

Summary Evaluation Report

Evaluation for evidence-based decision making



GOVERNMENT OF
MALAWI



UNITED NATIONS
MALAWI

Joint Programme on Girls' Education

EVALUATION OF THE MALAWI JOINT PROGRAMME FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION (JPGE): 2014 - 2017

Introduction

This summary evaluation report presents findings from the final evaluation of the Joint Programme for Girls Education (JPGE) Phase 1 in Mangochi, Dedza and Salima districts in Malawi. The JPGE Programme was jointly implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), from July 2014 to October 2017, with funding support from the Norwegian Government, (initially US\$14,716,598, and later increased by US\$7,287,000)¹.

The JPGE Phase I's overall objective was to improve the accessibility and quality of education for girls and boys through a holistic and human rights-based approach. Eighty-one primary schools in six zones across the target districts were selected, with a focus on girls in Standards Five to Eight.

Evaluation Objectives

The JPGE evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The evaluation covered the period from July 2014 to October 2017. The purpose of the evaluation was to document the achievements, challenges, and potential to improve accessibility and quality of education for girls through a holistic and human rights-based approach. The main objectives of the evaluation were:

Accountability and Transparency: The evaluation assessed and reported on the performance and results of the JPGE Phase I, using the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

Learning: The evaluation determined reasons behind results, derived good practices for learning by stakeholders, including UN participating agencies, the Government of Malawi, and the Norwegian Government to design, replicate and implement similar future programmes. Evidence-based findings were provided to inform operational and strategic decision-making.

Deepening Understanding: The evaluation attempted to deepen knowledge and understanding of the underlying assumptions guiding the programme's implementation, the Theory of Change (ToC), and the cultural context in which the programme was implemented.

Stakeholders and users of the Evaluation

The stakeholders and users of the evaluation include the Government of Malawi, WFP, UNICEF and UNFPA – Malawi, and their respective regional bureaus, head offices, Offices of Evaluation and Executive Boards, to inform their contribution to the future development of policy programmes related to girls' education; NGO partners; the Norwegian Government and the broader development community who may be interested in acquiring knowledge and evidence for strengthening results for girls in Malawi and other areas.

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed-method evaluation approach using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A quasi-experimental approach was used since participants were not randomly assigned to the treatment or control/comparison groups and project schools were selected based on their poor indicators, as such not fully equal to control schools. A difference-in-difference analysis was used where possible to compare changes over time (between baseline and end line) between the target and control groups. The methodology followed the baseline and mid-term studies to enhance comparability.

Limitations

Budget limitations and time availability for the study influenced the number of clusters included. The sample size was sufficiently large to allow ample range for calculation, and it was also fit for purpose. The potential confusion between project and non-project schools in the same zone was also considered. Due to some interventions focusing on system changes, there could be a spill-over effect in a particular zone. In some cases, it was difficult to find key informants who had been scheduled for interviews. To mitigate this the team triangulated information from other sources.

There were also issues of comparability and non-availability of previous data. The results framework had changed and, thus, indicators were different from the baseline. A few target

¹ Original amount NOK 128,851,174 (US\$14,716,598) increased by NOK 63,801,329 (US\$7,287,000) at 8 May 2019 exchange rates

values were missing from the framework. During the baseline study, two zones did not have any control schools as all schools in these zones were included as project schools. Where a comparison was not possible based on the baseline or Mid-term Review (MTR), the findings were compared between the intervention and control group and against the goal.

For quantitative surveys, the response rate at zone level and among schools was lower particularly among control schools, which is understandable since these schools did not benefit from JPGE. To address this, the team tried to identify the requested information from other sources and triangulated those to the maximum extent.

Data from the zone level was insufficient and of poor quality. Many questions were not responded to and/or incorrect answers were given. Delays and complexities at the onset of the mission led to the questionnaires being sent out very late, which potentially reflected on the actual response rate. The team tried to collect similar data in focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers, and quantitative data was derived from the District Education Management Information System (DEMIS).

Evaluation Findings

This section presents a summary of all findings from the evaluation and highlights progress made in the achievement of the various indicators against the DAC criteria, starting with the social and demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Social and demographic characteristics of the participants

As shown in *Table 1*, a total of 1,328 girls were interviewed - 678 JPGE participants and 650 from the control group. The girls were from 21 JPGE supported and 27 control schools. Their ages ranged between 9 and 19 (with a median age of 14 and an average of 14.08). They were between Standard 5 and 8, although the majority were in Standard 7 (46.1 percent) and Standard 8 (47.4 percent). Most girls (83 percent) were from families with both parents alive. In most cases, the father was the primary caregiver (48.3 percent), with the mother as secondary caregiver (31.4 percent) followed by the grandparents (8.5 percent).

