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Regional Office for
Southern Africa

Sustainability Starts with Teachers

Capacity Building Programme for Teacher Educators on
Education for Sustainable Development (CAP-ESD)

Sustainability Challenges in Malawi

Malawi is a landlocked country located in southern Africa. With an estimated population of 18 million, Malawi is ranked at 170 of 180 on the Human Development Index (HDI), indicating extreme levels of poverty. The economy of Malawi relies heavily on agriculture. Eighty percent of the population survives on rain-fed agriculture with tobacco as the main cash crop and maize as the staple food. Approximately one-fifth of the country consists of Lake Malawi, one of the world's largest fresh water bodies with unique species of water life. Up to 43% of the country's wealth is generated from renewable resources including forests, water and land. Only 11% of the population has access to electricity, with the majority of the population relying on energy sources such as firewood and charcoal.

Such a heavy dependence on natural resources underscores the significant role that the environment plays in the country's economy and sustenance. Malawi has also been classified as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate related disasters, including droughts, floods and erratic rainfall patterns that directly impact on people's livelihoods. With these levels of poverty and socioeconomic disparities, education is considered one of the ways of climbing the economic ladder. The literacy rate in Malawi is above 60% and education is considered one of the key reliable means of transformation.

Against this background the Sustainability Starts with Teachers consultation workshop was designed to assess how the education system, particularly teacher education, can respond to these challenges via Education for Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development in Malawi

In light of the United Nation's 2030 target of attaining the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Malawi has made



Policy Brief Malawi

This policy brief focuses on key issues emerging from policy dialogue in a consultation workshop of the UNESCO Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme held in Lusaka on 23-24 March 2021. Seventy participants from 12 teacher and TVET education institutions and several government officials in the Ministries of General Education and Higher Education attended. The workshop builds on progress made in Education for Sustainable Development in teacher education in Malawi over over more than fifteen years since the start of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in 2005.

efforts to incorporate and contextualise these in policy documents. The Malawi Vision 2063 includes measures aimed at eradicating poverty and implementing steps towards realisation of most of the SDGs.

Policy documents recently developed include the National Adaptation Plan Framework of 2020, the Disaster Risk Financing and Implementation Plan 2019-2024 and the 2018 Malawi Resilience Strategy Plan. Education-related policy documents have incorporated provisions for SDG 4 on quality education. The National Education Sector Investment Plan (2020-2030), which is the main policy document, has addressed Target 7 of SDG 4 through the integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) concepts in all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary). The 2017/18 Education Sector Performance Report (2018, p.21) stipulates the incorporation of cross-cutting ESD in the primary and secondary school curriculum and ESD is evident in areas such as Nutrition Education, HIV and AIDS Prevention, Productive School Environment (e.g. tree planting), Girls education programmes, Disaster Risk Management in Education and WASH in schools. The TEVETA (Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority) Strategic Plan (2018-2023) makes provisions for 'Incorporation of climate change and environmental degradation cross cutting issues requiring addressing in TVET programmes' (p.23) and the promotion of 'mitigation and adaptation of climate change' (p.27).

An integrated and multi-sectoral approach is the common strategy. All these policy guidelines point towards better livelihoods for people that encompass health, education, sanitation, and address inequalities. ESD, however, needs to be further integrated into these multi-sectoral approaches within the development of teacher and TVET education.



Sustainable Development Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Target 4.7

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Integrating Education for Sustainable Development in Teacher and TVET Education

In an environmental needs assessment scan conducted prior to the workshop, there was evidence of both good ESD practices on the ground as well as areas that need improvement. ESD integration in primary and secondary teacher education is evident in subjects such as Geography, Social Studies and Life Skills with topics including climate, environmental conservation and preservation, human rights, gender issues and citizenship. In tertiary education the

