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# A Mandate Under Fiscal Strain

## An Assessment of the Government of Malawi's First Year

October 2025 - September 2026



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACB | Anti-Corruption Bureau |
| ACEM | Association of Christian Educators in Malawi |
| ACW | African Citizens Watch |
| ADMARC | Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation |
| AfDB | African Development Bank |
| CDF | Constituency Development Fund |
| CSTU | Civil Servants Trade Union |
| DDF | District Development Fund |
| DPP | Democratic Progressive Party |
| ECF | Extended Credit Facility |
| EGENCO | Electricity Generation Company (Malawi) |

| | |
|---|---|
| ESCOM | Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi |
| FCDA | Foreign Currency Denominated Account |
| FIA | Financial Intelligence Authority |
| FISP | Farm Input Subsidy Programme |
| GBA | Green Belt Authority |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HRF | Hospital Rehabilitation Fund |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| ID | Identification |
| IDF | Infrastructure Development Fund |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| JCE | Junior Certificate of Education |
| MACRA | Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority |
| MANEB | Malawi National Examinations Board |
| MaNEPS | Malawi National Electronic Procurement System |
| MAT | Minimum Alternate Tax |
| MBS | Malawi Bureau of Standards |
| MCP | Malawi Congress Party |
| MDAs | Ministries, Departments and Agencies |
| MEC | Malawi Electoral Commission |
| MEPA | Malawi Environment Protection Authority |
| MHC | Malawi Housing Corporation |
| MIS | Management Information System |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MPS | Malawi Police Service |
| MRA | Malawi Revenue Authority |
| MSCE | Malawi School Certificate of Education |
| MT | Metric Tonnes |
| MVAC | Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee |
| MWK | Malawi Kwacha |
| NRB | National Registration Bureau |
| OPEC Fund | Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development |
| ORT | Other Recurrent Transactions |
| PAYE | Pay As You Earn |
| RBM | Reserve Bank of Malawi |
| SOFF | Systematic Observations Financing Facility |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| US | United States |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| VAT | Value Added Tax |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WRF | Water Resources Fund |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the first assessment of the Government of Malawi's performance against the commitments set out in the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) 2025–2030 election manifesto, covering the first year since President Arthur Peter Mutharika's inauguration on 4 October 2025. It draws on the Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker, developed by SIVIO Institute under the African Citizens Watch (ACW) initiative, which records and verifies publicly reported government actions against 462 promises extracted from the manifesto and grouped into five (5) sectors: Economy, Governance, Corruption, Climate Change and Social Services.

Of the 462 promises tracked, the government has taken 52 recorded actions relating to 44 promises in this first year. While 43 promises are In Progress, one (1) has been assessed as Broken, and the remaining 418 - just over 90% of the promises - are Not Commenced. No promise has been fully Implemented yet. Taken together, these results produce an average assessment score of 9% across the manifesto as a whole, with wide variation between sectors: Corruption, the smallest sector by promise count, scores highest at 17%, followed by Governance at 11%, Climate Change at 10%, Economy at 3% and Social Services - the largest sector, accounting for 39% of all promises - at just 3%.

The government's early record is concentrated in actions that fall squarely within executive reach: monetary and fiscal measures such as the Domestic Revenue Mobilisation Strategy and a revised Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and Value Added Tax (VAT) structure; the reform and expansion of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to MWK5 billion per constituency; the relaunch of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP); the removal of secondary school and examination fees; a mandatory digital procurement system; and enforcement action against single-use plastics and industrial pollution. These measures demonstrate that government can move quickly where action requires only a directive, budget line, or ministerial decision. By contrast, the manifesto's larger, capital-intensive and legislative commitments - housing, water and sanitation infrastructure, teacher recruitment, decentralisation of powers to district authorities, judicial and prosecutorial independence reforms, and other major infrastructure - have for the most part not yet commenced.

One development stands out as a direct departure from a specific manifesto commitment. In February 2026, the government withdrew long-standing corruption cases against several senior officials, including a former Reserve Bank Governor and a former Finance Minister, shortly after each was reappointed or promoted, contrary to the pledge to pursue stalled state-capture prosecutions.

With a five-year term running to 2030, this first-year snapshot is not presented as a final verdict on the government's record. It is intended to establish an evidence-based baseline grounded in what has been publicly verified rather than what has been promised. It is against this baseline that citizens, civil society and government itself can track delivery over the remainder of the term. SIVIO Institute will continue to update the Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker and report on progress in subsequent years until the end of the term.



# An Assessment of the Government of Malawi's First Year

## October 2025 - September 2026

Tracking the performance and effectiveness of the government of Malawi based on the pledges made by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the manifesto and other important policy pronouncements.

**1**
YEAR

**462**
PROMISES

**52**
ACTIONS

**9%**
PROMISE FULFILMENT

**0**
IMPLEMENTED

**1**
BROKEN

**418**
NOT COMMENCED

**43**
IN PROGRESS

For more information, explore our Tracker:
www.africancitizenswatch.org/malawi

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## INTRODUCTION

This report provides an analysis of the Government of Malawi's performance in the first year since 4 October 2025, when President Arthur Peter Mutharika was sworn in for a second, non-consecutive term. The report is based on data collected using the Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker, a platform developed by SIVIO Institute that records actions undertaken by the government against the promises made in the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) 2025–2030 election manifesto (Democratic Progressive Party, 2025).

The DPP, led by Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika, won the 16 September 2025 general election with approximately 57% of the presidential vote (Africa Press, 2025a), defeating incumbent President Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), who polled around 33%. The result marked Mutharika's return to the presidency after his 2014–2020 term and followed a campaign dominated by public frustration over inflation, currency depreciation, fuel shortages, and the rising cost of living under the outgoing administration.

This report is the first in what SIVIO Institute intends to be a series of annual assessments of the new government's delivery on its manifesto commitments over its five-year term, which runs until 2030. It does not seek to make a final judgement on the DPP government's overall record, given that a term of this length allows considerable room for policies to mature; rather, it offers an evidence-based snapshot of what has and has not moved in the first year of office, so that citizens, civil society and government itself can track progress against stated commitments over time.

The African Citizens Watch (ACW) is an independent platform developed and deployed by SIVIO Institute to track the performance and effectiveness of African governments against the pledges made in election manifestos and other significant policy pronouncements. First piloted in Zimbabwe in 2018, the platform has since expanded to track the governments of Botswana, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia. Promises are captured and reported publicly and are categorised under five (5) sectors: Economy, Governance, Corruption, Climate Change, and Social Services.

The Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker is populated using promises drawn from the DPP's 2025 manifesto and is updated on an ongoing basis as the government undertakes actions relevant to those promises. At the beginning of the five-year term, we extracted 462 promises from the DPP manifesto, clustered into the five (5) sectors mentioned above. The sectors are also divided into sub-sectors under which the promises are recorded. Of the 462 promises captured on the Tracker, Social Services accounts for the largest share at 39% (178 promises), followed by Economy at 34% (156 promises), Governance at 21% (99 promises), Climate Change at 4% (19 promises), and Corruption at 2% (10 promises).

*Table 1: Manifesto Promises by Cluster*

| STATUS | NUMBER OF PROMISES | % |
|---|---|---|
| Economy | 156 | 34% |
| Social Services | 178 | 39% |
| Governance | 99 | 21% |
| Climate Change | 19 | 4% |
| Corruption | 10 | 2% |
| Total | 462 | 100% |

So far, 52 actions have been captured on the Tracker relating to 44 of those 462 promises. Each promise is assigned a status: (i) Not Commenced, (ii) In Progress, (iii) Implemented, (iv) Modified, or (v) Broken- the last being reserved for instances where government action runs directly counter to what was promised. Of the 462 promises, 43 have been recorded as In Progress, one (1) as Broken, and 418 as Not Commenced. None have been fully Implemented yet. This report provides details on these promises and corresponding actions.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### Malawi's 2025 General Election and the Return of the DPP

Malawi held general elections on 16 September 2025 against a backdrop of a deepening cost-of-living crisis. Under outgoing President Lazarus Chakwera, inflation had exceeded 20% for three consecutive years, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth had slowed to 2%, the Malawi Kwacha (MWK) had depreciated sharply, and the country experienced prolonged fuel and foreign-exchange shortages (World Bank, 2025). These conditions, compounded by a region-wide drought that devastated the 2023/24 harvest, dominated the campaign debate and were widely credited with driving voter turnout to 76.4% (Africa Press, 2025a) - the highest level since 2009, and 11.6 percentage points above the 2020 presidential poll.

