

7 Malawi

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COUNTRY CONTEXT STATISTICS	
	<p>Population: 15.4 million (2011) GDP per capita: US\$357 (2010) Human development index: 0.400 Unemployment: not available Key economic sectors: agriculture Principal exports: tobacco, tea, sugar, cotton, coffee, peanuts, wood products, apparel HIV and AIDS prevalence: 11% (2010 est.) Gross primary enrolment ratio: 119% (2006) Gross secondary enrolment ratio: 32% (2010) Gross tertiary enrolment ratio: 1% (2010)</p>
<small>Country context data were obtained from a variety of sources: CIA (2012), UNAIDS (2011), UNDP (2011), UNESCO (2011).</small>	

The Republic of Malawi is situated in southeast Africa. In 1963 Malawi gained independence, changed its name from Nyasaland and adopted a single-party state. Malawi now has a democratic, multi-cultural government with a small military force to protect the country (including an army, a navy and an air force). In 2012, Joyce Banda became the country's first female president.

Malawi is among the world's least developed countries. The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, on which the large rural population depends. Malawian agriculture is mainly subsistence-based, depending on primary products, and with little processing to finished products. The country's wealth is largely in the hands of a small elite. Agriculture accounts for about 37 per cent of GDP and 85 per cent of all exports. To meet its development targets, Malawi depends significantly on outside aid. With the GDP real growth rate estimated to have been 6.5 per cent in 2010 and 4.6 per cent in 2011, the government faces challenges in building and expanding the economy, improving education and health care.

Malawi has a low life expectancy, a high infant mortality rate and a high prevalence of HIV which has affected the labour force. Malawi is among the top producers of tobacco in the world and ranked tenth in global rankings in 2010. It also produces tea, sugar cane and coffee which, alongside tobacco, account for about 90 per cent of all revenue (Nkhutako District Assembly 2009).

Higher education landscape

Higher education is provided by two public institutions and seven private institutions.

Brief historical overview of higher education

Shortly after independence the University of Malawi opened its doors to students, starting with only 90 students in 1965. Two years later, the Institution of Public Administration, Hill College of Education and Bunda College were established as colleges affiliated to the university, increasing

access to higher education for those who could not get access to the traditional university or who wanted a more professional training route. The establishment of Mzuzu University followed an Act of Parliament, establishing a second public university in Malawi. In order to facilitate the rapid establishment of this new university, the Commission for the Establishment of the University in the North (COMESUN), established by the Malawian President, recommended that the existing Mzuzu Teachers' Training College be upgraded to house the new university. The first intake of 300 students enrolled in 1999. Mzuzu University has five faculties that offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (Mzuzu University n.d.). This university did not complete a questionnaire in the current study, so data relating to the Mzuzu University have been sourced from SARUA's 2008 profiling study.

Since the late 1980s, much of the debate regarding higher education in Malawi has centred on managing the demand for higher education. In 1988 the criteria for admission were changed to a quota system, ensuring representation of students from all the provinces. The introduction of a quota system of selection meant that the University of Malawi would accept an equal number of students from each political district in Malawi. Within the quota selection system, each of the 28 districts was allocated space for 10 students per year. This quota system was overturned by a high court ruling in 1993, soon after a multiparty democratic government took office. The quota system was perceived to constitute a violation of fundamental human rights (Divala 2009). However, according to news reports the Minister of Finance insists that the quota system was abolished solely because of financial implications for the national coffers and the need to increase student tuition fees (Malawi News 2012).

The quota system was replaced by a merit system, meaning that students would gain access to university according to their academic excellence. In 2009 the government of Malawi and the funder of the University of Malawi decided to re-introduce the quota system in the selection of students to the university, but in 2012 the President of Malawi again abolished the quota system, stating that students should be accepted on the basis of merit rather than their place of origin. A committee has been appointed to design a new access system with the ultimate aim of increasing student intake into public universities (University World News 2011b). The University of Malawi remains the largest university in the country and now consists of five colleges: Bunda, Chancellor, Kunuzu Nursing, a polytechnic and a medical school (Kotecha 2008). Malawi plans to construct five new higher education institutions within the coming decade and a Public Universities Working Committee has been set up to oversee the planning (University World News 2011b).