Table 1: Girls and households interviewed per district

(Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 8)

District	Number of girls			Number of households		
	Phase1	Control	Total	Phase1	Control	Total
Mangochi	241	214	455	81	54	135
Dedza	221	220	441	80	70	150
Salima	216	216	432	81	79	160
Total	678	650	1,328	242	203	445

Table 1 also shows that in the household member interviews, 445 people were interviewed, with 242 from the JPGE group and 203 from the control group. Among them were 355 women and 90 men. Their ages ranged between 19 and 82, with an average of 38.6 years. 70.6 percent of the household interviewees had one or more girls in school.

Among the intervention group, farming was the most frequently cited primary occupation, whereas in the control group it was salaried employment. The household sizes were also different: the average was significantly larger at 6.17 for the JPGE group, against 5.71 for the control group. These findings tallied with the observation during the inception phase, that the groups were not fully similar, since JPGE purposely targeted poorer areas.

Relevance

The JPGE programme objectives were valid and appropriate. The objectives were aligned to the overall development framework and to the most important strategies and policies of the Ministries responsible for Education, Health, Youth, Gender, Agriculture, which worked in a similar area as that targeted by JPGE. JPGE was aligned with the MoEST strategic priorities, namely quality and suitable education, access and equity, and governance and management.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) appreciated JPGE's engagement in reproductive health rights for youth since it tapped into the limited knowledge on reproductive health rights and existence of services. The reproductive health component was found relevant to the *Malawi Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy* (2015).

The Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Manpower Development (MoLYSMD) reported that JPGE was complementary to their own efforts and aligned to the overall mandate of the youth sector to have vibrant, educated, healthy and economically independent youth. JPGE was also aligned to the four pillars of the Malawi Youth Policy (i) youth participation; (ii) abolishing cultural practices that predispose youth to early pregnancy, marriage, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs); (iii) youth economic empowerment; and (iv) youth education.

The JPGE design was sufficiently comprehensive and consistent to address and connect crucial components affecting education, such as schools' and teachers' capacity to provide child-friendly education, lack of access to food, limited knowledge among youth of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), child protection, and domestic and school-based violence.

The JPGE approach was also considered consistent with the *UN Delivering as One* Approach and Outcome 2.4 of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2012-

Reference:

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2016). Furthermore, the design was found to be comprehensive, coherent, consistent, and working on all factors underlying quality access to education for girls.

Geographical selection was made based on poverty indicators and low education outcomes, and this was found to be relevant in reaching the most vulnerable. JPGE managed to reach the schools where the needs were highest, and the approach and targeting were very relevant to the needs of girls, including avoiding pregnancy. The needs of boys, though numerous as well, were not part of certain parts of the design of JPGE, as it focused on girls' education.

The JPGE's intention to strengthen enrolment and attainment rates with a focus on girls was considered relevant to the needs of deprived people. The household survey highlighted that the education level attained by women was markedly lower than that for men. In interviews with parents and guardians, one of the questions was about the maximum education level of the husband and wife, and the results are shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Education level of interviewees from households

(Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 10)

Education Type	Husband	Wife
Primary	42.0%*	67.0%*
Secondary	29.7%*	22.9%*
Tertiary	3.6%*	0.7%*
None	5.8%	7.2%
Doesn't know	3.4%	0.2%
Not Applicable	15.5%	2.0%
Total	100.0%	100%

* = significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 2 demonstrates that the proportion of women with only primary education was markedly higher than men, and the proportion of women with secondary and tertiary education was lower. In 2014, at a national level in Malawi, inequality in the school completion rate reflected the same: 47 percent for girls and 56 percent for boys. In Standard 1, girls were enrolled more often than boys, but teachers reported that this percentage decreased with every Standard. The importance of girls' education was still insufficiently acknowledged by parents, with girls often marrying at an early age leading to dropouts.

Effectiveness

Both girls' and boys' attendance increased (*Table 3*), although girls were the main target group, it is for boys that the final attendance rate in JPGE schools is much higher. For orphaned and vulnerable children (OVCs), the attendance rate changed only in JPGE schools, likely because of the JPGE contributions (*Table 3*). Although the attendance rate targets for JPGE schools were met and were different from the control group, the sample was too small to make the differences scientifically significant.