President Arthur Peter Mutharika, who had previously served as President from 2014 to 2020, won with approximately 57% of the vote against Chakwera's 33%, avoiding a run-off under Malawi's 50%-plus-one threshold. Chakwera conceded on 24 September 2025 (J. Mwale, 2025b) despite MCP allegations of irregularities, and the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) subsequently confirmed that the DPP had also emerged as the largest single party in the National Assembly, with 77 of 229 seats.

President Mutharika was sworn in on 4 October 2025 at Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre, alongside his running mate Jane Ansah as First Vice-President. A week later, he appointed Enock Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy as Second Vice-President under the DPP's Blue Alliance coalition arrangement. In his inaugural address, President Mutharika acknowledged that his administration was inheriting what he described as a country in economic crisis, characterised by high borrowing, depleted public coffers and weakened institutions. He pledged fiscal discipline, zero tolerance for corruption, and institutional reform rather than easy promises (Botomani, 2025).

### The DPP Government's First Year

President Mutharika's second term began at a moment of institutional transition. Beyond the cabinet appointments and coalition arrangements described above, the government spent its opening months reversing several of the previous administration's decisions – including the relocation of statutory bodies discussed under Governance below – while operating through a National Assembly in which the DPP, though the largest single party with 77 of 229 seats, governs without an outright majority even with the Blue Alliance coalition arrangement. This configuration has shaped the pace of action across the reporting period, as the Findings section shows in detail. Promises achievable through executive directive or budget allocation have moved considerably faster than those requiring new legislation or National Assembly approval.

Economically, the new government inherited not only the debt and inflation legacy documented above but also a stalled relationship with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The previous administration's four-year, USD174 million Extended Credit Facility (ECF), which was approved in November 2023, was terminated in May 2025 after only USD35 million had been disbursed (C. Phiri, 2025). The IMF concluded that the programme had been unable to restore macroeconomic stability amid inflation above 30%, persistent foreign-exchange shortages and unsustainable external debt. In the period under review, the government has focused on monetary and fiscal tightening measures. Domestic revenue collection has improved through the widening of the tax base, although the country remains in debt distress with public debt going as high as 90% of GDP (Reuters, 2026; Bridgepath Capital, 2026). Domestic debt accounts for 65% of this debt problem. The government has worked on expenditure reduction through the cost-cutting measures introduced in November 2025 (Nyasa Times, 2025a). Malawi has continued to face foreign currency (forex) shortages in the reporting period, with an overvalued official exchange rate of USD1:MWK1,751 against a parallel market rate that is more than double the official exchange rate (Bridgepath Capital, 2026).

Citizens have not been spared from the effects of these difficult economic conditions during the reporting period. According to the Centre for Social Concern (2026), the cost of living rose by 46% between January 2025 and January 2026. A series of fuel price hikes effected between October 2025 and July 2026 in turn pushed up commodity prices across the country (G. Phiri, 2025; Nsanama, 2026; Jegwa, 2026). The government imported maize from Zambia between October and December 2025 as one way of easing the food crisis in the country. Although food insecurity dropped by 35% in this period, the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment

Committee (MVAC) report still projects that 2.6 million people will face food shortages in the 2026/27 lean season (Chauwa, 2026b). The country has also continued to suffer the impact of foreign-aid cuts, mostly felt in the health sector, which depends heavily on donor funding (Williams, 2026). Overall, this first year has been characterised by economic and social challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

This assessment is based on the real-time tracking, verification and classification of actions undertaken by the Government of Malawi. The Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker records and scores these government actions relating to promises extracted from the DPP Manifesto. The Tracker is built on the 462 policy promises as extracted from the manifesto and categorised into five sectors: Economy, Governance, Corruption, Climate Change and Social Services.

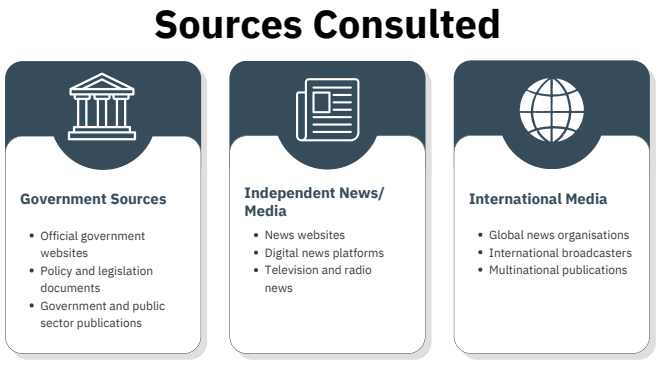
Each promise is assigned one of five statuses as government actions relevant to it are identified and verified:

- **Not Commenced** - there has been no discernible movement towards fulfilling the promise.
- **In Progress** - action has started but is not yet comprehensive; further steps are required for full implementation.
- **Implemented** - government action has fully and comprehensively addressed the promise.
- **Modified** - government has, due to changed circumstances, amended the promise while retaining the same underlying goal.
- **Broken** - government action has gone directly against what was originally promised.

Actions are captured from a range of published sources, including government communications, budget documentation, parliamentary records, regulatory notices, and credible online media (see Figure 1). As with all previous ACW reports, the Tracker records only publicly reported developments; where government has taken action that has not been publicised, the Tracker will not reflect it. This methodology helps to ensure objectivity, transparency, and consistency in tracking and reporting.

Actions captured and recorded in this report were published by the sources detailed below:

*Figure 1: Overview of Sources Used to Track the Promises*




The Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker employs a rigorous verification process. All recorded actions are triangulated and fact-checked using multiple independent sources before being included in the Tracker. This process helps ensure that assessments are evidence-based, accurate, and grounded in publicly verifiable information. Where necessary, additional documentary evidence is reviewed to confirm the existence, status, and implementation progress of specific commitments.

In evaluating the extent to which government has progressed towards fulfilling its commitments, each promise is tracked through a series of action-level indicators and assessed using a structured scoring framework, outlined in Table 2, that measures both the substance and quality of government action.

*Table 2: Overview of Promise Assessment*

| STATUS | DESCRIPTION | SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| Implemented | Promise fully delivered as stated in the commitment | 14 |
| In Progress | Measurable progress has been made, but implementation remains incomplete | 1-13 |
| Modified | Measurable progress has been made against the revised promise | 1-13 |
| Broken | Commitment has been abandoned/ contradicted | 0 |
| Not Commenced | No meaningful action taken | 0 |

The scoring process is guided by four (4) key dimensions:

1. Policy and Legal Framework in place to support implementation
2. Allocation of sufficient financial resources to allow for implementation
3. Human Resource: whether there is a line ministry or agency responsible and collaboration across ministries
4. Implementation Progress: actions implemented within planned timelines and whether tangible progress has been made

This provides a good basis for assessing the extent, quality and sustainability of government actions beyond the number of actions taken.

Specifically, the scoring process answers the following questions in allocating the scores to each government action as it relates to a promise (see Table 3).

*Table 3: The Scoring Framework*

| ASSESSMENT INDICATOR | SCORE |
|---|---|
| New strategy or programme introduced | 1 |
| Positive policy reform implemented or restrictive policy barriers removed | 2 |
| Existing legal framework supports implementation or new legislation enacted | 1 |
| Budget allocation made | 1 |
| Responsible institution established or strengthened | 1 |
| Cross-ministry or agency colleaboration established | 1 |
| Implementation progressing within planned timelines | 2 |
| Tangible implementation outcomes achieved | 5 |
| **Maximum Score** | **14** |

## FINDINGS: WHAT HAS GOVERNMENT ACHIEVED?

This section unpacks the progress made by the Government of Malawi in fulfilling the 462 promises outlined in the DPP's 2025 manifesto. Since President Mutharika's inauguration, 52 actions relevant to 44 promises have been recorded across the five (5) tracked sectors. No promise has yet been assessed as fully "Implemented"; 43 promises are "In Progress"; one has been classified as "Broken"; and the remaining 418 remain "Not Commenced". The assessment finds that the DPP has achieved a score of 9% in its first year of office. Table 4 below summarises performance by sector.

Comparing each sector's total promises against its scores as presented in the table above reveals how disproportionately government attention has been distributed in the reporting period. In the Economy sector, the government has recorded progress on 10 of its 156 promises and has yet to start work on the other 146 promises. The Economy sector achieved an assessment score of 3%. The Social Services sector also achieved an assessment score of 3%, with 10 promises out of the 178 having recorded progress, leaving 168 promises as Not Commenced. Governance achieved an assessment score of 11%, with 15 promises having recorded progress, leaving 84 promises Not Commenced. Corruption, the smallest sector, achieved a score of 17%, with four (4) promises having progress recorded, while one (1) promise was Broken and five (5) promises remained Not Commenced. Climate Change, also a small sector regarding the number of commitments made, achieved an assessment score of 10%, with four (4) promises In Progress while 15 are Not Commenced.

