

Malawi



About the Country

The Republic of Malawi is a landlocked country in southeast Africa. A former British colony known as Nyasaland, Malawi gained independence in 1964. The history of Malawi goes back to the 10th century, when the area was first settled. Today, Malawi is one of Africa's poorest and most densely populated nations. Malawi's economy is based on agriculture and 84% of its people live in rural areas. Maize (corn) is the country's main staple food while tea, coffee and sugar are some of its biggest exports. The people of Malawi have a rich history of traditional dance, mask carving and basketry. Soccer is the most popular sport.

Education

The educational system in Malawi consists of 8 years in primary school, 4 in secondary school and 4 at University. Starting in the year 5 of primary school, all subjects are taught in English. School enrollment has historically been low. However in 1994, free primary education for all children was introduced and enrollment in primary schools nearly tripled. Unfortunately, the impoverished school system was unprepared and many unqualified teachers have been recruited to teach in severely overcrowded and underfinanced schools. As a result, some frustrated students have dropped out. Dropout rates are higher for girls than boys because girls often face discouragement from male students and teachers. Additionally, girls are expected to take care of their families; fetching water, collecting firewood and preparing meals leaves girls little time for schooling.

It's estimated that Malawi had over a half a million AIDS orphans by the end of 2007. In general, young people between the ages of 13-24 have been affected by AIDS more than other age groups which is why many experts are calling for AIDS education in schools.

The African Library Project

The African Library Project (ALP) establishes and improves small libraries in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Wungwero Book Foundation (WBF), an NGO dedicated to rural library development in Malawi, initiated a partnership with the African Library Project in 2008. WBF is leading a coalition of six Malawian NGOs partnering with ALP to develop primary school, secondary school and community libraries in rural Malawi. Each library project provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library. ALP provides the books while WBF provides librarian training and coordinates the book distribution. Together, WBF and ALP evaluate and monitor the libraries.

Quick Facts

- About half of Malawi's population of 14 mil. lives on under a \$1 a day (UN).
- The adult literacy rate is 62.7%. Men tend to be more literate; 76.1% of males over 15 can read, vs. 49.8% of females. (CIA Factbook)
- Average life expectancy is approximately 40 years—a number that has been decreasing over time due partly to the AIDS epidemic. Malawi has one of the highest HIV rates in the world. (UNAIDS).
- Malawi has two official languages: English and Chichewa but several other local languages are spoken as well.
- Malawi's capital city is Lilongwe and commercial capital is Blantyre.

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