Table 3: Attendance rate in std 5 – 8

(Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 12)

	Baseline			End line	
	Phase I	Control	Target	Phase I	Control
Girls	72%	71%	80%	85.0%	85.4%
Boys	75%	76%	80%	88.4%	79.96%
OVCs	52%	57%	65%	72.1%	55.8%

Committee members, teachers and children confirmed that school meals contributed to the increase in attendance rates. The girls' survey results confirmed that school feeding had contributed to better nutrition for pupils. Parents and household members were even more positive about the effects of school feeding on attendance and the nutrition status at 96.7 percent and 95.9 percent.

Feedback from children on the provision of food was generally positive. Hygiene of food preparation and surroundings was reported to be good. Boys in Dedza District reported that the quality and variety of food was good and better than at home. However, they highlighted that the quantity was insufficient. In Salima District, some children complained that the food was mundane and of low quality. Some children and teachers reported a skip in the meal distributions of one or more weeks. In Mangochi District, the team observed food distribution around 11:00am only. Some children complained about targeting saying, "everyone eats".

Farmers confirmed that the local procurement mode for school feeding created a market for them to sell their produce at fair prices. Of the 40 schools that responded to the survey, 38 bought their food from local farmers. WFP reported that from 2016 they worked with 25,507 farmers (14,502 women and 11,005 men). Farmers reported that they acquired knowledge on agricultural production and the growing of a variety of crops.

On the question about absenteeism, most girls responded that they had been absent between 0 and 7 days the previous month, with the highest score for one day (32.5%), none (25.2%), two (23.8%) and three days (11.6%). The average number of days of absenteeism per month was 1.59 for the entire group of respondents (*Table 4*).

Table 4: Reasons for girls' monthly absenteeism

(Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 12)

Mentioned reasons for absenteeism	Number	Proportion
Illness	1,011	76.1%
Lack of uniforms, writing materials	222	16.7%
Household chores	166	12.5%
Lack of sanitary pads	85	6.4%
Total number of respondents	1,328	100%

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Although illness was by far the most prominent but also external reason for absence, there were also some girls mentioning reasons within the scope of JPGE, like poverty-related reasons such as having no uniform and school materials and having to do household chores, but also lack of sanitary pads (Table 4). Regarding girls staying in school, notwithstanding the awareness raising conducted under JPGE, many parents and community members did not appear to acknowledge the importance of education. Instead, they saw the short-term goal of going into business (for boys) and marrying a businessman (for girls) as more profitable.

JPGE supported opportunities for second chance education for learners, especially girls, who had left school or had never been to school. Non-formal education was supported, through Complementary Basic Education (CBE) and through specially established functional literacy centres. Support to re-joining formal education was also critical. On the question of whether girls knew of other girls who had been readmitted to school after dropping out, 66.2 percent of JPGE girls responded positively, which was significantly higher than in the control group (48.8 percent), which was repeated in the household members' interview (65.3 percent vs 54.7 percent). According to the schools' survey, 45.5 percent of drop-out girls were readmitted. This was markedly better than in control schools (6 percent).

Access to youth-friendly health services (YFHS) was important for the development of adolescent girls and was therefore supported by JPGE. Girls were aware of and mentioned several services provided by the centres. The majority knew about available services on HIV testing and counselling (81.2 percent) and contraceptive services (80.5 percent). Girls in the intervention group were less shy to use the services. Table 5 below shows the services provided at YFHS centres.

Table 5: Type of services in YFHS centres mentioned by girls
(Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 14)

Service provided	% of girls mentioning
HIV testing and counselling	81.2%
Contraceptive services	80.5%
Adolescent growth and development	43.8%
Prevention, diagnosis, management STIs	47.2%
Treatment of sexual abuse victims	26.1%
Psychosocial support	14.4%
Referral to hospitals	10.9%
Post-natal services	6.3%
PMTCT	6.2%
Antenatal services	6.0%
Post-abortion care	4.1%

Support to sports activities for girls was also seen as an enjoyable and effective way to expose girls to useful information and to empower them. Some girls found the achieved empowerment helped them to not be afraid to use YFHS. The girls confirmed that the information and education

they received on sexual behaviour was useful. Distance to the services was, however, an obstacle for the girls.

JPGE contributed to the awareness raising and empowerment of girls and encouraged them to take on leadership positions in the community and in school clubs. In JPGE schools, 44.5 percent of girls were members of a club, which was significantly higher than in control schools (31.8 percent). Although JPGE girls were more frequently members, the achievement was below the target of 75 percent and had slightly decreased from 46.1 percent at baseline, even though the mid-term review showed an increase at 66.1 percent.