The sections below provide detailed information and analysis on the government's performance in each sector.

*Table 4: Overview of Progress Across Sectors*

| Sector | Promises | Actions | Number of Promises | | | | | Assessment Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Not Commenced | In Progress | Implemented | Broken | Modified | |
| Economy | 156 | 12 | 146 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3% |
| Governance | 99 | 20 | 84 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11% |
| Corruption | 10 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 17% |
| Climate Change | 19 | 4 | 15 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10% |
| Social Services | 178 | 10 | 168 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3% |
| **Total** | **462** | **52** | **418** | **43** | **0** | **1** | **0** | **9%** |

## Economy

The Economy sector accounts for 34% (156) of the 462 promises captured on the Tracker. In this first year, 10 promises are classified as In Progress, and 146 remain at the Not Commenced stage. The overall assessment score for Economy is 3%. This reflects the limited actions that have been undertaken by the government towards the promises made under this sector. A total of 12 actions have been recorded in the sector during the period under review. Eight (8) actions have been recorded in the Financial Management sub-sector, with the Agriculture and Rural Development sub-sector recording two (2) actions, while the Trade and Energy sub-sectors recorded one (1) action each. No actions have been recorded in six (6) of the 10 sub-sectors in this first year (see Table 5). The table shows that most of the government's focus under Economy in this first year has been on managing the financial situation, given the tight budget it inherited. Many of the recorded actions have had to do with cost-cutting and not necessarily bringing in more money. The progress made in this sector, however, has a great bearing on the extent to which many of the manifesto promises can be fulfilled because most of them depend on the availability of financial resources.

*Table 5: Overview of Economy Sector Performance*

| Sub-sector | Promises | Actions | Assessment Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Financial Management | 26 | 8 | 14% |
| Agriculture and Rural Development | 32 | 2 | 2% |
| Mining | 9 | 0 | 0% |
| Trade | 5 | 1 | 11% |
| Transport and Infrastructural Development | 30 | 0 | 0% |
| Energy | 15 | 1 | 4% |
| Job Creation | 6 | 0 | 0% |
| Tourism | 9 | 0 | 0% |
| Industry and Commerce | 18 | 0 | 0% |
| Information and Communication Technology (ICT) | 6 | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **156** | **12** | **3%** |

The DPP manifesto's economic pledges centre on macroeconomic stabilisation - taming inflation, defending the exchange rate, containing government borrowing - alongside a long list of structural commitments on agriculture, energy, mining, trade and digital infrastructure. The earliest and most consistent activities have come through the Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM) taking a series of monetary tightening steps: In line with its promise to contain the Reserve Bank's net lending to the government, the RBM rejected Treasury bill bids (Mtemang'ombe, 2026b) on several occasions in the period under review, reducing government borrowing.

In relation to the promise to bring down inflation to single digits, the government was able to make progress towards this by taking actions that helped bring down food inflation. In October 2025, the government arranged to purchase 200,000 metric tonnes (MT) of maize from neighbouring Zambia, and it was delivered in December of the same year (Nyasa Times, 2025b). This arrangement increased the supply of maize, Malawi's staple food, on the market, which contributed to a reduction in maize prices. This contributed significantly to a drop in the country's food inflation (Banda, 2026a), leading to a drop in the country's year-on-year inflation to 24.9% in January 2026 from 26% in December 2025. Another promise made towards financial management was to rationalise fiscal expenditure and stop implementation of non-budget activities. Two (2) actions were recorded; first, the RBM responded by suspending non-essential procurement in October 2025 (Chimjeka, 2025). In the same vein, the President also announced a limitation to ministerial travel to one (1) trip per month (Dumbula, 2026) as one way of reducing government spending.

In February 2026, the government moved to reverse restrictive exchange-control rules by introducing dedicated bank accounts for Malawians in the diaspora, a partial step towards the manifesto's pledge to reverse all the negative exchange control regulations on Foreign Currency Denominated Accounts (FCDAs) belonging to Non-Governmental Organisations, Foreign missions and Malawians in Diaspora in 6 months (Mzungu, 2026). The new diaspora accounts reverse only one strand of the restrictive FCDA rules introduced under the previous administration; the manifesto's broader commitment to liberalise foreign-currency holdings for resident businesses and individuals has not yet been addressed, leaving Malawi's

parallel foreign-exchange market pressures largely unresolved a year into the new administration.

The government also began implementing its Domestic Revenue Mobilisation Strategy in December 2025, aimed at widening the tax base in line with the manifesto's target of raising domestic revenue by five percentage points of GDP by 2030. This involved an amendment to the Taxation Act in December 2025, administered by the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), to include an increase in the Value Added Tax (VAT) from 16.5% to 17.5%, while the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) tax-free bracket was increased to MWK170,000 per month as a way of shielding the low-income earners, the 25% bracket was removed and a 40% PAYE tax bracket introduced for those earning more than MWK10 million (Malawi Revenue Authority, 2025). This resulted in an increase in domestic revenue collection by the MRA, but the question remains as to the distribution of this revenue to the various sectors of the economy. The mid-year tax package embedded in this tightening cycle produced a real fiscal dividend – domestic revenue beat its 2025/26 mid-year target by MWK67.3 billion (Government of Malawi, 2026a) – but debt service is projected to absorb roughly 45% of the total projected 2026/27 tax revenue, and the VAT increase falls hardest on lower- and middle-income households already facing inflation above 20% (see Text Box 1). The same austerity logic shaped the 2026/27 national budget: Parliament approved an MWK11 trillion budget (Mtemang'ombe, 2026c) largely as tabled, rejecting parliamentary committees' request for an additional MWK2.3 trillion. The pattern across both measures is consistent: government is willing to raise revenue and hold the line on spending, but has not yet demonstrated, in a form verifiable to citizens, that the proceeds are reaching services rather than debt repayment.

On agriculture, the government reintroduced and launched the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) for the 2025/26 farming season in November 2025 (Kayo, 2025), a step towards the manifesto's pledge to ensure timely access to quality, affordable farm inputs for all farmers by improving supply chains, developing a fertiliser plant, and reforming the FISP to better support capable smallholder maize farmers to enhance sustainable food security in Malawi. The broader commitments to build a fertiliser plant and overhaul agricultural supply chains have not yet commenced. Further to the same promise, Viano (2026b) also reports that the government introduced new reforms for FISP in July 2026, particularly in the areas of beneficiary identification and coupon redemption oversight. These reforms transfer such powers from local authorities to farmers' organisations in a bid to close the loopholes that previously tainted these processes. The FISP relaunch has since been accompanied by a sharp contraction in scale: for the 2026/27 season, the government has said it will target 610,931 beneficiaries, roughly half of prior programme numbers, while reverting to paper coupons with security features to curb the fraud that affected the mobile-based e-voucher system, and shifting implementation from local authorities to farmers' organisations (Viano, 2026b). Possible challenges raised include the risk of excluding smallholders who are not members of any farmers' organisation and the reduced beneficiary count as a departure from FISP's original poverty-reduction purpose.

On energy, the manifesto's commitment to maintain and rehabilitate Electricity Generation Company (EGENCO)'s hydropower fleet registered its first concrete action in December 2025, when the government secured USD22.9 million from the African Development Bank (AfDB) towards rehabilitating the Kapichira and Nkula B power stations (African Development Bank, 2025). The AfDB-financed rehabilitation of Kapichira and Nkula B addresses only part of the manifesto's energy pledge; the wider commitments to expand transmission capacity, build regional interconnectors with Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania, and add new generation capacity toward a 1,500MW target remain Not Commenced.

In the trade sub-sector, regarding value addition, the government pledged to increase manufactured exports and reduce raw mineral exports. Towards this promise, the government banned the export of raw minerals in October 2025 (Africa Press Agency, 2025), though the wider mining value chain and beneficiation promises remain untouched. Despite this, concerns were raised in August 2026 over the mining of rare earth minerals at the Kangankunde mining site, as it appears that the presidential directive did not address the loophole of mineral exportation under the guise of sample testing (Nyasa Times, 2026d). The concerns have also been in line with the licensing category that leaves room for underreporting of the actual magnitude of mining activity at this mine and the potential benefits that the country could have realised from this activity that go unreported (Nzangaya,

2026a). These concerns were raised during a parliamentary session on 4 August 2026. Three days later, on 7 August 2026, after the parliamentary export-tracking concerns already noted above, the Minister of Mining stated that the mine had been cleared of allegations of illegal exports following the parliamentary scrutiny (Nyasa Times, 2026e). The sequence – a parliamentary finding that raw-mineral export volumes could not be independently verified, followed within days by a ministerial clearance – illustrates the accountability gap that the manifesto's raw-mineral export ban was meant to close: the licensing and reporting framework around Malawi's flagship rare-earth project still does not allow the public to verify what is actually leaving the country, or on what terms.

