

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: population growth

The education sector in Malawi has received a greater proportion of state funding over the years. The sector was allocated K99.19 billion in the 2013/14 budget representing 20 percent of the total budget, comparing with the 2012/13 allocation of K80.0 billion.

However, rapid population growth is hampering efforts by the government to raise education standards. Malawi's population has grown rapidly from almost four million in 1966 to nearly 15 million in 2012.

Because of this population growth, many schools are not well equipped to cope with the high number of students enrolled.

In some schools, there may be 100 children in one classroom, yet the global recommendation is 40. The number of qualified teachers is dwindling too, and a vast number of new classrooms are needed.

With all these problems being faced in the education sector because of population growth, there is need for something to be done, to ensure the highest quality of education in the country.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To increase knowledge of listeners on how population growth affects education standards
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on population growth and its effects on education
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to population growth and the effects it has on education

The Problem: Population Growth and Education

Many studies over the years have established that education is key to the development of any country.

However, as a result of high population growth, education standards in the country are often compromised.

Population growth has led to overcrowding in schools – with classrooms bulging with students.

Overcrowding in schools, impacts negatively on both teachers and students. It can make students restless and anxious. It means teachers have little or no time to work individually with students who may need extra help – and with so many students in a small space – it can lead to discipline issues.

It means there needs to be more teachers.

In fact, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO, for short, student-teacher ratios in Malawi are among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, with only one teacher on average for a class of 79 students.

Overcrowding also means there needs to be more classrooms. It can lead to less access to equipment and technology at schools.

For instance, there may not be enough rooms at the school to accommodate important subjects -- such as laboratory for science and computer classes.

Ultimately, this could result in many students not taking part in science and computer subjects.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how population growth affects the education system in the country

Make the following points:

Education is the key to development for any country, but population growth is hindering efforts by government and other players in raising education standards. Therefore, there is a need for more people to start planning their families more responsibly, so as not to overwhelm the education system.

A 2003 report by the United Nations that studied the relationships between education and population and how they affect development found the following:

Education plays a key role in developing a nation and helping it to grow economically and socially.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that schools offer high quality education to their students so that they become good citizens. But this will not be difficult to achieve if schools are overcrowded.

It is important to realize that through education, individuals are empowered to make choices that affect their own health and that of their children, including the spacing of their children. Therefore, if schools continue to be overcrowded, it will be difficult for Malawi to achieve the highest standards of education.

There is also a great need for traditional leaders to work

together with government and other organisations to encourage youth to consider the teaching profession.

Since student- teacher ratio is high in Malawi, if more people are trained as teachers, at least education standards will improve.

For example, if you have a high number of students in a classroom and most need help, it's going to take a lot of time for one teacher to assist all the students. However, a classroom with just 20 students allows the teacher to provide more individualized help, as it is needed.

Do a vox pop with a few teachers and find out from them how overcrowding in the classroom affects them. Do the teachers believe they can provide a quality education with 50-60 students in one classroom? What solutions do the teachers offer? How do they cope now? Also ask some students how they are affected by crowded classrooms. Do they believe they are getting a good education? Does their teacher have time to help them if they have questions?

Ask parents what they think should be done? What do local education officials propose? How big is the school budget? How much do teachers make per month?

Talk to the National Coordinator of Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE) and let him comment on how population growth affects education standards.

Useful Contacts

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- http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2003monitoring/WorldPopMonitoring_2003.pdf



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