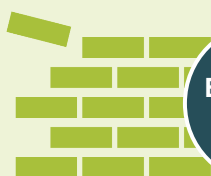


Theory of Change: Midline Status Update

The Malawi Secondary Education Expansion for Development (SEED) activity is a \$90 million commitment by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for urban expansion and rural construction of Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs). In urban areas, the SEED program constructed prefabricated classroom blocks, new boy and girl latrine blocks, and changing rooms for girls in 30 existing CDSSs in the cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu, and Zomba. In rural areas, the SEED program is constructing new “greenfield” CDSS facilities in areas where secondary school access has historically been limited. The first group of 30 new CDSSs in the Central and Southern regions of Malawi opened in January 2023.

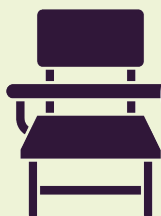
Data for Impact (D4I) and the Centre for Social Research (CSR) conducted an impact evaluation of the SEED program to help understand whether there is a change or impact on communities where the SEED program is carrying out the expansion and construction of CDSSs. Two rounds of data collection were conducted—baseline in 2021 and midline in 2023. This brief presents the Malawi SEED theory of change, midline results, and recommendations.

Malawi SEED Theory of Change



Expected Inputs

- Expansion of urban CDSSs and construction of new rural CDSSs
- Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) wrap-around services
- Abolition of secondary school tuition fees



Expected Outputs

- Increased number of Form 1 CDSS seats available
 - Decreased financial burden of direct secondary school costs
 - Decreased travel distance and time
 - Reduced self-boarding
 - Improved WASH and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) environment
 - Increased sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge
 - Improved gender norms influenced by updated SRH curriculum and improved MHM environment
- Increased access to secondary schools



Expected Outcomes

- Improved primary school attendance, performance, retention, and completion rates
- Increased student, caregiver, and community aspirations and expectations for students to continue their education
- Decreased risk of school-related gender-based violence (SR-GBV) associated with reduced long-distance travel to school and reduced self-boarding
- Delayed sexual debut
- Reduced child labor



Expected Impacts

- Improved transition rates from primary to secondary school
- Decreased levels of educational inequality between males and females
- Reduced incidence of early pregnancy
- Reduced incidence of child and early marriage
- Reduced risk of HIV exposure
- Potential spillover impacts on education, infrastructure, and business sectors

Key results

Improved WASH and MHM Behaviors



The availability of MHM facilities in the SEED rural schools and expanded urban CDSSs **reduced menstrual related absenteeism among girls** (-20 percentage points, $p < 0.01$).

Evidence

“Washing rooms have reduced absenteeism from students and [at] the same time students are not wasting time by going back home to clean themselves because they have change rooms right here at school.”

— Form 1 male student (Rural)

“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.”

— Form 3 teacher (Urban)

Improved educational aspirations and expectations

Rural qualitative students reported the new SEED schools increased their optimism for the future.

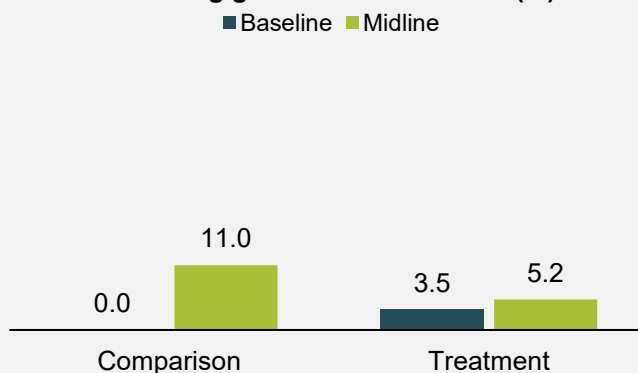
“I feel my future is so bright because the coming of this [SEED] school has changed my life to work hard academically and become independent in future.”

