



A Vision for the Health and Well-Being of Malawi's Young People



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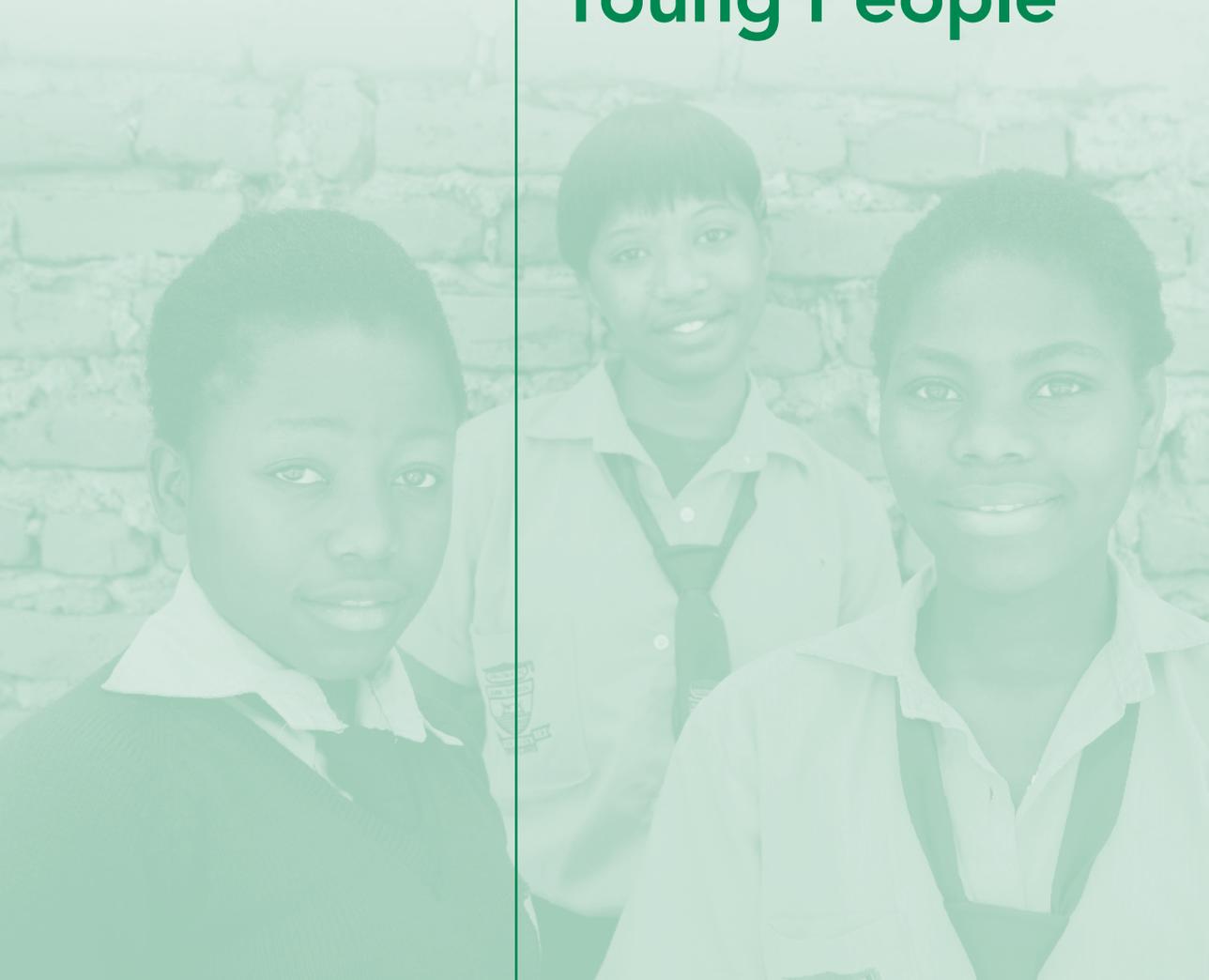
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A Vision for the Health and Well-Being of Malawi's Young People



Young People Significant for National Development

Malawi's large population of young people has special significance for national development. Today, Malawi has the largest population of youth¹ in its history, accounting for 40 percent² of Malawi's total population (16.3 million people).³ The population will continue to grow quickly as the current large generation of children and adolescents grow up and have children of their own. Even if fertility rates decrease, the size of the youth population is projected to increase to 9.3 million by 2025 and to 13.9 million by 2050,⁴ guaranteeing that Malawi will have a large youth population for the next 40 to 50 years.

If Malawi succeeds in decreasing fertility, as the children of today grow up, they will form a "youth bulge" in Malawi's population structure. These young people hold great potential as drivers of economic growth through participation in labour markets and as consumers. A young population can also be a resource for innovation and for the development of healthy democracies.

However, to harness the potential and reap the benefits of a youthful population, Malawi should make the right investments in current and future generations of young people.

There is a need to invest in health and education systems for children and youth as well as create a favourable and enabling policy environment for future youth development. Ensuring that education, health and employment systems can meet the needs of today's youth and absorb even larger numbers of young people in the future will help support more sustainable development. Helping young people complete their education, prevent unintended pregnancy and HIV infection, accumulate skills that are relevant to the job market and start an independent livelihood are critical to ensure they can positively engage in civil society and contribute to the development of Malawi. These investments will not only protect the health and well-being of young people and equip them with the knowledge and skills to positively shape their families and communities, but will also lead to greater social and economic development at the national level.

Young People Central to Development Strategy

Young people are central to achieving the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. It is important to both focus on young people in their own right and to integrate youth and youth issues into broader policies and programmes across all sectors. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) II identifies nine key priority areas that define the investments that are critical for immediate improvement in the economic well-being of Malawians (see Box 1, page 3). Given the fact that youth ages 10 to 29 make up nearly half of the total population, it is essential to consider how young people will influence and be influenced by the investments and policies introduced under the MGDS.

Here, we focus on the key priorities most relevant to and influenced by youth to examine how the MGDS II can respond to and benefit from Malawi's youth. As we

examine each priority below, we highlight one or two critical elements that need to be addressed for our young people to be a development asset.

