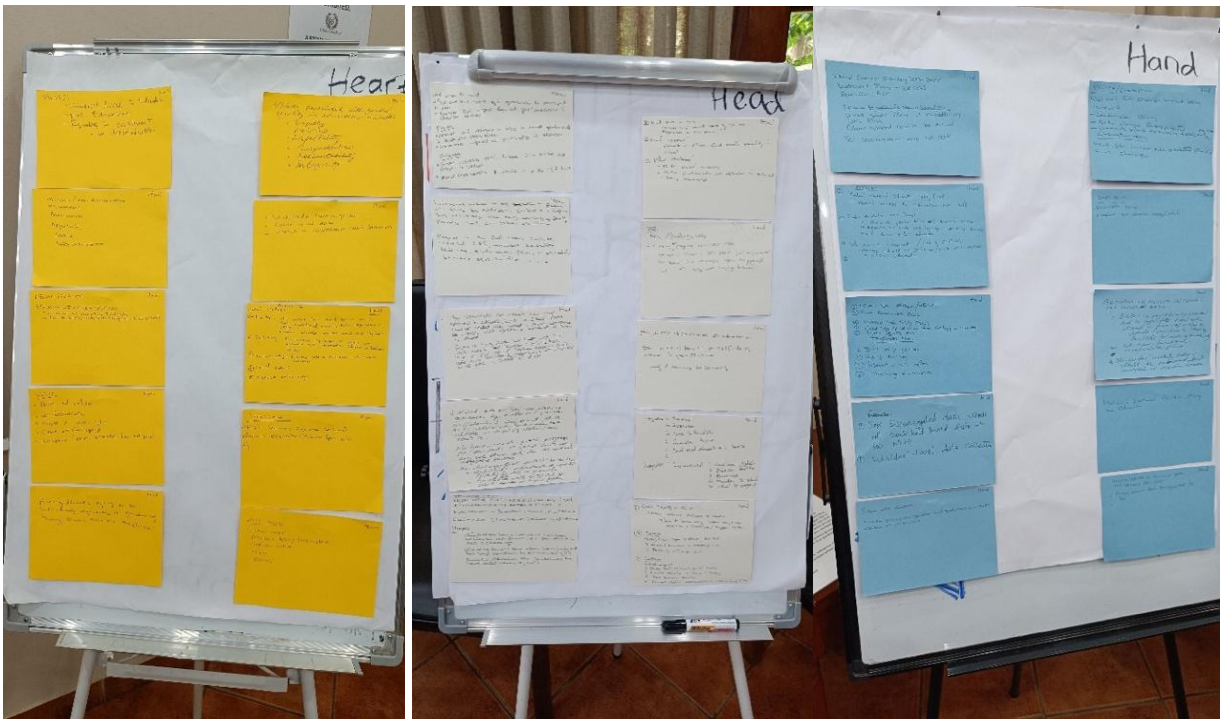
Table 3: Summary of issued raised concerning data in Malawi

Suggested improvements in data collection building from the AGEE framework and process	**Data challenges to be addressed**	**Good practice to be developed**
Understanding gender responsive allocations; identify what specific institutions exist; gender breakdown of decision makers; strategic consideration of AGEE.	Not discussed in detail.	Include technical personnel in work on building National Dashboard.
Strengthen partnerships and collaboration across all stakeholder groups working in areas of gender and education.	Data are fragmented across departments/sectors. This makes it difficult to be conclusive on missing data.	• Strengthen participation in AGEE by various departments /sectors • Enhance data-sharing to ensure informed decision making; • Conduct periodic stakeholder consultations to align AGEE with national and local needs; • Create communities of practice.

While workshop participants were less familiar with specific data sources and indictors, they offered insights into types of data and information that could be used in a national dashboard (see **Appendix B**).

However, moving forward, workshop participants emphasized the need to involve more technical data experts (e.g. data analysts and statisticians) in AGEE workshops to provide more in-depth information about data sources and missing data required for building an AGEE national dashboard.

A group discussion was held using AGEE's Head, Heart, Hand and Foot activity which required members to think, pair and then share their responses on issues of inequality in Malawi (see photo below).



©UNIMA: Head, Heart, Hands Feet activity used to discuss equity issues before selecting neighbourhoods for local workshops.

5. Focus for neighbourhood work

The Head, Heart, Hands and Feet activity led to preliminary discussions on where the neighbourhood work will focus. Participants identified 4 sites for data collection, linked with inequalities associated with gender and education. Forms of discrimination discussed were ethnicity, religion, race, and livelihood opportunities.

Participants proposed the following sites for data collection for the following reasons:

- Neno and Chitipa (Nthalire area) districts – Accessibility issues: bad roads and remoteness.
- Mangochi (Makanjira area) – Remote location; (Namwera, area) – Religion, rurality, remoteness.
- Mchengautuwa, Mzuzu; Mtandire, Lilongwe; Bangwe, Blantyre – urban poverty.
- Mzimba district – High rates of male dropout due to migrating to South Africa for work.

6. Conclusion and way forward

Participants agreed on a consultative process working with stakeholders 'to align AGEE initiatives with national and community needs' and think about sustainable funding processes to support the long-term implementation of the AGEE Framework in Malawi. Next steps include strengthening partnerships and expanding the community of practice, improving data-sharing, conducting regular stakeholder consultations, and developing sustainable financing strategies with clear distribution of responsibilities. Reports of the upcoming local workshops will help steer some of the national discussion going forward.