—Form 1 male student

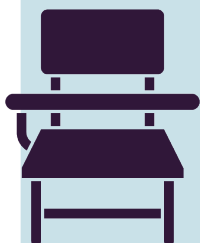
Decreased SR-GBV and school travel safety concerns

- SEED schools reduced risks of SR-GBV-related school absenteeism among Form 1 girls attending SEED rural schools (-20 percentage points, $p < 0.10$).
- Primary schools in SEED rural program areas were less likely to report school travel safety concerns were a barrier for girls to join secondary school. (-30 percentage points, $p < 0.10$).

Figure 1. SR-GBV related absenteeism among girls in SEED schools (%)

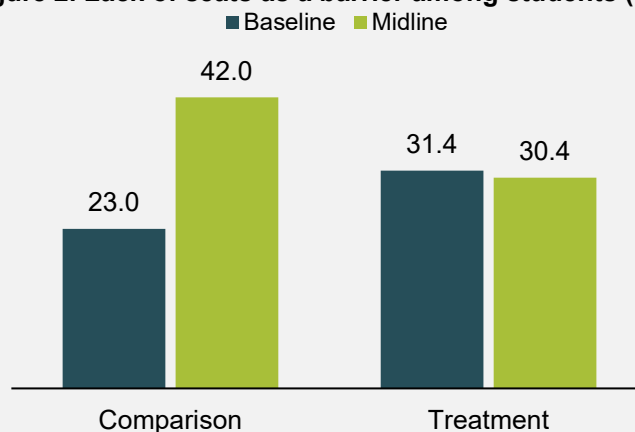


Increased availability of Form 1 admission spaces



Students in SEED rural program areas were less likely to report a lack of Form 1 seats as a barrier to achieving their educational goals (-20 percentage points, $p < 0.05$).

Figure 2. Lack of seats as a barrier among students (%)



Key results

Evidence

Decreased travel distance or time and self-boarding



- Students in SEED rural program areas were less likely to consider travel or distance to secondary school as a barrier to achieving their educational goals (-10 percentage points, $p < 0.10$).
- SEED rural schools were an average of 3 km closer to the farthest village that sends students compared to comparison secondary schools ($p < 0.05$).

Decreased financial burden of direct secondary education costs

Parents reported that having a local CDSS made secondary school more affordable.

Direct school costs hinder access to secondary school

Direct school costs remained a barrier for students in achieving educational goals.

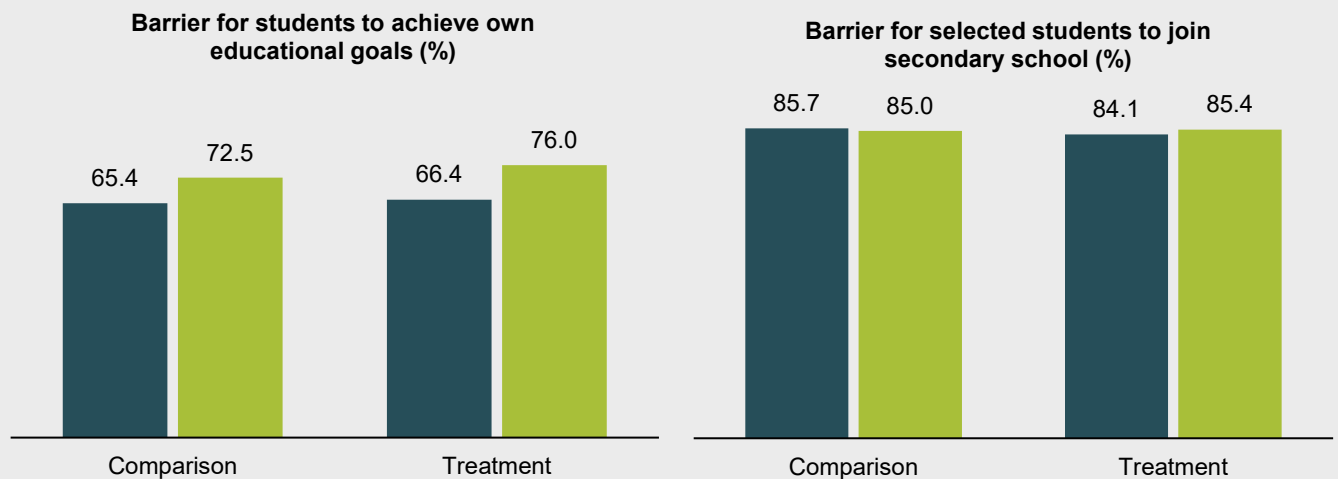
“This [SEED] school is helping us a lot. Children were travelling long distances to school. Some were even doing self-boarding just to cut transport costs ... This costed most of the parents since they had to pay rent, provide food and other upkeep for their children.”