The management of schools by head teachers was found to have improved, and targeted schools were observed to be better organized. JPGE contributed to MoH being better able to communicate with the girls in a more frequent and needs-based manner. The capacity of YFHS in general had improved, and YFHS were better able to provide young people with comprehensive information and services. Renovated youth-friendly health service corners helped MOH to provide SRHR information and services in a confidential manner. Improvement in sanitation available during menstruation was also reported by girls. This was attributed to the provision of better washrooms for girls and support to production of re-usable menstrual pads. JPGE was reported to have helped clear wrong information on SRHR.

Prevalence of corporal punishment was assessed among school staff and girls. In JPGE schools, 75 percent (of 40 schools) reported that corporal punishment was a problem in their school, against 56 percent (of 23 schools) in control schools. However, girls saw this a bit differently. The percentage of girls reporting corporal punishment (at least once) in the last year had increased more in the intervention group (60.8 percent to 84.7 percent) than in the control group (55.0 percent to 72.0 percent). The most frequent form of punishment was cleaning the classroom, followed by digging rubbish pits. Severe corporal punishments were hitting and beating. The main reasons for punishment were coming to school late (42 percent), and noisemaking (39.2 percent). Less common reasons for punishment were poor performance and lack of attention.

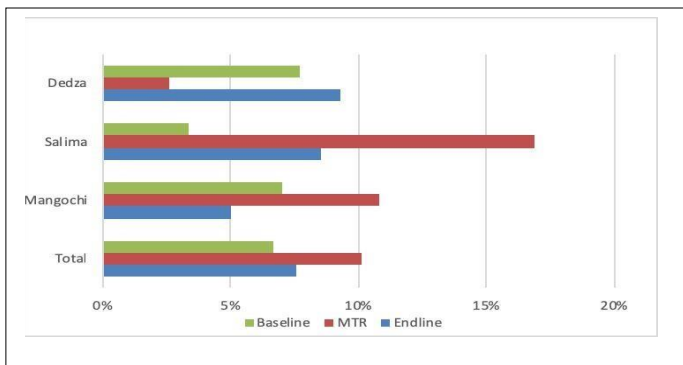
Violence awareness campaigns were supported by the programme, child protection structures were revamped, established referral pathways and systems were strengthened. JPGE worked on child protection through the police, social welfare, legal courts and by engaging parents. Child complaint boxes were established to receive, track, and monitor abuse cases and address violence in schools. The police raised awareness on referral mechanisms through wall paintings in schools. An increase in parents and chiefs reporting cases of child abuse or violence was reported.

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Among the interviewed girls, 15.8 percent reported that there had been cases of sexual violence of girls perpetrated by teachers (control 13.9 percent). 8.0 percent of girls reported a girl being raped at their school in the past year (control 8.1 percent); 8.0 percent of girls stated that a girl had been impregnated by a teacher at their school last year (control: 6.3 percent) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Girls who faced sexual harassment in the past year per district (percentage) (Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 17)



Obtaining hard and reliable data on violence was difficult since it is a sensitive topic. Moreover, it was difficult to explain an increase in reports of violence in terms of changes in prevalence. Among girls, 61.1 percent of victims had reported the violence mostly to the teacher and the school (52 percent), or the parents/guardian (46 percent). Only 59 percent of the girls who report the incident were satisfied with the solution. Most students reported that the school actively encouraged the use of complaint mechanisms (92.3 percent) and 79.4 percent found that complaints were adequately handled. In JPGE schools, 89.4 percent of girls felt safe, which was similar to control schools (88.8 percent). However, there appeared to be a significantly better feeling of safety among girls in JPGE schools: 50 percent reported to feel “very safe” (control 39.7 percent), and 39.4 percent “safe” (control 38.6 percent).

Teachers in all schools in the sample were sensitized on the use of learner-centred and gender-responsive methodologies. The girls’ survey also provided evidence of learner-centred and gender-responsive teaching methods in school. Trainings of youth peer educators and youth-friendly health service providers were conducted, including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) sessions, outreach activities and competitions for the assisted girls. In the 40 programme schools, 34 teachers were trained on CSE and 32 confirmed using their skills in teaching life skills.

On improved access and quality of education for girls, teachers and MoEST staff reported that JPGE support through the back-to-school policy led to higher enrolment and pass rates for learners. Girls and boys reported higher enrolment, better retention, and improved performance. The MoEST

made available more teachers to keep the teacher/classroom ratio manageable to prevent an increased burden on teachers. Almost all schools reported to have an improvement plan in place for girls’ education (which was already observed by the mid-term review (MTR) and confirmed by DEMIS data, reflecting 100 percent). This was significantly higher than in control schools (73.9 percent).

