



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

OPENING REMARKS

DELIVERED BY

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MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

AT THE

**2024 EDUCATION JOINT SECTOR REVIEW MEETING
*Theme: "Education for Impact"***

HELD AT

**BINGU INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE,
LILONGWE**

**ON
5TH NOVEMBER 2024**

SALUTATIONS:

- The Deputy Minister of Education, Honourable Nancy Chaola Mdooko, M.P.
- The Secretary for Education, Associate Professor Mangani Chilala Katundu
- The Principal Secretary for Basic Education, Dr Rachel Chimbwete Phiri
- Outgoing Chair of the Education Development Partners - Madam Arianna Zannolini, FCDO
- Incoming Chair of the Education Development Partners - Mr Simon Molendijk, UNICEF
- All Representatives of Development Partners here present
- Heads and Representatives of Bi-lateral and Multi-lateral Agencies
- Members of Parliament and Government Officials
- The 2024 JSR Keynote Speaker – Dr Grace Kaimila Kanjo
- Civil Society and Faith-Based Organisations
- Vice Chancellors and Representatives of education institutions
- Private Sector leaders
- Members of the Press
- Listeners following the proceedings on Education Broadcasting Station and participants on Zoom
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

It is an honour to stand before you today as we convene for this significant Education Joint Sector Review under the theme "Education for Impact". This theme resonates powerfully with the African proverb, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

As we recognize 2024 as the African Union's Year of Education, it is fitting that His Excellency the President, Dr Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, has declared November of every year - beginning with this month - as National Education Month, reinforcing the Government's commitment to prioritising educational advancement. This Joint Sector Review, therefore, serves as a timely call to action, urging us to ensure that our collective efforts yield tangible progress in the lives of our children and youth - the architects of our nation's future.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, our commitment to education is anchored in several legislative frameworks.

The Malawi Constitution, under Section 25, guarantees every person the right to education, supported by the **Education Act of 2013** and our **National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP, 2020-2030)**. These frameworks ensure that quality education remains a fundamental right for all Malawians, reinforcing the belief that access to education is essential for our nation's socio-economic development. As Nelson Mandela eloquently stated, *“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine.”*

Reflecting on the past year, I am proud of our achievements. The **2023/24 Malawi Education Statistics Report** and the **Education Sector Performance Report** highlight key milestones, including increased enrolment across all education levels, improved teacher training and recruitment, and expanded access to digital learning platforms. These successes reflect our collective dedication and the invaluable support from our Development Partners and all stakeholders present today.

However, these Reports also reveals **strategic issues** that we must urgently address:

1. There are significant **gaps in digital infrastructure**, particularly in primary education, which could hinder the effective implementation of technology-enhanced learning.
2. Disparities in **access to educational resources**, especially in rural and underserved areas, necessitate targeted programmes to ensure equitable access.
3. While there is a push towards Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL), its **sustainability and effectiveness** require ongoing evaluation and support.
4. We need comprehensive **professional development and training** for educators to effectively utilize ICT tools in their teaching practices.

5. Our **current policy environment** must be updated to fully support the rapid integration of technology in education.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is said that *“the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.”* The **NESIP 2020-2030** has set ambitious targets, particularly in learning outcomes, infrastructure development and equitable access to education. While our progress has, to a notable extent, been hindered by the adverse impacts of natural disasters that have disrupted learning environments, destroyed school infrastructure, and displaced students and teachers, let me be clear: our setbacks do not define our commitment. Instead, they fortify our resolve to build a resilient, inclusive education system capable of producing the skilled human capital essential for our development goals.

Moving forward, my Ministry is resolute in addressing the gaps with the following **recommendations**:

- 1. Expanding Access to Educational Technologies and Digital Infrastructure and Resources:** To build a digitally inclusive education system, we will continue enhancing our investment in scalable digital infrastructure. This ensures that teachers, students and administrators have consistent access to the internet, high-quality digital content and the educational tools they need to thrive. Our focus will include expanding real-time data access and deploying advanced data analytics to support evidence-based policy and decision-making across the sector.

At the primary and secondary levels, we will scale up tablet-based learning through initiatives like the Connect-A-School and BEFIT Programmes, expand the National Reading Programme, and prioritise local development of educational technologies through the EdTech Hub, alongside constructing classrooms and ICT-integrated smart labs.

To support universal access to at least 12 years of education, as outlined in the First 10-Year Implementation Plan of the Malawi 2063 (MIP 1, 2021-2030), my Ministry will pilot Smart Learning Access Centres of Knowledge and Support (SLACKS) across each region of the country. These Centres will address disparities in education access, increasing net secondary enrolment rates and providing out-of-school youth and unselected primary graduates in marginalized communities with essential access to modern educational technologies and other resources. The SLACKS will also serve as hubs for teacher support and digital access to continuous professional development (e-CPD) opportunities.

