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THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON MALAWI'S EDUCATION SECTOR: RESPONSES AND PRACTICES

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Abstract

Covid 19, alongside its new variants, has caused panic and stress in general well-being of people across the globe. Most, if not all, nations across the world are experiencing the socio-economic downfall in almost all sectors of their development. Malawi, too, has not been spared as it is experiencing the devastating effects of the pandemic in all sectors of development including education.

This paper explores the impact of covid -19 on the education system in Malawi and focusses on efforts made by government together with non-governmental organizations and the donor community in mitigating its devastating effects. In response to the pandemic, the Malawian government came up with policies and strategies to prevent further spread of the pandemic and ensuring continued learning of pupils in schools. The policy measures hinge on continued face to face learning and preventive strategies to avoid the spread of the pandemic. Firstly, in order to ensure continued learning in schools, measures such as decongesting classrooms and schools, remedial learning and remote learning are being advocated to. On the other hand, preventive measures like wearing of masks, hand washing and social distancing are being championed too. However, these measures are facing challenges since they are being implemented in already challenged education system characterized by low funding and inadequate resources. This paper further looks at possible ways of sustainable means of continued life within the context of covid -19 pandemic should the pandemic continues causing havoc indefinitely.

Key words: Covid -19, Challenges, School closure, Remedial learning, Remote learning

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

The overarching goal of the National Education Policy of Malawi is to promote equitable access, relevance, quality and improved governance and management of the education sector to contribute to socio-economic development and poverty alleviation, (Ministry of education (MoE), 2016). There are three main categories into which Malawi's education system is organized: that is, basic, secondary and tertiary education. Basic education includes pre-school, primary, and non-formal initiatives such as adult literacy. On the other hand, the formal education system is organized into eight years of primary education, four of secondary school and four (or five) of university, depending on the degree program being pursued. However, the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the education system and compounded the already existing challenges that the education system in Malawi faces.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020. Since then, Covid-19 has spread to many countries worldwide, affecting millions of people. As of 17 January 2021, there were over 93 million reported cases globally (WHO, 2021). In Malawi, the first three cases were confirmed on 2 April 2020; and as of 20 January 2021, approximately 14,851 cases of Covid-19 had been confirmed by the government (Ministry of Health (MoH), 2020/21). The World Health Organization advised the entire world that there was a need to enact social distancing as one way of reducing the spread of the disease. With this advice, countries started taking measures that would enforce social distancing; and these measures included directives implementing lockdowns, whose extent varied from country to country. Most countries including Malawi closed all schools and educational institutions in an attempt to limit the spread of the pandemic. The

government of Malawi ordered a closure of all schools and educational institutions on 23 March 2020 in an effort to protect learners, teachers and parents from the pandemic and support national efforts in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus (MoE, 2020). In Malawi, the schools were closed for a period of 5 months for final-year learners and 6 months for the rest from March to September 2020.

Temporary school closures in more than 180 countries kept nearly 1.6 billion students out of school, further complicating global efforts to reduce learning poverty, which is defined through deprivations of schooling and of learning in terms of learner enrolment and minimum proficiency based on a desired and agreed set of competencies. Data from the World Bank and UNESCO showed that 53% of children at the end of primary education in low- and middle-income countries already suffer from learning poverty (World Bank, 2019). In Malawi, school closures affected over 5 million learners in primary schools.

Studies around the world have examined the impacts of school closures on education. The most notable impact widely mentioned in recent research is the loss of learning which is defined as learning that does not occur while schools are closed and the already acquired learning that is lost or forgotten when students lose their engagement with the education system.

UNICEF (2020) highlighted that the longer vulnerable children are out of school, the less likely they are to return and that children from the poorest households are almost five times more likely to be out of primary school than those from the richest households. In addition, being out of school increases the risk of teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation, child marriage, violence and other threats. Furthermore, Viner (2021) adds that prolonged closures disrupt essential school-based services such as immunization and school meals and disrupt the important roles school plays in child protection.

Other studies examined the opportunity costs of school closures in terms of the future productivity of students and found that school closures have a large cost in terms of lost future productivity. Peet, Fink and Fawzi (2015), cited by the National Planning Commission

(2020), noted that one year of schooling increases wages by 12% on average in Malawi. It was further estimated at the time of the study that the value of the loss of future income was \$861 per student, which translated into USD 5.2 billion if school closures continued for 9 months given the enrolment of approximately 6 million Malawian children in primary school.