Meeting the Needs and Realizing the Potential: Young People and the Priorities of the MGDS II

Agriculture and food security. According to the *2011 Welfare Monitoring Report*, most youth work in the agricultural sector, primarily in unpaid or subsistence farming. Agricultural reforms could go a long way to improving the lives of many young people by incorporating training in innovative farming methods, crop diversification and nutritious foods and commercial farming.

For all young people, food security and nutrition are of paramount importance: Malnutrition can hinder cognitive and physical development at key stages of life; and food insecurity increases the likelihood that youth will engage in risky behaviours, making them more vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other negative outcomes. Increasing the production, distribution and accessibility of a range of nutritious foods through improvements in human and institutional capacity will reduce the incidence of malnutrition and food insecurity among children and youth.

Energy, industrial development mining and tourism. The MGDS recognizes that expanding the energy, industrial development, mining and tourism sectors is critical for transforming Malawi into a middle-income country. Sufficient and accessible energy is an essential ingredient for a healthy economy, and demand will only increase with the increasing population, while strategic investments in industrial development, mining and tourism could generate employment for large

BOX 1 The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II)

“The objective of the MGDS II is to continue reducing poverty through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development.”

Key Priorities

1. Agriculture and Food Security
2. Energy, Industrial Development, Mining, and Tourism
3. Transport Infrastructure and Nsanje World Inland Port
4. Education, Science, and Technology
5. Public Health, Sanitation, Malaria, and HIV and AIDS Management
6. Integrated Rural Development
7. Green Belt Irrigation and Water Development
8. Child Development, Youth Development, and Empowerment
9. Climate Change, Natural Resources, and Environmental Management

numbers of Malawians. Training and engaging young people in these areas will benefit them by expanding their employment opportunities in the formal sector and will benefit the country by drawing on the innovation and vitality inherent to youth. A particular emphasis on expanding energy and industrial development to hard-to-reach areas can increase waged employment opportunities for youth and reduce urban migration.

Education, science and technology. Investing in quality education, with a focus on equal opportunity and completion of secondary schooling for both sexes, will ensure that young people have the skills to become productive members of a modern, high-quality workforce. Adapting educational policies and programmes to provide young people with relevant skills in science and technology will create a high-quality workforce prepared to meet the demands of a more sophisticated economy.

Young people are the primary users and creators of new technology, an important asset for countries to successfully compete in the new global economy. When young people have training in and access to innovative information and communication technologies, their employment prospects are strengthened and the country's business and economic status is raised.

Public health, sanitation, malaria and HIV and AIDS management. Since the number of youth will continue to grow, there are major planning implications for social services such as sanitation and health care. To protect and promote the health of its current and future workforce, Malawi must intensify its efforts to combat malaria and HIV/AIDS and ensure the availability of youth-friendly services and programs that target all segments of youth including orphans, domestic workers and the disabled. Infrastructure development and improved sanitation—critical elements of the promotion of child and youth well-being—will complement these efforts.

Integrated rural development. The MGDS is aimed at “resuscitating rural economies and transforming them into potential drivers of economic growth and development.” Since youth ages 10 to 29 make up nearly 40 percent of the rural population, the success of integrated rural development will depend on ensuring that youth have access to loans, technology and meaningful employment. Moreover, by attending to the need of rural youth, Malawi can foster stronger, more-resilient rural communities that make substantial contributions to economic growth and reduce rural-to-urban migration.

Child development, youth development and empowerment. To benefit from a healthy, educated and engaged adult population in the future, it is essential to promote the development of children and young people today and to ensure a smooth transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Adequate nutrition and basic education are central for child development, while meaningful youth development efforts will emphasise higher education (tertiary as well as secondary), technical skills, training and capacity building in management and leadership. With strengthened social and leadership skills, young people can offer insight, guidance and innovative ways of thinking while promoting a positive view of youth in the wider adult community.

Climate change, natural resources and environmental management. For every country, land and natural resources are among the most important national assets. This is especially true for Malawi, where over three-quarters of the population is employed in the agricultural sector and another significant portion is dependent on fishing.⁵ Malawi's natural resources hold promise for economic growth if they are carefully and responsibly managed.

As the fastest-growing segment of the population, young people will be both dependent on and responsible for Malawi's natural bounty in the future. As future stewards of these resources, young people must be involved in issues and efforts related to climate change, natural resources and environmental management so that they learn to safeguard and sustain the environment. The right education and outreach will help young people bring innovation and energy to these areas.

Key Areas for Action

Clearly, young people are intimately connected into each of the national priorities identified in the MGDS II. So, what needs to be done to ensure that these young people are supported and that their potential is realised and channelled into social and economic development for the entire country? The government should partner with communities and families to protect and promote the well-being of young people, focusing on these key areas:

Investment in education, especially girls' education and higher education, is key. The returns on investments in education are quick and significant: Each year of additional schooling is associated with an increase in wages of 10 percent or more.⁶ Malawi has made great gains in primary schooling over the past two decades. For example, from 2004 to 2010, primary school net enrolment rose from 82 percent to 91 percent.⁷ However, there is a significant drop-off in enrolment between primary and secondary school in Malawi, and completion of secondary school is even lower—only 10.7 percent of males ages 15 to 49 and 5.6 percent of females completed secondary education. Even fewer young people are pursuing tertiary education; in 2010, less than 1 percent of males and females were enrolled in tertiary education.

As more and more children start and complete primary school, the demand for secondary and tertiary schooling will continue to grow. Ensuring young people enrol and complete secondary and tertiary education is critical so they can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to build a strong labour force and enjoy healthy, productive lives. Providing girls with the same educational opportunities as boys will result in even greater benefits, since girls who stay in school have better employment opportunities and can accumulate greater wealth over their lifetimes, benefiting their families and children.

Employment and job creation are important concerns for young people. Young people are disproportionately affected by challenges in the labour market compared to adults. Already, youth unemployment in Africa is double that of adult unemployment, and this situation will only get worse as more and more young

people begin looking for work. In Malawi, with continued high fertility, there will be a total of 5.2 million 18-to-24-year-olds entering the labour market in 2040 (with low fertility, this figure would decrease to 4.4 million).⁸

To address these issues, Malawi will need to make immediate investments in education and training programmes to ensure young people's skills match the needs of the labour market. Beyond these immediate investments, Malawi will need to plan for the long term and invest in policies that support job growth and economic diversification and increase the number of meaningful job opportunities for young people.

