

# THE USE AND USEFULNESS OF SCHOOL GRANTS: Lessons from **MALAWI**

Dorothy Nampota and Lizzie Chiwaula  
in collaboration with  
Patrick Lapukeni and Chrissie Kafundu



Malawi

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United Nations  
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## List of abbreviations

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>ARV</b>     | antiretroviral [drugs]   |
| <b>CAMFED</b>  | Campaign for Female Education                                      |
| <b>CCAP</b>    | Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian                             |
| <b>CEPD</b>    | Centre for Education Policy Development, South Africa              |
| <b>CDSS</b>    | community day secondary school                                     |
| <b>CERT</b>    | Centre for Educational Research and Training, University of Malawi |
| <b>CRECCOM</b> | Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation                         |
| <b>CTS</b>     | care, treatment, and support                                       |
| <b>DEM</b>     | district education manager   |
| <b>DEO</b>     | District Education Office  |
| <b>DfID</b>    | Department for International Development, UK                       |
| <b>DSS</b>     | direct support to schools  |
| <b>EDSA</b>    | education decentralization support activity                        |
| <b>ESSUP</b> 1 | First Education Sector Support Project, World Bank                 |
| <b>FP</b>      | full primary [school]  |
| <b>FPE</b>     | free primary education   |
| <b>IDA</b>     | International Development Agency                                   |
| <b>JP</b>      | junior primary [school]  |
| <b>LEA</b>     | Local Education Authority  |
| <b>MWK</b>     | Malawi kwacha  |
| <b>NESP</b>    | National Education Sector Plan                                     |
| <b>NGO</b>     | non-governmental organization                                      |
| <b>ORT</b>     | other recurrent transactions                                       |
| <b>OVC</b>     | orphans and vulnerable children                                    |
| <b>PEA</b>     | primary education advisor  |
| <b>PSIP</b>    | Primary School Improvement Programme                               |
| <b>PTA</b>     | parent–teacher association   |
| <b>SIG</b>     | school improvement grant   |
| <b>SIP</b>     | school improvement plan  |
| <b>SMC</b>     | school management committee  |
| <b>TDC</b>     | teacher development centre   |
| <b>TILIPO</b>  | Teachers Living Positively   |
| <b>VDC</b>     | village development committee                                      |

## Executive summary

This study is part of a regional research programme which included field research in five Eastern and Southern African countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi and Uganda. This programme was organised by IIEP-UNESCO between 2010 and 2012, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD).

Researchers interviewed school head teachers, teachers, members of parent committees, parents, and pupils from 12 schools, as well as actors from two district education offices (DEOs), to learn about the design and implementation of school grants in Malawi. The research team investigated the impact of the grants on school enrolment, as well as on the quality of the education delivered in schools and on equity within and between schools.

Malawi was the first country in the region to institute a Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, when a newly elected government introduced the reform in 1994. Nearly 20 years later, progress has been made towards achieving education for all, with greater state funding channelled into the sector.

Two grant programmes that were introduced as a result of FPE were explored in this research: ‘direct support to schools’ grants (DSS) and ‘school improvement grants’ (SIG). The first programme – cofunded by the World Bank and the (UK) Department for International Development (DfID) – began in 2006 and covered all schools in Malawi. Its purpose was twofold: to enable schools to purchase basic teaching and learning materials and to fund the maintenance and rehabilitation of schools.

The second programme, SIG, was introduced in 2010, and included support to three funding categories: school improvement plans (SIP); orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs); and HIV-positive children – referred to as care, treatment, and support (CTS). The SIG programme remained in a pilot phase at the time of the research and it was not known whether it would become a nation-wide policy or focus only on selected schools with the most needs.

One result of the research was to reveal that many respondents were not aware of the link between FPE and the DSS and SIG grants, perhaps because they were introduced so long after the FPE policy was put in place.

The allocation criteria of the two grants programmes differ significantly. Two simple allocation methods have been used for the DSS grant. In its first year, all schools received the same amount – MWK (Malawi kwacha) 66,000 (\$200). Since then, the grant has been allocated based on enrolment, schools being categorized into five ‘enrolment bands’. For instance, for an enrolment of 50–100, a school receives MWK 72,000 (\$216), while a school with an enrolment of more than 4,501 receives MWK 112,400 (\$337). This grant has enabled schools to purchase teaching/learning resources – such as flip charts, exercise books, pens – as well as basic maintenance materials, such as cement, timber, and paint.

