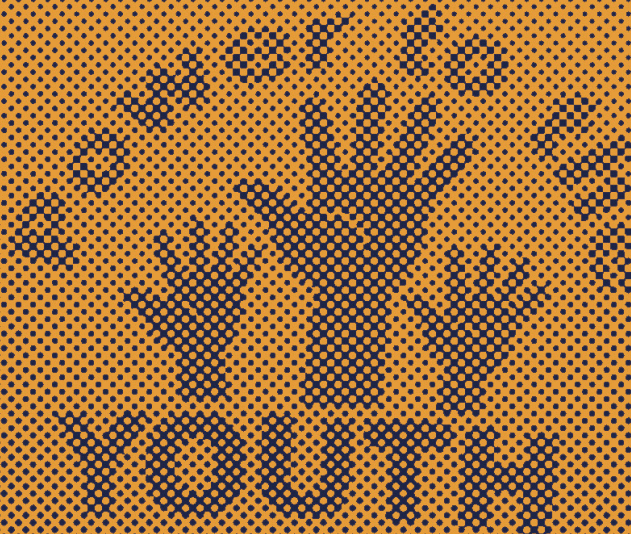


# Norwegian-Malawian Cooperation for Youth Employment

RIISING TO MALAWI'S UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE







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# THE ORGANISATIONS BEHIND THE REPORT

**Spire** is a Norwegian youth organisation working for a just and sustainable distribution of the world's resources. Spire aim to examine the structures that create injustice and hinder sustainability, focusing on climate change, food security, international trade and urban development.

**Network for Youth Development (NfYD)** is a Malawian non-governmental organisation which is committed to empowering young people to act around issues that affect their lives and play an active role in the development process of their country. NfYD implement projects through establishing local "Young Women Can Do It Clubs" (YWCDI), which give a forum to young women and men from different backgrounds to share ideas, exchange experiences and learn from each other. Their programmes focus on education, agriculture, girls rights, climate and leadership.

**Spire and NfYD** have been partners since 2005 and have had several projects together. Currently, the two organisations are implementing a programme called Action for Youth in Sustainable Environment and Empowerment (AYESE), which is a youth exchange program supported by NOREC (previously Fredskorpset). The aim of the programme is to strengthen youth leadership skills and enhance youth participation in Norway and Malawi. This study was the undertaking by the 2019 AYESE exchange participants.



The authors of this report at the beginning of their Norec exchange in Malawi







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# Abstract

This report explores the growing issue of youth unemployment in Malawi. Through survey responses and in-depth interviews with Malawian youth, the main barriers to employment are identified as lack of education and appropriate skills, as well as absence of opportunities in the labour market. Often these barriers are experienced in combination with gender or age related restrictions, further limiting youth's access to resources, and both educational and employment opportunities.

Norway is one of Malawi's key bilateral development partners. Thus, the potential for a more cohesive, meaningful and youth-focused collaboration to ensure Malawi's sustainable development is extensive and important. Based on the report's findings, this report outline policy recommendations for both the Malawian and Norwegian government in order to change a negative trend in development.



The exchange participants working together to plan their exchange period



# Introduction

At present, 1 in 10 youth globally are unemployed, making up over 58 million worldwide.<sup>1</sup> 1 in 10 people are living below the global poverty line of 1,9 USD per day. Thus, lacking access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food<sup>2</sup>. With the world's population projected to reach nine billion by 2050<sup>3</sup>, finding and creating sustainable and decent job opportunities is key in addressing poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition.

Half of the predicted population growth will take place in Sub-Saharan Africa, causing the continent's already young population to double in the next 30 years<sup>3</sup>. This will require a new level of coordination, vision and flexibility from societal, political and economic structures, both in Africa and abroad. The groundwork needed to support Africa's projected population growth must be laid by working holistically towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. Especially relevant here is SDG 8 - decent work and economic growth- and in

particular target 8.6, emphasising the importance of reducing the proportion of youth outside employment, education and/or training. It is futile, however, to emphasise that in meeting Agenda 2030, there must be a targeted focus on policy coherence. Achieving one goal without understanding the impact different policies can have on other SDGs, will set us up to fail overall. For example; further

attention and resources must be devoted to tackle the increasingly severe effects of climate and environmental change, which place even more pressure on African states and livelihoods. Hence, also challenging job opportunities for African youth.

***This report seeks to identify root causes of youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan countries, and to make recommendations towards a strong and coherent development cooperation, which targets the structural issues that perpetuates the problem.***

With Malawi as a case study, this report seeks to identify root causes of youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan countries, and to make recommendations towards a strong and coherent development cooperation (in this case between Norway and Malawi), which targets the structural issues that perpetuates the problem. In this way we will secure sustainable and dignified solutions when working on achieving Agenda 2030.

1 ILO. 2019. World Employment Social Outlook - trends 2019.

2 The World Bank. 2018. *Decline of global extreme poverty continues: but has slowed down.*

3 UN. 2019. *World population prospects. 2019 - highlights.*



Students and Martha Nyirenda at Senga Primary School



## THE CASE OF MALAWI

For Malawi, a small, landlocked country in South-Eastern Africa, the projections mentioned above are currently coming true. The country has a young population with 46 percent of its 18 million inhabitants below the age of 15, and 73 percent below the age of 30<sup>4</sup>. These numbers are expected to be more than double by 2050, meaning that the need to accommodate and absorb millions more into economic and social structures, which are already inadequate and overstretched, is as pressing of an issue as it is challenging<sup>5</sup>.

Malawi is among the world's poorest in terms of GDP per capita. The country relies on agriculture for almost 30 percent of its GDP, with limited opportunities outside the sector and lacking coverage of safety net programs and targeting challenges<sup>6</sup>. The country also ranks as number 172 of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>7</sup>, showing that the country faces vast challenges regarding education, health and equality. 52,6 percent live under the definition of multidimensional poverty<sup>8</sup>. Challenges of poverty, food insecurity, hunger and climate change are persistent and widely felt by the public. The economy remains underdeveloped and constrained due to a history of climatic hazards, policy inconsistency, macroeconomic instability, poor infrastructure, rampant corruption, high population growth, unfair international systems, poor health and a limited education system, which all limits labour productivity. Unemployment, officially at 20,4 percent for the general population, and even higher for youth

according to the National Statistics Office<sup>8</sup>, together with informal or unregular jobs with low salaries cause additional challenges. The youth in particular struggle to access the job market which is unprepared to absorb them. ILO states that more than four out of five employed young adults in Malawi are engaged in poorly paid, irregular and informal work that often does not match the qualifications of the person<sup>9</sup>.