The large majority of Economy promises - covering road, rail, port and airport infrastructure, Special Economic Zones, the recapitalisation of the Malawi Mining Investment Company, industrial clusters, tourism hubs, ICT and artificial-intelligence initiatives, and the bulk of the manifesto's debt-management and fiscal-consolidation commitments, including the pledge to attain a positive primary balance of at least MWK270 billion by the end of the first fiscal year – have not yet commenced. The manifesto's most capital-intensive commitments, including the Special Economic Zones, the new Mzuzu international airport, and the wider MWK6.35 trillion investment programme, require either external financing or a fiscal position that current austerity measures have not yet created. Whether the IMF ECF negotiations referenced in the manifesto's own framing progress far enough to unlock that financing will likely determine how much of this list moves in year two.

*Textbox 1*

## INCREASED DOMESTIC FINANCING OR INCREASED CITIZEN BURDEN?

### Context

In November 2025, the government introduced a package of revenue measures during the 2025/26 Mid-Year Budget Review, citing the need to widen the domestic tax base and address a growing fiscal deficit. The measures took effect against a backdrop of high inflation (29% in 2025, down only marginally from 32% in 2024), a public debt stock that had reached 93% of GDP by end-December 2025, and a domestic borrowing burden that continues to crowd out development spending. The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralisation presented the results of these measures in the 2026/27 Financial Statement, which records a marked improvement in domestic revenue performance in the six (6) months following implementation.

### What Changed: Summary of the Tax Package

The mid-year measures altered four main areas of the tax code:

| Measure | Before | After | Stated Retional |
|---|---|---|---|
| VAT | 16.5% | 17.5% | Broaden the consumption tax base and raise short-term revenue |
| PAYE tax-free threshold | Lower threshold, old 25% band | Tax-free up to MWK170,000/month; 25% band removed | Shield low-income earners from income tax |
| PAYE top band | Lower top marginal rate | 40% on income above MWK10 million/month | Increase progressivity at the top of the income distribution |
| Money transfer levy | None | 0.05% on money transfers | Capture revenue from the growing mobile-money and transfer economy |

| Measure | Before | After | Stated Retional |
|---|---|---|---|
| Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) | None | 0.5% of total company sales, irrespective of profit | Ensure loss-declaring firms still contribute to revenue |
| Super-profit tax threshold | Applied above MWK10 billion turnover | Applied above MWK5 billion turnover | Widen the pool of large firms subject to the super-profit levy |

*Source: Government of Malawi, 2026b; Malawi Revenue Authority, 2025*

The revised PAYE structure is worth spelling out because its distributional effect is not uniform. Income up to MWK170,000 (about USD98[1]) is now tax-free. Income between MWK170,000 (USD98) and MWK1.57 million (USD900) is taxed at 30%. Income between MWK1.57 million (USD900) and MWK10 million (USD5,737) is taxed at 35%. Income above MWK10 million (USD5,737) is taxed at 40%, up from a lower top rate previously. In practice, this means the lowest earners gain a small amount of relief, while middle-income earners face a slightly heavier burden than before because the old 25% band was removed. The highest earners face a materially higher tax bill.

**The Fiscal Case**

As presented in the 2026-27 Budget Policy Statement (Government of Malawi, 2026a)

- Domestic revenue beat its 2025/26 mid-year target by MWK67.3 billion (MWK4,545.1 billion vs MWK4,477.8 billion), directly attributed to the new measures.
- 2026/27 domestic revenue is projected at MWK6,454.0 billion, a 42% jump from mid-year 2025/26 outturn (MWK4,545.1 billion); tax revenue alone up 43.3%.
- The 2026/27 deficit narrows modestly to MWK2,852.5 billion, easing (slightly) reliance on domestic borrowing, which had pushed domestic debt to MWK16.01 trillion (61.3% of GDP) by end-December 2025.

**The Catch**

- Debt service still swallows about 45% of projected 2026/27 tax revenue at MWK2,792.7 billion (Government of Malawi, 2026a ) -– much of the new money has not reached services.
- VAT and the transfer levy are consumption taxes: their burden falls hardest on lower- and middle-income households already facing 20% to 28% inflation.
- Removing the old 25% PAYE band means many middle earners now sit in the 30% band, a net squeeze despite headline 'relief' framing.
- MAT (0.5% of turnover, regardless of profit) and a lower super-profit threshold (MWK10 billion → MWK5 billion) drew business-community warnings of reduced investment and possible job losses.

Whether this becomes durable domestic financing or simply a heavier citizen burden hinges on two (2) things not yet visible in the budget: whether new revenue is actually redirected to services rather than debt service, and whether MRA compliance capacity improves enough that citizens are not paying more without government collecting proportionally more.

[1] USD/MWK1743.4 US Dollar (USD) to Malawi Kwacha (MWK) 2025 Historical Exchange Rates

### Governance

The Governance sector accounts for 21% of the 462 promises captured on the Tracker, with 99 individual promises. In the first year since inauguration, 20 actions were recorded related to 15 of the sector's 99 promises. Of the 99 total promises under this sector, 15 are classified as In Progress, while 84 remain at the Not Commenced stage. The overall score under this sector is 11%. Progress has been recorded in eight (8) of the 11 sub-sectors under Governance.

*Table 6: Overview of Governance Sector Performance*

| Sub-sector | Promises | Actions | Assessment Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Administration | 16 | 3 | 11% |
| Rule of Law | 11 | 0 | 0% |
| National Security | 14 | 0 | 0% |
| Foreign Policy | 8 | 1 | 8% |
| Cost Cutting | 7 | 5 | 17% |
| Transparency and Accountability | 12 | 4 | 15% |
| Decentralisation/Local Governance | 8 | 2 | 8% |
| Women Empowerment | 4 | 1 | 16% |
| Justice for all | 4 | 0 | 0% |
| Information and Communication Technology (ICT) | 4 | 2 | 32% |
| Nation Building | 11 | 2 | 11% |
| **Total** | **99** | **20** | **11%** |

The governance sector registered the third-highest concentration of activity. One of the key government commitments under governance was the reform of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). In March 2026, the government reformed the CDF (J. Mwale, 2026c) to include what were previously stand-alone funds such as the District Development Fund (DDF), Water Resources Fund (WRF), Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF), and Hospital Rehabilitation Fund (HRF). This means that all development initiatives that fell under these individual funds are now housed within the CDF. The government enacted this as a new legal framework for the CDF in April 2026, setting out new guidelines governing its implementation (Chimjeka, 2026). This directly addresses the manifesto's pledge to depoliticise the CDF and bring resources closer to citizens. In the 2026/27 national budget, the government has increased the CDF allocation to each constituency from MWK200 million to MWK5 billion per financial year. Alongside this, the government provided for a further MWK100 million per constituency towards women's economic empowerment initiatives under the reformed CDF guidelines in April 2026 (Government of Malawi, 2026c). In September 2026, the government reported that it had disbursed a total of MWK85.5 billion to local councils under the CDF (Viano, 2026c). Most councils are yet to confirm receipt of this disbursement. While the legal framework and new CDF guidelines provide a good start towards implementation of these promises, the budget allocation recorded here is yet to be verified by the actual funds received by the District Councils as well as development works in the constituencies.

The government promised to review civil service structure and composition so as to reduce unnecessary expenditure while improving efficiency. This promise was acted on in December 2025, when the government initiated an audit of all government employees in all ministries and departments, which included each civil servant presenting themselves physically for verification of their existence as well as their qualifications and proof of employment (Media Forum for Effective Governance, 2025). This exercise helped to identify some of the irregularities existing in the civil service structure, including the inclusion of some names on the payroll that did not exist in real life as well as some civil servants without proper credentials for the positions they held (Nyasa Times, 2026c). So far, the government has been able to identify 298 ghost workers and remove them from the payroll (Chilemba & Mhango, 2026). Another action recorded under the promise to review civil service structure came in February 2026 when the government reduced the number of Principal Secretaries under Malawi's ministries from 80 to 38 as one way of cutting the government wage bill (Njiragoma, 2026a).