In comparison, the criteria chosen for SIG disbursement were generally seen to better reflect the individual needs of schools. Grant amounts were based on the specific needs budgeted for in a school plan and the number of OVCs and HIV-positive learners attending the school. In the initial pilot phase, the bulk of the funds were used to support OVCs and HIV-positive children. With the OVC funding, schools purchased materials for vulnerable learners, including uniforms, umbrellas, and school bags. The CTS funds were spent on antiretroviral drugs, hospital transport, blankets, and nutritious food. Although not the case in all schools, some of these funds were also put towards waiving parents’ contributions to schools and the examination fees of higher classes.



Both grant mechanisms had to some extent promoted participatory decision-making in schools, as parents and teachers were members of committees involved in determining the needs of the school. However, the role of parents in DSS grants appeared to be mainly limited to the oversight of purchasing the school's supplies – mostly confirming that the ordered material was received by schools. In the case of SIG, a committee was responsible for deciding how to spend the funds, but little information was provided on how this functioned.

Researchers found the SIG provided schools with greater autonomy on expenditures than did the DSS grants. With the latter, the schools were, at most, involved in choosing the supplier of goods. The money did not transit via the school: a cheque was made payable by the DEO to the supplier of the materials. The procedure was not only time-consuming but resulted in irregularities, as noted by school actors. For example, in one district, the DEO directed the schools to a particular supplier. Most respondents expressed frustration with the DSS mechanism on this point, believing that schools should be given the money directly. In contrast, with the SIG funding, once the DEO had received the lists of CTS and OVCs in the school and the school improvement plans, the allocated funds were directly deposited into the school's account, and the school decided on its expenditure. Generally, the school actors in the SIG pilot schools appreciated the relative flexibility they were given, for example in choosing a supplier themselves.

The monitoring processes of the use of the grants will require more government support in order to become effective, the researchers found. Although parents reported that they monitored expenditures, they were unable to provide details on how their monitoring mechanisms were structured. External monitoring was said to be carried out by the DEO, but this was hampered by inadequate personnel and lack of finances.

All those interviewed perceived the grants as being too small to meet the needs of the schools. There were some OVCs and HIV-positive learners, for example, who, although entitled to support, did not benefit from the grant, as it was too limited. Furthermore, irregular and late disbursement was a major problem in all the schools visited, leading the researchers to recommend greater government planning of the transfers of these funds.

The study confirmed that, in general, the school enrolment in Malawi had increased in the past few years. This is despite the fact that, as the study revealed, household contributions still represented an important share of many school budgets in the country. It appeared that many factors other than the reduction or eradication of school fees have contributed to increasing school enrolment. For instance, school feeding programmes, in place in all the schools visited, present strong pull-factors for many parents and students. However, it was observed that high absenteeism and dropout rates remain a problem in most schools. Finally, it emerged from the research that the FPE policy has also created some challenges, as it is seen to have caused 'overcrowding' in schools and, in the eyes of school staff, a loss of interest on the part of parents in the affairs of the school.

The general picture emerging from the research was that, notwithstanding certain challenges, the specific grants which were studied have had a positive impact on the schools, in that they have allowed some improvements in the learning environment, and also strengthened the motivation and morale of both teachers and learners.

# Introduction

## Why study school grants?

In a growing number of countries, a significant reform in educational management is under way: schools which in earlier years had very little or no say in their own financial management now receive grants directly from central authorities. While this trend is not new in OECD countries, it has an almost revolutionary character in many developing countries, because it breaks a tradition of centralized decision-making and control over financial resources.

These school grant policies were generally introduced to accompany fee-free education: grants were expected to make up for the loss of income due to the abolition of school fees. In addition, it was assumed that such grants will have at least four advantages:

1. There will be less bureaucracy than when schools have to wait for materials or funds from higher administrative levels;
2. Spending that is decided by the school actors should be more relevant than when decisions are made by actors who are far from the school and less in touch with its needs or priorities;
3. Direct transfers to schools means that all funds arrive at the school level without any 'loss' to the different administrative levels (region, district);
4. Grants could also have a positive impact on equity if higher amounts are given to disadvantaged schools, for instance those located in poor and remote areas and those characterized by high numbers of orphans and by gender disparities.