Apart from these overarching challenges facing Malawi as a whole, the youth find themselves at an additional disadvantage in accessing formal and secure jobs. This is because youth have limited access to productive resources, including land and credit, as well as to markets and farmer organisations and cooperatives<sup>10</sup>. In addition, youth are often politically marginalised and face discrimination. Many of the referred challenges were drawn out in Malawi's National Youth Policy (NYP, 2013), and later in the National Youth

*Aid has taken place within today's economic system, which by its mere nature perpetually creates winners and losers.*

Manifesto (NYM), prepared before the 2019 tripartite elections by a network of youth led or oriented civil society organisations<sup>11</sup>. The failure

to implement and renew the NYP and to listen to demands from the NYM strike at the core of the present problem; namely a lack of funding, political will, and a tendency to politicise the issue. The result of this is that youth are consistently neglected and their potential for societal contribution untapped.

The same challenges take place in many countries, and particularly in countries depending on aid, such as Malawi. Traditional aid has not been able to change the developmental path or tackle larger structural

4 Government of Malawi. 2017. *Malawi Growth Development Strategy III*.

5 Population Action International and the African Institute for Development Policy. 2012. *Population, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development in Malawi*

6 The world bank. 2019. *Overview: Malawi*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malawi/overview>

7 UNDP. 2019. *Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century: Malawi*. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/MWI.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MWI.pdf)

8 National Statistics Office. 2013. *Malawi Labour Force Survey*

9 Mussa, R. 2016. *Labour market transitions for young women and men in 2014*. ILO.

10 FAO. 2019. *Empowering youth to engage in responsible investment in agriculture and food systems – challenges, opportunities and lessons learned from six African countries*.

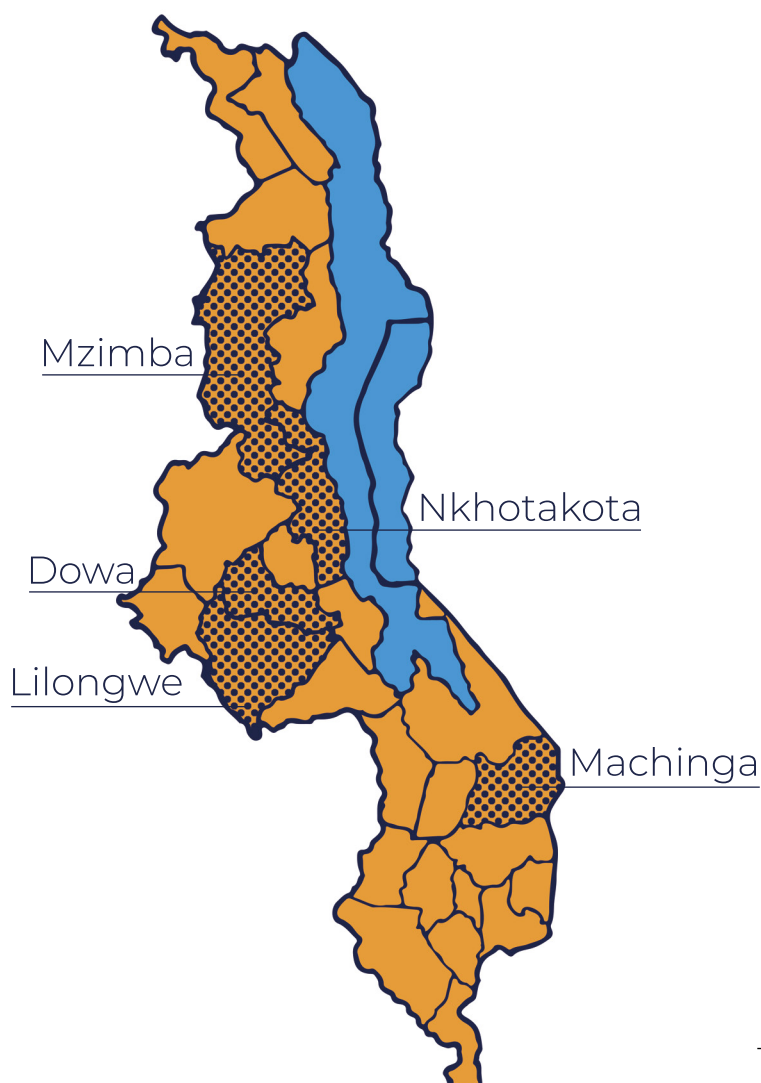
11 Youth Decide et al. 2019. *Youth Manifesto. Programmatic Demands for the period. 2019 – 2024*.



challenges creating this inequality. It is no doubt that the vast sums given through aid have contributed to increased health, access to education, and reduced poverty and hunger for millions of people all over the world. However, the challenges are still the same, and we see no change in the structures creating and perpetuating poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, hunger, or social, political or economic inequality<sup>12</sup>. Aid is politics, and has been used as a political tool in order to also benefit the donor countries for decades<sup>13</sup>. Aid has taken place within today's economic system, which by its mere nature perpetually creates winners and losers<sup>14</sup>.

## HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

The main sources of this study are Malawian youth themselves, defined as between ages 15-35. Data was collected primarily through distribution of questionnaires to NfYD's network of Young Women Can Do It-clubs in the districts of Mzimba, Nkhotakota, Lilongwe, Dowa and Machinga, as well as some online.



The questionnaire had 747 respondents where the majority were in their late teens or early twenties. The gender balance being quite equal, with slightly more identified females. A 4:1 ratio of rural to urban respondents, reflecting the general situation in Malawi, where 83 percent of the population live in rural areas<sup>15</sup>. The majority (59 percent) were currently in, or had completed secondary school. 25 percent were still currently in or had only completed primary education. Only 7 percent had reached higher education, and another 7 percent attended technical college or vocational training.

Malawi's challenges with youth unemployment are reflected in the respondents. As many as 45 percent of respondents defined themselves as unemployed, whereas 52 percent of these receiving limited income from farming and/or fishing, and 35 percent from informal business. In total, only 1 in 3 say they are either formally employed, underemployed or self-employed, while the remaining are in school, have internships or volunteer. 72 percent of respondents working reported earning less than Malawi's minimum wage at MK 350 000 per year (USD 483), and a further 14 percent earned between MK 350 000 - 500 000 per year (USD 690). This means that as many as 86 percent of the respondents live below the global poverty line.

