



The Let Girls Learn project invested in construction of 11 new secondary schools in Malawi.

To advance the journey to self-reliance, we safeguard people and resources by systematically addressing environmental risk.



*Finding source materials to build the schools was a challenge after it became clear that using sand from nearby streams like this one would significantly alter ecosystems.*



## Challenges

- Unsustainable sand and timber extraction
- Displaced inhabitants

## Solutions

- Alternative construction materials
- Inland sand extraction and ecological oversight
- Proper timber licensing
- Land tenure agreements and replacement

# ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDING SPOTLIGHT CONSTRUCTING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI FOR FEMALE EDUCATION

Teenage girls are undereducated in Malawi: Female students who complete primary school often leave the educational system due to early marriage, family work demands, limited classroom space, and unaffordable school fees.

Starting in 2017, USAID/Malawi invested in construction of 11 new secondary schools (with at least half of the 200 spaces per school reserved for girls), plus a 50-bed female dormitory and teacher housing. Named Apatseni Mwayi Atsikana Aphunzire (AMAA)/Let Girls Learn, the project also included construction and rehabilitation of small-scale water and sanitation infrastructure to support schools.



“With USAID/Malawi; the USAID Bureau of Economic Growth, Education and Environment; the Government of Malawi; implementing partners; and the community all working together, we resolved critical environmental and social challenges to help advance girls’ education in Malawi and create a successful project, with more schools to come.”

—Robert Matengula, Mission Environment Officer, USAID/Malawi

## Identifying Environmental Challenges

By following the environmental compliance and safeguarding process, USAID identified environmental challenges involving construction source materials, such as sand and timber. The initial plan was for sand to be extracted from nearby streams at a rate that would significantly alter local riverine ecosystems. The planned use of timber for construction would also be unsustainable; in Malawi timber is often illegally obtained, contributing to forest degradation and deforestation.

USAID also realized that construction of the schools would displace local inhabitants or affect their livelihood—for example, by removing farmers from their agricultural plots.

## Working with the Community to Identify Solutions

USAID and the implementing partner conducted field visits and met with local leaders, community members, and Malawian government officials to identify shared solutions. Stakeholders agreed that the best way to mitigate the environmental impacts was to pursue alternative construction materials. The preferred approach was to use prefabricated materials, improved soil stabilizing blocks, and cement concrete blocks.

Another approach was to prioritize sourcing of sand from inland sand pits—away from streams and ecologically sensitive areas. Where sand was extracted from waterways, USAID required the construction team to hire a riverine ecosystem specialist and obtain permits from the Department of Mines. In addition, USAID required any purchased timber to have been originally felled with appropriate licenses provided by the Malawian government.

To address the social challenges, USAID worked with community members to ensure that reasonable “in-kind” (i.e., new land) replacement was provided to people affected by the project, developing land tenure agreement documents in the local language.

## Expanding Success to More Schools

By working with the community, USAID was able to identify workable solutions that enabled successful completion of the schools without long-term negative environmental impacts that could have harmed the surrounding communities. Given the successful outcome of AMAA, Secondary Education Expansion for Development (a related, subsequent USAID project) is supporting construction of more than 200 new schools—with at least half the spaces saved for girls—in all 28 districts in Malawi.

*Following the success of Let Girls Learn schools like this one under construction in Balaka, Secondary Education Expansion for Development (a related, subsequent USAID project) is supporting construction of more than 200 new schools across Malawi.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit <https://www.usaid.gov/environmental-procedures> for resources and templates to implement environmental safeguarding procedures.

Contact your environmental compliance officers for guidance and additional resources: <https://www.usaid.gov/environmental-procedures/environmental-compliance-officers>.