In other words, school grants are expected to make a positive contribution to access, quality and equity. However, there can be a great distance between a policy and its implementation and the simple existence of school grants in no way guarantees that these improvements will be realized. So far, there has been little research on the way in which school grants are actually used within and by the schools. As commented by Buckland,

Many studies of school grants programs and school-based management interventions are based on analysis of program documents which describe the way in which initiatives were designed, and do not document sufficiently the extent to which and in what ways strategies were actually implemented on the ground, so that success or failure may often be more a function of failures or weaknesses in implementation rather than technical design (Buckland, 2011: 3).

## A research programme in Eastern and Southern Africa

The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and UNICEF coordinated a research programme in Eastern and Southern Africa from 2010 to 2012, in order to understand better how the school grants policy is implemented in and by different schools, and to learn what its real contribution is to the grand policy objectives it is intended to serve. These findings contribute to define strategies that could feed into the design and accompany the implementation of school grants, so that they make a stronger contribution to these objectives.

After a pilot study in Lesotho from October to December 2010, the research was conducted in 2011-2012 as part of a regional research programme, including four other countries from Eastern and Southern Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda). The research was coordinated by IIEP in partnership with the UNICEF Eastern and Southern African Regional

Office (ESARO) and national offices; Ministries of Education; national research institutes;<sup>1</sup> and the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD, South-Africa).<sup>2</sup>

## The analytical framework

The research focused on one specific source of funding, namely grants transferred from the central government to schools. Three criteria for the choice of schools were used: that the school is the recipient of these funds; that these funds arrive as grants and not as actual material resources; and that the schools have some autonomy in using these funds. The analysis therefore included all types of funding which met these criteria.

The following paragraphs offer further explanation and some examples of the specific interrogations that formed part of the research.

The contribution of school grants depends on the explicit *policy objectives*. The objective for instance may simply be to improve bureaucratic efficiency or it may be much wider, including overcoming disparities and strengthening school autonomy.

The objectives have an impact on the *criteria and the mechanisms for distribution* of the grant. A key question is: are the criteria simply based on the number of pupils or do they take into account certain characteristics of the schools and their environment such as the number of pupils from disadvantaged groups or the number of out-of school girls and boys?

The objectives also have an impact on the *total grant amount*. However, in many schools, the grants only form part of the *total financial resources available within the school*, as schools continue to collect some funds from parents or may receive contributions from non-government sources. It is crucial to be aware of the overall budget of the school and of the relative contribution of the school grants. The arrival of funds at the school level does not automatically imply that these funds will be used for the benefit of the pupils and will lead to better quality and improved school functioning. Several related issues crop up.

A first series of issues concerns the *decision-making processes within the school*: what is the role of the principal, the teachers, the parents and the pupils? Does the availability of these grants lead to a participatory decision-making process involving teachers, parents, the local community, and/or to improving the overall relationships within the school community?

A second series of questions concerns the *control mechanisms*, which have generally accompanied the transfer of grants to schools. Their effectiveness influences the use of the grants and their usefulness. Several questions may need to be examined here, related respectively to the actors, tools, and feedback:

- The *actors* who have the right to monitor and control can be inside the school, around the school (a school management committee or a parent–teacher association [PTA]) or at higher levels within the administration.
- The *tools* could be simple financial reports or much more detailed audits, including an examination of the usefulness and impact of these funds.
- A third, regularly neglected issue, concerns the *feedback*: what information is sent back to the school on the use of the grant, subsequent to monitoring and control? What action is taken in case of ineffective, incomplete or incorrect use of the grant?

1. Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Kenyatta University (Kenya), Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT, Malawi), and Makerere Institute of Social Research (Uganda).

2. A regional comparative analysis will be co-published by IIEP and UNICEF, separately from the *Country notes* published for each of the five countries.

The decision-making and control processes help us understand the way in which grants are really used. This depends also on a third element, namely the *knowledge* that the different actors have of the policy, and this depends, on the one hand, on their participation in the *policy formulation* process, and, on the other hand, on the *policy dissemination*.