We also conducted in-depth interviews with eleven youth representatives. Additionally six interviews were conducted with relevant key informants, selected based on their experiences working with or for youth in Malawi in order to understand the context and reality of which the informants are living, existing research and political documents have been used to supplement the report.

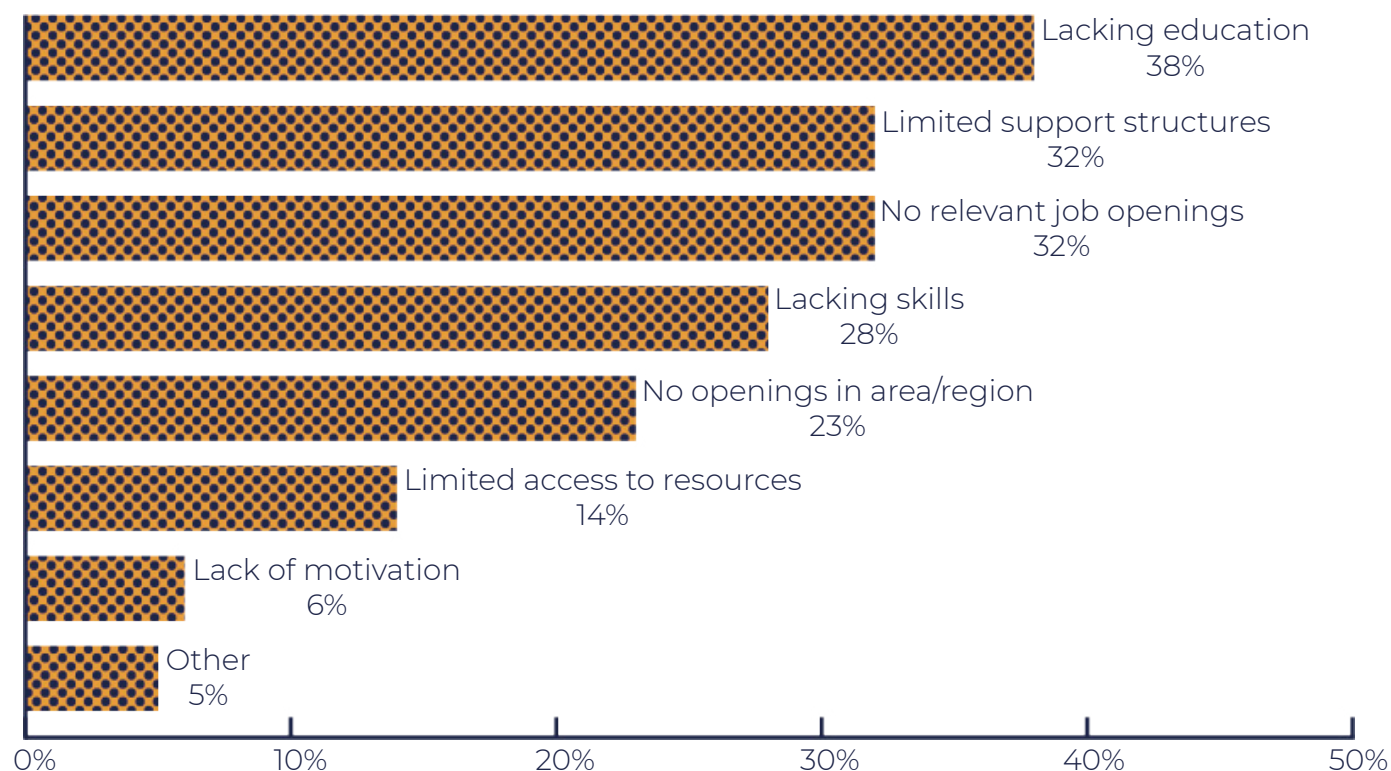
<sup>12</sup> Eggen, Ø. & Roland, K. 2014. *The History of Aid Paradigms. In Western Aid at a crossroad: The End of Paternalism*. Palgrave Pivot, London.

<sup>13</sup> Carothers, T. 2009. *Democracy Assistance: Political vs Developmental*. Journal of Democracy, 20(1), 5-9.

<sup>14</sup> Selwyn, B. 2014. *The global development crisis*. Polity, Cambridge

<sup>15</sup> World Bank 2018, *Rural population (% of total population) - Malawi*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=MW>

Interview question: If you have ever been unemployed, what were the main challenges you faced in order to make an income? (multiple answers possible)



## Barriers to youth employment

From this research, it has been established that there are, at least, two main challenges when it comes to accessing the labour market for youth in Malawi. First, opportunities are limited and many lack secure sources of income. Second, income levels are so low that even if you have a job, you might still be living in poverty.

## QUALITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Our respondents across all age groups, gender and marital status, identified the lack of education (both in terms of access and quality) and skills training as key barriers to achieving decent work, together with absence of relevant job opportunities. These are all further exacerbated by gender and age related restrictions.

Dropout rates from the educational system in Malawi are extremely high. Even though net enrolment rate for primary school is at 88 percent, it drops to 15 percent for secondary school<sup>16</sup>. In addition to this, only 13 percent of students are in the correct grade for their age, as many have to retake one or more years of school.

Efforts have been made to improve the situation by offering free primary education and introducing community day secondary schools. Additionally, the government introduced a graduate internship scheme and a number of Community Technical Colleges. The success of these schemes, however, has been minimal because of inconsistency in policies, and scarcity of resources. Thus, the Community College Scheme is yet to be rolled out in all 28 districts of Malawi.

However, youth still face significant barriers in accessing the education system. Many children and young adults live far away from their nearest school, placing particularly girls at risk for sexual and other forms of assault, perpetuating already existing gender imbalances. The cost of uniforms, food and school supplies

16 UNICEF. 2019. 2018/19 Education Budget Brief: Towards Improved Education for all in Malawi





Lidace Nyirenda from NfYD visiting Mpingu YWCDI club



provides another obstacle. As does the high student-to-teacher ratio and the general lack of resources and learning materials in community school <sup>13</sup>. Many key informants emphasise that the current curriculum is too oriented towards further studies despite most youth never entering universities. Instead they call for an increased focus on skills and training in sectors such as sustainable agriculture, machineries, informational technology, and the like.