The government also pledged to improve remuneration of all civil servants by aligning salaries to the cost of living, following recent waves of devaluation and increased inflation. Progress towards this pledge was recorded when the government, in consultation with the Civil Servants Trade Union (CSTU), negotiated and agreed on a salary adjustment for civil servants in April 2026 (Viano, 2026a). This adjustment saw

those in the lowest pay grade getting a 20% increase, while those in the highest salary bracket got a 10% pay increase. Leave grants were adjusted by 25%. The question remains, however, as to how an average increment of less than 20% aligns with the cost of living that surged by 46% between January 2025 and January 2026 (Centre for Social Concern, 2026), taking into account the VAT increase and PAYE bracket changes introduced in the same period.

Another promise made regarding the civil service was to promote all deserving career civil servants whose opportunities for career advancement have been thwarted by external forces. In August 2026, the government announced that it had promoted 310 government officials to leadership positions within the civil service, and this was not only to fill leadership gaps but also as a way of rewarding and motivating the employees (Meki, 2026).

On transparency, the government promised to establish robust accountability mechanisms, such as audits, citizen feedback systems, and independent oversight bodies, to ensure that local governments are responsive to their constituencies. In February 2026, the government introduced a toll-free citizen feedback line to promote anonymous reporting of any corrupt practices (Mlajira, 2026). Another promise was to digitalise and streamline land registration processes to eliminate corruption and reduce disputes. The government launched a two-month land-ownership audit exercise in February 2026 as a first step towards digitalising land registration and enhancing transparency in land issues (Njiragoma, 2026b). According to the Minister's speech in Parliament on 12 August 2026, this audit exercise was conducted in two areas (Area 3 and Area 10 in Lilongwe City), and it revealed a number of irregularities such as mismanagement and missing land records, allocation of plots without using proper channels and developments in reserved areas, among others. Following the results of this exercise, the Ministry of Lands has set out several actions that it plans to take to address the discovered issues of concern, including penalising identified offenders (Chipungu, 2026). The toll-free reporting line and land-audit exercise extend the government's transparency agenda into citizen-facing channels.

Another promise made under the governance sector was to reform existing service delivery processes and ensure that at least 70% of government services will be available online and AI-optimized for efficiency and transparency. As one step towards this promise, the Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS) moved its Management Information System (MIS) online in May 2026 (Njiragoma, 2026c). The MIS allows businesses to track applications, laboratory results, and certification processes online. It is expected that with this system, stakeholders will no longer have issues with the reliability of standards in terms of the time it takes for them to get their test results and to be certified. With this system, businesses can access all this information digitally from their offices or smartphones using this link www.mis-mbsmw.org.

In line with the promise to strengthen legal compliance and accountability across government operations, President Mutharika established a good governance unit in December 2025 as one way of strengthening governance in public institutions (J. Mwale, 2025a). This unit is meant to provide oversight over all government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), making sure that public resources are protected, the rule of law is upheld and that these MDAs serve the citizens of Malawi efficiently and without favouritism. The unit is expected to work with the Treasury as well as all MDAs and local councils in tightening fiscal controls and procurement loopholes (J. Mwale, 2025a).

Another promise made in the manifesto was to reverse the previous administration's decision to relocate several statutory bodies - including the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority, Malawi Housing Corporation, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Prison Services and the National Statistical Office - back to the southern region. In the first month of office, President Mutharika gave the directive that the headquarters of the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) return to Blantyre, while the Malawi Prison Service headquarters should revert to Zomba (Kasanda, 2025). MACRA, MHC and Malawi Prison Service obeyed this directive and immediately relocated their headquarters to Blantyre and Zomba as directed. MEC, however, has been contesting this directive in court since then and is yet to relocate its headquarters from Lilongwe (Nation Online, 2026b).

The government also moved to digitse the government-issued identity credentials in line with its promise to ensure that every Malawian will have access to a digital ID, which will be fully interoperable with social services, health records, education, mobile money, and agriculture

systems. In September 2026, the National Registration Bureau (NRB) launched the Nzika Digital ID wallet which now holds one's National ID, birth certificate as well as marriage certificate once registered (Njiragoma, 2026d). This enables citizens to store and access their identity credentials on their phones without having to carry their physical documents around. In addition, the government announced that all new IDs will no longer have expiry dates.

The remaining 84 Governance promises - including reforms to the Local Government Act, decentralisation of powers and resources to district authorities, judicial and prosecutorial independence reforms, expansion of broadband access, and the bulk of foreign-service and defence-related commitments - have not yet commenced.

### Corruption

The Corruption sector accounts for 2% (10) of the 462 total promises captured on the Tracker. In the first year since inauguration, the sector recorded six (6) actions relating to five (5) of its promises. Of the sector's five (5) promises with recorded activity, four (4) are In Progress and one (1) is Broken, meaning exactly half of the sector's 10 promises have generated some form of recorded action in the reporting period – a considerably higher "movement rate" than any other sector, even though this reflects only six (6) actions in absolute terms.

The sector achieved an overall score of 17% (see Table 7), the highest of all sectors, taking into consideration also that it houses the fewest promises from the manifesto. This is the highest score proportionate to the number of actions and level of activity in this specific sector; however, this is not necessarily to say that the government is doing more to address corruption as compared to addressing economic or social issues.

*Table 7: Overview of Corruption Sector Performance*

| Sub-sector | Promises | Actions | Assessment Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Corruption | 10 | 6 | 17% |

One of the promises made in response to dealing with corruption was to roll out deliberate systems that will eliminate the opportunity of corruption, such as digital management systems in all places of public service delivery to reduce discretion and human interaction. In line with this promise, the government moved to make the Malawi National Electronic Procurement System (MaNEPS) mandatory for all public procurements in April 2026 (Nation Online, 2026a; Chiputula, 2026). Although this system had been in existence since 2024, it was treated as optional, with most procurement processes still taking place offline. The government's move to make this e-procurement system mandatory for all public procurement moves the needle towards eliminating opportunities for backdoor deals in government institutions by enhancing transparency of said processes. This e-procurement system is accessible on www.maneps.mw, and it covers roughly 70% of the national budget by value.

The DPP government made a promise to conduct rigorous lifestyle audits, real-time audits of critical projects and procurement deals as well as ensuring improved vetting procedures in relation to public contracts. In May 2026, an audit of procurement processes in one of the government-owned enterprises led to the suspension of the finance chief of the Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi (ESCOM) over an MWK8 billion tyre-procurement deal, an action linked to this promise (J. Mwale, 2026d). This followed the handling of a tyre purchase deal where a multi-supplier framework agreement was instead awarded in full to a single vendor, a company that was separately facing tax-evasion charges at the time of the award (Kwilimba, 2026), in quantities so large that some stock is expected to expire before it can be used (Nyasa Times, 2026a). Although this one suspension is not sufficient to warrant a status of "promise Implemented", it shows the direction of progress and the results that can be achieved if audits of procurement processes and government officials' lifestyles are done properly and in a timely manner.

On asset recovery, the government promised to prioritise recovery of funds from perpetrators of corruption and financial crimes against the State. In February 2026, the government, through the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA), seized MWK9 billion (Matonga, 2026). This sits within a larger asset-recovery effort tied to the Green Belt Authority (GBA) scandal, in which prosecutors allege roughly MWK36.7 billion was siphoned through falsified certificates and bypassed performance bonds between March and July 2025. The funds, frozen in February 2026, were traced across 16 accounts at seven (7) banks (W. Mwale, 2026), following testimony from six (6) FIA officers. Although the full amount of funds

embezzled through this GBA corruption scandal has not been recovered, the seizure of the MWK9 billion helps to provide room for the government to recover it when investigations are finalised. In July 2026, the government, through the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralisation, gazetted the Financial Crimes (Confiscation Fund) Regulations that will guide the administration of the Confiscation Fund (Nyasulu, 2026). This is a fund held under the FIA that houses money recovered from financial crimes. This fund, though it has been in existence since 2017, lacked guiding principles on how the money is to be managed and used. The issuance of these regulations is a move by the government in prioritising the recovery and reuse of embezzled funds.

On the other hand, the government promised to enhance corruption education and preventive measures as they are cheaper than investigation and prosecution of corruption. In this regard, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) reinstating asset vetting and clearance for all property transfers in November 2025 counts as a preventive measure against corrupt asset transfers (Malawi24, 2025).

The ACB action concerns vetting of vehicle, land and property ownership transfers – a mechanism that had been suspended in August 2021 and now is reinstated under the Corrupt Practices Act.

Set against this, one promise has been classified as Broken: the manifesto's commitment to ensure investigations and prosecution of all corruption cases that have stalled during the past five years, especially those involving state captors. In February 2026, the government withdrew criminal cases against several senior government officials, a decision that directly counters that pledge (Banda, 2026b). The accused - including former Reserve Bank Governor Dalitso Kabambe, Finance Minister Joseph Mwanamvekha and Treasury Secretary Cliff Chiunda, among others - were each reappointed or promoted to senior government positions in the months before the cases against them were discontinued (Mtika, 2026a). The Malawi Law Society has since called for mandatory court review of the Director of Public Prosecutions' discontinuance decisions.