Sexual and reproductive health is a key component of young people's overall well-being. Policymakers must consider that more young people are making the transition from childhood to adulthood and are entering their reproductive years, making the provision of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services critical. Ensuring access to comprehensive, youth-friendly SRH services will help young people delay childbearing until they are ready and avoid HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. This will enable them to stay in school and to participate in the productive workforce, benefiting them, their families and the nation as a whole.

Promoting gender equality will benefit women and men alike. Reducing gender inequality is a specific objective of the MGDS II, and gender equality has been recognised as an important factor in achieving sustainable national development. Ensuring that women can make decisions about marriage and childbearing and that they have equal access to education and employment will enable them to reach their full potential. They can participate more fully in the workforce, and eventually, have greater resources for their children and families.

Girls are less likely to complete school and find a job than their male peers, limiting their future economic prospects. Additionally, the continued prevalence of early marriage and childbearing and the threat of sexual violence put girls at risk for poor health outcomes, including maternal disability and HIV/AIDS.

Focusing gender equality efforts on young people will not only improve the status and well-being of girls and young women, but will also amplify and sustain important health, social and economic gains for the country as a whole.

Young people are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. Strengthening the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS among youth will protect the health of the nation's current and future workforce. Youth have different needs than adults, and while a policy exists for a youth-focused response to HIV/AIDS, implementation of the policy has been inconsistent. It is critical that service delivery be designed to cater to the unique needs of youth, including access to age-appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health; life skills for literate and illiterate youth; and youth-friendly prevention, diagnosis and treatment services. Ending the epidemic requires working to empower young people to protect themselves against the disease.

Focus Point Summaries

The following focus point summaries provide an overview of the current situation of youth in the context of each of these areas for action, including key data and information on the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain. The focus point summaries illustrate the relevance of young people for national development and form the evidence base for policy decisions affecting them. Together, the policy brief and focus point summaries serve to inform policies and programmes that invest in the well-being and livelihoods of Malawi's youth.

**SEXUAL AND
REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH**

EDUCATION

EMPLOYMENT

GENDER

HIV/AIDS



Today, more young people than ever before in Malawi are making the transition from childhood to adulthood and entering their reproductive years. Young people need access to sexual and reproductive health services so they can avoid STIs, prevent unintended pregnancy and choose when and how many children to have. Investments in sexual and reproductive health also enable young people to remain in school, gain more skills and contribute more to the economy throughout their lives.

The Malawi government initiated a Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS) program in 2007 to ensure that young people have access to sexual and reproductive health services (see Box 1, page 9). However, a variety of indicators show that young people in Malawi—especially girls—still face multiple risks and challenges related to their sexual and reproductive health.

Early sexual activity is high in Malawi, particularly among young men. Among the 15-to-24 age group, 14 percent of young women were sexually active by age 15 (see Figure 1).⁹ For young women, this rate reflects the association between child marriage and early sexual activity. At the same time, other risk factors—such as physical and sexual violence and a large age difference between an adolescent girl and her partner—are linked to early sexual debut. Among young men, more than one of every five was sexually active by age 15.¹⁰ For young men, first sex is more likely to have taken place prior to marriage, suggesting that young men as well as young women need access to sexuality education and contraception services to prevent unintended pregnancies and the spread of STIs and HIV.

Youth-friendly health services are improving but still insufficient to meet the needs of many young people. Young people's sexual and reproductive health needs are distinct from those of adults, and they may face additional barriers to accessing the information and services they need, including stigma and poor treatment by providers. A 2010 evaluation of YFHS in Malawi found that although

Figure 1

A Substantial Proportion of Young People Have Sex by Age 15

Percent Who Had Sex by Age 15



Source: Malawi National Statistical Office and ICF Macro, 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (Calverton, MD: ICF Macro, 2011): table 6.5.

over 85 percent of evaluated sites were providing the minimum package of care, fewer than 50 percent had Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials for young people available, and only 30 percent had at least two providers trained in YFHS. Overall, less than a quarter of evaluated sites (64 of 266) were providing YFHS according to the standards set by the Ministry of Health.

Early childbearing is high, putting young mothers and their infants at risk.

Early childbearing is high: Over one-quarter of girls ages 15 to 19 have begun childbearing (are pregnant or have given birth). Girls with less education and from poorer households are more likely to become pregnant or give birth by age 18. Early childbearing carries risks for both mothers and babies: Young women who give birth before age 20 are at higher risk for pregnancy and delivery-related complications,¹¹ and infant mortality is higher among children born to mothers under age 20 than to older mothers.¹²

Modern contraceptive use remains low among young women and men. Modern contraceptive use has increased overall among married women ages 15 to 49. However, rates remain low among younger women: Among currently married women ages 15 to 19, only one in four uses a modern method of contraception (see Figure 2). Rates of modern contraceptive use are higher among young men than young women (mostly due to higher rates of condom use) but follow a similar pattern: Unmarried sexually active 15-to-19-year-old men were less likely to use contraception than their older counterparts.

