



Fostering Digital Education in a Covid-19 Environment in Malawi



GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR
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RESULTS AND LESSONS BRIEF

Harnessing Education Technology as a response to COVID-19

This Learning Brief was compiled by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to spotlight the project work, results and lessons from Civil Society Education Coalition's (CSEC) project entitled "Fostering Digital Education in a COVID-19 Environment". The project was designed and implemented within the framework of the Resilience to COVID-19 through Digitalisation (RESICODI) German BACKUP Initiative to follow-up on the implementation of Education 2030 Agenda and SDG4 targets. The content presented in this learning brief was generated from the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities that had been set-up by the GCE Secretariat for national coalition partners to report on the progress and results of their respective country level projects. The end of project report submitted by CSEC to GCE has been the primary source of the lessons and experiences shared in this brief.

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Background of the initiative

The 'Harnessing Education Technology as a response to COVID-19' is a GCE project funded by the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through Enabel and the GIZ-BACKUP Initiative. In the framework of this action, GIZ via the BACKUP Initiative opened a call for proposals on fostering digital solutions for basic education with the aim of strengthening and developing the capacities of education partners. In response to the call, GCE designed a programme to support the uptake of digital solutions to improve the continuity and quality of education services and provide evidence of their potential and limitations in Africa, in view of the contextual challenges faced by the education sector in the continent.

The GCE programme is complemented by country level projects, implemented by seven national education coalitions in Burundi, DRC, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, and Zambia and the one Teachers' Union in Namibia. In this project, GCE supported the eight national level project partners to engage in research, monitoring, and planning with government institutions: including evidence-based advocacy for education technology (EdTech) and digital solutions in public education settings.

Civil Society Education Coalition's (CSEC)

The Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) is a membership organization that exists to promote the right to quality education for all and complement the Malawian government's efforts towards a literate and highly productive nation. CSEC presently operates as the coalition of 84 diverse independent and voluntary organizations in Malawi to facilitate information sharing, research, advocacy, and capacity building of member organizations and stakeholders. The Coalition is a member of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), the African Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA), the UNESCO CCNGO, participates in various regional policy fora and plays a crucial role in engaging governments in education policy processes at national level.

Objectives and scope of the project

In line with broad scope of the initiative, CSEC developed and implemented a country level project, entitled "Fostering digital education in a Covid-19 environment". The project aimed at promoting the design of low-cost technological interventions to facilitate continued learning within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and raising awareness on the value of online learning/ICT in education service delivery and access to digital education services for learners and/or education professionals. The project was designed and implemented through three interrelated processes: (a) Content Creation including digitalisation of curriculum, design of interactive applications and animations for Grade 1 and 2's numeracy, literacy and comprehension; (b) Teacher Training through creation of learning hubs at Teacher Development Centres (TDC), capacity building for teachers on digital mediums for teaching and learning at school level and interschool exchanges/ twinning. (c) Awareness Creation through radio or TV interventions and establishment of an online learning platform as a sub domain at CSEC website.



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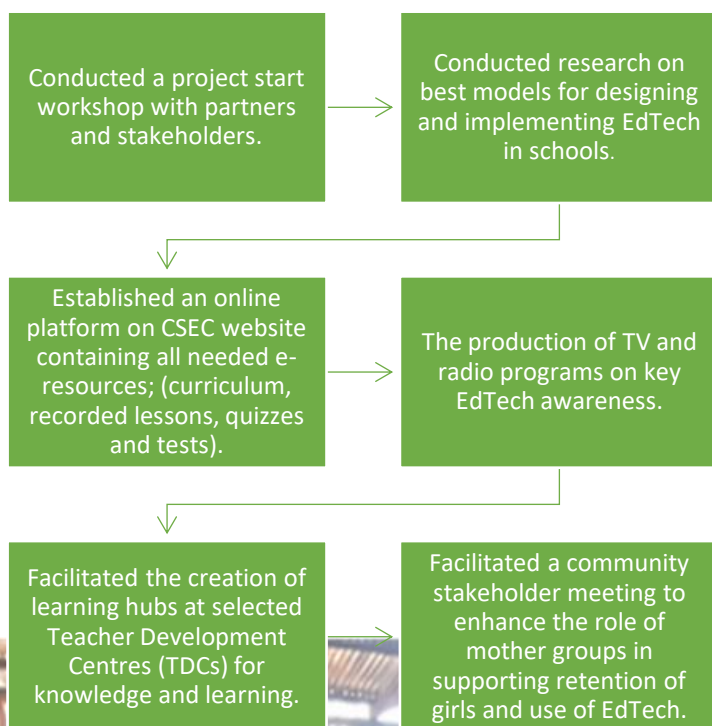


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Successes and results of the project

1. Content Creation and digitalisation of curriculum

One of the notable achievements from the CSEC project was the development and digitalisation of curriculum. CSEC successfully developed 17 video and audio lessons which constituted seven stories or *nthano*, six Standard 1 lessons and four Standard 2 lessons. These were uploaded in the tablets and desktops for learning and teaching. Furthermore, CSEC managed to procure desktops, tablets and projectors that are helping to beam the digitized education content for children’s learning. Additionally, CSEC engaged the government and got a commitment that the schools will be offering the digitized lessons during their normal teaching and learning hours. To achieve this result, CSEC engaged various stakeholders to undertake the following interlinked process:



- CSEC facilitated consultations with the coalition members, Secretariat and Government, including the Basic Education Department and Directorate of Innovation, Science and Technology.
- The consultations helped to plan and influence government thinking on digital solutions in the country as critical issues were discussed and agreed such as the choice of education districts, zones and schools.
- CSEC established learning hubs at two teacher development centres (TDC) namely Malingunde and Manyamula. TDCs help to facilitate easy implementation of digital solutions for teachers within the education zone.