Educational financing plays an important role in several aspects of the education process. Educational inputs and processes all require adequate funding and this has been reflected in the high percentages of annual government funding (20%) going to education in the SADC region (MoE, 2002). In the Malawian context, according to Kafumbu, F.T. (2017), education sector public expenditures fall into two categories: recurrent and development (or capital). The recurrent expenditures are financed by domestic revenues from taxes and non-tax sources and from budget support grants. The recurrent expenditures are further divided into personal emolument (PE) and other recurrent transactions (ORT).

1.2. Aims and Objectives

This paper explores the effects of Covid-19 on education in Malawi with a focus on policy responses by the government and international organizations to ensure continued education during the Covid-19 epidemic, including the practices in schools. Specifically, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To highlight the government policy measures in response to Covid-19 in education,
2. To document the implementation of the policy measures in response to Covid-19 in schools and
3. To examine the efforts rendered by the donor community to education in Malawi on covid -19.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How has the coronavirus impacted children's lives and school education in Malawi?
2. What kind of measures have the government and international organizations taken?
3. What are the prospective reforms that need to be adopted to ensure continued school education in future?

2. Methodology

This paper is primarily based on desk research that synthesized available information in Malawi to gain an understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected education in Malawi and how the government of Malawi and the Ministry of Education in particular responded to the pandemic. The global literature on Covid-19 supplemented the information gained from internal Covid-19 documents. Specifically, the literature search focused on areas such as school organization, class organization, teaching and learning processes and the impacts of school closures on learner enrolment and dropout. Furthermore, the desk review analyzed the policy responses of the Ministry of Education to the pandemic and concentrated on measures related to remote learning during the school closures, decongesting schools and classes when schools reopened, remedial learning to compensate for the lost learning during the school closures, and general policy guidelines that intended to protect the learners and school staff from spreading or contracting the coronavirus.

3. Discussion of findings

The discussion of the findings focuses on the impact of covid -19 pandemic on the lives of school children, government's policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in education in Malawi, the implementation of government policy measures and guidelines for Covid-19 prevention in all schools.

3.1. Impact of the pandemic on the lives of school children.

Poverty levels remain quite high in Malawi. According to the National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) report of 2010/11, the country has about half of the population being poor and one quarter living in abject poverty. Eighty-five percent of the population lives in rural areas where poverty levels are high while as only 17% of the urban populous is poor. This means that access to quality education by learners in the country faces numerous challenges already. Schools are very few compared to the demand coupled with poor infrastructure and inadequate teaching and learning resources. The emergence of covid-19 has added more salt to the open wound that Malawi

education sector is still nursing. Some school children have become orphans due to the death of their parents and guardians because of the pandemic. This has greatly affected a lot of primary school learners' school life as despite having a free primary education policy in the country, many are withdrawing from school due to lack of basic needs support. Furthermore, secondary school, college as well as university students are finding it hard to fend for themselves on top of the requirement to pay the tuition for their studies.

To those children who are still attending school especially in primary schools have seen their school schedules being changed in order to achieve decongestion and social distancing as preventive measures directed by the authorities. This, too, has made their school time shorter than initially planned hence reduced learning time. According the Government of Malawi (2020), the school day was to start at 07:30 a.m. and end at the following times:

<i>Standard 1</i>	<i>11:30</i>
<i>Standard 2</i>	<i>12:00</i>
<i>Standard 3</i>	<i>12:40</i>
<i>Standard 4</i>	<i>13:15</i>
<i>Standards 5-7</i>	<i>13:55</i>

The directive further stated that schools with very high enrolment were to have staggered infant and junior sections. Learners from standards 1 and 3 were to attend school on alternate days with learners in standards 2 and 4. Learners in standards 5-7 were to attend classes daily.

In addition, schools were temporarily closed on the onset of the pandemic as a way of lessening the spread of the virus. According to Malawi Covid 19 Socio-Economic Recovery Plan 2021-2023, the population of students affected by the closure of schools and other education institutions in March 2020, as a part of the Government's COVID19 preventive measures, was 9 million which was about 50% of the population. Some 2.01 million children were in Malawi Priorities Project. <https://npc.mw/malawi-priorities-2/>

Early Childhood Education; 5.3 million were in primary education; 1.452 million in secondary school; and 34,924 students were at the university and college level. Schools remained closed until September 2020. Using cost benefit analysis (CBA), the National Planning Commission (NPC) estimated the social cost of closing schools for up to nine months at around \$5.2 billion over the next 50 years.