Unmarried youth are also in need of sexual and reproductive health, including contraception. It is also important to pay attention to the sexual and reproductive health needs of unmarried young people, who will be or may

BOX 1 National Youth Friendly Health Services Standards

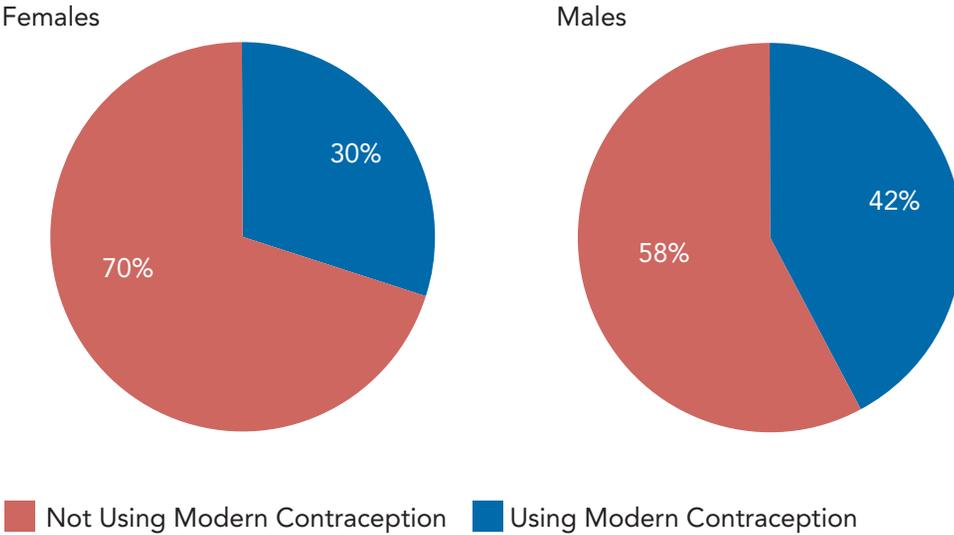
1. Health services are provided to young people according to existing policies, procedures and guidelines at all service delivery points.
2. Young people are able to obtain health services that include preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative health services appropriate to their needs.
3. All young people are able to obtain health information (including SRH and HIV) relevant to their needs, circumstances and stage of development.
4. Service providers in all delivery points have the required knowledge, skills and positive attitudes to effectively provide YFHS.
5. Health information related to young people is collected, analysed and utilised in decision-making at all levels.

Source: Ministry of Health, *National Standards on Youth Friendly Health Services* (2007).

already be sexually active. In particular, unmarried youth need access to family planning: Among sexually active unmarried women, 15-to-19-year-olds are the least likely to use modern contraceptive, followed by 20-to-24-year-olds. Additionally, unmarried youth often face barriers in accessing contraception as a result of stigma and health care providers who are not trained to work with young people.¹³

Figure 2

Use of Modern Contraception Among Unmarried Sexually Active 15-to-19-Year-Olds Is Low



Source: Malawi National Statistical Office and ICF Macro, 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (Calverton, MD: ICF Macro, 2011).

SUMMARY POINT

All young people have a need for comprehensive, age-appropriate and accurate sexuality education. Effective sex education programmes have been shown to reduce misinformation, increase the use of contraception to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs, and promote positive attitudes and behaviours.

Education is a key focus of the MGDS II, which recognises that expanding access to and the quality of education for all youth are critical to prepare young people for a healthy, productive life. Improvements in educational quality and completion rates, with a particular emphasis on girls' education and higher education, will also drive economic growth at a national level, since young people who are able to stay in school will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in today's modern economy. The Malawi government has set the following goals for education:

- Equity and Access
- Quality and Relevance
- Governance and Management

This focus point summary describes the current context of education in Malawi in relation to those goals.

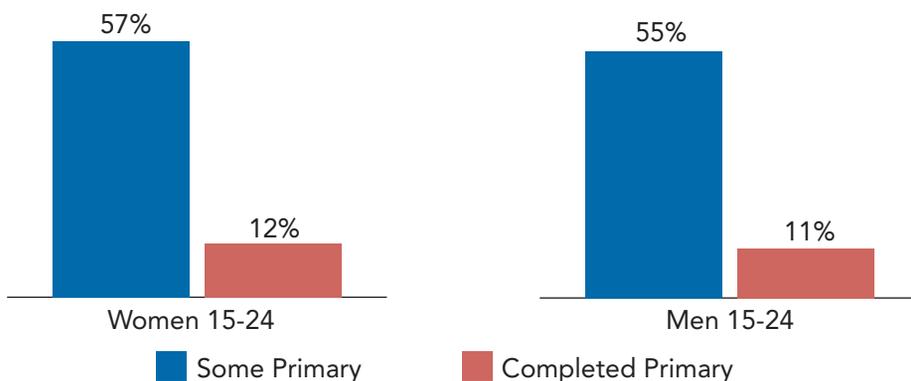
Primary school enrolment has increased, but high repetition and dropout continue to be an issue. In Malawi, more children than ever before are enrolled in primary education. From 2004 to 2010, primary school net enrolment rose from 82 percent to 91 percent.¹⁴ However, dropout and repetition rates are high (see Figure 1).

The quality of education at all levels is a serious challenge. The quality of education in Malawi has suffered from a very high student-to-teacher ratio, insufficient classroom space and lack of materials.¹⁵ A recent report by the Ministry of Education notes that although efforts are underway to hire and train more

Figure 1

Primary Enrolment Is High But Completion Rates Remain Low

Percent of Women and Men Ages 15-24



Source: Malawi National Statistical Office and ICF Macro, *2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey* (Calverton, MD: ICF Macro, 2011): tables 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.

teachers, there is still a shortage and many teachers have inadequate training.¹⁶ Additionally, teaching and learning materials are insufficient or nonexistent. These factors have a serious impact on students learning: the report notes that performance in reading and math is very poor across grades and well below curriculum targets.¹⁷

Few young people attain higher education. Although primary school enrolment has improved, progression to secondary and tertiary schooling remains low, especially among girls. Overall, only 10.7 percent of males ages 15 to 49 and 5.6 percent of females completed secondary education, while less than 3 percent of males and 1 percent of females achieved more than secondary schooling.¹⁸

Disparities in education put poor and rural youth at a disadvantage. Progression beyond primary school is tied closely to economic status, with adolescents from the poorest families less likely than their peers to continue on to secondary school or beyond.¹⁹ Significant disparities in educational achievement also exist between rural and urban areas, with men and women in rural areas more likely to have never attended school and less likely to progress to or complete secondary education.²⁰ This low educational attainment and resulting lack of skills development contributes to continued poverty and interferes with economic growth.

Opportunities for young people who are out of school are limited. More than one in four 6-to-13-year-olds and nearly half of those ages 14 to 17, both male and female, are not in school.²¹ Demand for technical and vocational education or entrepreneurial training is high, but the capacity is low, and few out-of-school youth have access to those resources.

