

Malawi SEED Urban: Midline Qualitative Findings

The USAID-funded **Malawi Secondary School Expansion for Development (SEED): Urban** activity involved the design-build construction of prefabricated classroom blocks, new boy and girl latrine blocks, and changing rooms for girls in 30 existing Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) in the cities of Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe, and Mzuzu. SEED Urban sites were handed over to the Ministry of Education between December 2020 and February 2021. SEED’s main development hypothesis is that by providing increased access to CDSSs, young Malawians will attend school rather than move into the “out-of-school” population that impedes the country’s future development. By providing a proper learning environment (sanitary conditions, decongested classrooms, and closer access to schools), young girls will remain in school longer, reducing the risk of early pregnancy, early marriage, and HIV exposure.

Data for Impact (D4I), in collaboration with the **Centre for Social Research (CSR) at the University of Malawi**, is conducting an impact evaluation of the SEED activity to help understand whether there is a change or impact on communities where SEED is carrying out expansion and construction of CDSSs. This brief summarizes results from the midline (2023) urban qualitative component which was conducted at three expanded SEED schools—one each in Blantyre, Lilongwe, and Mzuzu (Figure 1)—to explore perceived positive and unintended impacts of the expansion. Results will inform understanding of how education and health outcomes can result from secondary school construction in Malawi.

Methods

Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with Form 3 male and female youth who had entered Form 1 when the expanded schools opened in 2021. FGDs were also conducted with male and female caregivers of Form 3 youth, and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with Form 3 teachers and community leaders. A total of 90 people participated in the urban qualitative component as shown in Table 1.

FGD, IDI, and KII interviews were audio recorded, translated and transcribed into English, and uploaded into Dedoose for coding by the D4I/CSR team. The team then coded the transcripts using pre-determined codes based on the evaluation questions and key outcomes.

Findings are summarized by reported positive impacts, unintended outcomes, and business environment spillovers.

Figure 1. SEED: Urban locations



Table 1. SEED impact evaluation: Midline qualitative

Evaluation midline (2023)	Number of respondents
FGD: Form 3 girls	23
FGD: Form 3 boys	24
FGD: Female caregivers of Form 3 youth	18
FGD: Male caregivers of Form 3 youth	13
IDI: Form 3 girls	3
IDI: Form 3 boys	3
KII: Form 3 teachers	3
KII: Community leaders	3
Total	90



Reported Positive Impacts

Respondents reported numerous positive impacts of the SEED expansion.

Students, caregivers, teachers, and community leaders expressed an increased sense of school pride	Conducive learning environments (clean, uncrowded, well-ventilated) have encouraged attendance and facilitated learning
<p>“The school blocks are beautiful. Children were not happy to come to this school when they got selected ... because of the how the school was looking. But now every child wants to be at this school because of the beautiful school blocks that have been expanded.” —Community leader</p> 	<p>“After they expanded the classrooms, it has made us to learn well. We sit very well in classrooms, there is no congestion. We are learning well, and it happens that other classrooms are free and can be used for studying.” —Form 3 female student</p> 
Reduced absenteeism among girls due to the presence of changing rooms for menstrual hygiene management	
 <p>“The expanded washrooms and toilets have made girls more comfortable to attend school regularly ... Before the expansion, we had few toilets and students used to run away from school or ask to be excused to go home so that they could take care of themselves as girls. Now that there are expanded facilities like the toilets and washrooms, students are able to help themselves here at school.” —Form 3 teacher</p>	<p>“When going to the toilet, like the changing rooms, everything was found there, like soap, water, everything was there.” —Form 3 female student</p> 
Improved student teacher ratio due to smaller class size	Reduced disease/improved hygiene as a result of the new girls' and boy's toilets
<p>“There is a good teacher to learner ratio ... when we divide the class into half, one class remains with 45 to 50 and the other class too ... Since students have different ways of learning, you are able to observe the needs of everyone. You end up knowing the strengths and weaknesses of every student in the class ... You end up knowing what each student needs to understand.” —Form 3 teacher</p> 	<p>“[The new toilets] “helped us to prevent diseases like the ones occurring in our communities which come due to poor disposal of human waste.” —Form 3 male student</p> 



Increased motivation to send children to school due to improved environment

“Because of the new block, it has created space. Everyone should have a desk and participate alone with their books. The old blocks [were] overcrowded, people could quarrel and [my child] could tell me at home that ‘people were fighting for desks, this and that’ which shows that it was affecting the mental health of the students.”

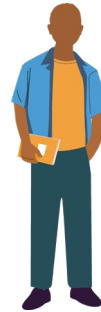
—Female caregiver



Increased motivation to perform well in primary school in order to be selected to the expanded SEED school

“The expanded school has motivated the younger ones in primary schools to work even harder because they now know that they have higher chance of being selected to secondary school.”

—Form 3 male student



Unintended Impacts

Three unintended impacts were reported.

Increased teacher workload



“We distributed the students into Form 1A&B, 2A&B, 3A&B, up to Form 4. This means if you are teaching mathematics, you will have to teach it seven periods at A and seven periods at B ... It reaches an extent whereby you have 30 something periods alone ... The periods are too much and you end up being exhausted because of too [many] classes.”

—Form 3 teacher

Increased enrollment

SEED Urban was not intended to increase enrollment, but rather to decrease overcrowding. However, respondents noted that the expanded schools can accommodate more students and students were transferring to the expanded schools because they were attracted by the conducive environment.



Expanded blocks and toilets/changing rooms not used for intended purpose

“The new toilets are being used by the teachers, as students, we are still using the old toilets. So, we don’t see benefit since we are not the ones using them ... even the change rooms are not accessible to us ... they were built same place where the teachers’ toilets are, so we cannot use them.”

—Form 3 female student




“Another [new block] acts like a staff room because the staff room we wanted to build; its blocks got stolen. The other old staff room is very small and during the COVID period, that’s when we decided that the staff room should be spacious.”

—Form 3 teacher



Business Environment Spillovers

Piecework, employment, and an increase in consumers were reported as positive business environment spillovers in communities where CDSS's were expanded.

 <p data-bbox="362 451 862 751">"Ever since the classes were expanded, more security guards from surrounding the school have been employed. Secondly, some women come and clean this place for us. So, some people got employed while others found a business opportunity due to the increase in enrollment. Enrollment can't be the same when we had one block to now that we have four of them."</p> <p data-bbox="683 758 870 785">—Form 3 teacher</p>	<p data-bbox="943 401 1451 533">At baseline in 2021, during the construction/expansion phase, community members were hired to draw water, carry bricks and soil, and serve as watchmen.</p> <p data-bbox="943 556 1459 653">At midline in 2023, respondents noted that some community members had gotten jobs at the school as security guards or cleaners.</p> <p data-bbox="943 676 1468 804">Respondents at both baseline and midline noted that the increased number of students meant that local businesses were benefitting from an increased number of consumers.</p>
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Conclusion

Many positive and important impacts of the SEED: Urban expansion were reported by respondents, as were positive impacts on the local business environment. There is an opportunity to ensure staff at the expanded schools are using the new spaces for their intended purposes. Future urban expansions may want to consider building new teachers' latrine blocks in addition to girls' and boys' latrine blocks to prevent teachers from restricting the new toilets for staff use.

To learn more about D4I's impact evaluation of the Malawi SEED project, visit D4I's website for reports and briefs at <https://www.data4impactproject.org/countries/malawi/>

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