## EMIGRATION AND BRAIN DRAIN

As other poorer countries, Malawi faces significant challenges due to brain drain. As many as 45 percent of Malawians say they have considered emigration, whereas the two main drivers are to escape poverty (51 %) or to find work (40 %) <sup>17</sup>. It must be noted here that these two responses are not mutually exclusive, but in many cases interlinked. The level of Malawian brain drain shows that there is a need to readjust the educational system. Furthermore, there is a present and desperate need to make the newly educated return back home so as to establish needed institutions and infrastructure to ensure sustainable development. Among those graduating higher level education in Malawi, there is a portion who emigrate to countries like the United Kingdom or South Africa in an efforts to secure work or a higher salary <sup>18</sup>. This is particularly a problem within the health sector, where there is already a desperate need to strengthen the workforce. For Africa as a whole, there is an estimated need for additional six million healthcare workers to reach the aim of universal coverage by 2030 <sup>19</sup>. This shows the need for a more secure job market, higher payments, better living conditions or other benefits, assuring that a larger level of educated health care workers stay within the country.

## GENDER ROLES

Our data showed that married respondents generally reached a lower educational level than single respondents, this being significantly visible among women. The trend is connected to Malawi's high rate of early marriages and, consequently, high drop-out rates of young girls. While child marriage was declared illegal in 2015, the practice remains common, particularly in rural areas, with 47 percent of females finding themselves married before the age of 18 <sup>20</sup>. As a result, young women often end up sacrificing their education in order to raise children and care for the home. Malawi has a male-dominated culture based on traditional gender roles, meaning that girls and women require public policy response at different levels. As one interviewee explains, women's roles as mothers and wives often compromise and overshadow their educational and/or career pursuits. This is an example of one of the underlying causes of unemployment that cannot be solved solely by making changes to employment policies.

Men, in particular single men and those above the age of 25, emphasise the lack of job opportunities as a barrier for employment. Here both in relevant fields and in their respective regions. These respondents are likely to have completed studies and skills training, and many in the latter group are in a position where they provide for a family. For them to find stable, fair-paying jobs is therefore essential not only for their individual security, but for that of their entire family.

## EXPERIENCE-GAP AND ENTREPRENEURSHIPS

The "experience-gap" in the job market is yet another issue. Most new graduates find that despite meeting educational criterias for relevant jobs, they lack required experience, as

17 Bhoojedhur, S. et al. 2019. *Almost half of Malawians consider emigration; most-educated are most likely to look overseas*. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 281.

18 Masanjala, W.H. 2018. *Brain drain in Africa: The case of tackling capacity issues in Malawi`s medical migration*. African Portal.

19 Jack, A. 2019. *African medics seek brain drain cure to tackle shortages*. Financial times.

20 Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare and African Institute for Development Policy 2017, *Child Marriage in Malawi Factsheet*,



most listings ask for 2-5 years of relevant work experience. With limited interning opportunities during studies and mostly unpaid or low-wage internships and volunteer positions available afterwards, youth are placed in an impossible situation: underqualified for the positions they *should* get, and overqualified for the un(der)paid positions they *can* get. Gift, age 26, explains his experience as an intern:

*'The stipend (for my internship) is not sufficient for my needs but half bread is better than none, and I know by the end I will have acquired at least some working experience.'*

The system as it is now, either requires youth to be financially supported to gain experience, something most lack, or to be subjected to unfair and exploitative positions. Many, especially women, therefore look to self-employment as an opportunity for income and independence, as they have limited belief in the existing structures' ability to create opportunities for them.

One of our youth respondents, Edith (21), told us how she started a small beautician business in efforts to secure work. She had limited resources and with no support from her parents or other grantors, the business had no chance.

Edith's story is not unique. Globally around 30 percent of new businesses fail during their first two years, and more than half within the first five years<sup>21</sup>. This is not because the ideas are not good, but because they have limited access to a market where they can sell their product/service. Such is the game of the neo-classical market liberalisation. Thus, we have no evidence leading us to believe Malawi is any different. Rather, we know that a large domestic middle class is an important factor to succeed<sup>22</sup>, which Malawi is missing. Promoting entrepreneurial programmes must therefore be done in a way that is conscious of the

challenges it is presented with, and intentional about the kind of projects it encourages. Projects needed are ones contributing to long-term sustainable development of both individuals and the larger community. Not ones that simply encourage over-consumption and (ab)use of natural resources. For example; new ways of securing stable crops, climate-adapted agriculture, co-operatives, local markets and contributions to greater development and security for local communities.

Many of the respondents called for increased support for entrepreneurship schemes. This, however, when we look at the insecurity attached to entrepreneurship, might be a reflection of how youth in Malawi see themselves in an impossible situation. Job-insecurity at current levels, will lead many to seek alternative working conditions, if available.

## INTERNATIONAL MARKET STRUCTURES

As seen in the previous chapter, entrepreneurship alone is not a realistic or sustainable solution to Malawi's unemployment challenge. Being one of the poorest countries in the world, the buying capacity in Malawi is low. An option would be to sell products globally, such as through Amazon or other e-commerce channels. However, as multinational and larger companies dominate the global market, having comparative advantages, makes it almost impossible for small companies from the global south to compete. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) themselves have responded to our inquiries to retrieve data on success rates of entrepreneurial schemes (in terms of income and lifespan of projects), that they do not have routines set up to monitor the success of such schemes. Thus, trying to alleviate youth from poverty through a push for entrepreneurial policies as a main strategy,

21 US Small business advocacy - Office of Advocacy. 2018. Frequently asked question. Available at: <https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/advocacy/Frequently-Asked-Questions-Small-Business-2018.pdf>

22 Ordenana, X. et al. 2012. *Middle-Class Entrepreneurship and the Effect of Social Capital*. IDB Working Paper NO. IDB-WP-318



is irresponsible and ineffective. It is putting youth at the risk of ending up in a poverty cycle. The main focus should be on changing underlying structures withholding youth from accessing jobs and participating in the innovation of a sustainable society.

It is clear that the global free market and power structures need to be scrutinised further in current development discussion, at all levels. The power of transnational companies, global trade agreements, political participation and donors' self-interest in aid policies, enhance underlying, yet dominant, structures which cannot be neglected. Malawi, as many other

developing countries, face large obstacles at the international market. In 2017 Malawi exported for \$869M and imported goods for \$1.44B, resulting in a negative trade balance<sup>23</sup>. Malawi mainly exports commodities like tobacco, dried legumes and sugar. In these processes, transnational companies control the majority of production, policy-making processes and the value chain.