Therefore, the closure of schools has had negative consequences at several levels. For instance, few schools have been able to make alternative learning arrangements for their students while the burden of keeping children at home has fallen disproportionately on women. Even for the privileged few that could access online learning, there was need for the presence of an adult to provide guidance and supervision, especially for the lower primary students; and such support was not always available for the learners.

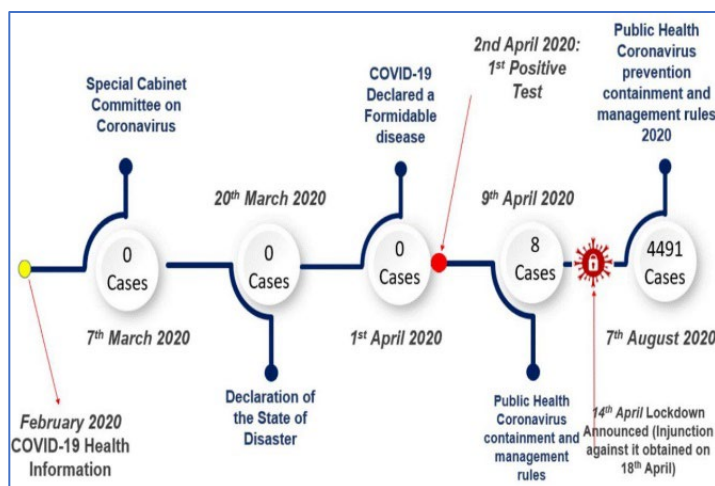
Households with children with disabilities or needing regular medical treatment have also been seriously affected by the disruptions of their already complicated routines. Significantly, a large number of girls became pregnant and assumed early parental responsibilities. In fact, child marriage still remains a challenge to the country despite the significant milestone achieved in 2017 in relation to the amendment of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi to raise the age of marriage to 18, for both boys and girls from the initial 16 for girls and 18 for boys.

3.2 Government's Policy Response and Interventions

Malawi is a democratic state with its constitution as a supreme law of the land. This follows therefore that any policy pronouncements related to anything affecting the general well-being of the citizenry must not go against the constitution. This is why, despite the emergence of the deadly Covid -19 pandemic, the government of Malawi had to make sure that the fight against the disease should be done with the full backing of the law. It is obviously a daunting task for the government of Malawi to achieve quality and meaningful education in the midst of the coronavirus

disease. However, the government is determined to achieve its goals in education because one of its broad developmental priorities as stated in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) II, is the recognition of education as a catalyst for socio-economic development and an instrument for empowering the poor, the weak and the voiceless.

On 20 March 2020, a state of national disaster was declared and COVID-19 was declared a formidable disease in April 2020. The first step that the government enacted regarding education was to close schools, which were later reopened after 5 months. In June 2020, the government established the National Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Plan focusing on the intended responses to Covid-19 by different sectors including the education sector. This was in preparation for the reopening of schools. Figure below shows the Structure of National Covid 19 response Plan.



Source: *The health policy response to COVID- 19 in Malawi* by Mzumara G.W, Chawani Marlen, Sakala M, Mwandira

According to the Government of Malawi (GoM) (2020), some of the specific objectives of the education sector were to promote the safety of learners and teachers through safety measures and decongesting classes once the schools were reopened. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education developed some guidelines to be followed by learners, teachers and all other stakeholders in schools (MoE, 2020a). This was done to curb the spread of the coronavirus in schools. The guidelines focused on the following areas: training, quality instruction, social distancing, sanitation and hygiene, the use of face masks and disease monitoring

and management. Being one of the least developed countries in both sub-Saharan region and the entire world, Malawi faced and continues to face many challenges in the implementation of such measures since it requires adequate financial resources to raise awareness to the general public and purchase and provision of amenities required in the fight against the pandemic.

a) Training

Training was provided to ensure that before schools reopened, head teachers, teachers, other school staff, learners and the community were familiar with the Covid-19 guidelines and that they were aware of how to prevent the further spread of the pandemic. The training followed a cascade model and spread to the grassroots' levels in communities through school structures such as the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs), mother groups and chiefs. Reports indicate that training was performed and that all stakeholders were aware of the guidelines. Teachers were also trained on how to conduct remedial learning to compensate for the lost learning. However, compliance and adherence to the guidelines remains an issue in most schools.