Then, when examining the *actual use of the grants*, the research focused on questions such as: Are these funds used for inputs or activities which are known to have an impact on quality? Are they used more for the immediate benefit of teachers or of pupils or of both groups? Are the specific needs of disadvantaged groups such as orphans or poor pupils within the school or within society taken into account?

This intricate combination of factors leads us to the final and fundamental question, namely what has been the *contribution of school grants* to the major policy objectives, be they the ones included in the explicit objectives of the national policy or be they broader ones that the literature claims could be the result of such a policy.

## The research design

It will have become clear that several factors, which help explain the contributions of the school grants policy, are dependent on in-school processes. These processes can be very different from school to school, and therefore the use and usefulness of grants will also differ between schools. This has three fundamental implications for any research on this theme.

The first one is that we need to enter into the school, so as to really understand how decisions are made, what role different actors play, what knowledge and understanding they have of the policy, and who controls. Such questions are complex and delicate. The answers cannot be found through a simple study of policy documents, neither can they be answered through a quick survey at a distance. What is needed is in-depth and qualitative research into the functioning of the schools.

Secondly, we cannot limit ourselves to collecting opinions of a few actors within the school. Our interest is precisely in knowing the diversity of opinions between actors and the possibly unequal levels of knowledge and understanding. It is important therefore to interview various groups, from principal over teachers and parents to pupils.

The main data collection instruments were the following:

- interviews with a wide range of actors at school and district levels;
- consultation of relevant documentation such as reports on basic education indicators and on schools' financial management (when available, schools' accounts books and financial reports, schools' plans, SMC/PTAs' minutes of meetings); a school profile gathering key education and financial data was completed by the school staff in each school;
- observation in particular on the use of school grants and quality of school infrastructures, on the information signposted in schools, and, where possible, on relations between school actors.

A third implication follows logically from the above: once it has been decided that each school will be examined in depth through detailed and lengthy interviews and through some observation, unavoidably the number of schools has to be limited. We decided to cover, in each country, a group of 12 schools (though the numbers are slightly different between countries). Those schools were chosen among two or three districts in order to learn also about the role played by district offices. In each country, the group included schools with varying characteristics, taking into account in particular their location (urban/rural) and the level of socio-economic development.

## Research in Malawi

The objective of the research on which this report is based was to analyse the main characteristics of school grants in Malawi. While acknowledging the various grants that the schools receive, the investigation focused mainly on the grants transferred from the central government to schools. These grants were primarily direct support to schools (DSS) and school improvement grants (SIG) provided through the primary school improvement programme (PSIP) and the education decentralization support activity (EDSA).

### *Direct support to schools (DSS)*

According to DSS policy guidelines (Government of Malawi, 2006) DSS started in 2006, 12 years after the introduction of free primary education (FPE), under the First Education Sector Support Project (ESSUP 1) of the World Bank and was funded through a grant from the International Development Agency (IDA), UK. The programme covers all schools in Malawi. While the initial purpose of DSS was to help schools purchase basic teaching and learning materials in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, after the implementation of three cycles, between 2006 and 2008, this was reviewed in 2009 to also include maintenance and rehabilitation. The review of purposes was implemented when the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) joined the World Bank in school financing, resulting in the enhancement of the grant (Government of Malawi, 2008).

The DSS guidelines show that in 2006 all schools received the same amount – MWK 66,000 (\$200). This was changed and in subsequent years the grant was given based on enrolment. Schools were categorised into 'enrolment bands' that determined how much money they should receive. In addition, the schools were supposed to receive a discretionary grant which the school could use either for teaching and learning materials or maintenance and rehabilitation.

### *Primary School Improvement grant (PSIP/EDSA)*

PSIP was implemented through a USAID-funded project called education decentralization support activity (EDSA). PSIP is set within the context of the National Education Sector Plan–NESP (2008–2017). Although the formulation process of this programme started in 2000, its implementation began in 2010 and it was carried out in phases, starting with selected schools in six districts chosen across the three geographical regions of Malawi. The second phase, implemented in 2011, continued covering the same six districts, and now covers all primary schools in those districts. However, the intention is to cover an additional six districts across the country to make a total of 12. At the time of this study, neither these additional schools in the initial pilot districts nor the additional districts had begun to receive any grants.