A research on US-based tobacco leaf-buying companies' influence on Malawi's economy and trade policy, concluded that the companies actions restrict competition, depress tobacco prices for Malawian farmers, and contribute to poverty in Malawi. Furthermore, they keep the country dependent on tobacco growing which highly relies on monocultures that are eroding agricultural soil, further reducing Malawi's food security<sup>24</sup>.

A different case study on sugar production of the Kalimkhola community in Dwangwa, shows that land grabbing leads to a loss of traditional culture practice. The study draws out how the main reason for discontentment amongst the community members are not

how they are displaced in the community itself, but how this has worsened their lives and working environments<sup>25</sup>.

## YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO LAND

The above challenges are well reflected in the lack of youth involvement in decision-making

*Trying to alleviate youth from poverty through a push for entrepreneurial policies as a main strategy, is irresponsible and ineffective.*

processes, another key challenge identified by the respondents. Youth activist Catherine, age 24, explains the problem as two-fold. First, youth are not adequately included in

decision-making structures and procedures to begin with. Second, even when they are, they are often not taken seriously or given enough time to voice their opinions.

*This is a meeting and they (i.e politicians) want to have someone representing young people, but then that person's voice won't be heard.*

In this way, opinions and needs of youth are excluded or silenced in political dialogues. For this reason, it is important to look far beyond access to relevant bodies, and to critically evaluate the extent to which youth are given information and the right platform to engage, participate and influence relevant processes in a meaningful way, if or when given a seat at the table<sup>26</sup>.

Further, we see that especially those above 19 years old, highlight the need for inclusion of youth in decision-making processes.

*When [chiefs, political leaders, members of parliament, etc.] get elected into power, they don't even listen*

23 OECD. 2019. Malawi Economic Statistics 2019. Available at: <https://tradecouncil.org/malawi-economics-statistics-2019/>

24 Otanez, M. et al. 2007. *Global leaf companies control the tobacco market in Malawi*. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2598545/>

25 Bae, Y. 2019. *A Displaced Community's Perspective on Land-Grabbing in Africa: The Case of the Kalimkhola Community in Dwangwa, Malawi*. In Land 2019. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/8/12/187/htm>

26 Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. 2001. *The case for Participation as Tyranny*. London:Zed.

*to what are the problems of young people in society, so sometimes we might say that young people don't speak up but that's because there are no channels for them to speak up through.*

– Catherine (24)

The need for youth participation is supported by many key informants, both in government and in civil society. This is because Malawi's youth is a formidable resource for sustainable development and must be recognised as such. Furthermore, as the District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO) in Lilongwe West, explains,

*Things are changing economically and socially, even environmentally, we need to go a certain way. [...] The youth should be put at the forefront if we are to make relevant change. Most importantly in decision-making structures.*

Further, this is connected to the challenge experienced by youth in regards to access to land and resources. Particularly married women highlight issues related to lack of access to land and resources, often related to limited perceptions of youth's role in society and gender structures. The District Agricultural Development Officer supported this by pointing out the generational gap which separates those who own and have access to land, and those who do not. The latter almost always being young people. He said that 'youth are a resource, (they) are active, but lack direct access to and authority over resources'.

All of the above, are signs of a more structural problem where youth are repeatedly neglected. Marginalised both within their society and by aid programmes. Often are youth viewed as a problem, rather than as a potential. Thus, needs are ignored or overlooked. This is detrimental both on an individual and a community level, and can lead to a negative cycle where some take part in unproductive and destructive behaviour, because they lack proper opportunities for education and work. Regardless, breaking the cycle and giving

youth the opportunity to learn, work, and provide for themselves and their family is a sure way of building both individuals and the community as a whole, in a way that is sustainable and productive. This would allow the youth to contribute to society with new knowledge, skills, ideas and income, something the whole country will benefit from.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE

Malawi is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, many of which are already being felt acutely in parts of the country. This, of course, has serious consequences for the agricultural sector, on which 90 percent of the general population relies on for food and/or income<sup>10</sup>. With extreme weather on the rise, the agricultural sector has become insecure. It is therefore necessary to fight the global climate crisis, offer more support for small scale farmers, prioritise environmental protection, and additionally climate adaptation in other areas like infrastructure and security as well.

Around 56 percent of rural Malawian youth are engaged in the agricultural labour force<sup>27</sup>. However, this is often informal, for shorter time periods and does not generate a safe and stable income. There are, however, many opportunities within this sector as well. Today, the domestic supply of food is unable to meet the rapidly growing domestic food demand, as a result of the predominant use of traditional inputs, low yields and declining productivity. IFAD claims that if the engagement of youth in agricultural activities is facilitated by access to information, communication- and other productivity-enhancing technologies, they would be able to tap into the potential of domestic agrifood-systems<sup>25</sup>. Such a move would address not just unemployment, but also increase agricultural productivity and bolster rural transformation. This requires policies which address access to land, capital and required skills. Given that increasing youth employment is a prioritised policy for the Government of Malawi, as well as diversifying the economy, other opportunities than farming must be developed as well.

