



MARCH 2021

# COUNTRY BRIEFING: MALAWI



LNGB

1 project

5000 target beneficiaries<sup>1</sup>

**TEAM Girl Malawi** is a **Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)** project which targets the most marginalised and vulnerable out-of-school girls in 40 communities in two rural districts, Dedza and Mchinji, and one urban district, Lilongwe in Malawi's Central region.

The TEAM Girl Malawi project aims to improve the learning outcomes and life chances of marginalised girls, aged 10 to 19, in Malawi who have never been to school or who have dropped out of school. The project supports girls to improve their functional literacy and numeracy through the participation in girls' clubs and Complementary Basic Education Centres in small groups on a 1:15 ratio. The project also enhances the girls' knowledge of sexual reproductive health and rights, and offers girls training in financial literacy, as well as vocational and micro-business training. The first cohort includes 2,000 marginalised girls as well as 400 marginalised boys, and they started their learning journey in July 2019. The second cohort is currently being enrolled starting in January 2021, again with 2,000 girls and 400 boys.

PROJECT NAME	WINDOW	LEAD PARTNER	PROJECT START DATE	PROJECT CLOSE DATE
<u>TEAM Girl Malawi</u>	LNGB	Link Education International	16 August 2018	31 October 2023

## Achievements

From August 2018 to June 2020, TEAM Girl Malawi reported the following achievements:

- TEAM Girl Malawi recruited 2,000 girls to the project's first cohort
- They have created 80 new learning spaces in communities (e.g. in schools and community centres) for the girls to meet and learn.
- In terms one and two of the academic year 2019/20, over 5,000 textbooks (in subjects such as Maths, English, Chichewa and Life skills) were distributed to the girls.
- Of the first cohort of girls, around 13% (around 260) are girls with disabilities. The project has provided 196 assistive learning devices (such as crutches, canes and hearing aids) for those girls.
- 99 community awareness-raising and/or sensitisation events have been held, increasing family and community awareness of the benefits of girls' education and their role in supporting girls to learn.

**Since the project began, they have created 80 new learning spaces in communities for girls to meet and learn.**

<sup>1</sup> Number subject to adjustment following identification of beneficiaries

*Project data is based on reporting from May to October 2020*



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## Challenges

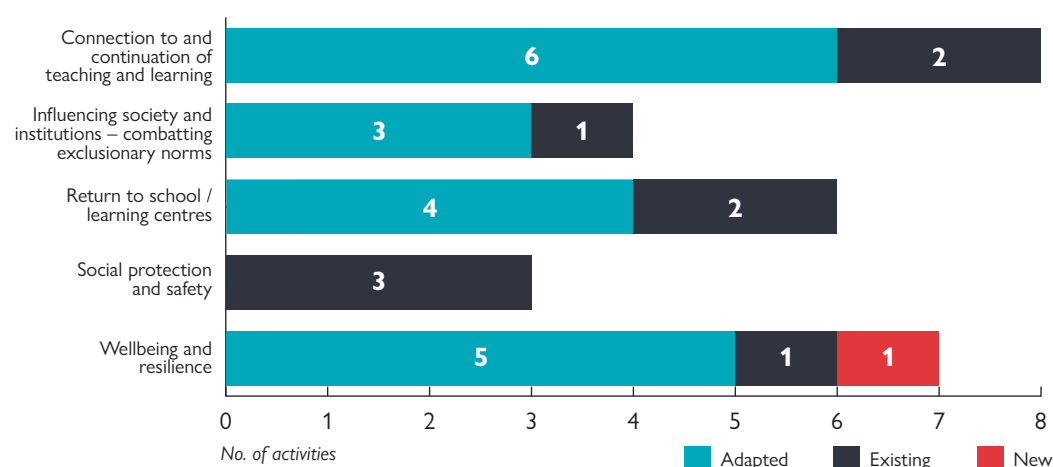
All districts in Malawi have reported cases of COVID-19 and, in April 2020, the national government implemented lockdown measures to try to curb the spread of the virus. This included school closures, travel restrictions and bans on large gatherings. In June 2020, TEAM Girl Malawi carried out a rapid assessment exercise with a sample of 287 girls in the project. The assessment revealed that only 44% of learners have some access to a radio and only 12% have access to a phone. This created challenges to keeping in touch with girls and their families or caregivers, and demonstrated that distance learning initiatives by radio or phones would not be able to reach the most marginalised girls. The response to these challenges is outlined below. The rapid assessment exercise also found that girls felt an increased risk of sexual violence, domestic violence, forced marriage, and increased chore burden at home, which are all additional barriers to marginalised girls returning to education and a focus for project activities. Although schools re-opened in mid-October, there is a concern that dropout rates for the project could be high. Analysis by Link Malawi's monitoring and evaluation team suggests that drop out could be as high as 9%.