According to the field manager for EDSA Malawi, based in the USAID offices, the overall goal of the PSIP is to deepen education decentralization in the primary sub-sector so as to improve basic education service delivery.

There are in fact three categories of PSIP/EDSA funds which make up the SIGs allocated to schools: (i) support to school improvement plans (SIP); (ii) support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs); (iii) and support to children infected by HIV – care, treatment, and support (CTS).

The SIPs should be school level plans, written with the input of the community, which establish the needs of the school and revolve around achieving three NESP goals: quality and relevance; access and equity; and governance and management.

The OVC funds are meant for both primary and community day secondary schools and are meant to be used for examination fees (making identity cards and paying examination

fees), tuition for community day secondary school (CDSS) learners, sanitary materials for girls, stationery, uniforms, and shoes.

The part of the grant geared towards supporting HIV-infected students is CTS and is reserved for primary schools and should be spent on transportation and food supplements.

### *Methodology*

The study examined the implementation of the two school grant policies in primary schools in Malawi. The examination of the four issues regarding the grants was carried out through field studies in a sample of 12 schools in Malawi visited between June and August 2011. The schools were purposely selected in three specific education districts,<sup>3</sup> based on their location and education indicators: one district had a relatively low pupil dropout rate and was an urban district. It is referred to in this document as 'City District'. The second education district was rural although, administratively, it was located in the same urban district. This is referred to in this document as 'Rural District'. The third education district was the peri-urban district of Lakeshore, which, similar to many schools along the lakeshore, experienced low education indicators. It is referred to as Lakeshore District.

The selection of schools in each education district was based on both the education indicators and whether or not the school was receiving either of the two grants described above. All the sampled schools are under the government's FPE programme.

The schools in the Rural District were receiving only the DSS grant and so only two schools were selected.

In the City District, both DSS and SIG were in operation as this was one of the pilot districts for SIG. The district had both schools which had the experience of receiving both grants and schools that had experienced only the DSS grant. The schools in the latter category had received training on SIG but the grant had not yet reached the school. In this district, four schools were selected, two with experience of both DSS and SIG and two schools that had only DSS experience.

Lakeshore District was also one of the pilot districts for SIG and, of the six schools selected, two were DSS-only schools located in the town and therefore classified as urban and two schools were DSS-only and selected from the rural part of the district. The last two schools were also located in the rural area but had both DSS and SIG grant experience. Junior primary (JP) schools that include the first four to five years of schooling were sampled where possible, but most of the schools that made up the sample were full primary (FP) schools that offer the full cycle of eight years of primary schooling.

In summary, the 12 schools can be described as shown in *Table 1*.

---

3. To ensure anonymity, the names of schools and districts were replaced with fictitious names.

**Table 1. Sample schools by location and grant type**

| District           | Name of school | Type of school (JP or FP) | Location   | Grant received |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------------|------------|----------------|
| The City District  | Waware         | FP                        | Urban      | DSS            |
|                    | Limwere        | FP                        | Urban      | DSS            |
|                    | Tetere         | FP                        | Peri-urban | DSS and SIG    |
|                    | Yanire         | FP                        | Peri-urban | DSS and SIG    |
| The Rural District | Njerera        | FP                        | Rural      | DSS            |
|                    | Mwiyora        | JP                        | Rural      | DSS            |
| Lakeshore District | Sitinire       | FP                        | Urban      | DSS            |
|                    | Chokare        | JP                        | Urban      | DSS            |
|                    | Lindira        | FP                        | Rural      | DSS            |
|                    | Lukulara       | FP                        | Rural      | DSS            |
|                    | Salumwera      | FP                        | Rural      | DSS and SIG    |
|                    | Mutuwara       | FP                        | Rural      | DSS and SIG    |

Interviews were carried out with a number of actors in each school: the school head teacher or deputy, a group of teachers, the chairperson of the school management committee (SMC), the chairperson of the parent–teacher association (PTA), a group of parents, a group of learners, and the primary education advisor (PEA). While most of the information was collected at the school level, additional information was sought from district level actors. These included the district education manager (DEM) and, in some cases, the accountant and the desk officer responsible for either DSS or SIG.

