Back to school

Dream big for debt justice

Children take part in a maths class at Kanyindula Primary School, Mchinji, West Malawi Photo: Watipaso Nungu/Christian Aid

Use this resource to

- Tell the story of debt and education
- Pray
- Take action with your church
- Write to your MP
- Tell your community

What did you dream of being when you were at school?

An astronaut, doctor, lawyer? Our school days give us the opportunity to dream big about our future. But around the world, debt is robbing children of their hopes and dreams. Join us as we head Back to School and take action with your church for debt justice.

School vs debt

When people get a good quality education they can break free from cycles of poverty and inequality. It's powerful and transformative.

But indebted lower-income countries often have to decide between paying off debts to private lenders or paying for teachers and textbooks.

Malawi is one of 25 African nations spending more on external debt than on education.

In lower-income countries across the world a debt crisis is trapping millions of people in poverty. Every dollar spent on debt is one that can't go into vital public services like education. Ordinary people are being denied the opportunity to make their lives better.

But it doesn't have to be like this

Most of the debts that burden low-income countries are governed by English law and owed to private companies. That means the UK Government has the power to pass a new debt justice law that would push private lenders to participate in debt relief for lower-income countries.

This new law could mean that countries like Malawi wouldn't have to spend more on debt than vital public services like education.

New term, new law.

This term we have the opportunity to call on our MPs for the introduction of a new debt justice law.

During the autumn the Debt Relief (developing countries) Bill will be reintroduced in UK Parliament. If put into law it would push private lenders to participate in global debt relief, releasing funds for countries in debt crisis that could be used to fund vital public services. We need to make sure that our elected representatives are hearing about debt so that they can support the Bill when it reaches the House of Commons.

Back to school – how you and your church can take action

1. Tell your church why we need to act for debt justice - use the stories, prayers and ideas from this guide.

2. Invite your church to share the dreams from their school days. What was your dream for the future – a job, supporting your family, helping your community? Grab a sheet of A4 paper and a thick marker pen and write your dream in one or two words. At the bottom of the page write BACK TO SCHOOL – DEBT JUSTICE NOW! You could do this after a Sunday morning service.

3. Take a picture – you can do this as a group or on your own.

4. Tell your MP– write a letter to your MP using the information in this guide and share the MP briefing. Tell them what getting an education means to you, what it means for your community and for children around the world living in poverty. Share your photo and ask them to take action.

5. Tell your community - use the press release template or speak to our media advisor (jlunam@christian-aid.org) and share your picture with local media. You can also share this on your/your church's social media and tell people why you're part of the Back to School moment (don't forget to tag Christian Aid!)

6. Share your pictures with us, and let us know if you've been in touch with your elected representative – campaigns@christian-aid.org

What to ask your MP

When you write to your MP:

- Tell them about your schooldays dream and why education is important to you, your local community, and for communities living in poverty around the world
- Ask them to call on the UK Government to introduce a 'debt justice' law that pushes private lenders around the world to take part in debt relief.
- Share the Restore Campaign debt MP Briefing

Are you in Wales? You can also talk to your Member of Senedd about debt – all our elected representatives can be part of pursuing justice.

Tell the story – Malawi

In Malawi, debt is robbing children of their dreams as they struggle to get a good quality education. Just less than half of Malawi's children complete their primary education. Only 15 percent finish secondary school. If Malawi's external debt were reduced down to 10 percent of the Government budget, they could put 523 more primary teachers into schools, or enable 16,500 more children to complete primary school.

Meet headteacher Moses Mtalika, and student Benadeta Innocent

Moses Mtalika, Headteacher

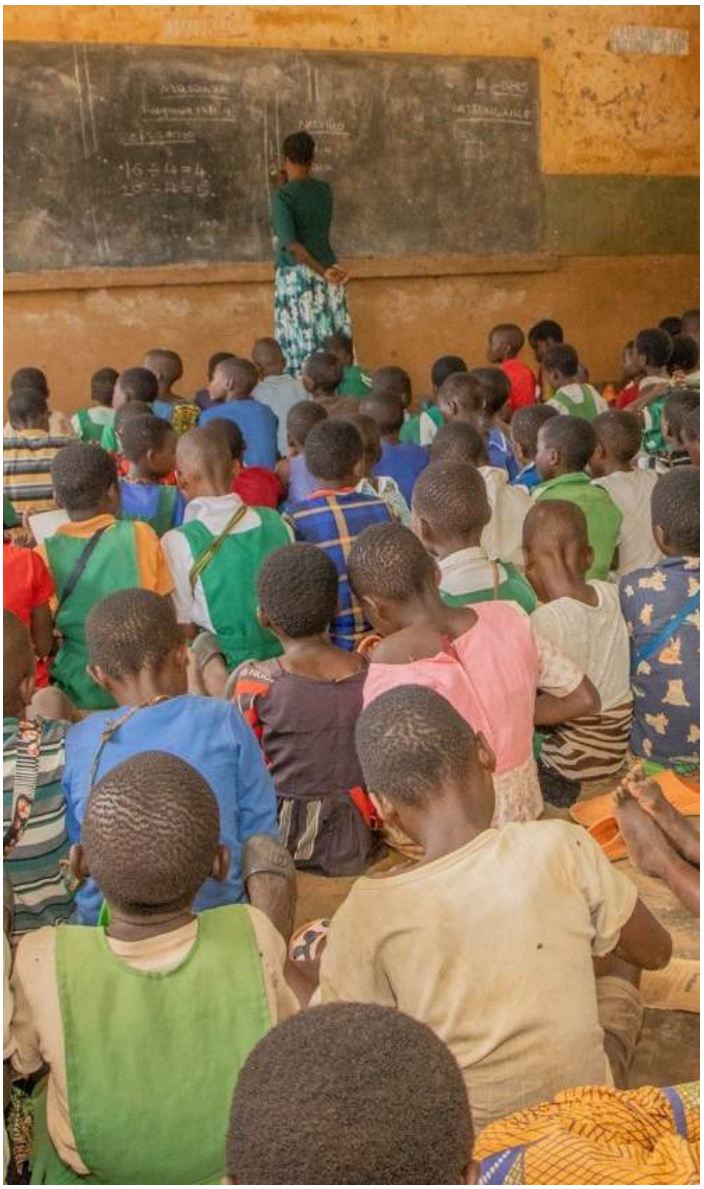
Moses Mtalika is the headteacher at Kanyindula Primary School in Mchinji, West Malawi. His school sees over 1000 children each week. But teachers are few and far between – just one for 100 students. Moses says

