



# MALAWI UNION OF THE BLIND

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## CALL TO ACTION

### FOR AN INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE ON EDUCATION IN MALAWI

#### 1 Preamble

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, 700,000 people were estimated to be visually impaired (blind and partially sighted) and DeafBlind in Malawi with about 98.5% living in rural areas. Of all the school-age children with visual impairment and DeafBlindness, less than half were receiving education.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that has now enveloped the whole country, government have taken swift response measures to contain the spread of the virus and to mitigate against its impact. Within the education sector in Malawi, learning institutions were closed and alternative educational methods such as online and distance learning were adopted to ensure continuity of the learning process.

#### 2 Challenge

Unfortunately, these alternatives have proven to exclude learners who are visually impaired and DeafBlind including those with additional disabilities. This is attributable to a lack of inclusive planning in the design and delivery of these alternative educational methods, inaccessible learning media interfaces and instructional methods as well as poor or absence of internet and radio signal.

In situations where these conditions are favorable, more practical challenges are further contributing to the exclusion of learners who are blind or partially sighted and DeafBlind from current online and distance learning programs. These challenges include the absence of accessible content, lack of devices needed for reading and writing and the lack of skills to manipulate the devices and interact with the content.

As a result, most learners who are visually impaired and DeafBlind in Malawi, are being left behind or totally excluded from the alternative learning processes. For them, the COVID-19 response measures within the education sector have increased their alienation from the right to learning, thus further exacerbating an already prejudiced situation. It is more likely that learners with visual impairment and DeafBlindness who live in rural setting will be worst hit by these alternative educational methods. Also, Due to the long stay at home, female learners with visual impairment and DeafBlindness who have been cut off from essential protection services and social networks may find it even more challenging accessing education. This has resulted in a