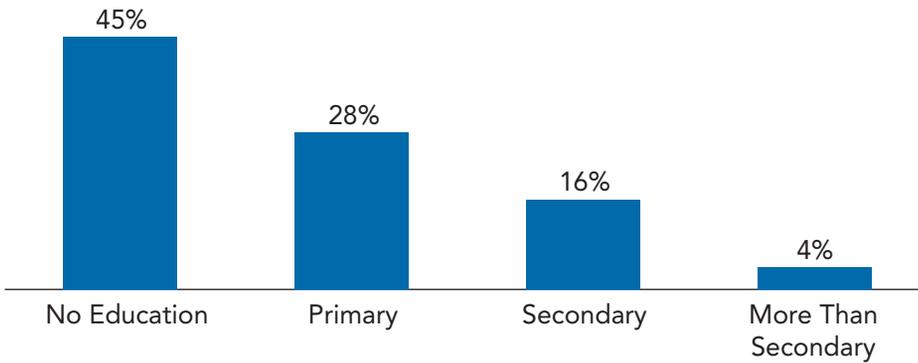
Improving education enrolment and completion rates for girls can boost economic growth. Keeping girls in school can increase income for individuals and boost economic development for nations. Enrolment and retention of girls in primary school has improved, but progression to and completion of secondary school remains a challenge. This deserves attention, since the returns on secondary education can be even greater than for primary.

A single year of primary school boosts women's wages later in life by 10 percent to 20 percent, while secondary education results in a 15 percent to 25 percent increase in women's wages.²² Girls who stay in school are likely to marry later, and their families benefit from their added income, which they are likely to invest in their families and children.²³

Figure 2

Girls Ages 15 to 19 With No Education Are More Likely to Have Begun Childbearing

Percent of Girls 15-19 Who Have Begun Childbearing



Source: Malawi National Statistical Office and ICF Macro, *2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey* (Calverton, MD: ICF Macro, 2011): table 4.8.

Investing in education has positive outcomes on population and reproductive health issues. Investing in young people's education improves sexual and reproductive health outcomes and contributes to more manageable population growth. The more educated an adolescent girl is, the more likely she is to use contraception and avoid unintended pregnancy, and the less likely she is to have ever been pregnant (see Figure 2). In Malawi, women with no education have 6.9 children on average, while women with secondary education have an average of only 3.8 children.²⁴ Young people with an education are also more likely to know how to prevent HIV infection and are more likely to use condoms.

SUMMARY POINT

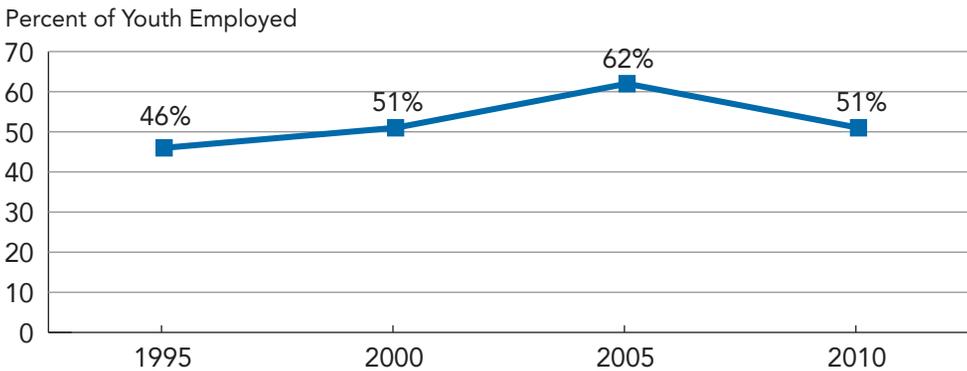
Educating young people now ensures a skilled workforce in the future and will support Malawi's economic growth and goal of becoming a middle-income country. With the right investments, Malawi can build on progress made thus far to improve the equity and access, quality and relevance and governance and management of its educational system.

Expanding economic opportunities for young people is critical to promote growth and development. However, with such a large youth population, the economy cannot absorb all the new workers: Every year there are more young people entering the job market than there are new jobs created. The National Youth Policy notes that youth unemployment is “both a political-security issue as well as a socio-economic one,” and emphasises the need for a range of vocational and technical skills-building programmes and centres for young people, including young women. More investments are needed in order for today’s young people to find productive employment and contribute to the growth of Malawi’s economy.

Employment for Malawi’s youth remains a challenge. The employment-to-population ratio is the proportion of a country’s population that is employed. The proportion of youth that were employed grew steadily from 1995 to 2005, but has been declining since (see Figure 1).²⁵

Figure 1

The Proportion of Malawi’s Youth Employed Grew Steadily From 1995 to 2005, But Has Been Declining Since



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators Database.

Unemployment is higher among young women and urban youth. The overall youth unemployment rate masks significant disparities by sex and residence. Young women are more likely to be unemployed compared to young men, and urban youth have higher rates of unemployment than their rural counterparts. Job creation strategies will need to take these inequities into account.²⁶

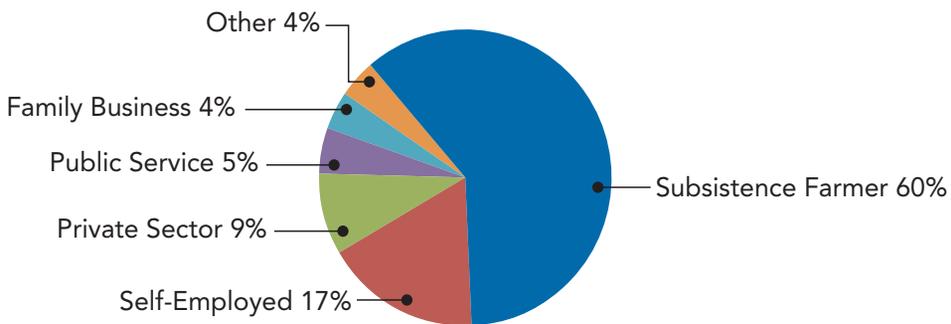
Improving young people’s transition from school to work is critical. Due to low secondary-school completion rates, many young people are leaving formal education too early, underqualified or with qualifications that do not match the needs of the labour market. Recognizing that greater access is only one aspect of improved education, the Malawi government is also emphasising the need to improve educational quality. As part of that, it will be critical to include training in skills that will enable young people to find and maintain a job—including problem-solving, decision-making, responsibility, teamwork and self-confidence.²⁷

Vocational training and workplace learning can improve youth employment prospects. Extensive, real workplace learning is an important factor to improve employment opportunities for young people. In addition, the provision of good labour market information, vocational guidance as well as job-search services can also play an important role.

