

Why Population Matters to Malawi's Development



Managing Population Growth for Sustainable Development



A Primer on Selected MGDS Priority Issues and Population

- Agriculture and Food Security
- Energy, Industrial Development, Mining and Tourism
- Education, Science and Technology
- Public Health, Sanitation, Malaria and HIV and AIDS Management
- Integrated Rural Development
- Child Development, Youth Development and Empowerment
- Climate Change, Natural Resources and Environmental Management



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Investment Returns for Malawi

Malawi's population has grown rapidly from almost 4 million in 1966 to 14.8 million in 2012.¹ UN population projections show that Malawi's population could easily reach 23 million in 2025 and 37 million in 2050 if families continue to have, on average, six children.

This astounding growth has come from:

- A decline in mortality that the country has experienced since the 1950s due to improvements in nutrition and health care.
- Stubbornly high levels of fertility that have remained unchanged since 2004. Even with a national HIV prevalence of 11 percent, AIDS-related mortality does not offset the results of high fertility.²

As Malawi and the world improve health and reduce mortality by focusing on the Millennium Development Goals, Malawi's population growth will continue to pose challenges for its development, unless families have fewer children.

Malawi has made substantial improvements in addressing its population issues, especially by increasing its use of modern contraceptive methods, currently at 42 percent.³ Yet for Malawi to achieve its full set of goals in its *Growth and Development Strategy* (MGDS), it must address population growth. Family planning is a key strategy to achieving our goals. The popular slogan "Children by Choice" tells us that we need to decide if and when to have children. Family planning can ease pressure on available resources, contribute to sustainable economic growth and development, and lead to a healthy and prosperous nation.

"A healthy population is not only essential but also a pre-requisite for economic growth and development. There is a very close and strong correlation between health status and level of development. That is, countries with good health are highly developed, whereas those with poor health are underdeveloped."

— *Malawi Growth and Development Strategy*

Malawi Growth and Development Strategy Priorities

Malawi adds over 400,000 people each year to its population.⁴ Without a reduction in the average number of births per woman, health, education and employment services will be overstretched. This trend will continue to challenge the country's progress to meet the Millennium Development Goals, despite current efforts to advance Malawi's economic growth and prosperity, as described in the *Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS)*.⁵

The MGDS is the overarching five-year strategy to help achieve Malawi's goals and its Vision 2020.⁶ The goals are closely aligned with the Millennium Development Goals. The central goal of the MGDS is to promote economic growth and development with strategic investments and to provide basic social services, setting the stage for Malawi to become a middle-income country.

This primer examines several of the priority issues addressed in the MGDS:

1. Agriculture and Food Security
2. Energy, Industrial Development, Mining and Tourism
3. Education, Science and Technology
4. Public Health, Sanitation, Malaria and HIV and AIDS Management
5. Integrated Rural Development
6. Child Development, Youth Development and Empowerment
7. Climate Change, Natural Resources and Environmental Management

The 2010 annual review of the MGDS shows progress in a number of areas. However, rapid population growth challenges the sustainability of these improvements.

This primer provides information on the relationship among population growth, family planning, and the seven priorities of the MGDS. Each section offers facts about specific priorities, the relationship of the issue to population growth, and suggested actions for mobilizing support.



Agriculture and Food Security

Population Growth Is Reducing Average Family Farm Size.

Facts

- Population growth increases the demand for food.
- Women (especially in developing countries) are responsible for most of the world's food production.⁷ In Malawi, women constitute almost three-quarters of subsistence farmers.
- Keeping women healthy is key to food security. Food security exists when all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life.



Country Context

Malawi is one of the world's least developed and most densely populated countries. Population density has grown from 85 people per square kilometre in 1987 to 139 people per square kilometre in 2008.⁸ Landholdings have become smaller and smaller to accommodate the increasing population. Smaller farms combined with soil erosion have degraded agricultural land and decreased Malawi's arable land.⁹ More than 80 percent of Malawi's population earns its income from agriculture. These conditions, combined with high fertility, make the poor highly vulnerable to effects on food security of natural disasters such as droughts and floods.

Until recently, most households were able to feed themselves adequately. However, in 2010-2011, a drought affected some parts of the Southern region and reduced food security.¹⁰

If families continue to have, on average, six children, by 2040 the yearly production of maize will barely feed the population and Malawi will have very little maize for export. With fewer children and smaller families, Malawi would have a surplus of maize. One critical way to address food security is to slow population growth.

Actions

1. Include population growth and family planning in policy dialogue related to agriculture and food security, sustainable development policy, planning and programming.
2. Incorporate population and health messages into agriculture extension, water harvesting and food security programmes.

