



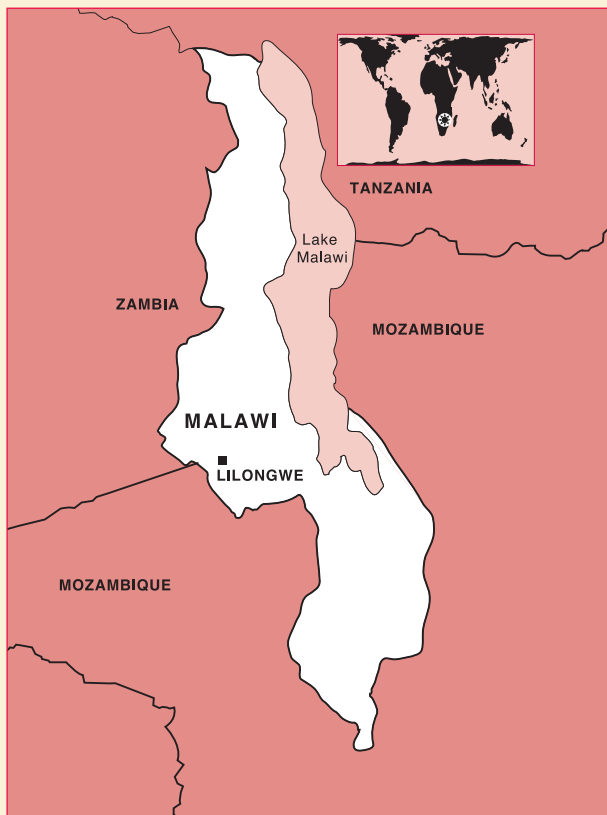
**actionaid**

# Country and community information



# Malawi

# ActionAid in Malawi



Malawi gained independence from Britain in 1964. It is a country of great natural beauty with mountains, plains and the awe inspiring Lake Malawi forming a vast inland 'sea'. The principal languages spoken are Chichewa and English. The main religion of Malawi is Christianity. There is also a large Muslim population mostly along Lake Malawi and many who still hold traditional beliefs.

Agriculture supports the majority of the population in Malawi. Tea and tobacco, mostly from large estates, are the main export crops while basic produce is grown on small subsistence farms, which occupy most of the farmland.

Relatively poor in natural resources compared with neighbouring countries, Malawi has a high population density with over 11 million inhabitants. This has put excessive pressure on the land and has contributed to widespread rural poverty.

ActionAid began working in Malawi in 1990. We work at a practical level to improve access to basic services by lobbying governments and other decision makers for change to the policies and practices that affect poor people's lives. We work with community groups and where possible local organisations to ensure that changes are appropriate and longlasting.

## Malawi facts:

- The population is 11.9 million
- Life expectancy is 38 years
- One in six children die before their fifth birthday
- 38% of adults are illiterate





## Making a difference to the poorest people

The poorest families in Malawi lack access to sufficient land. Employment opportunities are few and basic services such as education and health provision are poor. Approximately 16% of children die before their fifth birthday.

While there are many common problems facing the poorest people in Malawi, each community will have their own priorities that they need to address.

The first stage of any project supported by ActionAid is to work with the community to identify the most important local issues. The next step is planning how best to tackle these problems. The nature of the work in each area therefore differs according to communities' priorities.

## Water and sanitation

Families in the areas where we work must collect their drinking water from springs, streams and rivers. This may take the women and girls in a household many hours of hard work, walking several miles to a source and carrying a very heavy pot of water back to their home, sometimes more than once a day. Many of these unprotected sources of water are also used by animals and in the dry season may disappear completely.

Improving access to safe, clean water and proper sanitation facilities is an important step towards preventing disease. ActionAid is helping villagers to protect shallow wells and springs and is encouraging the use of ventilation pit latrines. Also important is developing greater awareness and understanding of health and hygiene issues among villagers.

## Health

Health services are limited and most poor, rural families cannot afford to use them or live too far away to reach them. The most common illnesses are malaria, respiratory tract diseases and diarrhoea. Weakened by malnutrition, it is the children who are most likely to fall victim to disease. Cases of cholera and tuberculosis are increasing annually and there is a very high incidence of HIV/AIDS, estimated to be as high as 16% of the adult population.

### Collecting water

***Fulale Sikaliyoti is anxious to improve the local water supply.***

***There is a spring nearby, about 2km away. I am upset because it is not protected. I do not allow my children to go there, the sides are slippery and a child could easily fall in and be injured, so I must go and collect the water myself.***

ActionAid works with traditional health workers and government health authorities to provide communities with better access to information and healthcare support, as well as equipment and immunisation. We also support improvements in child and maternal healthcare. We help renovate or improve facilities at local health clinics. We provide training to village healthcare volunteers and councillors who can work with people affected by the HIV virus within their communities. They can then share information about how to prevent infection as well as distributing condoms and providing counselling and testing facilities.

## Education

Primary education is now free in Malawi. In the past, the cost of providing uniforms was enough to keep many children away from school, which meant illiteracy rates remained very high. The government recently removed the requirement for students to wear uniforms and enrolment has increased dramatically as a result. Unfortunately, the student/teacher ratios can be as high as 100/1. For children from very poor families it is still difficult to find the time to attend school during the day as they are needed to help with farming and housework. Consequently, drop-out rates are very high.

ActionAid is helping communities to construct school classrooms locally so children have somewhere to learn, building accommodation for teachers (who were previously housed by the community) and providing training to increase the number of teachers and teacher skills. We are also helping adults in the community who missed out on schooling by establishing adult literacy classes in the villages. Teaching is very practical, based on subjects relevant to villagers, and instructors are drawn from the community to ensure the skills are developed and shared throughout the village.

## Livelihoods

Producing sufficient food is a major challenge for every household and helping to ensure that families have enough to eat is an absolute priority.

ActionAid trains farmers in agricultural practices which enrich the soil, conserve water and prevent erosion and increase crop yields and variety. Drought resistant seed has been introduced. The growing of vegetables has been encouraged to enrich local diets. Road access to local markets has been improved making it easier to trade surplus crops.

It is very difficult for a farmer to increase food production without capital to buy tools, seeds, livestock or fertilisers. However, most poor people have no access to credit due to their lack of income and security. ActionAid is helping farmers in Malawi to resolve this by establishing their own savings and credit groups.



### The 'hungry season'

***If the previous harvest has been poor and the rains late, families often endure a long 'hungry season' when there is little or no maize for up to six months. This situation can very quickly turn to famine.***

Members save a small amount each week and then take loans to invest in their farm as they choose, which they repay with profit made from increased output. ActionAid helps with the formation of these groups and training of the members who will administer the scheme and provide the initial funds needed. Members of the groups can also take seed credit, rather than money, particularly if their harvest is poor and they do not have enough seeds to plant in the next season.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, ActionAid is able to do so much to improve the lives of some of the world's poorest families. Since 1972, we have helped millions of people throughout the world, giving them the chance to enjoy a healthier, happier and more dignified future. Malawi is one of over 40 countries where we work.

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