Most young people work in the agricultural sector. Like adults, most young people in the labour force work in agriculture. Seventy percent of economically active young people work in agriculture, forestry and fishing.²⁸ Youth in this sector are largely unpaid or engaged in subsistence farming (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Most 15-to-24-Year-Olds Work in Agriculture



Source: Malawi National Statistical Office, *2008 Census Report on Children and Youth* (Zomba, Malawi: National Statistical Office, 2008).

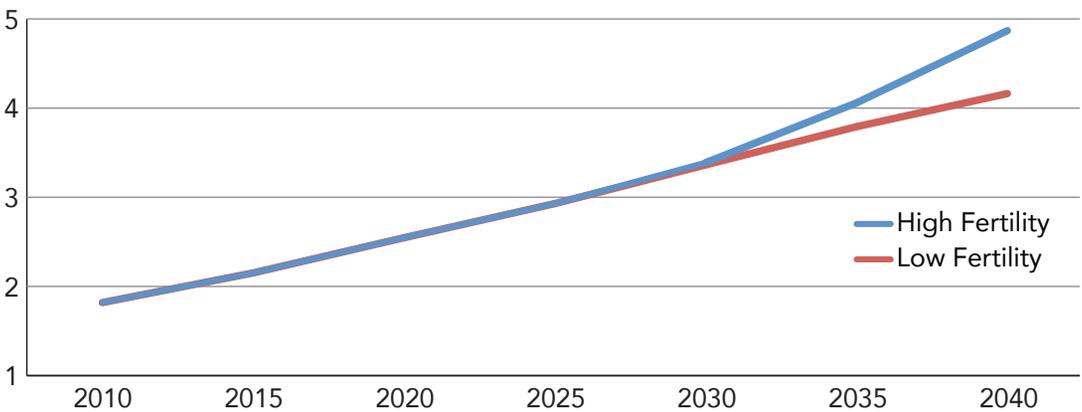
Young people are less likely to have waged employment and more likely to work in the informal sector than adults. Youth are more likely to be self-employed and less likely to have waged employment than adult workers. Additionally, many young people work in the informal sector in both urban and rural areas. This means that young people have less job stability, lower earnings and fewer prospects for advancement. However, youth—especially out-of-school youth—are drawn to small business and trade within the informal sector because earnings are still higher than for agricultural work, making the informal sector an important contribution to household income.²⁹

Youth entering the labour force will increase demand for job creation. The number of workers in Malawi already exceeds the number of jobs available, and Malawi will struggle to create enough jobs for the large numbers of young people entering the labour force over the next two decades. If fertility does not decrease, this will become even more of a challenge for future generations (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Fertility Rates Will Have a Significant Impact on the Number of New Entrants to the Labour Force

New Labour Force Entrants, Youth Ages 18-24 (in millions)



Note: Data for high fertility and low fertility are the same until 2030.

Source: Futures Group and Futures Institute, 2014.

SUMMARY POINT

Creating meaningful jobs for both young women and young men will allow Malawi to harness the energy and potential of its youth to support national development. Expanding education and vocational training, and supporting the large number of young people who work in the agricultural and informal sectors will also be important for improving employment prospects and conditions.

One of the themes of the MGDS II is gender and capacity development. The MGDS II acknowledges that there has been little success in the systematic mainstreaming of gender into sector programmes. Working with young men and women is a key strategy to transform gender norms, promote gender equality and enhance the participation of all people in social and economic development. Several challenges require immediate attention:

Although enrolment is increasing, girls are still less likely to continue on to secondary education than boys. Attendance is still lower for girls than boys, but Malawi continues to make progress in increasing girls' enrolment in secondary school. For example, the percentage of girls to boys enrolled at secondary level was 77 percent in 2010 compared to 63 percent in 2000.³⁰ However, higher dropout rates among young women during secondary school prevent them from enrolling in higher education and in 2010 only 62 percent of young women were enrolled in tertiary education compared to young men.³¹ This restricts their future participation in the labour market and reduces their future earning potential, since each additional year of schooling boosts wages later in life.³²

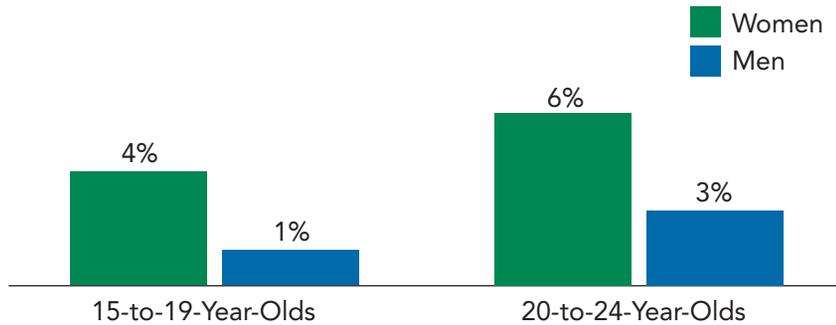
The educational experience is different for girls and boys. Even though girls in Malawi continue to make gains in accessing educational opportunities, their experience in school is quite different from that of boys. For example, research conducted during the Safe Schools Program in Malawi discovered that teachers, boys, parents and even girls themselves stereotyped girls as "sex objects." According to girls, teachers frequently mocked and insulted them in class and male teachers initiated sexual relationships with girls, using their power to pressure girls into having sex with them. These experiences can make girls feel unsafe in school and contribute to high dropout rates among female secondary school students.