The remaining five (5) corruption promises - covering police investigative capacity, the technical and financial capacitation of the ACB and FIA, and public and school-based anti-corruption education - remain Not Commenced.

*Textbox 2*

## A BROKEN PROMISE IN PROSECUTING THE PAST - CASES DROPPED AGAINST REAPPOINTED OFFICIALS

### Context

The DPP government pledged to pursue stalled corruption cases as part of the new administration's accountability agenda. That promise came under strain almost immediately after the new administration began. The government, through the Attorney General, began to drop some corruption cases. The cases in question were opened under the previous administration and were framed publicly as anti-corruption efforts, though critics at the time alleged they doubled as tools of political marginalisation against DPP-aligned figures. That contested origin made the cases politically loaded from the start and made their fate after the 2025 election a test of whether prosecutions in Malawi track evidence or track power.

### Actions Taken by Government

- Reappointments preceded the discontinuance. Several of the accused returned to senior office in the months after the election and the discontinuances followed in February 2026 - after, not before, these appointments.

- The Director of Public Prosecutions discontinued the cases on 11 February, 2026. The prosecutor's discontinuance letter lifted bail conditions for six (6) accused senior government officials (Banda, 2026b). The underlying charges were abuse of office and financial mismanagement tied to two matters: the handling of MWK6.2 billion in COVID-19 relief funds, and allegations that false information was given to the IMF regarding a USD350 million Afreximbank facility that prosecutors said was drawn down without parliamentary approval and not properly disclosed to the Fund. A related prosecution, over MWK4.6 billion in ESCOM procurement irregularities dating to 2017 was discontinued in the same period.
- Court documents show the Attorney General directed the decision. Reporting on the case file indicates the Director of Public Prosecution acted "on the direct instruction of the Attorney General" - meaning the executive branch, not independent prosecutorial judgment, ended cases involving an alleged misappropriation of funds and USD350 million in unauthorised spending. When asked to justify the decision, the Director of Public Prosecutions did not offer a substantive defence and referred questions to the Ministry of Justice's public relations office (Mtika, 2026b).
- The formal oversight mechanism has not been used as a check. Malawian law requires the Director of Public Prosecutions to submit discontinuance justifications to Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee within 10 days; that report remains undisclosed. The state has reserved the right to revive the cases within six (6) months if "new and substantial evidence" emerges, but no such review process has been made public yet.

**Implications for the Fight Against Corruption**

- Prosecutorial independence is now a live constitutional question, not an abstract one. Section 99 of Malawi's Constitution gives the Director of Public Prosecutions broad authority to discontinue proceedings at any stage before judgment - a power meant to protect prosecutorial independence from political pressure. An Attorney-General-instructed discontinuance inverts that logic: it uses the same provision as a channel for executive control rather than a shield against it.
- The timing pattern damages the credibility of enforcement even if each individual step can be defended. Officials returning to senior office shortly before their cases were dropped does not, on its own, prove the two are causally linked. Some of this reflects the ordinary reshuffling that follows any change of government. However, the sequence is close enough, and the amounts involved are large enough (MWK6.2 billion, MWK4.6 billion and USD350 million), that it reads to the public as cases being resolved by rank rather than by evidence.
- It complicates Malawi's position with the IMF at a sensitive moment. The Fund has made strengthened governance and anti-corruption action a condition for future support, after cancelling the prior USD174 million programme. The specific cases dropped concern alleged deception of the IMF itself (Mtika, 2026a) - meaning officials who allegedly misrepresented data to the Fund are now among those representing Malawi in talks to secure a new programme with it. That is a harder credibility gap to close than a generic governance criticism; it goes to whether the counterparties across the table can be trusted on the specific issue under negotiation.

### Climate Change

The Climate Change sector accounts for 4% of the 462 promises captured on the Tracker, with 19 promises. In this first year, four (4) promises are classified as In Progress, and 15 remain at the Not Commenced stage. No promises under this sector have been Broken or fully Implemented. The overall assessment score for Climate Change is 10%. At 19 promises, Climate Change is the second-smallest sector after Corruption, and its comparatively high 10% score warrants the same small-sample caution applied to Corruption above. Having four (4) of 19 promises recording activity makes Climate Change the sector with the second-highest activity (number of actions compared to promises in the sector) after Corruption. On paper, Climate Change is therefore the second-most active sector this year even though it accounts for just 4% of the 462 total manifesto promises – a pattern consistent with the sector's disproportionately high share of total actions relative to its promise share.

*Table 8: Overview of Climate Change Sector Performance*

| Sub-sector | Promises | Actions | Assessment Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Climate Change | 19 | 4 | 10% |

One of the key promises made in the sector is to eliminate single-use plastics. Under this promise, the government, through the Malawi Environment Protection Authority (MEPA), took enforcement action against thin-plastic manufacturers and traders in November 2025 (Mhone, 2025). MEPA closed a company that manufactured the prohibited thin plastics and penalised two (2) other manufacturing companies along with two (2) distributor companies with fines for not complying with the ban on thin plastics (Mhone, 2025). Although the regulation on the production and the use of thin plastics is not a new strategy brought by the Government of Malawi under President Mutharika, enforcement of this regulation had been lacking. As such, this government action recorded in November 2025 shows progress towards enforcement of this ban and towards environmental protection in general.

In line with the promise to foster effective environmental management, the government launched a MWK6.6 billion programme to strengthen weather forecasting and early-warning systems in February 2026 (Nyasa Times, 2026b). The Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF) Malawi project, which is aimed at strengthening weather observation and early warning systems across the country, is being implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The initiative is expected to improve Malawi's ability to generate, process and share high-quality weather and climate data in line with international standards.

On pollution control, the government promised to develop and implement stringent air, water and chemical pollution control regulations and strategies. This promise registered progress when the government ordered Presscane Limited to stop operations and compensate surrounding communities in Chikwawa District in January 2026 (Nzangaya, 2026b). This was because Presscane had failed to manage its effluent discharges that spilt into the neighbouring communities and were affecting livelihoods there. An inspection of the site by MEPA in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture led to the decision to stop operations at the site until the necessary effluent control measures are implemented. Presscane Limited was also ordered to submit a comprehensive effluent management plan to MEPA for approval and to compensate members of the surrounding communities who had been affected by the spillage.

Each of these actions shows a wider gap between announcement and delivery than the 'In Progress' status conveys. The weather and early-warning programme is funded through the UNDP-administered SOFF (UNDP Malawi, 2026), with technical support from the Norwegian and Icelandic meteorological services. This underlines that the programme, like much of Malawi's climate response, depends on donor rather than domestic financing. The Presscane closure also proved to be conditional rather than final. MEPA lifted the suspension in May 2026 after the company paid Chikwawa District Council MWK895 million in compensation, but civil society groups have since alleged that individual affected households received as little as MWK1,171 each, and that some were coerced into signing compensation forms in a language they did not understand (Chavula, 2026; Chiwalo, 2026). This raises questions about whether the enforcement action delivered meaningful redress to the communities it was meant to protect.

The remaining 15 promises in this sector - including the establishment of a dedicated National Disaster Risk Management Authority and Fund, investment in large-scale water

infrastructure, biodiversity and wildlife-conservation programmes, a carbon and emissions trading system, and the deployment of environmental officers to all district councils - have not yet commenced.

As is the case with the other sectors, the 15 Not Commenced promises are disproportionately the ones requiring standalone institutions or capital investment rather than enforcement of existing regulations, which is where all four (4) In Progress promises in this sector sit. Malawi remains highly exposed to exactly the climate shocks these unfunded commitments are meant to address. The region-wide drought that shaped the 2025 election campaign, noted earlier in this report, underscores the cost of the gap between the sector's proportionally strong 10% assessment score and the scale of adaptation infrastructure the manifesto promises but has not yet funded.

### Social Services

The Social Services sector accounts for 39% of the 462 promises captured on the Tracker, with 178 promises. In the reporting period, 10 promises are classified as In Progress, and 168 remain at the Not Commenced stage. The Social Services sector achieved an overall assessment score of 3% in the first year.