"The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy recognizes that a healthy and educated population is necessary if Malawi is to achieve sustainable development."

—Malawi Growth and Development Strategy

Energy, Industrial Development, Mining and Tourism

Slow population growth to invest in a healthy, trained and marketable workforce.

Facts

- Rapid population growth places greater demands for more infrastructure, energy and access to clean drinking water.
- Sixty-five percent of Malawians live below the national poverty line and are the most vulnerable to a wide range of natural disasters—floods, storms and droughts (one every three to five years), as well as man-made hazards such as pollution, disease epidemics and economic shocks.¹¹



Country Context

Malawi has the potential to diversify its income-generating avenues, to expand its economic base through multiple sectors such as energy and industry rather than depending solely on agro-business. While Malawi has made great strides in strengthening its economy, energy generation and supply are critical if the country wants to expand its industry sector.

With an annual population growth rate of 2.8 percent, Malawi needs to be better equipped to meet its energy needs. At the same time, growing industries will create employment. Easing the pressure of rapid population growth will give Malawi greater potential for meeting its energy and job creation needs; providing the capacity to manage natural resources for future development; and investing in a more highly trained, healthy, competitive workforce.

Actions

1. Workplace and income-generation programmes need to take into account the reproductive health needs of the current and future workforce, and include provisions for sexual and reproductive health services.
2. Put in place strategies to increase productivity and protect natural resources.
3. Ensure access to reproductive health/family planning and other social services in disaster mitigation strategies.

“By the year 2020, Malawi, as a God-fearing nation, will be secure, democratically mature, environmentally sustainable, self-reliant with equal opportunities for active participation by all, having social services, vibrant cultural and religious values and a technologically-driven, middle-income economy.”

— *Malawi Vision 2020*

Education, Science and Technology

Family planning improves opportunities for education and employment.

Facts

- Education plays a critical role in a person's wellbeing and welfare. Through investing in health and education, people—especially young people—have better employment opportunities.
- Keeping girls in school, which deters early marriage, is linked to better socio-economic outcomes.¹²
- Raising the education levels and drawing on innovations in science and technology increase Malawi's competitiveness in the global economy.



Country Context

Since Malawi initiated universal primary education to increase access to basic education in 1994, there has been progress in educational attainment. The proportion of the population with no education has decreased, and the proportion with primary education has increased. In 2004, 30 percent of females and 20 percent of males ages 6 and older had no education at all; in 2010, the proportions decreased to 19 percent and 11 percent, respectively. The median number of school years completed increased from 3.1 to 3.5 for males and from 1.8 to 2.5 for females. There are urban-rural and regional differences in educational attainment as well: The proportion of men and women with no education is higher among people in rural and Central and Southern regions than among urban and Northern regions.

For Malawi to increase its number of high-quality professionals with relevant knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the country's economy, it will need to expand access to and attainment of higher education and vocational training. Only 8 percent of its population over age 6 has completed secondary schooling and only 2 percent has achieved some degree of post-secondary education. The spread of new technologies has increased the demand for skilled workers. A highly skilled and educated population will help to hasten Malawi's socio-economic growth and development.

Actions

1. Integrate population and gender equity issues into programmes that will increase access and improve the quality and relevance of higher education, science and technology in Malawi.
2. Prioritize literacy and numeracy skills by expanding access to educational opportunities outside the formal education system.

Education, science and technology are some of the major catalysts for socio-economic development. An educated and highly skilled population will help in accelerating economic growth and development.

— *Malawi Growth and Development Strategy*

Public Health, Sanitation, Malaria and HIV and AIDS Management

Improving health requires a skilled and professional workforce and implementation of innovative human resource policies.

Facts

- A significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line, with serious consequences for children and women.
- Poor health and malnutrition are associated with high fertility, and can cause, among other conditions, the underdevelopment of children's brains and intellectual capacity.¹⁴
- Gender inequity is a major obstacle to reaching better family planning and maternal and reproductive health outcomes, and contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹⁵



Country Context

Use of modern contraception has increased in Malawi from 12.5 percent in 1992 to 42 percent in 2010. Contributing factors include the emergence of strong political will, strong partnerships with providers from non-governmental organizations and the private sector, and use of an extensive community-based distribution system. Nevertheless, large family size remains the norm despite the high demand for family planning. Gender disparities will increase if girls are left with few opportunities for education and meaningful employment. By prioritizing family planning as one of the critical areas within social development, Malawi can slow population growth and shift resources to strengthen health and hygiene/sanitation programmes.