More young women are HIV positive than young men. Although the prevalence of new HIV infections is declining among young people, young women continue to face a higher risk for contracting HIV compared to young men (see Figure 1, page 18). According to the most recent DHS, more than three times as many females than males ages 15 to 19 had HIV. Among 20-to-24-year-olds, more than two times as many females than males were HIV positive. Girls' vulnerability to HIV is increased by cross-generational sex, transactional sex and coercive sex.

Figure 1

Young Women More Likely to Be HIV Positive Than Young Men

Percent of Young People HIV Positive



Source: Malawi National Statistical Office and ICF Macro, 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (Calverton, MD: ICF Macro, 2011).

Early marriage is common for girls, and perpetuates gender inequality.

Although age of first marriage has been increasing in Malawi, many girls are still marrying too early in life. Half of young women ages 20 to 24 were married by age 18.³³ Girls in rural areas are even more likely to marry at a young age than their urban peers.³⁴ Early marriage often marks the end of schooling for girls, leads to early childbearing and health risks for the mother and child, and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Marrying at such young ages also limits young women's capacity to negotiate contraceptive use and safe sexual behaviour practices with relatively older husbands. Keeping girls in school is a key strategy for reducing early marriage and decreasing fertility. Data from a study of two districts in Malawi show that nearly one in four girls who dropped out of school did so because of marriage or pregnancy.

Young women and men are more, not less, accepting of domestic violence.

Gender-based violence is a common experience for women of all ages, including young women. Troublingly, young women and young men are more likely than older women and men to agree that a man is justified in beating his wife across a range of specific instances.³⁵ It is imperative that more work be done at earlier ages to transform gender norms and make gender-based violence less acceptable to future generations.

Young married women have the least access to resources and decision-making power compared to older married women.

A review of the most recent DHS shows that there are a large proportion of households where men alone make decisions for household spending. For example, among currently married women who receive cash earnings for employment, the husbands of married adolescents (ages 15 to 19) and married young women (ages 20 to 24) were more likely to be

the main decision-maker about spending women's earnings. In addition, married adolescent girls are the least likely of all age groups to make decisions about their own health care, household purchases and visiting family or relatives.

Female-headed households often face greater hardship than male-headed households. A recent report found that female-headed households were more disadvantaged than male-headed households in terms of housing, asset ownership and access to basic necessities such as water and cooking fuel. Levels of education were also lower among female heads of households than their male counterparts.³⁶

SUMMARY POINT

Gender equality is critical to social and economic development, and benefits men and women alike. Working with girls and boys from a young age is the key to promoting positive gender roles and improving the status of girls and women. Investing in girls' education and economic empowerment, along with efforts to prevent child marriage and reduce gender-based violence, will enhance national development as a whole.

The MGDS II recognises that a healthy population is necessary for sustainable economic growth and development. Ensuring a healthy population requires improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. This is especially true for young people, who are often disproportionately affected by the epidemic. The recent declines in HIV prevalence that Malawi has achieved, including among young people, are cause for optimism, but there are many challenges remaining.

“The reduction of HIV prevalence in the general population is achieved globally when there are reductions in new infections among young people.”

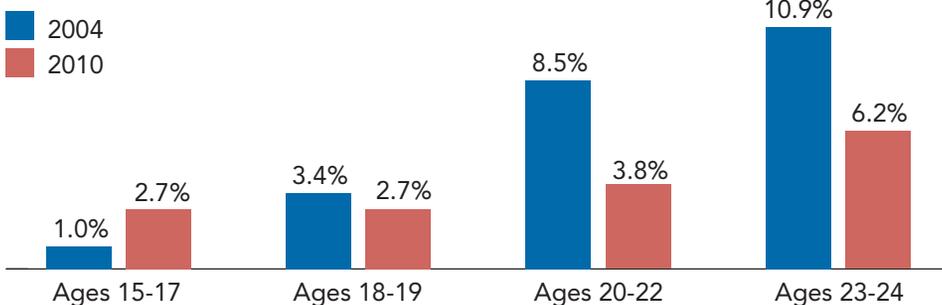
2012 Global AIDS Response Progress Report: Malawi Country Report for 2010 and 2011

HIV prevalence has declined, but remains high among young people, especially young women. In Malawi, changes in the sexual behaviour of young people—including waiting longer to become sexually active and having fewer sexual partners—has resulted in reductions in HIV prevalence among young people generally. From 2004 to 2010, HIV prevalence among 15-to-24-year-olds declined from 6 percent to 3.6 percent (see Figure 1). However, over the same time period, HIV prevalence actually increased among 15-to-17-year-olds, a concerning trend and one that highlights the need to reach youth early with appropriate information about sexual and reproductive health.

Figure 1

HIV Prevalence Has Decreased Among Most, But Not All, Younger Age Groups

Percent HIV Positive



Source: Government of Malawi, *2012 Global AIDS Response Progress Report, Malawi Country Report for 2010 and 2011* (Zomba, Malawi: Government of Malawi, 2012).

Awareness of HIV is high but detailed knowledge needs to be improved.

Nearly all young people (over 98 percent) are aware of HIV/AIDS, but understanding of transmission and prevention is limited: Less than half of young women (41.8 percent) and young men (44.7 percent) ages 15 to 24 have comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS.³⁷ Life Skills Education is now mandatory in Malawi, but implementation of the LSE curriculum is hindered by lack of learning materials, inadequate teacher training, teacher's lack of SRH knowledge and discomfort teaching sexuality.

Condom use is increasing, and there is widespread support for education about condom use to avoid HIV.

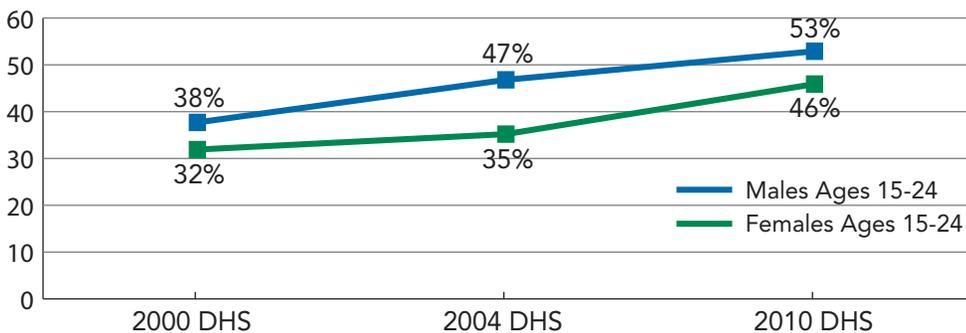
Condom use is an important strategy for preventing HIV, and over half of respondents of all age groups and both sexes agree that 12-to-14-year-olds should be taught about using condoms to avoid HIV.³⁸ There are also positive signs that condom use is increasing: According to the Malawi DHS, 37 percent of men ages 15 to 24 used a condom at last sex with any partner, up from 32 percent in 2004. For women, the rate of condom use with any partner increased to 13 percent in 2010 from 9 percent in 2004.