National higher education policy context

The government's National Educational Sector Plan 2009–2012 sets out three priority areas for higher education improvement (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2009):

Priority 1: Governance and management. This focuses on national education sector plans to improve the quality and relevance of higher education, to create legal provision and change in managerial approaches.

Priority 2: Access and equality. Here the aim is to increase the number of higher education institutions in Malawi. There is insufficient space for all eligible students to be accommodated within the two public universities and thus students do not have a fair chance of accessing higher education in Malawi. This supports World Bank findings (World Bank 2008), which indicate that access to higher education in Malawi remains one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. Another report by the United Nations, based on research from selected African countries, reveals that less than one per cent of Malawi's qualified cohort are actually enrolled in some form of tertiary education (UN 2010).

Priority 3: Quality and relevance. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy seeks to transform the nation from poverty to prosperity. This requires a sound human capital resource base with skills that are technologically up-to-date and adequate knowledge in scientific research. The quality of higher education will need to meet the human resource requirements and development needs of the country.

These priorities resonate closely with the main objectives stated in the 2012 Output Budget issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, namely to:

- mainstream gender issues in higher education activities;
- fight HIV/AIDS and minimise its impact in schooling and society;
- strengthen educational management and governance at all levels;
- improve quality and relevance of education at all levels; and
- widen equitable access at all levels to all Malawians.

There is evidence of an effort to link higher education to national development needs. This is observed in the 2001 Policy and Investment Framework of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture: 'the Government acknowledges the significance of a solid higher education system in enhancing the development of Malawi' (Minister of Education, Sports and Culture 2000:32).

The overall regulation of higher education is done through an accreditation committee whose membership comprises the Ministry of Education (Education Methods and Advisory), the Office of the President and Cabinet (Department of Human Resources Development and Training) and the University of Malawi. For public universities, governance issues are regulated by Acts of Parliament (Chevvara 2009).

According to the Ministry of Education questionnaire response, the ministry does not monitor governance and management of higher education at the institutional level: institutions are independent. With the exception of funding, which comes from the Ministry of Finance as well as irregular interventions from the Ministry of Education, all internal institutional planning and processes are conceived and implemented at institutional level. Interventions are based on institutional needs, and institutions have responsibility for both governance and management. The University of Malawi and Mzuzu University are each governed by a council, consisting mainly of members appointed by the government, and supported mostly by government grants and miscellaneous income sources. Private higher education institutions usually have independent councils and senates which are appointed by their proprietors, mostly religious bodies. The Ministry of Education also indicated that parliament has just approved the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education, and council members have been appointed.

Size and shape of higher education

There are two publicly funded universities and seven privately funded universities. The student percentages indicate that although there are more private institutions, most students are enrolled in public universities. Most of the privately funded universities are owned by religious groups.

Table 1: Number and type of higher education institutions

Type of higher education institutions	Number of institutions	Percentage of students enrolled
Publicly-funded universities	3	80
Publicly-funded technical universities	N/A	N/A
Privately-funded accredited universities or colleges	7	20
Total	10	100

Sources: SARUA MoE questionnaires (2011)

Access to higher education remains a major challenge as the two public universities cannot accommodate demand. For example, approximately 38.1 per cent of the 2007 Malawi Secondary Certificate of Education (MSCE) graduates were admitted into public universities in 2008. This means that slightly over 60 per cent of the students eligible for higher education could not be admitted due to limited space (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2009). The increasing number of private institutions is enabling access for professional and vocational training.

In a 2007 study of the students who had applied for undergraduate admission, 60 per cent were not accepted due to limited infrastructure and facilities. Even though students met the minimum

admission requirements, limited infrastructure prevented the admission of more students. Of the 2 000 students who applied for postgraduate studies, only 20 per cent were admitted.