At the tertiary level, initiatives like the Transforming Higher Education Systems and the SAVE Project will expand digital accessibility and stimulate innovation, ensuring that we graduate a workforce equipped to drive economic development. Additionally, we are committed to continually evaluating and enhancing Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) offerings to meet student needs and provide high-quality educational experiences through modern technologies and platforms.

Sector-wide, the establishment of EDUSPACE - a national education cloud - will create a secure platform for accessing educational resources, collaborative tools and essential data. EDUSPACE will support personalised learning, seamless communication and efficient administration across the education system.

- 2. Enhancing the Quality of Education Delivery:** To support our country's industrialisation objectives, particularly through increased manufacturing capacity and productive output, we will prioritise technical and vocational education, strengthen teacher capacity and promote collaborative research and innovation at the university level. This includes expanding comprehensive teacher training programmes focused on digital pedagogy, effective technology integration in the classroom, the use of Learner Management Systems, and data-driven assessment of learning outcomes.

Furthermore, we are committed to ensuring equitable distribution of high-quality teaching and learning materials across all education levels to facilitate impactful curriculum delivery and foster a practical, skills-oriented learning environment.

- 3. Enhancing Education Governance and Management:** To better integrate digital technologies in learning and promote equitable access to educational opportunities, we will continue to review and modernise our education policies. I am pleased to announce that the National Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) Policy has been recently approved, and finalisation is underway for the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (NSTIP), the ICT in Education Policy and the Inclusive Education Policy.

For these frameworks to succeed, we will strengthen cross-collaboration with other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and partners to ensure cohesive implementation.

We will continue to advocate for the active participation of the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders to enhance resource availability for strategic educational initiatives.

These partnerships are essential to secure both funding and technical support for the digitalisation of education, as well as to advance research, development and innovation in tertiary institutions.

To foster inclusive and sustainable human capital development, supporting the goals of Malawi 2063, we are also reviewing our policy coordination structures to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration and boost the effectiveness of our initiatives.

Furthermore, to lead by example in elevating the sector's performance, my Ministry is prioritizing targeted capacity building within its structures to align with the goals of NESIP 2020-2030. We are committed to enhancing the skills, tools and operational efficiencies necessary for effective service delivery.

This includes comprehensive staff training focused on data-driven policy analysis, advanced digital literacy, resource management, accelerated programme implementation, and robust monitoring and evaluation practices.

We will also improve internal work-flows, by leveraging technological solutions and establishing strategic oversight mechanisms that enable agile and responsive decision-making. With these enhanced capabilities, the Ministry aims to become a high-performing, well-equipped institution capable of implementing impactful education policies, closely monitoring results and driving sustainable improvements throughout the education system.

- 4. Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation:** We will establish robust mechanisms to assess the impact of technology integration in education, ensuring that data-driven insights inform ongoing policy adjustments and strategic planning.

This will involve the development of comprehensive M&E frameworks that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of educational initiatives and technology deployments.

We will actively engage stakeholders - including educators, students, parents and community members - in the evaluation process to gather diverse perspectives and enhance accountability. Furthermore, the M&E systems will facilitate regular reporting and feedback loops, enabling timely adjustments to programs and interventions based on evidence and lessons learned.

To bolster our efforts, we will invest in capacity-building for staff responsible for monitoring and evaluation, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and tools to analyse data effectively.

By embedding a culture of continuous improvement through rigorous evaluation practices, we aim to enhance the overall quality and impact of our educational programs, ultimately driving sustainable improvements across the education system.

And, now, **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**, moving on to our **strategic focus areas**:

1. Primary Education:

We will continue to prioritize early-grade learning through construction of classrooms under the MERP initiative, and expand evidence-based literacy and numeracy programmes, such as the BEFIT Programme, the National Reading Programme, and the recently launched National Mathematics Curriculum Reform Programme, under which we are rolling out a new Standards 1 and 2 Mathematics Curriculum.

To reduce drop-out rates, especially among girls, we will intensify our efforts to strengthen teacher capacity through effective and targeted recruitment and deployment, continuous professional development and the creation of supportive learning environments and community networks. Just as a tree is bent while it is still young, we will enhance our assessment tools to monitor our progress and ensure we are on the right path in all these interventions.

2. Secondary Education:

Expanding access to quality secondary education for marginalized communities is crucial. We will continue to improve educational infrastructure and increase the number of secondary schools to accommodate the growing population of secondary-age students. Through initiatives like EQUALS, SEED and ISEM II, we will promote equitable access to education, with a particular emphasis on STEAM education to prepare our youth for meaningful participation in the global economy.