b) Quality instruction

It was the Ministry of Education's interest that in order to compensate for the learning lost during the long school closures, strategies should be enacted to ensure that learners obtain quality teaching and learning when schools reopen. Strategies such as remediation periods before and after school days, increased teaching and reduced class sizes were advocated as policy measures to address the gap.

c) Social distancing

Social distancing is one of the widely publicized measures for the containment of the spread of the coronavirus (Center for Disease Control (CDC), March 2020). Therefore, it is important that learners and teachers in school enact social distancing to avoid transmitting the virus among people. Hence, the Ministry of Education reiterated in the Covid-19 guidelines on schools reopening that schools should

maintain a 1–2-meter distance between learners in class and ensure that no more than 2 learners sat at a desk. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, among other things such as ensuring social distancing, directed the following: schools should decongest their classes by reducing class sizes to 40 learners per class, classroom breaks and start/end times should be staggered to avoid crowds of learners, large gatherings such as school assemblies and sporting events should be severely restricted, no unauthorized guests should be allowed to enter the school premises, and arrival and departure times of learners should be staggered.

d) Sanitation and Hygiene

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) (2021), as quoted by *Lizzie W. Chiwaula, et al.* sanitation and hygiene are fundamental principles of controlling the spread of the coronavirus. The Ministry's guidelines advocated for the following sanitation measures in schools: continuous access to safe water in schools; hand washing stations at school entrances and outside of classrooms and offices; washing hands with soap and water or rubbing hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer regularly; regular cleaning of surfaces, sanitation facilities, classrooms and offices; sanitizing frequently touched surfaces; removing and disposing of trash regularly; disinfecting classrooms and all other common spaces regularly; and cleaning the school surroundings at all times

e) Use of Face Masks

Masks are recommended as a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the mask coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice (CDC, 2021). As a requirement by the Ministry of Education, all learners, teachers and all other staff working in schools and education institutions are to wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose properly. All learners and staff were sensitized to the importance of wearing a mask, and head teachers were expected to enforce adherence to the practice.

f) Disease monitoring and management

To ensure that the schools are safe for both teachers and learners, it is necessary that schools are guided by the precautionary measures on disease monitoring and management established by the government. Some of the measures directed by the government were as follows: schools should have a designated quarantine area for isolating sick learners and teachers; the health room should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice per day; schools should have a structure/process for regular screening by Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs); and schools should monitor the temperatures of learners, teachers, and other school staff and any visitors using a thermal scanner. Other measures were that teachers should also monitor and track daily class attendance; learners identified as having a fever, cough, or other symptoms consistent with Covid-19 should be isolated and HSAs should be contacted immediately; and learners, school staff, parents and guardians should be advised to remain at home and not to come to school when they are sick.

3.2. Implementation of government policy measures and guidelines for Covid-19 prevention in Malawi's schools

For education to be effective, structures that are well defined need to be laid and the collection of those structural pieces forms a system. An education system comprises everything that goes into educating public school students at all levels. These may include laws, policies, and regulations; public funding, resource allocations, and procedures for determining funding levels, [http: www.edglossary.org/education](http://www.edglossary.org/education)

Given the policy measures and guidelines enacted by the government to ensure the safety of learners and the quality of education amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, this paper sought to establish how schools in Malawi implemented such measures. Details of these measures, which included decongesting schools and classes, remote learning, remedial learning and others, are discussed below.

3.2.1. Decongesting of schools and classes

Given the challenges of large classes faced by most schools in Malawi such as in primary schools especially in the lower grades of standards 1 to 4, there was great need to decongest the classes to ensure social distancing. According to MoE (2020 b), most of the classes in Malawi's primary and secondary schools, especially the Open and Distance learning (ODL) schools, range from 70 to 100 learners, which could encourage the spread of coronavirus given the way it is transmitted.

According to the Ministry of Education guidelines for reopening schools, the ideal class size is 40 learners per class. Some of the suggested strategies to decongest schools and classes that schools were encouraged to apply included the following: splitting large classes using extra existing rooms like dining halls, open air classes and tents to increase the amount of learning space; employing the double shift system whereby the large classes should be split into two with one class in the morning and the other in the afternoon; overlapping classes; recruiting more teachers; redeploying teachers, increasing teacher-learner contact time; staggering the beginning and end of the school day; staggering break times; and cancelling assemblies, sports games and other events that create crowded conditions.