Image 1: Picture showing learners enjoying the digitised lessons under the help of a trained and fully equipped teacher.



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2. Improvement of digital skills of learners and education professionals

Another key success from this project was strengthening the digital skills of learners and educators from a unique opportunity created for capacity development for both organization staff, teachers and school governance. The intervention managed to build the capacity of teachers, school administrators, head teachers and school governance members on the use of EdTech to facilitate learning for learners. The project targeted 84 teachers and 21 head teachers, making a total of 105 educators with special training on the use of the Edu-Tech materials and gadgets in 3 zones. 20 teachers out of the 24 that were provided gadgets for teaching can support and facilitate learning using the gadgets.

Additionally, the committees were also empowered on how they can best support the learning by ensuring the safety of the technology. CSEC's unique practice to realise this result was a facilitation of inter-zonal school exchanges (twinning) for the schools targeted by the project.



Image 2: Part of the training audience in Mzimba Manyamula Zone.



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3. Learning and network building at national, regional and international level on EdTech

Through the implementation of this intervention, CSEC gained unique opportunities in terms of its contribution in the policy processes. In the period, the coalition participated in the Local Education Group (LEG), Joint Sector Review and SADC Education and Training and Science Technology and Innovation Summit and made concrete contributions with regards to EdTech. Key highlights from the coalition’s engagements are noted below.

- ◆ **Engagement with SADC:** The coalition engaged in the SADC Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation, during their meeting in Lilongwe, Malawi, 13th-17th June 2022, where it raised critical issues and recommendations on EdTech. Below are some of the issues that were raised in the position paper shared:

1. Appropriate governance and regulation is required to protect education as a basic human right and a public good while also leveraging the capacities of the private sector to accelerate and improve digital learning.

2. States must invest in having electricity accessible to schools and communities in rural areas.

3. Member States should provide friendly and inclusive sensitive hardware to enable teaching and learning processes.

4. Member States must build and maintain robust, free public learning content and platforms that catalyse human-centred learning experiences.

5. Member States need to establish mechanisms to increase access to connectivity to schools.

6. Member States need to subsidise teaching and learning hardware and assistive devices from the tax regimes”.

7. Stronger effort should be invested in developing trusted online spaces that share quality-controlled, free, curriculum-aligned, easy-to-access, and contextually relevant digital learning resources.

Image 3: The coalition Chair Dr. Nsapato making a presentation at the Summit to the Chair of the Task Force, Ms.Thokozani Banda, the Secretary for Education in Malawi.





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- ◆ **Engagement in the LEG:** Additionally, the coalition participated in one LEG meeting that took place on the 16th of June 2022 to share information on the new GPE operating model and to review the request by the MoE to apply for a system capacity grant. Even though the meeting was mostly an informative meeting, the coalition continued to press on government to stop calling for LEG meetings only when there was a need to endorse something. However, CSEC along with other stakeholders present at the LEG meeting approved that the Government of Malawi to go ahead and apply for the GPE new operating model which will incorporate education technology and the system capacity grant.
- ◆ **Engagement with JSR:** Furthermore, the Coalition also managed to participate in the 2022 Joint Sector Review which happened on from the 9th to 10th of November 2022 where it was requested to make its presentation on the CSO's education performance status and the desired education in 2023. The coalition spoke on key thematic areas which also included EdTech.
- ◆ **Engagement with GCE and other partners:** Lastly, the Coalition participated in the regional learning event that was organised by Global Campaign for Education in South Africa in September 2022. The purpose of the meeting was to leverage learning and sharing among partners as well as to document key lessons learnt from the project. The Coalition managed to share its study and project lessons and learn from other project partners.