3. Higher Education and TEVET:

For Malawi to develop sustainably, we must make deliberate investments in tertiary education. In this sub-sector, our goal is to produce a highly skilled workforce that can drive the country's industrialisation and socio-economic growth.

By reforming higher education and TEVET curricula to emphasise entrepreneurship, innovation and commercialisation on one hand, and fostering partnerships with the private sector on the other, we will provide students with hands-on experiences and expand technical and vocational training opportunities that align with labour market demands. This approach will not only enhance employability but also contribute to sustainable development and growth.

My Ministry is developing a strategic framework for collaboration between higher education institutions and industry, which is one of the reform areas under implementation in the 2023/24 and 2024/25 fiscal years.

We are also establishing strategies to increase investment in research and innovation. Looking ahead, our focus on impactful education will not only empower individuals but also catalyse socio-economic transformation in alignment with Malawi 2063. This is what we mean by our theme: *“Education for Impact”*.

4. Teacher Development and Support:

Henry Brooks Adams once said, "A teacher affects eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops". Recognising that teachers are the cornerstone of our education system, my Ministry is committed to enhancing teacher training, professional development and retention, particularly in rural areas. We will ensure that educators are well-equipped with the skills and resources necessary to inspire and empower the next generation.

5. Digitalization:

In today's digital age, technology integration is not only essential but transformative for education. True educational transformation must be evident in its positive impact on access, quality and equity. As seen in the advancements highlighted in the 2024 JSR reports and exhibitions, digitalization is a powerful equaliser, expanding educational opportunities with measurable impact expected through 2030 and beyond, aligned with Malawi 2063.

Digitalization in education will equip each school (tracked in the Education Statistics Report and EMIS database) with full electrification, internet connectivity at acceptable speeds, and a minimum of 40 digital access devices.

This infrastructure will support digital content that complements traditional teaching methods, foster digital learning in ICT-equipped smart labs, and enable teacher development through continuous professional development (CPD) programmes incorporating advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality.

Additionally, this initiative prioritises monitoring, research, learning and reporting (MERL) to track and publicly share the measurable impact on students, educators and administrators, further embedding inclusive Human Capital Development as a foundational goal of development in our nation.

This vision aligns with global priorities, as recently reinforced by the Pact of the Future at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA79), which places education for impact through science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation as a primary pillar.

The African Union's 5th Session this week also aims to endorse the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2034, TVET Strategy for Africa 2034 and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2034, all of which align with Malawi's commitment to digital transformation in education.

Here at home, my Ministry's digitalization agenda is guided by five key policy instruments - some of which are in the final stages of approval and expected to be in place by the end of this fiscal year 2024/2025. These include the National ODeL Policy, Inclusive Education Policy, ICT in Education Policy, National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (NSTIP), and the Data Protection Act, which establish guidelines for data sovereignty, cyber hygiene and children online protection.

6. Inclusive Education:

Inclusive education is central to our shared vision of an equitable education system, underscored by our commitment to ensuring that every child - regardless of background - has access to quality education. As UNESCO reminds us, *"Inclusion is not simply about physical proximity. It is about intentionally planning for the success of all students"*. In Malawi, this means prioritising access for children with special needs, those from underserved communities, and other marginalised groups.

To achieve this, we are finalizing the Inclusive Education Policy and reviewing the National Strategy on Inclusive Education to ensure it meets current needs. Model resource centers are being constructed in every district, and we have significantly increased funding for specialized teaching and learning materials, including assistive devices.

The Malawi Government's commitment of 1.5 billion Malawi Kwacha in the 2024/25 financial year demonstrates our dedication to leaving no learner behind, in alignment with Malawi 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, my Fellow Malawians, the Ministry cannot achieve these aspirations alone. As Helen Keller wisely stated, *"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much"*. I call upon our Development Partners, civil society and the private sector to join us on this journey. Together, we can build an education system that meets today's needs and prepares our children for the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.

Let me emphasize that we have unwavering political will to drive the transformation we seek. **His Excellency the President, Dr Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera**, has demonstrated his commitment to advancing education as a cornerstone of national development.

With our robust legal frameworks and policies, alongside the expertise of various stakeholders, we have every opportunity to transform education and fulfil our promise of a brighter future for our children.

In closing, I echo Malcolm X: *“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today”*. As we deliberate over the coming days on the future of education in our beloved country, I urge us all to critically review our progress, address shortcomings and align our efforts towards achieving meaningful impact so that no child in Malawi is left behind.

With these remarks, it is my singular honour to officially declare the **2024 Education Joint Sector Review Meeting open**.

May God bless Malawi.

Thank you.