As Table 9 shows, five (5) of the 11 sub-sectors – Land Tenure and Human Settlements, Housing, Service Delivery, Sports and Arts, and Child Protection – recorded zero (0) actions, together accounting for 29 of the sector's 178 promises. Education and Health, the two (2) largest sub-sectors by a wide margin, together hold 102 of the sector's 178 promises (well over half the entire sector) but only five (5) of its 10 actions, and their individual scores – 3% and 2% respectively – sit close to, rather than above, the sector's already low 3% headline score. In other words, the two (2) sub-sectors most directly tied to citizens' daily welfare (schooling and healthcare) are performing in line with, not better than, the weakest headline score of any sector in this report.

Water and Sanitation (4%) and Public Safety (8%), though scoring higher than Education and Health, each rest on a single recorded action against a small promise base of eight (8) promises apiece – evidence of a small-sample effect rather than materially stronger delivery capacity in those areas. Social Protection, with 18 promises and two (2) actions (6%), is the second-highest-scoring sub-sector combining a moderate promise base with more than a single action, making it arguably the most genuinely – rather than statistically – active sub-sector in Social Services after Education and Health (see Table 9). With the largest promise base of any sector (178, or 39% of the manifesto) but the joint-lowest sector score (3%), Social Services' shortfall this year is therefore not concentrated in one or two neglected corners: it is broad-based, spanning more than half of the sector's sub-sectors, including Health, the sector's second-largest sub-sector by promise count.

*Table 9: Overview of Social Services Sector Performance*

| Sub-sector | Promises | Actions | Assessment Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Land Tenure and Human Settlements | 7 | 0 | 0% |
| Water and Sanitation | 8 | 1 | 4% |
| Public Safety | 8 | 1 | 8% |
| Housing | 9 | 0 | 0% |
| Service Delivery | 3 | 0 | 0% |
| Education | 61 | 3 | 3% |
| Health | 41 | 2 | 2% |
| Youth and Women Empowerment | 13 | 1 | 5% |
| Sports and Arts | 8 | 0 | 0% |
| Child Protection | 2 | 0 | 0% |
| Social Protection | 18 | 2 | 6% |
| **Total** | **178** | **10** | **3%** |

The most prominent promise in the Social Services sector was to review the Education Act to include free and mandatory secondary education and remove examination fees for Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) and Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). In January 2026, President Mutharika ordered the cancellation of examination fees, school development fees and other user fees in all public secondary schools in the country (Ecofin Agency, 2026). Boarding schools will, however, continue to collect boarding fees until further notice. This action goes further than the DPP's own 2018/19 fee reforms under its previous administration, which had removed tuition and textbook fees but left examination and other fees in place. The bottleneck this reform targets is real and well-documented: a 49.7% primary-to-secondary

transition rate against just 16.8% net secondary enrolment (see Text Box 3). However, Malawi's own 1994 experience with free primary education shows that removing fees without matching investment in teachers and classrooms can convert an access gain into a quality loss (Africa Press, 2025b). Whether the increase in education spending (about 39% across all votes against 27.8% rise in the overall budget) recorded in the 2026/27 budget is enough to avoid repeating that pattern will depend on decisions regarding teacher recruitment, infrastructure financing and disbursement timeliness, which are yet to be seen.

Still under education, the government made progress towards its promise to undertake comprehensive curriculum review for Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and adult literacy education programmes to ensure that the curricula respond to the country's education needs and industry demands in the 21st century. In January 2026, the Ministry of Education and other key stakeholders met for a review and validation of the new primary school curriculum (Malawi Institute of Education, 2026). This 'review' of the primary curriculum sits within a multi-year National Curriculum Framework process that the Malawi Institute of Education traces back to 2023, with a major competency-based curriculum unveiled in October 2025 (Malawi Institute of Education, 2025) and further syllabus development continuing into mid-2026 – as such, this is not a new strategy by the current administration but the cementing of work already in progress.

Regarding civil servants' pensions, the government promised to clear out bottlenecks affecting pensioners' access to gratuity and pension money. Towards this, the government began clearing the backlog affecting pensioners' access to gratuity and pension payments in January 2026 (Chauwa, 2026a). The pension-backlog clearance so far covers only gratuity and pension payments for people who retired in 2022-2023, while the larger backlog for 2023-2025 retirees is yet to be addressed.

The government also promised to establish a Youth Enterprise Fund which will provide a revolving MWK100 million every year to each constituency in low-interest loans and grants for young entrepreneurs and graduates of technical colleges. Progress towards this was recorded in the 2026/27 budget allocation of MWK100 million per constituency to a Youth Enterprise Fund for young entrepreneurs under the CDF (Government of Malawi, 2026c). A related promise was to establish MWK12 billion Sports Development Fund, from which every constituency will access MWK50 million for sports every year. The government allocated MWK50 million per constituency to a Sports Development Fund as captured in the current year's budget (Government of Malawi, 2026c). The Youth Enterprise and Sports Development Funds are drawn from the same reformed CDF implementation guidelines cited under Governance above. They are expected to be covered under this year's MWK5 billion per constituency budgetary allocation – but the actual allocation of funds is yet to be confirmed pending the release of constituency-level spending data.

In the health sub-sector, the DPP made a promise to establish and strengthen sound relationships with development partners, regional and international health actors in order to meet the health needs of Malawians. As part of fulfilling this promise, the government signed a health cooperation memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the United States (US) in January 2026 (U.S. Department of State, 2026). The MoU is designed to leverage Malawi's significant progress in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, supporting the country's commitment to maintaining its 95-95-95 goals for epidemic control through sustainable, integrated service delivery approaches that the Malawi government will self-maintain after the MoU concludes. The government also conducted a national polio vaccination campaign in February 2026 (Munthali, 2026) as part of its promise to implement or strengthen Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in health care facilities through a range of occupational health and patient safety measures.

Ensuring the provision of safe and sustainable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in all health facilities is another promise in the manifesto under Social Services. Parliament approved an Act authorising the government to take a USD27 million loan for the Jenda water project in January 2026 (Government of Malawi, 2025), from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development (OPEC Fund). This loan will be invested in the construction of a new water supply system with production capacity of 4,826 $m^3$ per day, installation of 5,000 water meters, and procurement of materials for water connections and laboratory equipment aimed at improving access to safe water in the northern districts of Malawi, including health facilities in that region. Regarding public safety, one of the promises made was to provide humanitarian assistance and

disaster relief to affected populations. The USD1 million food-relief financing agreement between the Malawi government and the AfDB in January 2026 responds in part to this promise (Mtemang'ombe, 2026a).

These actions illustrate how far Malawi's social-service delivery still depends on external partners. The USD792 million, five-year US health package, of which the January 2026 MoU is the framework agreement, was framed by both governments around the 62nd anniversary of US-Malawi diplomatic relations under Washington's 'America First Global Health Strategy'. Malawi's Foreign Affairs Minister welcomed the support while stressing a wish to move toward trade and investment rather than continued aid dependency, when the fuller package was unveiled in mid-2026 (Mtemang'ombe, 2026d). The AfDB food-relief financing, at USD1 million, was itself described by the Bank's own Country Director as 'a small amount of money' against an estimated four million people needing food assistance in the 2025/26 lean season. It illustrates the gap between the promises captured on the Tracker and the scale of underlying need. On infrastructure, the OPEC Fund loan authorising additional financing for the Jenda water project was gazetted into Malawi law in late December 2025 (Government of Malawi, 2025), meaning the underlying parliamentary authorisation preceded the January 2026 date recorded here.

All repayments are charged to the Consolidated Fund, an addition to the debt-service burden noted in the Economy sector above.

Notwithstanding this activity, 168 of the sector's 178 promises - including the large majority of commitments on housing, water and sanitation infrastructure, teacher recruitment and training, disability and elderly support services, youth centres, sports infrastructure completion (including the long-delayed Bullets and Wanderers stadiums), and health-system digitalisation - remain Not Commenced.

As with the Economy sector, the pattern in Social Services favours actions that could be announced by executive decision – fee cancellations, MoU signings, loan approvals – over the sector's more implementation-heavy commitments: teacher recruitment and training, housing and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, disability and elderly support services, and completion of the long-delayed Bullets and Wanderers stadiums. With Social Services holding the largest share of manifesto promises (39%) but the joint-lowest sector score (3%), the gap between the volume of commitments made to citizens on cost-of-living and social-delivery issues, and the resources and administrative capacity so far mobilised to meet them, is the widest of any sector this report tracks.

*Textbox 3*

## FREE SECONDARY SCHOOL: ACCESS VS CAPACITY

On 1 January 2026, the government abolished the School Development Fund and other user fees in all public day secondary schools and scrapped the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) examination and Identification (ID) fees nationwide. This fulfils President Mutharika's October 2025 pledge. Boarding fees remain at boarding schools, Open Secondary Schools and Association of Christian Educators in Malawi (ACEM)-subsidised schools. Free Secondary Education is Malawi's biggest free-education expansion since 1994. It is aimed at improving the primary-to-secondary school transition rate which was at 49.7% as of December 2025 and the net secondary enrolment which sat at 16.8% (Ecofin Agency, 2026).