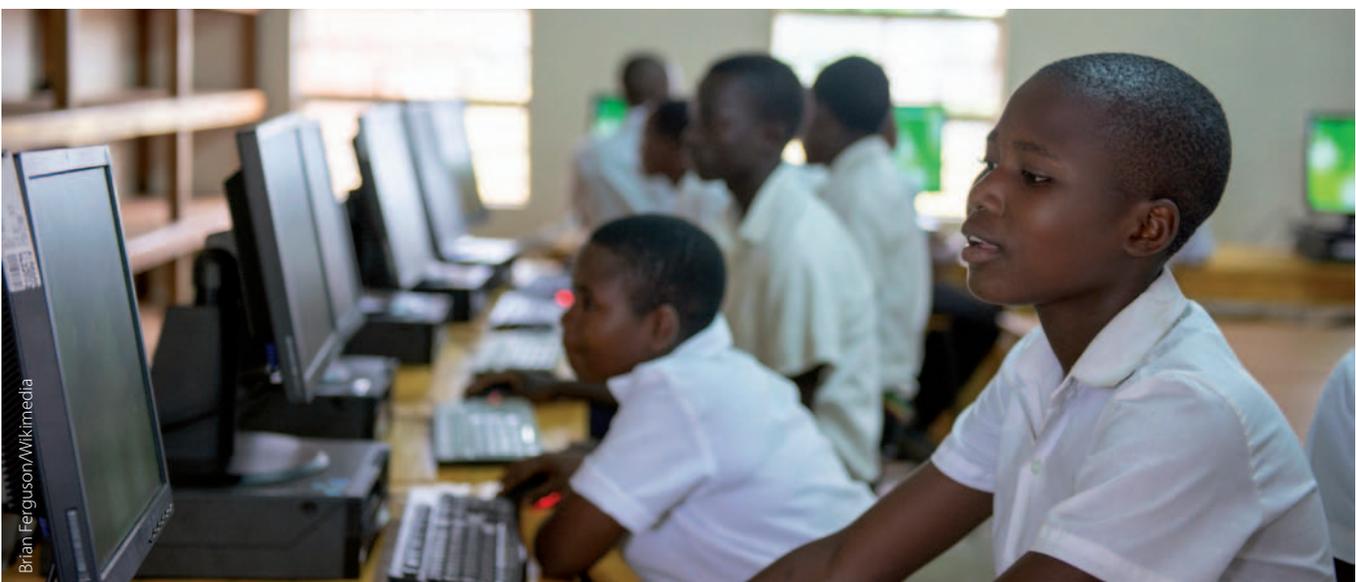
integration of ESD is mostly course-specific, for example, in courses such as Environmental Studies. There is also a shift of emphasis to pedagogical approaches that are learner-centred, requiring critical thinking and participatory learning.

Further evidence of good practice is the alignment of ESD objectives to the goals stipulated in the policy documents including the National Education Sector Investment Plan (2020-2030); the 2017-2022 Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MDGSIII); Act No. 21 of the 2013 National Education Act and the TEVETA strategic plan (2018-2023). This is indicative of the Government's willingness to work towards integrating ESD into education and specifically teacher training and TEVT colleges.

Education for Sustainable Development Challenges in Teacher Education

While there is evidence of good practice in terms of ESD integration, there are gaps and challenges especially in relation to teacher education and TVET colleges. Challenges linked to implementing and operationalising what policies recommend in practice include:

1. *The lack of familiarisation with the various policies and their requirements especially in terms of ESD integration into the curriculum.* This was evident in those expected to implement the policy and compounded by more than half of the teacher trainers revealing a lack of knowledge of ESD and how to integrate ESD in their teaching, particularly in a practical way.
2. *The nature of the curriculum which remains traditional in pedagogic approach and exam-oriented.* This forces educators to focus on covering the syllabi as evidence of having taught and successfully examined the students. Current syllabi and traditional pedagogies often work contrary to ESD principles.
3. *Resistance to change especially to ESD-compliant pedagogies.* Most educators find the idea of moving into uncharted waters daunting, largely due to lack of confidence from insufficient training.



The Contribution of the 'Sustainability Starts with Teachers' Programme in Malawi

The Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme aims to build on progress being made in countries to integrate Education for Sustainable Development into teacher education with a focus on Early Childhood Care and Education, primary, secondary and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) teacher education institutions.

Special focus is on Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is oriented towards the achievement of educational quality within a lifelong learning framework, and Target 4.7 which emphasises integration of Education for Sustainable Development.

The Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme is an action-learning programme centred on a contextually defined Education for Sustainable Development Change Project. A **Change Project** is an institutional curriculum or educational transformation initiative, relevant to a given context.



