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EDUCATION



10 steps for an Inclusive Complementary Basic Education in Malawi

While the Government of Malawi (GoM) progresses the implementation of free and compulsory education for every child below eighteen years, a number of children and young people remain out of school. In order to support them to gain a foundational education and prepare to join mainstream school, the GoM and development partners deliver Complementary Basic Education (CBE).

The Ministry of Education (MoE), Basic Education Department has a core CBE model, which development organisations have adapted in order to trial different approaches. The MoE now would like to standardise CBE delivery to ensure that all CBE in Malawi conforms to the highest standards and ensures quality CBE education is available to all out of school children.



Inclusive Complementary Basic Education

Children and young people who are out of school are by definition the most educationally marginalised and hardest to reach. They face complex, intersecting barriers to attendance, participation and achievement in school, including child labour, early marriage, pregnancy and parenthood, and disability among others. Marginalisation is further complicated by community perceptions around gender and age. As a result, out of school children and youth require an approach to CBE which specifically seeks to include the most marginalised, those who would otherwise be left behind delivered within their scope and learning needs.

Link Community Development / Link Education developed and trialled an inclusive model of CBE through the TEAM Girl Malawi project (FCDO, 2019–2023). Learning from this project has informed the following recommendations to MoE for Inclusive Complementary Basic Education.

The 10 steps

1. Enrol the hardest to reach

Deliberate efforts are needed to build trust in communities and promote the view that CBE is for everyone, especially children and young people who have previously been unable to access education e.g. due to disability, pregnancy, having children, or being over-age. Deliberate efforts also need to reach all geographical localities to ensure equitable access to education for all.

2. Ensure learning environments are accessible and safe for all

Concerns about safety and poor sanitation are key causes of school dropout, especially for adolescent girls who are menstruating and children with disabilities. Ensuring that learning spaces meet minimum requirements for safety and hygiene, with consideration of accessibility and gender, makes a significant difference. Cautious planning and learning spaces also need to integrate female learners who may have a duty to care – either for own children or other parental responsibilities.

Integrate CBE into local child protection systems to ensure that all staff and volunteers are held to high standards of child protection, children's safety is promoted, and there are robust systems for reporting abuse and providing support.

3. Train Facilitators to use Inclusive Education techniques

Inclusive Education recognises that the most marginalised learners face multiple, intersecting barriers to learning. Rather than taking a standardised approach to teaching learners with specific challenges, Facilitators are asked to be problem solvers in the learning environment, making adaptations to pedagogy, timing of lessons, and modifications to learning spaces to take account of multiple barriers faced by their students. Facilitators can support all learners by getting to know their needs and what works for them. This approach is relevant to learners facing all types of barriers to attendance, participation and achievement, not just those with disabilities, and means that Facilitators do not have to be “experts” in disability or other barriers.

Training packs and continuous professional development materials are available from TEAM Girl Malawi to support the use of Inclusive Education techniques at all stages from lesson planning to delivery to assessment.

4. Encourage flexibility, while committing to a high standard for all

Complex barriers faced by out of school learners makes it difficult for them to commit to a full-time or regular schedule of classes. Recognising this, Facilitators in consultation with the local community and their learners should arrange learning spaces and lesson times to suit the learners, and provide follow-up support such as home learning activities or catch-up classes for missed lessons. Some learners might benefit from Individual Education Plans which focus on relevant learning goals according to their needs.

5. Effective learning goes beyond academic knowledge and skills

It is necessary to be realistic about what can be achieved in CBE with the available time, teaching staff, and learners' challenges. Achieving realistic goals is motivating for learners, Facilitators, and their communities. It can be useful to focus on core literacy, numeracy and life skills which provide a foundation for further learning or future life chances, rather than aiming to fully cover the primary curriculum.

Integrate activities such as sports, games and drama, which support the development of social and emotional skills. This provides motivation for attendance and ensures that children and young people are prepared for learning. Include access to information about sexual and reproductive health and rights. At a minimum this should include signposting learners to relevant local youth-friendly health service providers.

6. Sufficient staffing

Inclusive Education approaches are most effective when Facilitators get to know their learners and how to support them. A low student-teacher ratio and small class sizes supports this. TEAM Girl Malawi used a ratio of 30 learners to two Facilitators per class. Having two Facilitators (or one Facilitator / teacher and one Learning Assistant) also supports a twin-track approach, where individual support can be provided as required while working to improve education for all learners.

Effective learning assistant roles include assisting a learner with visual impairment to access additional learning materials as part of the lesson, checking on learners' progress during the lesson and providing support to those who are stuck, visiting learners and their guardians to provide encouragement and home learning activities, and supporting childcare.



7. Informed and supportive community-based structures

Learner Centre Management Committees can provide vital support and accountability to Facilitators. Members can enhance or fulfil many of the essential learning assistant roles. They can also promote the vision of an Inclusive CBE as one which is relevant and welcoming to all learners, and help shift community perceptions toward education for all.

School-based Mother Groups can extend their roles to CBE, supporting vulnerable learners, facilitating family mediation, promoting inclusive education approaches, promoting daily attendance and follow-up on extended absenteeism, and provide a link into formal education to support learners' transition.

Including parents and community members from diverse backgrounds and with characteristics similar to CBE learners helps to ensure CBE is relevant to its learners as well as creating ambassadors for inclusive education in the community.

8. Connections to wider education and other systems

Providing support to CBE Facilitators from mainstream school teachers, such as Inclusive Education teachers or those with expertise in early grade literacy or numeracy, helps to improve the quality of teaching in CBE. It also enables mainstream teachers to become familiar with CBE learners and the support they might need when they transition to mainstream school. This supports achievement and retention in CBE, and rates of transition to school.

In addition to inclusive teaching, learners with disabilities often benefit from access to medication or assistive devices. Formalised processes for linking these learners and their families to Disabled People's Organisations, NGOs, and the Ministry of Health can facilitate access to this support.

9. Disaggregated data collection and analysis

Looking at enrolment, retention, attendance and learning data disaggregated by gender, disability, and other marginalisation factors helps to identify groups which are being left behind and require additional efforts to be included.

10. Prepare learners for the next step

Understanding how learning prepares them for the future is essential to learners' motivation. Clear pathways after CBE, which learners are actively involved in defining and choosing, are vital to encouraging good attendance and participation in CBE, leading to high learning performance. Possible pathways include, but are not limited to, mainstream education, vocational training, or employment. Building connections between CBE and these pathways should be done from the learners' early engagement in CBE. Vertical integration of government planning would significantly support this.



“With Link you are always working within the Ministry. Other NGOs present reports with recommendations for scaling up and then leave.

With Link scaling up and capacity building is within the project.

Community participation for supporting teaching and learning is enhanced. Tools and instruments are developed with the Ministry to

meet Ministry needs”

– Director of DIAS, Ministry of Education



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