The JPGE used a successful combination of capacity building approaches at institutional, organizational, and individual level. Various stakeholders benefited from capacity building, including Government staff, schools, school management and food committees, farmers, parents, police, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) staff and girls and boys. Capacity was built on hardware, including school upgrading, sanitation, functional literacy centres, youth corners in health centres. Trainings were provided on in school feeding, violence, protection, and sexual and reproductive health rights. This created the basis for some stakeholders to improve their engagement with school girls’ HIV test and youth in general.

Discrepancies between behaviour and attitudes inside and outside of schools may have limited the results in terms of increasing the percentage of girls staying in school and pass rates. On the one hand, capacity and attitude of village leaders, teachers and people who participated in committees were positively changed under JPGE. On the other hand, the potential of gains to be made in schools was affected by parents’ practices and perception, which JPGE did not manage to change and did not sufficiently address.

Although there was a certain overlap and not all indicators are equally clear, the revised framework was found adequate to produce the envisaged results and contribute to the objectives. Many respondents found the JPGE duration relatively short when compared to the complexity of the programme but saw JPGE II as an opportunity for rectification.

Out of seven outcomes, five had almost been achieved (appropriate nourishment of girls and boys, access to youth-friendly health services (YFHS), reduced violence, teacher attitudes and empowered communities) and two partly achieved (girls’ access to second chance education and strengthening leadership positions for girls).

Efficiency

Putting in place District Coordinators with strong knowledge of the local context, the status of implementation and challenges, made decision-making and coordination easier and faster and contributed to improving efficiency. However, the government highlighted that these coordinators could have been more effective and conducive to Government ownership if they had been placed under the government because they were often seen as working for the UN. Training

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and awareness raising by all UN agencies was considered efficient and the quality of the trainings was found good.

The provision of school meals was also organized efficiently and done at school level. The cost was low, initially at 13 cents per menu and declining towards 11 cents due to changes in the menus at the end of the project. There were, however, issues with the procurement of food items, which led to delays from a few days up to a few weeks.

Although the multi-partner approach led to successfully addressing girls' education, it did not fully translate into an efficient implementation mechanism. The three UN agencies often focused on their own line of activities, their outcomes, and responsibilities, and did not always fully benefit from the potential of strong collaboration. Government partners and NGOs indicated that there was a long chain of different steps under each agency before the intended target child is reached. They also perceived that this led to a significant amount of money being used for operational costs. Each partner implemented its own component efficiently. Synergy between the three UN Agencies was not explicitly required under the programme; nonetheless, if work was combined at field level, it could have raised the level of efficiency and visibility of the programme. More synergy would have enabled a higher level of cross-benefits and contributed to a better understanding among stakeholders of the importance to address all underlying issues under girls' education.

Overall, the objectives and most outcomes were achieved on time, especially after JPGE had increased its implementation speed in the second year of implementation. Many of the project's stakeholders faced delays with payments and fund disbursement for various reasons, including bank transfer processes and electricity shortages.

Feedback on the adequacy of the time available was mixed. Three years was found to be insufficient to set up the implementation model and modalities. Several time-consuming processes had to be completed before the project could start, including mobilization of implementing partners, national and district level consultations, and planning meetings. Three years were therefore deemed insufficient by most to demonstrate results, but Phase II was seen as a solution to accomplish this.

Interviews with implementation partners revealed that the resource allocation to the beneficiaries seemed appropriate, and most of the funds benefitted the marginal groups. Both Government and UN agencies had an M&E system in place to track and report on the allocation of resources. Apart from general education-level data, JPGE mainly monitored output-based data, such as budget and expenditure, quantities of food and number of trainees. The various types of data remained at the agency level and were not mutually shared. The JPGE joint M&E did not appear to be comprehensive,

because each agency and Government department focused their monitoring on their sectoral priorities, with little synergy. The JPGE M&E framework was not sufficiently conducive to force such synergy upon the stakeholders.

Impact

The achievements under the various outcome areas were considered synergistic and simultaneously addressed various barriers to girls' education, which included a lack of incentive, lack of awareness, quality of education, dropouts, pregnancy, violence, and access to YFHS.

The JPGE's impact was measured through indicators including the enrolment rate, pass rate, survival rate and dropout rate. The achievement of these indicators was reasonably positive. The enrolment rates had increased, especially in Mangochi District. The dropout rate for girls had fallen impressively by more than two-thirds (15.6 percent at baseline to 5.2 percent at endline). Pass rates for girls was achieved as per target. For boys, however, pass rates had declined. The pass rates for the control group had also increased. JPGE was hopeful to decrease the incidence of pregnancy among schoolgirls; however, this appeared a quite difficult goal to achieve, and the Evaluation Team (ET) could not substantiate the findings with hard data.