Twelve teacher training and TVET institutions are taking part in this programme. They have conceptualised Change Projects that aim to address the following areas:

1. Advocating for an ESD-compliant curriculum

The visibility of ESD principles in policy documents is a good starting point towards integration of ESD in teacher education and TVET colleges. While the current system has incorporated ESD through specific subjects in either a fragmented, infused or issue-based approach, the pedagogic methods and focus remains traditional and promotes passive rather than action-oriented learning.

This called for the need to advocate for a curriculum review exercise that ensures that content, pedagogical approaches and assessment processes are aligned with ESD principles. The move from an exam-based approach to teacher training is also important in achieving not only SDG 4 but other goals too.

As teacher trainers and TVET college educators, the starting point was to lobby for a review of the curriculum. Critical engagement between policy guidelines and practice on the ground would create a visible acknowledgement of the gap between theory and practice. This engagement should lead to review of curricula that will actively integrate ESD.

2. Formation of intra- and inter-institutional communities of practice

In view of the impact and efficiency of unity, one of the initiatives underway involves bringing together a team of educators to work together on ESD. This comes against the background of the diversity in areas of specialisation both

within and across institutions. Through exchange of ideas and expertise, the impact of Change Projects can be increased.

For example, **Nalikule College of Education** has water supply problems and plans to work with **Chancellor College** in a Change Project on ground water extraction. Through networking with Chancellor College's Faculty of Science and Chemistry department, it is hoped that expertise from the latter will facilitate active learning, a key aspect of the Change Project.

3. Engaging with communities on ESD issues

ESD is distinctive in its action-oriented nature and in ensuring provision of an education that has visible and sustainable results that serve both the present and future generations. One way of doing this is by engaging communities in such initiatives. Joint identification of ESD issues affecting communities means that solutions would include community input and incorporate Indigenous Knowledge Systems. This ensures both sustainability as well as ownership of the initiative.

An example is the **Chancellor College** Change Project with the **Environmental Justice and Sustainability Clinic (EJSC)**. This is a multi-faculty initiative including faculties of Education, Science and Law. A number of activities have been planned to incorporate ESD in Chancellor College. One was a community engagement initiative involving capacity building of community leaders in environmental issues and hands-on involvement of surrounding schools in tree planting. This is a response to deforestation and heavy reliance on forests for livelihood and energy sources. Networking by EJSC is also important in this Change Project.



Chancellor College

Another proposed Change Project by TVET colleges involves engaging surrounding communities in tree-planting and the production of briquettes from waste paper and sawdust (by-product from carpentry). Both exercises can mitigate against destruction of the forests required by the carpentry industry and for energy for cooking in households. The Change Project also has the potential to become income-generating thus responding to more than one SDG.

4. Broadening of assessment

A significant aspect of ESD integration in teacher education and TVET institutions is an evaluation on how students are assessed. The transition from a curriculum restricted to the classroom to one that reaches out into the community requires transitions in assessment too. This could involve students in project-based assessments that demonstrate internalisation and active usage of knowledge.

Teacher trainees and TVET students brainstormed potential ESD-compliant modes of assessment that were reflective of critical thinking, problem-solving skills as well as futuristic thinking. Among these were proposals for assessment that included engaging TVET trainees in projects on solutions to 'real-life' and 'close-to-home' issues.

References

Government of Malawi. (2020). Voluntary National Review: Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/malawi>



Implementation and monitoring of Target 4.7 of SDG 4

One of the outcomes of the Sustainability Starts with Teachers programme is increased national capacity for monitoring and evaluation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7. Through the Sustainability Starts with Teachers Change Projects teacher/TVET colleges are being supported to contribute towards preparing teachers for critically engaged, participatory citizenship, peace and sustainable development with respect to: rights, duties and responsibilities; tolerance and mutual respect; management of diversity, differences and conflicts; preserving and protecting the environment and resources and social cohesion among others. Governments can monitor the outcomes of the Change Projects for reporting on SDG 4, Target 4.7.



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For further information on the Change Projects and the Sustainability Starts with Teachers Programme, visit www.sustainabilityteachers.org

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