Student profile

From available data, 99 per cent of students in Malawi (8 556) are national citizens. Seventy-five students were said to be from the SADC region and five students from other countries outside the SADC region. The universities consist mostly of contact students, although the number of distance students is growing. Most of the students are enrolled for undergraduate studies. The highest enrolments are in science, engineering and technology (about 25 per cent of all registered students). More males (59.6 per cent) than females are enrolled for undergraduate studies.

Enrolment patterns

Enrolment rates have been increasing, with about 8 000 students enrolled for undergraduate studies in 2008 (World Bank 2008). The majority of students (more than 85 per cent of all enrolments) are registered for undergraduate studies at public universities, with the highest rate of enrolment being reported for engineering and technology. Although engineering and technology has the highest student enrolment overall, the humanities and social sciences have 52.2 per cent of students enrolled for doctoral studies (the highest percentage at this level of study). Most students enrolled at the universities are male, with the exception of the health sciences in which 55.6 per cent of the students are female. The greatest gender disparity is seen in science, engineering and technology, where 67.3 per cent of the students are male.

Staff profile

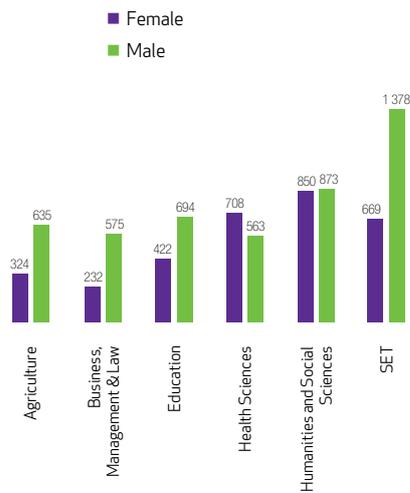
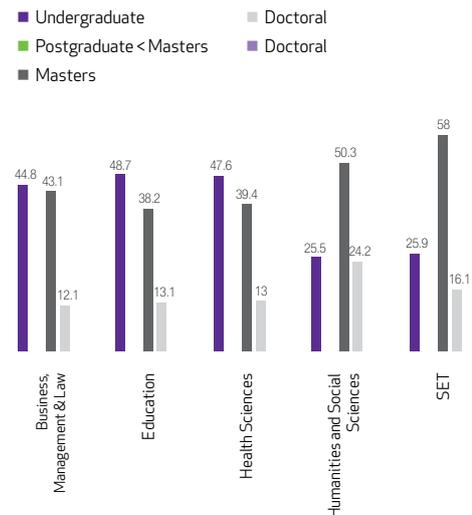
Data from the study indicated that there are about 890 academic and research staff at public higher education institutions in Malawi. Of these, 91.8 per cent are employed at the University of Malawi, while 8 per cent of the staff are from Mzuzu (note that the Mzuzu figures are from the SARUA 2008 study). Of the 770 academic and research staff members at the University of Malawi, 94.3 per cent are Malawian citizens, 0.8 per cent are from SADC countries, and about 5 per cent are from countries outside the SADC region.

As with student enrolment patterns, a large gender disparity is evident among staff with 71 per cent of academic and research staff being male. Most staff are located in the Science, Engineering, and Technology Faculty, where most of the students are enrolled. The majority of academic and research staff at the University of Malawi have masters degrees as their highest qualification. There are no staff members with doctoral degrees in the agriculture department.

National higher education outputs and alignment with policy imperatives

Graduate patterns

As with enrolment data, the majority of qualifications are awarded at the undergraduate level, with most of the qualifications awarded in science, engineering and technology. This distinguishes Malawi significantly from most other countries in the region where the majority of graduates are in the humanities, business management or education. Overall, there was no major difference between male and female graduate output. There is a significantly lower throughput rate at masters level, where only a quarter of enrolled students graduate in regular time. Based on the data provided by the University of Malawi, the humanities and social sciences are the only field of study that produced a doctoral graduate in the 2009/2010 academic year.