Various Government and health facilities' respondents found that JPGE contributed to the MoH being better able to communicate with the girls in a more frequent and needs-based manner. The renovated youth friendly health service corners helped MOH to provide SRHR information and services in a confidential manner. Various protection mechanisms for girls were put in place inside and outside of schools, including through the police. Nonetheless, the pregnancy rate among young girls had unfortunately not decreased according to respondents' qualitative feedback, though no hard data were provided.

By the end of 2017, 50,069 girls and 47,905 boys received JPGE-supported school meals; 12,668 girls and 1,648 boys received take home rations (THR). Teachers were trained on learner-centric and gender equal teaching methods, from which pupils in Standard 5-8 benefited. These pupils also had improved access to youth-friendly health services and protection. Other children, in the same school or community, benefited indirectly from quality education and youth-friendly health services. A total of 81 communities benefited from the school feeding programme, including farmers and community members. Farmers engaged in JPGE perceived their income as improved through regular sales of food items for school feeding. They used part of this money to support the education of their daughters and sons.

JPGE contributed to decreasing gender inequality through its multi-faceted approach. Lower dropout rates strengthened the position of girls in their adult life. Gender-sensitive

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treatment by teachers in schools, supporting girls who have dropped out of school, helping girls to achieve leadership positions, and strengthening access to youth-friendly health services all helped close the existing gaps between girls and boys. Boys' resentment was an unexpected impact of the programme. Boys and other stakeholders felt it was unfair that girls received more support and would sometimes be found to lash out and feel frustrated as a result.

Sustainability

National ownership of JPGE positively contributed to sustainability. Community bylaws were put in place to fine parents if they did not send their children to school. Religious and village leaders emphasised that they would continue overseeing compliance with the bylaws. However, many parents still did not fully support the notion of sending their children to school, especially daughters, and this may affect sustainability.

Training results and acquired skills were considered reasonably sustainable. The capacity of the Government had sustainably improved to support school feeding, girls' education, and empowerment. Knowledge transfer and empowerment of teachers and mother groups are key resources that allow continuity. Teachers were trained on learner-centred and gender-responsive methodologies and although others had been transferred the knowledge remains useful, and they are likely to continue in a similar job.

School Management Committees (SMCs), Food Committees (FCs), and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) were trained on nutrition, food safety, hygiene, and sanitation. Many respondents reported that they will use the acquired knowledge in the committees that they are members of. At individual levels this would help participants to maintain or improve the nutrition status for themselves and their households. The acquired knowledge and skills will continue to be beneficial since much of the knowledge transfer was through existing structures.

Sustainability may have been affected by the lack of an exit strategy. Lack of Government financial resources was expected to seriously hamper further organization of certain activities, such as school feeding, sports, and adolescent health campaigns. School feeding was not likely to continue without external funding. While alternative plans had not been worked out under the first phase of JPGE, the second phase (JPGE II) includes plans for improving sustainability of school meals.

Coordination and Partnerships

JPGE had various coordination mechanisms at the central and district levels, which facilitated quality implementation. Cooperation and coordination in the field posed challenges at times, and some local Government staff felt overburdened by

multiple tasks from JPGE and other externally funded interventions.

In Phase I, funding was provided through implementing partner NGOs and district councils. Government respondents were dissatisfied with the funding mechanism through NGOs, believing it hampered coordination. They perceived that NGOs were not always available, did not always work in a transparent manner and that their procedures resulted in a loss of time. This was then addressed in Phase 2, when the funding mechanism was channelled through the councils.

Feedback on the coordination and cooperation of UN agencies was mixed but relations improved over time. The implementing UN agencies had regular communication and aligned their activities and outcomes under JPGE synergistically, although there was less visible coordination and cooperation in the field. Local authorities who engaged in JPGE found that NGOs were operating too independently. The NGOs were not always forthcoming with their feedback and reports, including to the district coordinators.

Overall Conclusions

The JPGE approach was geared towards keeping girls and boys in school, through a synergistic approach to addressing the many existing barriers to girls' education. The integrated approach, incorporating food security and nutrition, quality of education and access to SRHR, appeared essential. The approach facilitated the combining of resources with specific knowledge and expertise. It enabled the various UN agencies to cover the same target group with different forms of support. This helped achieve objectives on enrolment, attendance, and lower dropout.