**Social and Economic Benefits**

- This removes the single most-cited barrier to secondary access, targeting the gap between primary completion and secondary enrolment directly.
- Disproportionately benefits girls, whose dropout is linked to early marriage (approximately 50%) and teenage pregnancy (approximately 29%) according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports (Wachaya, 2025).
- Narrows the urban–rural, rich–poor access gap and provides direct relief for household budgets previously stretched by termly fees.
- Builds a larger, more skilled future labour force which is the core rationale behind Malawi 2063's human capital pillar.

### What the Budget Shows

| Budget Line | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ministry of Education Other Recurrent Transactions (ORT) (Vote 250) | MWK61.2 billion | MWK123.9 billion | 100% |
| Education Sector (all votes) | MWK106.6 billion | MWK148.6 billion | 39% |
| Human Capital Development pillar | MWK2,565.9 billion | MWK2,743.9 billion | 6.9% |
| Free Primary Education transfer | MWK5.3 billion | MWK15.96 billion | 200% |

*Source: Government of Malawi, 2026b*

Education spending is growing faster than the 27.8% overall budget increase - a real, not just rhetorical, commitment. But it is not yet a discrete, costed programme line, and it competes with debt service (MWK2,792.7 billion, about 45% of tax revenue) inside an already strained recurrent budget.

### The Risks

- 1994 precedent: Free Primary Education saw enrolment surge while classrooms, teachers and materials lagged - quality suffered for years. The same risk applies here.
- Teacher and infrastructure shortages are already acute; recruitment and double-shift plans are announced but not yet costed.
- Success hinges on subsidies reaching schools in full and on time to replace lost fee income for day-to-day operations.

### Bottom Line

This presents a well-evidenced social and economic case, genuine budget backing so far. Whether it becomes a durable human capital gain or repeats 1994's quality trade-off depends on government decisions regarding teacher recruitment, infrastructure financing and disbursement discipline. Such decisions have not yet been fully published or costed.



## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

### Challenges

The clearest structural challenge this first year is the gap between the manifesto's volume of commitments and government's administrative and fiscal capacity to make progress in its first year. Social Services, the largest sector at 39% of all promises, recorded the joint-lowest score of any sector at 3% (alongside Economy), while capital-intensive commitments across every sector - infrastructure, decentralisation, judicial reform, disaster-risk institutions - remain almost entirely at the Not Commenced stage. Most of the activity that has occurred, particularly in Climate Change and Social Services, depends on donor rather than domestic financing, as seen in the UNDP-administered weather early-warning programme and the US health cooperation package. This raises questions about how much of the manifesto's wider agenda can be delivered from domestic resources alone.

A second challenge is the limited availability of outcome data for measures government has already announced. The toll-free anti-corruption reporting line and the land-ownership audit have both been publicised as actions but not yet accompanied by published uptake, results or quantified figures. This makes it difficult to assess whether these measures are delivering the transparency and efficiency gains they were designed to achieve, and it is a constraint on this report itself: the Tracker records only what is publicly reported, so government action that has not been disclosed is not reflected in these findings.

A third challenge concerns the consistency of accountability. The same reporting period in which the ACB and FIA pursued asset recovery tied to the GBA scandal also saw the withdrawal of prosecutions against officials reappointed to senior government positions. This does not reflect a lack of institutional capacity – both the ACB and FIA demonstrated they can act quickly and reach senior figures – but the coexistence with the Broken promise raises a reasonable perception of selective application of the government's own stated principles.

Finally, several of government's most visible relief measures have been outpaced by the conditions they were meant to address. The 10-20% civil-service salary increments fell well short of the 46% rise in the cost of living recorded over the same period, and the VAT increase and revised PAYE bands introduced alongside it fall hardest on the low- and middle-income households the wider fiscal package was meant to protect. Similarly, the removal of secondary school fees addresses a well-documented access barrier but, without a costed plan for teacher recruitment and classroom infrastructure, risks repeating the quality-for-access trade-off that followed Malawi's 1994 free primary education reform.

### Lessons Learnt

Sector-level scores are only meaningful when read alongside the size and nature of the promise base behind them. Corruption's 17% score reflects rapid movement on a small, narrowly executive-actionable set of 10 promises, not necessarily a deeper government commitment to that sector than to Social Services, whose 178 promises span far more implementation-heavy terrain. Comparing sectors on raw score alone risks understating the scale of what remains outstanding in the largest sectors. Therefore, understanding of this report needs to look at both the headline score and the underlying promise composition.

Government's own transparency agenda would be strengthened by publishing outcome data alongside process announcements. Actions such as the toll-free corruption line and the land-ownership audit were reported as delivered, but without uptake or results data they cannot yet be verified as effective, which weakens both public confidence and the government's ability to claim credit for them. Building a habit of publishing short outcome updates - even interim ones - alongside launch announcements would close this gap.

Flagship social commitments delivered through fee removal or one-off budget allocations need a matching multi-year, costed delivery plan if early access gains are to be sustained. The free secondary education policy and the reformed FISP are both genuine and well-funded first steps. Whether these produce durable improvements in learning outcomes and food security, rather than repeating past patterns, will depend on the government decisions and actions that follow these first steps.

Finally, this first assessment underscores the value of ACW's continuous, independent tracking over a single end-of-term verdict. It is a rolling, evidence-based approach - rather than a retrospective assessment at the end of the government's mandate. It allows both government and citizens to stay updated on actions as they take place, giving an opportunity to identify and correct gaps early before they become entrenched problems.

## CONCLUSION

The Government of Malawi, led by President Arthur Peter Mutharika, took office on 4 October 2025, inheriting what the President himself described as an economy in crisis. In the first year covered by this report, the government has recorded 52 actions relating to 44 of the 462 promises made in the DPP's 2025 manifesto: While 43 promises are In Progress, none of the promises have been fully Implemented, and one (1) has been assessed as Broken, leaving 418 promises still at the Not Commenced stage. The first-year assessment shows an assessment score of 9% progress made towards fulfilling the manifesto promises.

The pattern that emerges for the first year is one of visible early motion on distinct, quick-to-execute administrative and macro-financial measures - interest rate decisions, procurement rules, CDF disbursement guidelines, subsidy re-launches - set against a much larger body of manifesto commitments requiring legislative change, new infrastructure, or multi-year capital investment, on which no public action has yet been recorded. This early record shows a government prioritising measures within its immediate administrative reach over the manifesto's larger and more capital-intensive infrastructure, industrial and social-service commitments yet to be initiated.

The withdrawal of stalled corruption cases against senior former officials stands out as an early departure from specific anti-corruption commitments, even as other measures in the same sector moved forward.

The Corruption sector shows the highest progress (an assessment score of 17%), reflecting a cluster of enforcement and procurement-reform actions in a small subset of only 10 promises. The two (2) largest sectors by volume, Economy and Social Services, each register single-digit progress rates against considerably longer promise lists. The high progress recorded under the Corruption sector makes sense when taken into consideration that the sector only contains 10 promises recorded and is being tracked against 156 in Economy and 178 in Social Services sectors.

With a five-year term running to 2030, there remains time for the government to advance its wider manifesto agenda, and the pattern observed in this first assessment period is not necessarily predictive of the term as a whole. SIVIO Institute, through the Malawi Citizens Watch Tracker, will continue to monitor and report on the government's progress against these promises, with subsequent reports expected to track whether early administrative wins translate into the sustained legislative, fiscal and infrastructural delivery that the bulk of the manifesto still requires.

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## About SIVIO Institute

SIVIO Institute is an independent organisation focused on ensuring that citizens are at the centre of processes of socio-economic and policy change. It aims to contribute towards Africa's inclusive socio-economic transformation. It is borne out of a desire to enhance agency as a stimulus/ catalyst for inclusive political and socio-economic transformation. The Institute's work entails multi-disciplinary, cutting edge policy research, nurturing citizens' agency to be part of the change that they want to see and working with communities to mobilise their assets to resolve some of their immediate problems.

The Institute has three centres/programs of work focused on: (i) civic engagement, (ii) philanthropy and communities and (iii) economic development and livelihoods. In the process, the Institute addresses the following problems:

- Inadequate performance of the existing political and economic system
- Increasing poverty and inequality
- Limited coherence of policies across sectors
- Ineffectual participation in public processes by non-state actors
- Increased dependence on external resources and limited leveraging of local resources