—Male caregiver



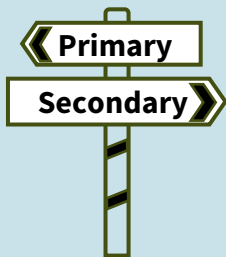
Figure 3. Direct costs

■ Baseline ■ Midline



Key results

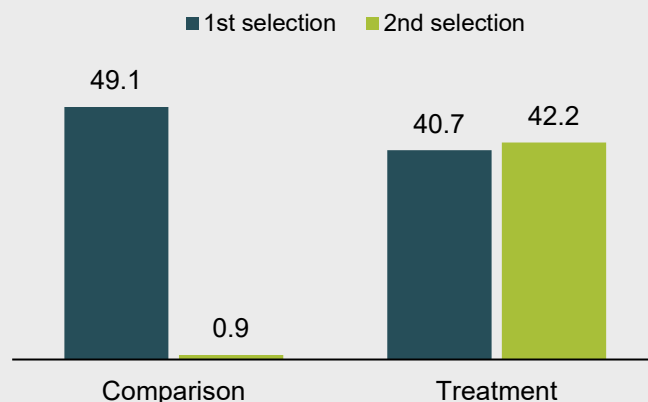
Increased public Form 1 transition rate



- SEED schools increased student transition to secondary school during the second selection at midline ($p < 0.001$) but did not impact overall school progression and transition.

Evidence

Figure 4. Transition Rates by Selection (%)



Increased work and business opportunities

- Community members were employed during expansion/construction of SEED schools.



- Local businesses also benefited from customers that included construction workers and the increasing number of new students.

“There is a change because these additional classroom blocks brought in additional learners. This has increased the number of people who buy what people sell here hence businesses make fair gains.”

—Female caregiver (Urban)

Recommendations

Broadly, the midline findings showed notable positive impacts on the SEED program’s outputs and outcomes. However, perceptions of direct school-related costs as a barrier to secondary education remained high among students both at baseline and midline. As such, further investigation is needed to explore why cost is a persistent and pervasive barrier to school access. Additionally, given the importance of the \$90 million investment and its relevance to Malawi’s future development—an educated young population required to drive the country’s economic growth—there is a need to conduct an endline evaluation to confirm the findings in order to inform evidence-based policies and programming. This will also ensure adequate exposure time to detect any differences resulting from the SEED program’s implementation.

Recommended citation:

Mwase-Vuma, T., Kuntembwe, M., Kayange J, Evance, S., Amin, C., and Kholowa, A. (2024). *Malawi Secondary Education Expansion for Development (SEED) Impact Evaluation: Theory of Change Midline Status Update*. Chapel Hill, NC, USA: Data for Impact.

This brief summarizes key findings from the [Malawi Secondary Education Expansion for Development \(SEED\) Impact Evaluation Midline Report](#) by Brugh K., Angeles, G., Thakwalakwa, C., Fehringer, J. Mwase-Vuma, T., Markiewicz, M., Kuntembwe, M., Mkombe, D., Kayange, J., Millar, L., Wilkes, B., Chen, T., Kadzamira, E., and Manthulu, S. (2024).

This publication was produced with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Data for Impact (D4I) associate award 7200AA18LA00008, which is implemented by the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in partnership with Palladium International, LLC; ICF Macro, Inc.; John Snow, Inc.; and Tulane University. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government. FS-24-668