Boys and their families, however, were less positive, because they felt that girls benefited more from the programme, particularly from take-home rations. Their conditions were not always amenable, and unless they were orphans or part of a receiving household, they otherwise did not receive access to a take-home ration.

JPGE enabled multiplier effects by increasing the income of parent farmers while simultaneously improving school conditions, health access and providing food to pupils. The school meals were appreciated but are probably not sustainable due to lack of Government resources.

JPGE did not manage to sufficiently engage parents. As a result, they were not fully committed to their daughters' education, leading to the risk of achievements at school level being undone. The incidence of girls experiencing sexual violence had not decreased since baseline, and the worrying pregnancy rate of girls had remained the same, despite achievements of JPGE in output areas that were expected to have had a decreasing effect.

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Lessons learned

The evaluation identified lessons learned which are reflected below.

If a community does not adopt the goals, pursued by a project like JPGE, the achievement will be minimal, no matter how good the implementation. The support on developing and implementing community bylaws was a very good example and contributed to keeping girls in school. Although JPGE reached village leaders and committee members, it did not manage to sufficiently reach parents, who are members of a crucial target group when it comes to girls' education. Therefore, for future interventions on girls' education, the inclusion of parents as a target group should be ensured and clearly defined.

A child-centred approach was essential in JPGE to achieving results in child protection and education. Working directly with girls was paramount to project success. A conducive environment and trust must be created for girls to share and work on sensitive issues like SRHR and gender-based violence. Listening to the children was an important part of JPGE, which ensured the suitability of the approach. In projects working with children, a child-centred approach must always be at the forefront of design and implementation.

Although the design, relevance and effectiveness of an intervention may be good, overall poverty, largely an external factor to the project, presented serious stumbling blocks to sustainability and impact. To achieve optimal results, projects focusing on education or other areas where poverty is a constraint need to find ways to address the issue. This could be accomplished by including activities that generate income or link beneficiaries to other interventions or programmes that offer social protection or help them diversify their income-generating sources.

Strong financial procedures and processes are essential to a project of this size and complexity. Both the UN and Government's financial requirements and rules were complex and often different at various points; both were difficult to follow for NGO partners and other stakeholders, leading to delays in implementation and frustration. To avoid such issues, each UN project should start its implementation with training of partners on their financial procedures. On a parallel trail, the financial procedures of the Government should be assessed to make standard allowances for rules that may be impossible to adhere to.

Factors Affecting Results

Factors Affecting Results Positively

Factors that positively contributed to girls staying in school include incentives for girls, civic education to parents, role modelling for girls, promoting community participation for

Table 6: Factors contributing to girls staying in school

Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 13)

Factors contributing	Phase 1	Control	Total
Incentives for girls to remain in school	217	104	321
Civic education to parents	169	122	291
Role modelling for girls	140	135	275
Promote community participation in girls' education	73	101	174
Strengthen mother groups	69	117	186
Total	678	650	1,328

girls and strengthening mother groups (*Table 6*).

Child Protection: This was done through the police, social welfare, courts, and engaging parents. Child complaint boxes were established to track and monitor abuse cases and address violence in schools.

Factors Affecting Results Negatively

Table 7 shows a list of factors that prevented girls from excelling in school. Poverty ranked high (56,2 percent) compared to other factors. Cultural factors were also perceived as a hindrance, although they ranked low (6,9 percent).

Table 7: Barriers to girls excelling in school

(Source: Malawi JPGE Main Report, page 19)

Reason	Proportion	
	JPGE	Control
Poverty	56.2%	61.2%
Peer pressure	35.8%*	49.1%*
Lack of teaching and learning material	24.3%	28.3%
Low level parents' education	17.0%	10.3%
Lack of role models	13.7%*	7.2%*
Household chores at home	9.9%*	21.5%*
Physical abuse	5.9%*	9.5%*
Emotional violence against girls	6.8%	7.7%
Sexual violence against girls	5.9%*	12.2%*
Cultural factors	6.9%	9.4%
Traditional beliefs	2.9%	2.3%

* = Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Poverty: More than half of the girls perceived poverty as a factor that hampered them from performing well in school. The government, village leaders and teachers also highlighted that poverty is a major issue that hinders parents from sending their children to school.

Early Marriage: Girls often got married at an early age, leading to an increase in dropout rates. This is because the importance of girls' education was still insufficiently acknowledged by parents.