Long Term Results and Impact

- 1. Contributions to strengthening the use of digital solutions in the education sector as a COVID-19 response:** The intervention focused on influencing government to plan and respond to the impact of COVID-19 using EdTech in the country. The Coalition intensified on piloting EdTech innovation so that its findings would influence government to go that direction. Hence, one of the main recommendations by the Coalition submitted through different platforms was the government's inclusion of EdTech in its five-point commitment made at the 2022 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It should be noted that after the UNGA, Ministry of Education organised a Joint Sector Review where it presented its transformative agenda. It was encouraging to note that under the five pillars the President committed to, EdTech as one of the commitments. This is a testament to the contributions that the coalition has made towards the transformation of education in Malawi. From the government's presentation at the JSR, pillar number five in the Malawi's Five-Strand Education Foundations Strategy for improving performance and holding partners accountable for learning outcomes places digitisation of education as a game changer for achieving access, quality, efficiency, and resilience in the education sector in Malawi.
- 2. Development and strengthening of the CSEC alliance** (technical processes, structures, management, knowledge management, etc): The intervention enhanced the coordination and governance oversight role of the Executive Board as it was able to support coordination meetings for the Board. Governance meetings helped the Board to provide strategic direction to the project, as well as performance reviews so as to ensure that the project attains its goals within the stipulated timeframe. This ensured timely and efficient oversight role of the Board to the pilot. Additionally, the coming in of the EdTech expert also provided the Coalition with an additional expertise in managing the organization's technology and the pilot technical needs. This reduced cost on maintenance of desktops and laptops.
- 3. Cooperation with national and international stakeholders** (in case of CSOs, collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the LEG): CSEC continued to enhance its collaboration with GCE in getting



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technical, financial guidance and direction during the implementation of the project. The support provided by GCE was so essential and timely for the successful implementation of the pilot within the agreed timelines and ensuring that the results of the pilot were attained. At national level, CSEC collaborated with the Ministry of Education, Council for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Malawi (CONGOMA), Local Education Group, Sector Working Group, Technical Working Group and Parliamentary Committees on Education on issues around Edu-Tech. The discussion of the pilot in these platforms also enhanced the visibility and relevance of the pilot in enhancing learning amidst serious challenges in the education sector. EdTech was recognised as a game changer for transforming education to achieve access, equity and quality inclusive education Malawi.

- 4. CSO participation and/or strengthening of the role of CSOs in education sector processes:** The project supported CSEC's representation in the key education sector processes with relevant data and information for engagement. To begin with, the measure conducted a study on EdTech innovative models that are working in the country. The study revealed mostly two models which were *Padziwe* model and Unlocking talent. The study further analysed the *pros* and *cons* of each model, which meant that the Coalition's contribution in these key education processes like the Local Education Group (LEG), Sector Working Group (SWG), Joint Sector Working Group (SWG) and engagement with SADC Ministers of Education and Training was informed by qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Description of how the activities under this project have been taken into consideration by the Ministry responsible for education

1. The outputs and results of this project have been central in shaping the direction of EdTech in Malawi's education sector. Through engagement and the intervention on EdTech, government has prioritized digitisation of education in its five-track priorities as announced by the President of Malawi at the UNGA Education Summit which was held from the 13th to the 27th of September 2022 in New York. The Coalition will continue its engagement with the government to push for the development of a strategy that will actualize those commitments. Prior to the UNGA Education Summit, CSEC organised a National Education Summit to shape the national priority areas, attended by diverse CSOs, government departments, media and DPs. A follow up meeting was conducted after the Summit where the Ministry of Education debriefed the stakeholders on the outcome of the meeting and the nationally agreed upon priorities. At present, the Open Distance and Learning Department is developing a policy on technology in education.
2. The intervention also influenced the functional review of the Directorate for Open and Distance Education Learning to foster accelerated progress in digitalization of education to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, as well as to expand enrolment and learning.
3. In the ongoing curriculum review for primary education, CSEC influenced the important role that EdTech plays in curriculum reform to aid teaching and learning in a resource-constrained environment. Finally, both radio and television dialogues have profiled the strategic importance of EdTech in Malawi and the need for joint efforts by all players. Transforming education in the 21st Century requires that appropriate EdTech models are identified, tested, and harnessed to address the challenges in the country's education system.



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Challenges that the project encountered and overcome

- ◆ The critical challenge was inadequate digitised content: The project managed to digitise few topics as it was too expensive to digitise the whole class subject content. However, the Coalition encouraged schools to download other relevant digital education content from YouTube to improve the content.
- ◆ Frequent transfer of teachers in the target schools. The Ministry of Education, through the District Education Manager, proposed transfer of teachers that were already trained on EdTech to other schools, which could have negatively affected the implementation of the pilot. However, the project lobbied with the district management to return the teachers in the target schools so that skills and knowledge imparted to them are utilised for the pilot.

Lessons learned from the project

- ◆ The Coalition has had a great experience during the implementation of the project as it was a new and unique intervention. This has happened at both district and national level. At all levels gained great recognition from the ministry of education and other stakeholders for the contribution to the education sector through the exciting results emerging from our pilot.
- ◆ The project considered gender in the provision of digital skills and participation in policy engagement. The project made sure that both male and female participants were represented during the trainings and meetings.
- ◆ Additionally, CSEC learnt that digitizing the education content and putting it in catchy formats motivates learners to stay and re-enrol in schools.

Way forward

To ensure that the project is sustainable and continues into the foreseeable future, CSEC will:

- ◆ Develop follow-up activities that are organised in two-fold. The first of the activities does not require additional funding which the Secretariat and District structures will continue to engage different stakeholders for them to mainstream philosophy or design EdTech projects sustain the current efforts.
- ◆ Implement second tier of activities where the coalition continues to engage different donor partners for possibility of funding so that it continues to influence institutionalisation and streamlining of digital transformation in Malawi.

Contact Information about the project	
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