Condom use at last sex with a nonmarital, noncohabitating partner also increased (see Figure 2). This increasing use may be contributing to the decline of new infections in Malawi. However, the fact that fewer young women report using condoms may reflect their inability to negotiate condom use, especially in situations of coerced or forced sex.

Figure 2

Condom Use Is Increasing

Percent Who Used a Condom at Last Sex With a Nonmarital, Noncohabitating Partner



Source: ICF International, MEASURE DHS STATcompiler (2012), accessed at www.statcompiler.com, on Aug. 8, 2013.

BOX 1 **New Evidence Suggests That Economic Empowerment Can Reduce HIV Transmission**

Evidence from a cash transfer program in Zomba, Malawi, suggests that social protection programs can strengthen efforts to prevent HIV. The study found that cash transfers increased school attendance, reduced child marriage and early pregnancy, and reduced self-reported sexual activity. HIV incidence also declined since there was less of a need to rely on sexual relationships with older men for economic support.

Sources: Sarah Baird et al., “The Short-Term Impacts of a Schooling Conditional Cash Transfer Program on the Sexual Behavior of Young Women,” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, No. 5089 (October 2009), accessed at <http://irps.ucsd.edu/assets/033/10615.pdf>; and World Bank, Development Research Group, *A Cash Transfer Program Reduces HIV Infections Among Adolescent Girls* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010), accessed at [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/HIVExeSummary\(Malawi\).pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/HIVExeSummary(Malawi).pdf), on Feb. 22, 2013.

Male youth are more likely to report having multiple sex partners than female youth. In Malawi, 7 percent of young men ages 15 to 24 reported having multiple partners in the last year; on the other hand, less than 1 percent of young women the same age reported having multiple partners. When young people engage in unprotected sex with many different partners, they increase their chances of becoming infected with HIV.

Programmes that address gender equality are needed to curb the spread of HIV. In Malawi, HIV prevalence among women ages 15 to 24 is more than twice that of their male peers. Young women may be at greater risk of HIV due to factors such as early marriage, gender-based violence, cross-generational sex, transactional sex and lack of power to negotiate condom use.

Integrating reproductive health and HIV prevention and treatment services could yield positive results. Young people represent a significant proportion of new HIV infections each year, emphasising the importance of effective and innovative HIV-prevention and treatment services for young people. The government of Malawi supports integration of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS services throughout the health care system—a cost-effective strategy to meet the needs of young people. In addition to improving the quality and utilisation of services, integration addresses overlapping health needs. This maximises opportunities and minimises costs for protecting young people’s sexual health, reducing their risk for HIV and ensuring that those who are HIV positive have access to adequate care. Finally, integrating general reproductive health care and HIV/AIDS services may reduce stigma associated with seeking HIV preventive or treatment services.³⁹

SUMMARY POINT

Though young people are among the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, they are also the key to addressing the epidemic. Accurate and comprehensive information, along with access to youth-friendly health services, is the centrepiece for effective HIV prevention among youth. Ultimately, reducing the spread of HIV among Malawi’s youth will bolster social and economic development efforts.

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For More Information About Malawi's Population

Malawi's Pathway to a Demographic Dividend is a policy brief that explains the connection between the demographic dividend and investments in voluntary family planning; highlights Malawi's particular challenge in achieving a demographic dividend and the need for immediate action; and prioritises actions and investments in health, education and gender equity; as well as subsequent economic policies needed to open and take advantage of this window of opportunity.

www.prb.org/pdf14/malawi-demographic-dividend-2014.pdf

The Malawi Population Data Sheet 2012 provides information for 20 population, health, and environment indicators. Selected indicators are compared over time, and among regions, wealth quintiles, and education levels.

www.nsomalawi.mw

www.prb.org/pdf12/malawi-datasheet-2012.pdf

Why Population Matters to Malawi's Development is a primer that examines selected priority issues addressed Malawi's Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) and their relationship with rapid population growth. For Malawi to achieve its full set of growth and development goals, it must address population growth, and family planning is a key strategy toward achieving these goals. The primer provides information on the relationship among population growth, family planning, and seven of the MGDS priorities. Each section offers facts about specific priorities, the relationship of the issue to population growth, and suggested actions for mobilizing support.

www.prb.org/pdf12/malawi-population-matters.pdf

"Malawi: Investing in Our Future Now" is a multimedia presentation that highlights the advances Malawi has made and the challenges it still faces as it strives to become a middle-income country. Exploring the impact of rapid population growth at the national and the family level, the presentation illustrates the links between rapid population growth, family planning, and development. The presentation underscores the importance of addressing rapid population growth and meeting unmet need for family planning in order to reduce poverty and achieve national development goals. The presentation was created by PRB in collaboration with the Malawi ENGAGE task force chaired by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and the Ministry of Health with support from USAID through its IDEA project—Informing DEcisionmakers to Act.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3AQX0egt0o&feature=youtu.be

Coming Soon! A policy brief on gender and family planning; a Malawi youth fact sheet, discussion guide and population data sheet 2014; a multimedia presentation, *Carrying Our Nation Forward: Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health for Young People*; and a multimedia presentation on family planning and faith.

These materials were prepared in collaboration with the Department of Population and Development in the Division of Development Planning at the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development of Malawi, with assistance from the Population Reference Bureau through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project Informing DEcisionmakers to Act (IDEA).

A Vision for the Health and Well-Being of Malawi's Young People



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