Reference:

Full Evaluation Report, and the Management Response are available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/malawi-joint-programme-girls-education-evaluation>
For more information, please contact the Office of Evaluation wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org

Lack of sanitary pads was also mentioned as one of the reasons for absenteeism. The capacity building on producing re-usable sanitary pads was considered a significant achievement. Significantly more girls under JPGE were trained on producing affordable sanitary pads and received support from Mothers' Support Groups (MSG).

Early-exposure to sexual activities: It was reported that many girls were exposed to sexual activities, initiation rites, sexual violence, and early marriage. This also put them at a risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), exposure to HIV, and to falling pregnant at a young age.

High illiteracy levels among parents: Parents were still not aware of the value of education, especially the importance of educating a girl-child. This is because both parents and religious leaders are often illiterate themselves, and hence it was difficult for them to immediately acknowledge and promote the importance of education.

Absenteeism: Illness was the most prominent reason for absenteeism. There were also some girls who mentioned a lack of uniforms and school materials and having to do household chores as reasons for absenteeism in school.

Awareness of parents was not yet sufficiently addressed to gather their full support to their daughters' education. Although Mothers' Support Groups (MSGs) were included as beneficiaries, the mothers of the pupils in JPGE had very little decision-making power over the fate of their daughters.

Limited infrastructure: Infrastructural needs hampered schools from providing quality education on a continuous basis. Libraries were a rarity, and only a few schools had Teacher Resource Centres. There were fewer classrooms than the number of learners. In many schools, learners had to sit outside and did not go to school during bad weather. Roads were poorly maintained, buildings were frequently dilapidated, and there was insufficient access to water.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of this evaluation led to the evaluation team proposing several recommendations below.

Recommendation 1: Interventions that aim at closing an existing gender gap may target activities to boys or girls but should avoid excluding boys from project activities that provide visible benefits. To promote gender transformation, roles, needs and opportunities of both boys and girls must be analysed and considered. At activity level, providing take-home rations mostly for girls (apart from OVC boys) led to resentment of boys and should not be continued for girls only. Awareness-raising needs to be conducted for boys and girls alike, together, or separately. Working with girls who have dropped out of school focuses on a very gender-specific group and can be conducted with girls only.

Recommendation 2: Parents in general need to be more strongly addressed and engaged in JPGE II. Parents must become aware that education is a right and that taking girls out of school will have severe long-term consequences on the wellbeing of their daughters. They also need to understand their role in ensuring girls' education. Including additional emphasis on mothers will also help to close the gender equality gap at that level, allowing mothers to better understand and become role models for girls' empowerment. Ways to achieve this could include a sensitization campaign or working specifically with mothers to help them increase their share in decision-making in their daughters' education.

Recommendation 3: Central and local Government bodies responsible for education, gender, health, and sports need to be fully engaged in all stages of JPGE II. Relevant Government bodies' staff must be included in each design activity and in the selection of partner NGOs. The district coordinator must reside at MoEST and the various agencies should use their input and connections to strengthen coordination between various Government bodies at local level.

Recommendation 4: JPGE II needs to be further improved with a focus on strengthening sustainability. A detailed exit strategy with community exit plans must be designed and used. For school meals, support needs to be provided to developing a sustainable detailed national school meals programme within the existing policy framework. For the other components, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP should use their collective weight to advocate with Government for fund allocation and sustainable planning. This should include integrated programmes in District Development Plans with funding that is collected at council level allocated from district revenue.

Recommendation 5: For JPGE II and potential other joint programmes, the responsible agencies (Government as well as UN) need to ensure a strong M&E framework and system is developed and established as soon as possible. This should include a better focus on measuring results and outcomes, and include details on regularity, responsibilities, analysis and sharing. The M&E system should be conducive to joint programme-based data collection and adaptation of the programme.

Recommendation 6: In-depth analyses into issues related to girls' access to education should be included in JPGE II to provide deeper understanding and improve the effect and impact of the programme. It is especially important to study the factors underlying pregnancy rates in the target areas of Malawi, and the lack of success of JPGE in addressing sexual violence. The results of the studies must be used to further improve JPGE II and other interventions working in similar areas.

Reference:

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSE	Comprehensive sex education
DADO	District Agriculture Development Office
DEMIS	District Education Management Information System
ET	Evaluation Team
FC	Food Committees
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
JPGE	Joint Programme for Girls Education
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLYSMD	Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Manpower Development
MSGs	Mothers' Support Groups
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation Development/Development Assistance Committee
OVCs	Orphaned and vulnerable children
PTAs	Parent Teacher Associations
SMC	School Management Committees
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health rights
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections
ToC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Populations Fund
YFHS	Youth-friendly health services
WFP	World Food Programme

Reference:

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