27 Kafle, K. et al. 2019. *Who works in agriculture?* IFAD.





Participants at the workshop “Entrepreneurship for Waste Reduction” in Lilongwe



## ACCOUNTABILITY OF RESPONSIBLE ACTORS

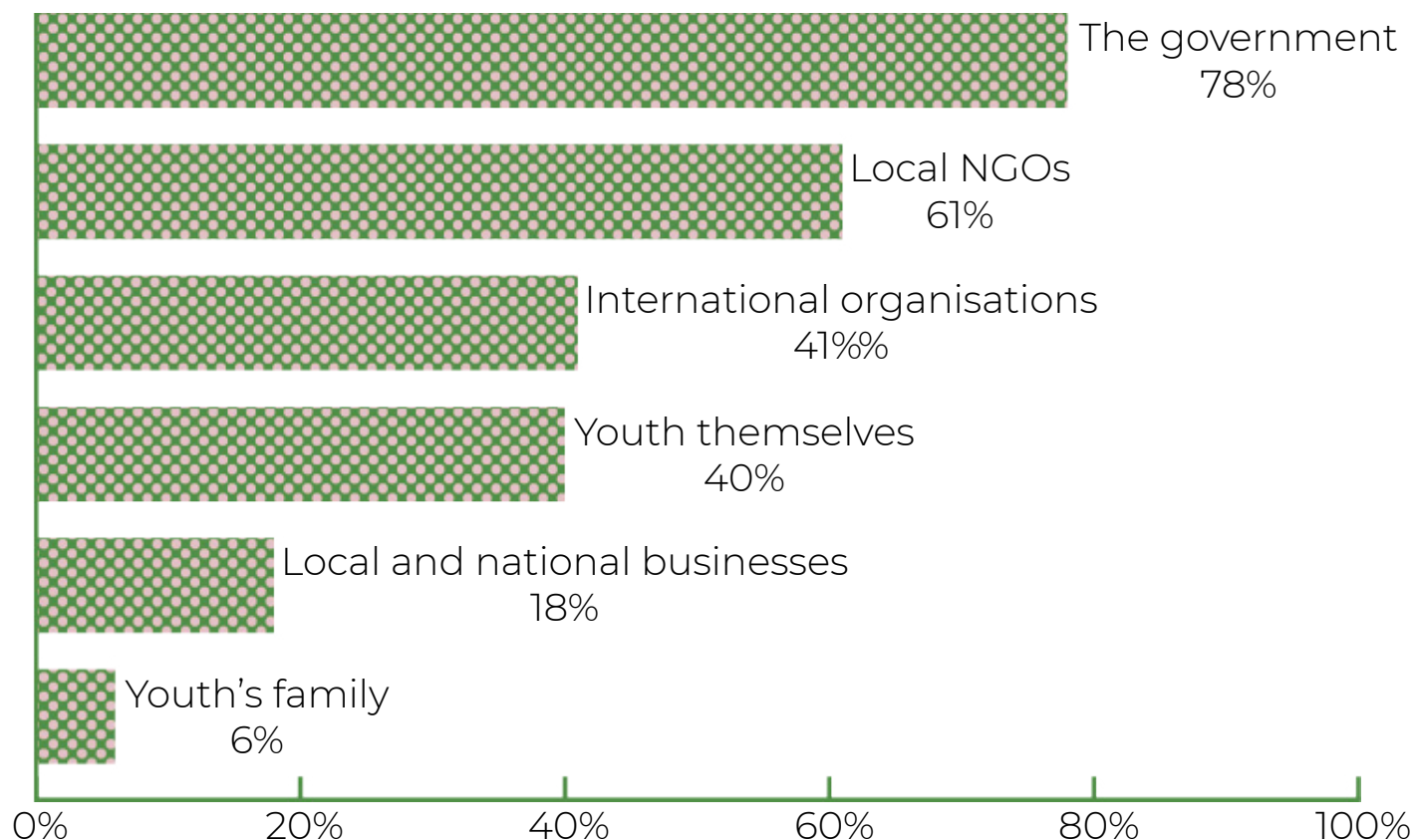
Our respondents were asked who they view as responsible for creating job opportunities for youth. Here their alternatives were; the government, local businesses, international organisations, local NGOs, their families or themselves. Across all age categories, the government was viewed as most responsible, followed by NGOs, international organisations and youth themselves. Families and businesses were generally not seen as responsible, except among some of the oldest respondents.

It is interesting to note that local and international businesses are not considered responsible, whereas local NGOs and international organisations are. The latter are both external, or externally supported, actors which are not growth generating or profit pursuing. While they can support youth and the government in providing specific services, they are not, in and of, themselves intended to

be the generators of jobs or wealth (directly). This suggests a required shift in youth's perspective to one where fellow Malawians and local ventures are seen as potential solutions to own unemployment problems, instead of seeking solutions from the government and (I)NGOs alone.

The government should be the responsible actor for employment in a country. Despite clear efforts, in particular those earlier mentioned in regards to education, the Malawian governments efforts are generally felt to be inadequate. Sometimes in scope, sometimes in implementation, and other times in both. Despite youth perceptions of responsibility, the reality is that to create a sustainable and dynamic society all actors must contribute. This shows another weakness of the larger dominating system, as it is both more difficult to challenge and almost impossible to hold accountable. Thus, more cooperation across sectors, coherent policies and in-depth structural change is required. Once again, this must be based on the involvement of all actors, youth especially.

**Interview question: Who do you think is responsible for creating opportunities for youth? (multiple answers possible)**





# Solving the challenges

The respondents gave a clear answer when asked what relevant policies should be prioritised going forward. Skills development needs to be a top priority, along with improved access to and quality of education, although this alone is not enough.

Key informants call for increased and improved collaboration between the government, civil society, private sector, development partners and local authorities. This to utilise existing structures when implementing new projects and to ensure the sustainability of changes made. By laying more emphasis on skill development, amending the national curriculum, inclusion of youth in political participation, intersectional equality, as well as building more stable institutions, the current situation can be confronted. However, it requires action on different levels and with cooperation among different actors. It is the government's responsibility to put appropriate structures in place which facilitate and promote multiple policies, i.e. increase access to land, reduce interest rates, provide more flexible loans, etc. In the interim, civil society organisations, such as local NGOs, and international organisations and donors can assist practical implementation, or actual provision of these services through workshops, training courses, mentorship programs, etc. Further, all countries, companies and organisations have a responsibility to secure sustainable development in all aspects of their activities and ensure policy coherency.

## HOW CAN THE NORWEGIAN AND MALAWIAN GOVERNMENTS CONTRIBUTE?

As outlined earlier, many of the political and economic structures referred to in this report are part of a global system. They need to be understood and tackled in relation to each other. We need to go to the core of the issues,

*Present challenges need to be addressed on a structural level in a more cohesive way.*

as it is not enough to only make small, superficial changes, as often proposed. This includes the aid sector.

As Malawi is one of Norway's long-term development partners and received over 475 million NOK, around 52 million USD or just above 35 billion MK, in aid in 2018<sup>28</sup>, both Norway as a partner in aid and Malawi as a receiving partner must contribute in making large changes. For years, aid has made up a significant portion of Malawi's national budget (up to 40 percent in 2011), making it highly donor dependent<sup>29</sup>.

