

Planting the SEEDs for Education

In Malawi, only 29% of students transitioned from primary to public secondary schools in 2019. Available space in secondary schools is limited, and students are often required to travel long distances to reach schools, which disproportionately affects female students for whom there are increased safety concerns.

The SEED program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), aims to increase access to public Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) and reduce early pregnancy, marriage, and new HIV infections in Malawi. The program's main development hypothesis is that increased access to secondary schools will result in improved secondary enrollment.

Data for Impact (D4I) was tasked with conducting an impact evaluation (IE) of the SEED program and collected baseline data in 2019. This brief presents the SEED theory of change and underlying hypotheses. Page two highlights baseline data related to the hypotheses.



Malawi SEED Theory of Change



Inputs

- \$90 million investment cofunded by USAID and PEPFAR to expand existing urban CDSSs in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu, Zomba, and construction of new CDSSs in rural areas
- Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) wrap-around services
- Abolition of secondary school tuition fees
- Updated sexual and reproduction health (SRH) curriculum



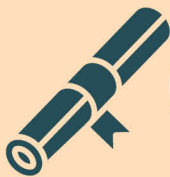
Outputs

- Increased access to secondary schools
- Increased number of Form 1 seats
- Decongested urban CDSSs
- Reduced self-boarding
- Decreased financial burden
- Decreased travel distance to school
- Improved WASH and menstrual hygiene management (MHM)
- Increased SRH knowledge
- Improved gender norms



Outcomes

- Improved primary school attendance, performance, retention, and completion
- Increased aspirations for educational attainment
- Decreased risk of gender-based violence (GBV) during school travel and self-boarding
- Delayed sexual debut
- Reduced child labor



Impacts

- Higher rate of transition to secondary school
- Decreased educational inequality by gender
- Reduced early pregnancy and child/early marriage
- Reduced risk of HIV
- Positive spillover benefits for education, infrastructure, and business sectors

Pre-Intervention Status in Rural Communities

Seven hypotheses underlie SEED's main development hypothesis. Standard 7 students, their caregivers, and their schools reported on barriers related to these hypotheses in the SEED IE baseline. Hypotheses and corresponding baseline results are shared here.



Reduced travel distance will lead to a reduction in GBV risk.

- 25% of students say safety concerns while traveling to/from school are a barrier
- Caregivers and students emphasized GBV risks when students must travel long distances to school.

“Walking to school is a problem for [girls] since [they] will be meeting the boys who will be forcing her into doing unnecessary things like sleeping with them...This is a big problem that a girl child faces, and it is difficult for her to finish school.”

—Male caregiver

Increased school access will improve educational aspirations and expectations.

- 99.7% of students aspire to secondary school
- 70% feel their chance of completing secondary school is high

New CDSSs will increase secondary school access in rural areas.

- 26% of students report the lack of Form 1 seats is a barrier
- 55% of students say distance is a barrier

“I see that in this community children face challenges as regards to education. They can learn here at [location] but when they have reached Standard 8 and they have passed their examination, some children fail to go to school because there are long distances.”

—Female caregiver

Increased interest in education will decrease child labor.

- 14% of students participate in paid work
- 12% engage in unpaid household labor

Improved MHM conditions may influence gender norms.

- 44% of secondary schools have a girls-only changing room
- 12% of menstruating girls missed school during their last period

“At our friends’ school, we see that there are bathrooms. Children bathe right there. They go together just as if they are going to be chatting there but then they will bathe and go back to classes. Just because the child is in her period, and she should be staying home? No.”

—Female caregiver

Reduced school fees and boarding costs will improve school access.

- 63% of students say direct school costs are a barrier
- 60% report exam and related fees as barriers

Increased educational expectations will delay sexual debut and reduce early marriage and pregnancy.

- 39% of students say getting married is a barrier
- 49% of caregivers say pregnancy is a barrier for girls

“[Getting pregnant] affected her education [in] that she dropped out of school since the other children would tease her about the pregnancy every time she goes to school.”

—Standard 7 female student