## Recent highlights

In response to the challenges that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic, TEAM Girl Malawi developed a response plan with activities designed to best support the most marginalised and vulnerable out-of-school girls to continue learning, remain safe and to be ready for schools and learning centres to reopen. *Figure 1* outlines the types of activities Team Girl Malawi has implemented and indicates the proportion of these that are existing, adapted from existing activities or completely new to projects. Some highlights from these activities include:

- Modifying the ways in which students engage with the learning centres within the government guidelines, for example allowing students to meet at the centres, collect learning resources, learn at home and return the following week for feedback. During COVID-19 learner ratios went from 4:60 (four teachers with 60 students) to around 1:4 with learning taking place in small groups in line with the restrictions. Going forward, the project is going to keep classes to 1:15, rather than classes of 60 students, to ensure some face-to-face contact.
- Communicating directly with 1,624 (1,343 girls and 281 boys) project beneficiaries via the phone and in-person, to explain more about how they could use the local learning centres available, when the centres would be reopening and what support they could receive.
- All GEC projects have put in place safeguarding protocols and procedures specifically to ensure that their COVID-19 responses are safe for girls, other beneficiaries and staff members. Safety, as well as learning, continues to be a top priority for the GEC.\* In particular, Team Girl Malawi has been training community members, school staff and statutory agencies on child protection throughout COVID-19, and engaged 'trusted adults' in communities to act as an additional reporting option.

**Figure 1: COVID-19 Response activities in Malawi<sup>2</sup>**



\* Please see the safeguarding section on the COVID-19 page of the GEC website for materials and guidance provided to projects: <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/#/article/covid-19-response>. The GEC expects our projects to be compliant with our 14 minimum standards on safeguarding.

<sup>2</sup> Projects began implementing the COVID-19 response activities in Q2 2020 and will continue or be adapted in accordance with the evolving COVID-19 situation in each context and in agreement with the FM.

## Coordination and collaboration

Through the pandemic, TEAM Girl Malawi has recognised the importance of coordination and collaboration with local community groups, NGO partners, and local and national government. The project is a member of the Malawi COVID-19 response task force and sits on the national Basic Education Committee. Link Malawi is also an active member of the Education Cluster and recently joined the Civil Society Organisation Response Team which is led by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare. Recently the team presented at CBE (community-based education) working group meetings and supported the redesign of the CBE curriculum to reduce from seven subjects to four, which will be rolled out nationally.

## Lessons learned

- Limited access to technology has meant that in-person continued learning and support has been critical, so TEAM Girl Malawi has opened more learning centres.
- The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of working with and through community networks. This has not only offered the girls increased support and communication with a network of named, trusted adults, but also improved the project's ability to reach girls.
- School closures in 2020 have exacerbated the problem of poor attendance rates. In response, TEAM Girl Malawi intends to continue provision of at-home learning content, recognising that the challenges in attendance that some learners face will continue even as schools reopen.

## Priorities from January 2021

TEAM Girl Malawi will be focused on:

- Supporting girls to return to learning centres safely to resume learning together rather than taking their learning materials home when allowed under the COVID-19 restrictions, and monitoring girls' attendance rates.
- Identifying and enrolling the second cohort of students to the programme.
- Returning to activities which were disrupted due to COVID-19, in particular supporting school improvement planning.
- Training of CBE facilitators and learning assistants in gender-responsive, child-centred and inclusive teaching methods.
- Focusing on supporting girls' transition to the next stage of education or into jobs and livelihoods options, which was delayed due to COVID-19, for example, piloting a vocational training programme for girls and their carers or parents in financial literacy, business and income-generating skills.

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