*This requires a new way of understanding development.*

According to Norad's own 2017 evaluation of the effect and results

of Norwegian aid in Malawi, the room for improvement is sizable, and the priorities going forward should be to stimulate growth in agriculture, more egalitarian land distribution, diversification of the economy and strategic political work to affect change<sup>30</sup>. While some headway has been made in education and health, present challenges need to be addressed on a structural level in a more cohesive way. Norway and other donor countries need to shift to a wider perspective on their engagement and work towards systemic, long-term and large-scale challenges alongside the Malawian government. This can be done through initiating development cooperation programmes as an alternative

28 Norad 2019, *Norsk bistand i tall*. Available at: <https://norad.no/om-bistand/norsk-bistand-i-tall/?tab=geo>

29 Page, S, 2018, 'The Development Aid Situation in Malawi' in *Development, Sexual Cultural Practices and HIV/AIDS in Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 43-60,

30 Amundsen, I. Norad. 2017, *Country Evaluation Brief: Malawi*, [https://norad.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/publikasjoner-2017/evaluating/4.17-country-evaluation-brief\\_malawi.pdf](https://norad.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/publikasjoner-2017/evaluating/4.17-country-evaluation-brief_malawi.pdf)





Student at Senga Primary School



to traditional aid. This requires a new way of understanding development. Here the receiving countries have increased control and are not forced into projects that might primarily reflect the interests of the donor countries. Still, a common strategy for donors is to develop businesses like, in the case of Malawi, sugar and tobacco, and then sell them relatively cheaply at the global market. This does not create long term development, but rather reinforce global inequality and unjust power relations.

The overarching goals of Norway's foreign aid policy is to reduce poverty, hunger, and social and economic inequality. This, however, must be achieved by honoring Norway's responsibility and accountability towards the local population by facilitating participation to identify challenges and find appropriate solutions. Fighting for the opportunities and inclusion of youth is one of these challenges.

Going forward, Norway needs to be more purposefully directed towards the most vulnerable in the society, in order to reach the goal of the greatest development and sustainability for all regardless of age, gender or status. To provide youth with secure and sustainable jobs is clearly a way of targeting some of the most marginalised and of establishing long-term development for Malawi. Consequently, we present the following recommendations outlining the focus areas that have emerged from our findings:

## 1. COHERENT AND COMPLEMENTARY POLICIES

Most development policies in Norway are directed towards aid projects, either multilateral or bilateral aid, through civil society organisations or multinational corporations. Global development, however, does not take place in a vacuum. Policies and actions in international trade, environmental regulations, peace and foreign policies, and tax regulations all unlock room for action and development.

Sometimes, consequences of policies and actions in these areas impact social and/or economic development of other countries, or their opportunity for such, negatively. Thus, there needs to be consistency in values and goals pursued across the board from donor countries.

**Policy coherence as defined by the UN<sup>31</sup>:** Policy coherence is essential to a balanced implementation of sustainable development. It means developing mutually reinforcing policies so that policies work together to achieve national goals and objectives, while avoiding or minimizing negative impacts in other policy areas.

*Samstemthetsrapporten*, the coherent policy report from the Norwegian government in 2019, shows a lack of understanding or willingness to go into the core of these issues, leaving them as something yet to be addressed by the sector of Norwegian foreign aid. The lack of cohesion points to how there are large intersectoral tasks that no one organisation or actor can effectively address or solve by themselves. To do this, collaboration and cooperation between different actors is crucial, including international donors, organisations, community leaders and chiefs, local and multinational businesses, and the different governments, to mention only some. However, ensuring this should be facilitated at governmental level. Norway must aim to ensure its policies complement and strengthen existing local or international efforts in Malawi, in order to amplify the potential for effective impact. Together, they need to make arenas with representatives from different sectors where these can work together. The different actors have a range of experience and a wide knowledge base, and by working together they will be more efficient.

31 UN. undated. Policy coherence. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/capacity-development/what-we-do/areas-of-work/policy-coherence/>

Reaching the SDGs must be the overall goal for all departments and policies, both in Norway and in Malawi. All actors should therefore work in order to change the underlying dominating structures in order to not make efforts to empower youth into a system where they are already set up to fail. Fairer conditions must be put in place for countries, despite or because of their economic and/or technological status.

## 2. QUALITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Access to education is already an important area in Norwegian development policies. It is, however, not enough to secure access to schooling and education, if teaching staff, curriculum, teaching conditions, infrastructure and learning materials are not up to par. Moving forward, education of satisfactory teachers will be essential as well as to recruit more in order to reduce class sizes. The intermediate teacher/pupil ratio in 2018 was at 58.68<sup>32</sup>, this should decrease to 45:1 by 2022 and 30:1 by 2030. The salary must also rise, and revise the general minimum wage to MK 350 000 by 2021, and MK 500 000 (equals the international poverty line) by 2025.

Access, quality and relevance of learning materials must be improved, including the development of a curriculum that is in line with the demands and needs of Malawian society, both now and in the future. In line with the NYM, more schools are required to reduce the number of youth who have to cover long and dangerous distances in order to get to school. As key informants highlighted; there is a need for career guidance and support for students, which could be facilitated through improved access to and use of existing community youth centers.

## 3. TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Fair employment procedures free from nepotism and corruption are crucial. Development cooperation programs should contribute to raise the quality and access to technical colleges, as well as the offer of paid vocational/ internship schemes, for all. These, however, must answer the present as well as future needs of the labour market, i.e. an increased focus on professions such as teaching, agronomy, health, climate smart agriculture, information and communications technology. Internship schemes and similar programmes, must be conducted in a manner which does not exploit youth as cheap labour, but rather provide them with a stable income, both while occupied with internships and afterwards.

*Integrating youth into productive and environmentally sustainable agrifood activities tooted in inclusive domestic food, may be one of the few true and sustainable solutions to the current youth employment challenge.*

## 4. CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE

Because of Malawi's vulnerability to climate change, and Norway's historical responsibility, Norway must scale up its contributions on financial and technical support directed towards promotion and implementation of adaptation measures in the agricultural sector. In addition, support and compensation for loss and damage connected to climate change needs to be intensified through volunteer measures, within and outside of the UN. Financial support needs to be in addition to the goal of 1 percent of GDI utilised as aid.

The OECD claims that integrating youth into productive and environmentally sustainable agrifood activities tooted in inclusive domestic food, may be one of the few true and sustainable solutions to the current youth employment challenge<sup>33</sup>. For this to succeed,

32 The global economy. 2019. Malawi: student teacher ratio, primary school. Available at: [https://www.the-globaleconomy.com/Malawi/student\\_teacher\\_ratio\\_primary\\_school/](https://www.the-globaleconomy.com/Malawi/student_teacher_ratio_primary_school/)

33 OECD. 2013. *Policy framework for investment in agriculture*.



OECD also highlights some key measures to be taken; investments in agriculture and infrastructure, promotion of local value chains and markets, safety nets like compensation in case of failed crops due to e.g. extreme weather, and raising the voice of rural youth in policy dialogue, all of which are measures we recommend for the Malawian context.