Given the different strategies for decongesting schools from which schools could choose depending on their situation/environment, schools decongested classes using different strategies. These vary from district to district and within districts from school to school. Common scenarios were as follows. Some schools allowed standards 1 to 4 to attend classes once in two days. That is to say standards 1 and 2 attend classes one day while standards 3 and 4 attend classes on the following day, and they keep alternating until the end of the term. Other schools split a class into streams and choose which streams to attend school on which day. In the end, each stream attends class once in two days. This strategy was used due to an inadequate number of teachers to cater to new classes created in an attempt to reduce class sizes. Due to the same problem, it was not possible to have all the classes on the same day. Some schools allowed standards 1 and 2 to attend classes in the morning and standards 3 and 4 to attend classes in the afternoon. This meant attending classes every day but with reduced time. Such schools had adequate

numbers of teachers to cater to the different classes. It is worth noting that an adequate number of teachers and classroom availability are also key to decongesting classes. With a sufficient number of classrooms, learners can be split into a number of classes, but without teachers to teach them, such efforts will not yield anything. Therefore, with the current teacher shortages in Malawi, decongesting is a daunting task. It is therefore imperative for the government to fast-track teacher recruitment and enhance teacher deployment to schools with inadequate numbers of teachers. Most of the schools had cancelled the routine morning assemblies to avoid crowding and reduce the spread of Covid-19. While schools are striving to comply with these measures, there have been instances where adherence has been hampered by large school enrolments, inadequate numbers of teachers, inadequate numbers of classrooms and minimal enforcement by some school authorities. Teachers reported that it was difficult for schools to control learners during break time with most of the learners playing around and creating crowded scenarios.

3.2.2. Remote Learning

To deal with the negative educational impacts of long school closures due to the pandemic, the Ministry of Education organized some distance learning opportunities for learners to continue receiving their education at home. Remote learning frameworks included the use of radio, television, internet and mobile technology (MoE, 2020 a). The radio and television programs were mainly meant for primary school learners, and online learning materials that demanded internet and mobile technologies were mainly meant for secondary school learners and those in tertiary institutions. The use of textbooks and printed study guides for rural primary school learners with limited technology during the school closures was also explored (Department of Inspection and Advisory Services report, 2020).

3.3 Interventions by the International Organizations in the Fight Against the Coronavirus

As already highlighted, Malawi is one of the least developed countries and the context of the education system in Malawi is strongly marked by demographic pressure, a high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS, striking

poverty, and very low human and social development. Given the above narrative, it is seemingly and extremely difficult for the Government of Malawi to stage a winning fight against the pandemic especially in school education circles. This, thus, calls for the donor community and all development partners to come in and complement the Malawi government's efforts through the Ministry of Education in order to successfully implement the policy measures and responses discussed above.

According to Ministry of Health (2021-2022), several development partners have supported the Government in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the UN Agencies are providing technical expertise, including co-chairing the 10 clusters of the NCPRP; and catalytic funding to support its implementation. In addition, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided US\$91 million to assist Malawi in meeting its urgent Balance of Payments needs arising from the pandemic.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) provided US\$45 million to support the establishment of four additional infectious diseases treatment centers at Kamuzu Central Hospital; increase the number of households receiving support from social protection schemes from 292,500 to 346,000; support the establishment of jobs and businesses relief scheme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs); and support the food security of vulnerable groups by restocking the strategic grain reserves, so as to minimize the impact on food shortage and inflation. The World Bank provided US\$30 million to support the Government's response to the pandemic. Malawians (at home and in the diaspora) and Malawian businesses responded quite well to the financing needs of the health system to address its capacity challenges by raising about K 3 billion between January and March 2021.

All these collaborative efforts by the donor community and development partners were channeled to the Malawi Government and then to the clusters including the Education cluster. For example, for the period stretching from 2021 to 2022, UNICEF provided 10 million United States dollars in order to support the implementation of the country's comprehensive Covid - 19 education response. The grant was specifically meant to enable government work with national internet providers and radio broadcasting corporations to ensure distance learning among school going children and enhancing coronavirus awareness campaign to the general populous in order to easily implement the policy

responses enacted by the Government of Malawi in liaison with the World Health Organization.