"The classrooms are congested and there are only enough desks for two classes. Our school is fortunate – other schools don't have desks at all."

Classroom space and desks are not the only problem.

"There are not enough learning and teaching resources available. This results in some kids not receiving the necessary help from teachers as they should have. These problems are quite serious. Sometimes even if we have the textbooks, they don't last as they are torn when the students fight to access them. These problems contribute to students' poor performance. Because the tools are few and the textbooks inadequate, we have such problems at our school."

Moses and his school are doing all they can to support



At headteacher Moses Mtalika's Kanyindula Primary School, there is only one teacher for a class of 100 children. Photo: Watipaso Nungu/Christian Aid

their students to get a good education; from providing free meals so that children are learning on a full stomach to loaning neighbouring schools the few chairs they have so exams can be taken sitting down. But the challenges are beyond what one school can do.

Moses can see the role that debt is playing in robbing children of their education and their dreams.

"The government spends a lot of money on debt, while here in schools we have no books for teaching."

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Children in Malawi face crowded classrooms, often without desks and chairs. Kanyindula Primary School, West Malawi. Photo: Watipaso Nungu/Christian Aid.

Speak up on debt justice for Malawi so that children can head back to school and dream big!

Just less than half of Malawi's children complete primary school.

Only 15 per cent complete secondary school.

Benedeta Innocent, student

Benadeta Innocent also lives in the Mchinji District. She was forced to drop out of primary school as her family couldn't afford school essentials such as learning materials, as they struggled to meet their basic needs.

Leaving school had a significant emotional impact on Benedeta. Like many children facing similar circumstances, she began to lose hope in her future and believed her dreams of achieving a better life were no longer possible. With limited opportunities available to her, she faced an uncertain future.

Benadeta was eventually able to return to school after taking part in a programme run by Christian Aid partner Girls Empowerment Network. She says:

"I now believe that with determination and support, every girl can achieve her dreams regardless of the challenges she faces."

The Girls Empowerment Network has been transformative for Benadeta. Many other children in Malawi don't have this opportunity because debt repayments mean the Government is unable to support those who need it.

Pray

The start of a new school term is a great time to pray for children, teachers and parents in your community as well as around the world. Use these prayers and ideas to join prayer and action.

God of All
At the start of this new term, we thank you for lessons to be learned, games and fun at play time, and big dreams for the future.
We pray for every child in our community returning to school. Give them joy and confidence in their learning.
We pray for every teacher preparing lessons ready for young minds. Give them joy and grace in their classrooms.
We pray for children around the world who are missing out on school, fun and dreams because of unjust debt.
We pray for change.
Move our government to act for the common good
Move corporations to favour people, not profits.
May all children everywhere be able to go back to school.
Amen

Blessing of the backpacks – if you have children in your church, invite them to bring their backpacks to church as school starts. Ask them to bring their backpacks to the front of church and pray a blessing on them as they return to school. You can also include prayers for children around the world missing out on school due to unjust debt.

Blessing of the backpacks
For every backpack and every child
We pray joy, curiosity and big dreams
For every backpack and every child
We pray for friendship, laughter and fun
For every backpack and every child
We pray strong and eager minds ready to learn
And for every backpack and every child who can't go back to school
We pray transformation and change
For every backpack and every child who can't go back to school
We pray justice, liberation from unjust debt
For every backpack and every child who can't go back to school
We pray Governments and corporations that serve the common good
In the love of the Father, the caring parent
In the name of Jesus Christ, who was both child and teacher
In the power of the spirit who reveals truth
Amen

Share your dreams!

We'd love to know how you and your church have taken part in Back to School. Email us your photos and let us know.

campaigns@christian-aid.org

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