## 5. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Meaningful youth representation and participation is essential to achieve sustainable national development. As a starting point, youth must be given the opportunity to actively participate from an early stage in influencing decision-making processes, in all parts of a given process. However, to develop a resilient and resourceful population, youth must be allowed more than a seat at the table. They must be given access to information, speaking rights, and the power to influence decision-making and -makers. Youth should gain schooling in advocacy work and political rights. Accordingly, all development projects should make sure youth are included at local, regional and national levels, preferably in committees and boards. Costs for travel etc. should also be covered. In this way, youth can contribute to the creation of more opportunities for all youth in Malawi. These measures are in line with both the NYM and Malawi's own goal of including youth in political processes to a much larger degree. These premises should apply both to government structures and initiatives, as well as those of local, national and international organisations and donors.

## 6. GENDER EQUALITY

Gender inequality is still pervasive in Malawi, particularly in rural areas. The number of girls who drop out of school is alarming. This coupled with the attitude that girls should not work, have access to land or take part in political decision-making, makes it extremely difficult for girls and women to earn their own income and consequently, be in control over their own life and future.

It has been proven on numerous occasions that active participation of women is crucial for fair and sustainable development.<sup>34</sup> To facilitate and achieve this, both donors and the Malawian government need to work with local communities and chiefs to change parents' and society's perceptions of girls' role in society. While ensuring girls access to support structures, guidance, and positive role models. Initiatives such as the Young Women Can Do it-clubs should be supported.

Further, there is a need to address structures assuming women to be the main caretakers of children and the home, at the expense of their access to education and external employment. Through affirmative action in both public and private sector, the role of all genders in society will eventually challenge these structures. Giving all actors more options in their everyday lives, and create a more equal society. This would both better the situation for girls and women, as well as have larger positive effects on the society as a whole.

34 UN Women. 2018. *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

# Final remarks

The intention behind this report was twofold: to hear from Malawian youth themselves and to amplify their voice on issues of unemployment, but also to make suggestions to the Norwegian Development Agency (Norad) on how to achieve more successful programmes tackling youth unemployment. Thus, what we have presented here are challenges youth face every day and the first-hand accounts of why they are unemployed and what measures youth think need to be taken to unlock their, and consequently, their country's potential.

Policies which have been adopted not only by Malawi to foster development, but also Norway and other international actors and institutions in efforts to secure development, have not been successful. A young and growing population together with increasingly negative and severe effects of climate change and old challenges, does not prosper sustainable development.

We cannot continue efforts to empower youth into a broken system. Today we see that youth, and other marginalised groups, are highly entrenched into a system which does not allow for them to participate in society as equal actors. It is therefore crucial that both the Norwegian government and Malawian government (and other institutions) enhance their efforts in changing the underlying structures which uphold this marginalisation. Unless these efforts are scaled

*We cannot continue efforts to empower youth into a broken system. Today we see that youth, and other marginalised groups, are highly entrenched into a system which does not allow for them to participate in society as equal actors.*

up and implemented across the board, the problem will only shift from one area to another instead of being solved. Here the entrepreneurship schemes promoted both by the Norwegian Development Agency, World Bank and FAO, represent a failing policy.

Employment, poverty, food security, inequality and climate politics, none of these can be understood as separate from each other. Thus, in the next section we outline some policy recommendations for both the Malawian government and Norwegian Development Agency, to secure structural changes needed to tackle youth unemployment.





Jayne Phisso Ayese coordinator at Nfyd, speaking for the Urban youth Forum



# Policy recommendations

## THE MALAWIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

1. Implement the recommendations addressed by the Malawian youth in the “Youth Manifesto - Programmatic Demands for the Period 2019-2024.”
2. Revise the minimum yearly wage to MK 350 000 by the year 2021. Working to ensure a minimum wage of at least MK 500 000 (international poverty line) by 2025.
3. Secure financial and project support to local structures such as Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs), to change mindset perceptions on girl’s education and work and youth as political actors.
4. Develop a national curriculum reflecting the demands of society, including elements such as sustainable development, climate and environment, and political participation.
5. Engage the private and public sector in opening up for paid internships and creating entry-level jobs.
6. Introduce skill training in technical colleges relevant to the job market, including trades as landscaping, sustainable agriculture, information and communications technology, and irrigation technology by the year 2024.
7. Introduce young adult education programmes for out of school youth, so they can acquire a minimum of a secondary school education.
8. Enforce and adhere to the recommended intermediate teacher/pupil ratio of 45:1 by 2022, and 30:1 by 2030.
9. Set regulations for multinational companies working in Malawi in regards to national workforce, technological transfers, working conditions, payment and environmental standards.
10. Make sure small-scale farmers have safety nets (such as compensation) when crops fail due to unreliable climate.
11. Ensure that cooperation between different relevant actors and local authorities always include youth from beginning to the very end of a project.
12. Work to ensure coherent policies at all levels and between all sectors.
13. Use affirmative action in order to secure more gender equality.



## THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

1. Target development programmes towards youth and/or ensure proportional inclusion/representation in existing development programs.
2. Work to strengthen youth's access to political arenas, ensuring real political participation, especially by young women and marginalised groups.
3. Ensure policy coherence through an action plan on policy coherence for Norwegian development aid.
4. Increase the share of aid - minimum 15 percent - directed towards agriculture with a focus on small-scale farmers. Prioritising sustainable farming methods, climate adaptation and support local ownership and markets.
5. Work with the Malawian government to ensure youth's right to own agricultural land and areas and access to financial services.
6. Ensure that the work on "education for all" includes free primary and secondary school education, and support the National Youth Manifesto's demands regarding increased access to education.
7. Increase level of support in the skills development sector which targets youth, with special programmes for young women and youth with disabilities.
8. Support national efforts to build and increase the capacity of technical colleges. Focusing on skills that are relevant for society both today and in the future.
9. Push for increased existence of guidance counsellors in schools, both for academic support and career paths/choices.
10. Encourage the national government to review and adopt the National Youth Policy with participation and/or support them in the development of a new one.
11. Implement internal guidelines, together with youth, on the non-homogenous group youth represent, and how to target the various groups in various projects.
12. Channel a larger share of Norwegian aid and development projects through civil society organisations and grassroots movement, rather than multinational organisations.





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