3.4 Moving forward with School- life amidst Covid -19

As discussed above, Covid – 19 has had a major impact on schools in Malawi. From school closures to remote learning, the past few years have been challenging. School closures have disrupted learning and have led to poor performances among learners. There have also been cases of dropouts from school as a result of such disruptions.

However, in spite of global efforts to deal with the pandemic once and for all, coronavirus disease seems not to part ways with the planet any time soon as new cases and waves are being continuously reported in various parts across the world in almost all the continents. Such being the case, there are fears that the pandemic has come to stay. Thus, numerous questions regarding the survival strategies to live with the coronavirus arise. Similarly, the education sector has to see to it that there is a relentless fight against the pandemic while ensuring continuity of school life because education is hub that propels any country's socio-economic growth and development. The strategies to attain school life continuity may be categorized into three which are short, medium, and long term. The short-term measures have been discussed in this paper which include hand washing and wearing of masks.

Regarding the medium strategies, several stakeholders were consulted in the planning of resuming in-person learning, with one of the key events being an education stakeholders' meeting held on 13 May 2020. The meeting was chaired by the then Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Honorable Dr William Susuwele Banda, and was attended by representatives from the following institutions: University of Malawi, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Edukans, Independent Schools Association of Malawi (ISAMA), National Council for Higher Education, Association of Christian Educators in Malawi, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Teachers' Union of Malawi (TUM), Civil Society Education Coalition, Association of Private Universities in Malawi,

Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and Malawi National Examinations Board. The meeting agreed that all decisions for the return to school would be based on proven science and public health expertise, taking into account the best interests of learners and teachers. The meeting resulted in the appointment of a National Planning Task Force whose composition includes academia, civil society, ministries, departments and agencies, development partners and school associations. According to Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Government of Malawi 2020b, 2020c), the responsibilities of the task force are to:

- a) Advise the ministry on the reopening of pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, teacher training colleges, adult education institutions and universities;
- b) Review and reorganize the school calendar as part of the COVID-19 post-recovery strategy;
- c) Support and track sector resource mobilization;
- d) Advise the ministry on issues of safety and logistical modalities upon readmission of learners when schools reopen;
- e) Consult widely with relevant stakeholders, including parents and wards;
- f) Advise the ministry on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the demand for education by poor households and suggest mitigation measures;
- g) Advise the ministry on the health and safety measures to be put in place for students, teachers and entire school community;
- h) Provide up-to-date learnings from other countries, experiences applicable to Malawi and global best practices;
- i) Submit regular reports to the ministry on the implementation progress of COVID-19-related programs;
- j) Consider any other related duty that may be assigned by the Honorable Minister during this time of response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The long-term strategies that can ensure continued and smooth running of school life in Malawi would include massive infrastructural development that will see construction of classroom blocks so as to enable social distancing in schools across the country. The expansion and building of schools will demand more

teachers hence recruitment of as many teachers as possible and provision of teaching and learning materials. It is always a challenge considering Malawi's economic situation, nevertheless there is need for political will that will see the improvement of budgetary allocation to education sector and this will mean prioritizing education sector in the country's financial allocations among other sectors.

Improvement of internet accessibility and availability across the country in order to achieve distance learning. The finalization of the National Education Sector Investment Plan 2020–2030 coincided with the recognition of the need for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in schools, colleges and universities. It is very unfortunate that in most schools, they do not offer computer lessons or ICT. It must be noted that a highly relevant component of the National Education Sector Investment Plan is the development and implementation of an ICT policy, which is currently non-existent in Malawi. A recent study by the National Statistics Office (2020) provides important statistics on access to ICT infrastructure in Malawi as shown in the table below:

Access to ICT infrastructure in Malawi, 2019

Description	Percentage
Household ownership of a functional radio in Malawi	46.0
Individual radio listenership	71.1
Proportion of households across the country with a working television set	11.6
Local TV stations viewership	69.8
Households in Malawi who owned a mobile telephone that was accessible to every household member	37.0
Proportion of individuals that owned computers	2.8
Proportion of individuals with access to internet services	14.6

Source: National Statistics Office 2020

The above statistics are a big setback in the efforts of dealing with the covid -19 in ensuring quality education through remote learning. It is therefore imperative for the government of Malawi to invest heavily in this aspect for better availability and access to ICT services among the school going children in the country.

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