Figure 1: Enrolment by gender and major field of studySource: SARUA university questionnaire (2011)¹**Figure 2: Highest level of qualification for academic and research staff**

Source: SARUA university questionnaire (2011)

Quality assurance

The University of Malawi quality assurance policies have recently been approved. Quality assurance processes, however, vary across the different institutions and campuses. There is no generic quality assurance process or tool used by all higher education institutions within the system. Reports from the University of Malawi point to the need for further development of institutional quality assurance procedures. Arrangements for the engagement of external examiners and consultants, and moderation of the quality of the academic activities (including attainment of standards of performance and outcomes as well as staff training) are already in place. The university is currently engaged in the formation of a Quality Assurance Unit to monitor the quality assurance arrangements intended to maintain and elevate quality, and monitor, review, analyse and make available to the public reports on the quality of outcomes at the University of Malawi. The availability and quality of student support services seem to be high, even though most of the services are insufficient for the many students that need them.

Research output

The University of Malawi defines itself as a research-intensive university. However, no data were provided on research output to support this statement.

Recent developments and debates in higher education

As briefly mentioned above, Malawi plans to develop five new universities in the next decade. A committee of 17 people are in charge of this plan. Somewhat concerning is the fact that all the committee members are male. Sceptics doubt whether the construction of the five new universities will happen and argue that a better plan would be to change the teaching colleges into universities as there is currently not enough funding to build new universities (University World News 2011c). The new University of Science and Technology is currently being built. This new university will include an academy of medical science and a school of climate change and earth sciences. This university is expected to start operating in 2014 (Mkoka 2011).

Malawi is preparing to pass higher education legislation that will regulate accreditation of private universities, stipulating how private institutions operate and specifying standards. The bill gives the Ministry of Education the right to shut down private institutions if they fail to meet the new standards (University World News 2011d).

¹³ Some of the data used come from the 2008 study, as no data were received from Mzuzu University in this study.

Regionalisation

Malawi places considerable importance on regional collaboration and integration in the higher education sector in the areas of governance, financial management and capacity-building. The Ministry of Education reports that elements of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training have influenced Malawi's national higher education policy and practice.

Collaboration with the SADC region is valued and given high priority by management and senior academic staff at the University of Malawi. However, underfunding prevents management from committing fully to the practical aspects involved in ensuring adequate collaboration (Kotecha 2008). Even though the absolute numbers of students from outside Malawi remains low, there has been a significant increase in students from foreign countries studying at the national higher education institution in the past five years. However, no form of language and/or cultural support is provided for them.

Conclusions

Malawian higher education has come a long way, from one university with a quota selection system to the current two public universities and improved academic freedom. Even though there is no higher education policy currently in operation, a few policies are in the pipeline. These policies are expected to shape and improve the quality of higher education provision, management and output at different institutions of higher learning and training in Malawi.

The demand for higher education remains very high, with limited opportunities for access in the present public and private institutions. This is evident in the low intake of students who qualify and apply for university admission. With recent government plans to increase the number and quality of universities, it is hoped that access will improve for both national and foreign students from SADC and beyond. This will not only improve the level of internationalisation of the higher education system, but will also expose the higher education system to other academic development frontiers.

There continues to be more male than female students enrolled for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The student and staff gender disparities require attention, as does the regional footprint in terms of partnerships and collaboration with other universities and higher education institutions in the region. The dominance of the SET fields provides some hope for an economy aiming to break the cycle of dependence on foreign donors and to widen its focus beyond agriculture to technology and innovation, required in the knowledge economy.

With increasing emphasis on the rise of the knowledge economy at global and regional levels, higher education institutions in Malawi will have to establish a structured and incentivised framework to encourage knowledge production through scientific publications and develop a system to monitor and reward academics for their research output. Higher education policies should focus on increasing access, ensuring quality human capital training and improving knowledge creation and accumulation, since this will ensure that higher education gains its relevance in the country and the region.