While Malawi's 2010 MDG report notes that the country will likely meet its targets to improve child survival and reduce the spread of malaria, HIV and TB, its targets for improving maternal health are off course. Although Malawi has made progress in a number of areas in the health sectors, the gains are delicate and challenges will persist until Malawi addresses its population growth and reduces its burden of disease.

Actions

1. Mainstream reproductive health/family planning into all public health and sanitation programmes.
2. Include access to reproductive health/family planning and other social services in poverty reduction strategies.

Integrated Rural Development

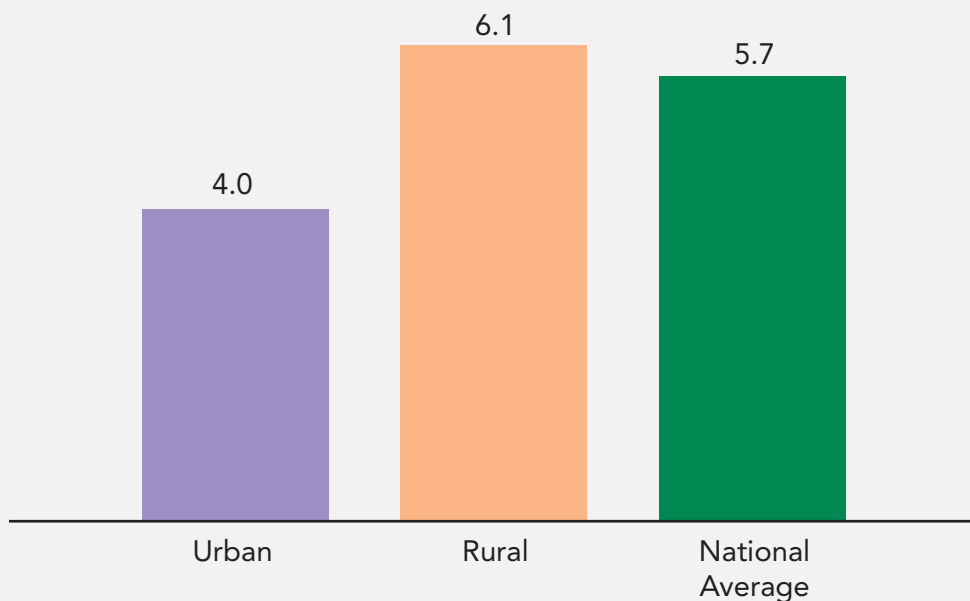
Economic opportunities improve rural livelihoods.

Facts

- Rural areas lack access to basic amenities and infrastructure.
- Poverty is pervasive in rural areas.
- Rural-urban migration is increasing rapidly.

Rural Women Have More Children Than Urban Women

Average lifetime births per woman



Country Context

Eighty-five percent of Malawi's population is rural, and the majority depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Poorly maintained roads, along with limited access to markets, make farming unprofitable and reinforce the cycle of poverty. Although efforts, such as the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, are assisting Malawi's poorest citizens, these programmes are not designed to be long-term solutions for economic growth.

Access to other amenities such as health and education are also limited in rural areas. Women in rural areas are less likely to use family planning and have, on average, two more children during their lifetimes than women in urban areas. Educational opportunities in rural areas are unattainable by many or seen as unnecessary, with 21 percent of women and 13 percent of men having no education at all.

Malawi's urban growth rate is among the highest in Africa at 5.2 percent. In many cases, movement to cities and towns is seen as an escape from rural poverty, brought on by situations such as diminishing land holdings and lack of off-farm employment opportunities. But rapid population influx to urban centres can be problematic. Recent migrants are often without adequate support networks and can find their living conditions worse than those in rural areas.

Thus, investments in integrated rural development provide access to markets for rural populations, and provide incentives for them not to migrate to urban areas.

Actions

1. Improve access to basic amenities and infrastructure. Providing health care, including family planning, and educational opportunities, as well as easy access to markets, is critical to improving the living standards of rural communities.
2. Promote income-generating programmes in rural areas. Creating more diverse employment opportunities beyond agriculture will alleviate unemployment and contribute to poverty reduction.
3. Establish rural growth centres to serve as socio-economic hubs. Providing central locations for social amenities and market facilities will contribute to economic growth and help mitigate the negative impacts of rural-urban migration.

Child Development, Youth Development and Empowerment

Smaller families make investments in children and youth count even more.

Facts

- A youthful population strains health and education services.
- Education and training is needed for a more productive labour force.
- Early marriage and childbearing are major health concerns for young women and impede development efforts.



Country Context

A large percentage of Malawi's population, 46 percent, is below age 15. This youthful population places a heavy burden on the working-age population (generally ages 15-64) to provide for the basic needs and services required by children and youth, such as health and education.

