Malawi

African Library Project

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 called *nsima*) is the country's main staple food while tobacco, uranium, sugar, tea and coffee are its biggest exports. The people of Malawi have a rich history of traditional dance, mask carving and basketry. Soccer (called football) is the most popular sport.

In 2015, Malawi had one of the highest HIV rates in the world with 9.2% of adults or 980,000 people living with HIV. Nearly one million orphans have lost one or both parents to AIDS, which is why experts are calling for AIDS education in schools. In 2013, Malawi showed immense progress by reducing child HIV infection rates by 67%.

Education

The educational system in Malawi consists of 8 years in primary school, 4 in secondary school and 4 at university. Starting in year 5 of primary school, all subjects are taught in English. School enrollment has historically been low. In1994, free primary education for all children was introduced and enrollment in primary schools nearly tripled. Unfortunately, the majority of primary schools have overcrowded classes and insufficient books. Just one in eight primary students completes eight years of primary education. 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.

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 was soon joined by DAPP Malawi, an NGO focused on teacher training, the Malawi Institute of Education, and the University of Malawi.

Each library project provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library. ALP provides the books while the four partners provide clearing of the books' sea container, librarian training and follow-up. Together, the organizations evaluate and monitor the libraries– 465 as of 2018.

Quick Facts

- About half of Malawi's population of 16 million lives on under $1/day.
- The adult literacy rate is 66%. Men tend to be more literate: 73% of men over 15 can read vs. 59% of women.
- Average life expectancy is about 64 years. Malawi has such a low life expectancy in part because about 16% of the population has HIV/AIDS.
- Malawi has two official languages, English and Chichewa, but several other local languages are spoken as well.
- Malawi's capital city is Lilongwe and the commercial capital is Blantyre.