While a youthful population represents the potential for a large labour force in the future, jobs must be available to avoid plunging more people into poverty. Low levels of education, lack of productive skills, and high rates of unemployment in Malawi result in limited opportunities for young people. Only 12 percent of those ages 14-17 attend secondary school.

Addressing adolescent reproductive health can be a life-or-death matter for the many women and girls who marry at young ages and have little choice regarding sexual activity. Fifty percent of young women ages 20-24 were married by age 18, while more than one-quarter ages 15-19 have already begun childbearing.

Actions

1. Reduce the adverse effects of poverty on children. By reducing unemployment in the working-age population, families will have more funds available for children's health and education needs.
2. Ensure that education and skill levels are appropriate for the labour market. By improving access to education, including technical and vocational training, young people can be better integrated into the workforce and fully employed.
3. Provide comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education for young people in and out of school. Youth-friendly reproductive health services, including access to and information about a full range of contraception and about the complications of early childbearing, are also critical to youth development.

"The youth are energetic, adventurous, industrious, strong, healthy, and willing to learn. They are therefore an important human resource, but their full potential is under-realized, under-utilized, and sometimes misdirected."

— Republic of Malawi, *National Youth Policy*

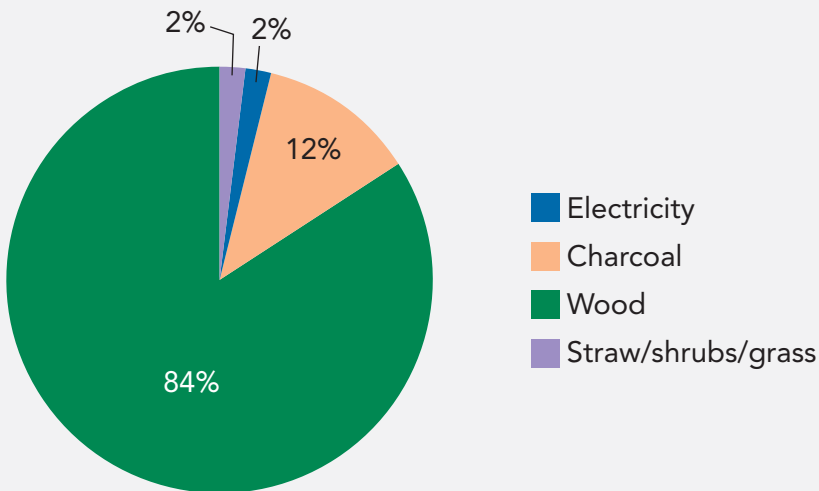
Climate Change, Natural Resources and Environmental Management

Protecting the environment will provide for the next generation.

Facts

- Increased climate variation is most threatening to those who rely heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods.
- Rapid population growth is depleting natural resources.

Type of Cooking Fuel by Household



Country Context

Increasingly, Malawi is experiencing a number of climate variations including droughts, floods and temperature increases. Any of these can negatively affect agriculture, natural resources, infrastructure and transport. For example, in 1992, drought reduced that year's maize production by 60 percent and reduced the country's GDP by 10 percent. Climate-related disasters can have far-reaching effects on people's health, often leading to disease and malnutrition.

Unprecedented population growth along with high poverty levels has led to an increasing exploitation of natural resources. Approximately 80 percent of the country's population relies on natural resources for their survival. Lack of alternative livelihoods and unaffordable energy technologies have the potential to lead to serious long-term impacts. The proportion of land under forest cover has been reduced from 41 percent in 1990 to 35 percent in 2010 as a result of unsustainable natural resource use.

Actions

1. Improve weather and climate monitoring, prediction systems and information and knowledge management systems. Improve early warning systems to protect the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations through preparedness and rapid response.
2. Strengthen education and public awareness programmes on natural resources and conservation. Building consensus among citizens will ensure sustainable management and utilization of the environment and natural resources, providing for the next generation.

Conclusion

Malawi has made great strides in tackling various development issues, and has identified key priorities to improve its growth and development. Critical for building on and sustaining these achievements is slowing population growth. Slowing population growth requires stronger support from a variety of sectors, including agriculture, finance and industry, health, water and land use.

By slowing population growth, Malawi can:

1. Consistently provide sufficient food for the population.
2. Improve the quality of its infrastructure, energy and access to water.
3. Develop a healthier, productive and competitive workforce.
4. Have smaller, healthier families.
5. Invest in more diverse employment opportunities.
6. Provide young people with safe and healthy transitions to adolescence and adulthood.
7. Better mitigate the challenges of climate variability and natural disasters.



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