### This booklet

This report analyses and synthesizes the data collected during the field research in Malawi. It is organized into six chapters: *Chapter 1* presents the main characteristics of the schools studied and their environment. *Chapter 2* examines the policy formulation and dissemination processes on each policy. *Chapter 3* discusses the criteria and grants' distribution mechanisms, while *Chapter 4* focuses on the use of the grants at school level. *Chapter 5* deals with the monitoring and control of the use of school grants. *Chapter 6* summarizes the main contributions of the grants to access, equity and quality, assesses the strengths and challenges of both grants, and provides a set of recommendations for improvement of each grant.

# 1. Profile of the schools and their environment

## 1.1 Basic characteristics of the schools' localities

The localities of the schools forming the sample for the research had many shared characteristics. Except for the two City District schools with a majority of the community working as civil servants, the rest of the schools were located in poor communities with only a few mid to high socio-economic families. For example, the two schools located in the peri-urban area of the City District had poor families with the majority of parents running small-scale businesses. Some had no reliable source of income. This was also true of the Rural District schools where almost all the parents were subsistence farmers.

The Lakeshore District schools presented a very mixed picture. Although generally the community members were poor, there were some relatively wealthy people. The richer families largely lived from wages earned in South African mines and shops where many young men in the district go to work, and to a smaller extent fishing, as the district is located along Lake Malawi. However such parents, including those living at the town centre of the district, have low education levels with the majority having dropped out of school before reaching Grade 5, and some have never attended school at all.

Generally, the catchment areas of the schools are large with a substantial number of pupils travelling a long distance. Surprisingly, even the City District schools had students walking from as far as 6 km away. The situation was worse for Lakeshore District schools which are few and far between. In this district, some full primary schools are interspersed with junior primary schools to help ease the distance problem for younger learners. This, in turn, creates its own problems as some pupils drop out after completing junior school.

While the major reason for the large catchment areas was an insufficient number of schools, some parents were motivated by the good reputation of the school. For example, Waware school actors, including the head teacher, declared that 'Many pupils come from far away because they say that this school offers good education'. This was confirmed by the PEA who claimed that 'It is one of the better schools among my five schools'. The parents added that many pupils from the school are selected to go to secondary school. This encourages most parents from around the community and even from places further afield to send their children to this school.

## 1.2 The schools: general information

### Profiles of the schools

Five of the sampled schools were government-owned and therefore managed through the Local Education Authority (LEA). The majority were owned by different churches and religions with the Catholic Church taking the lead. Interestingly, while the City District schools were largely government-owned, all the schools sampled in Lakeshore District were owned by churches, with two-thirds belonging to the Catholic Church. This is a sign of missionary influence for the Lakeshore District where education indicators tended to be low.

Regardless of the proprietor, however, the Malawi Government, through the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology is responsible for teaching and the provision of learning resources to all the schools sampled. There was a great variety in the sizes of the schools, as well as in their other characteristics such as the number of classrooms and teachers, and state of the buildings. However, all the schools had a school management committee (SMC) and a PTA despite having different perceptions of their roles, as will be discussed later. *Table 2* shows some of the different characteristics of the schools.



**Table 2. Profiles of the schools**

| Name of school | Proprietor      | Number of pupils   | Number of teachers                         | Pupil/teacher ratio | Number of classrooms | State of school buildings   |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--|---------------------|----------------------|---|
| Waware         | LEA             | 1,590 (51 % girls) | 25 (19 females)                            | 63:1                | 22                   | Buildings in good condition, basic teaching and learning materials available  |
| Limwere        | LEA             | 2,553 (45% girls)  | 29 (26 (females)                           | 88:1                | 16                   | Buildings in fairly good condition, basic teaching and learning materials available   |
| Tetere         | LEA             | 6,848 (52% girls)  | 60 (54 females)                            | 114:1               | 12                   | Buildings in fairly good condition but insufficient, new classrooms under construction  |
| Yanire         | LEA             | 11,021 (52% girls) | 99 (80 females)                            | 111:1               | 16                   | Buildings in fairly good condition but very few, school operating in double shift system  |
| Njerera        | CCAP church     | 962 (49% girls)    | 21 (11 females)                            | 45:1                | 5                    | Buildings scarce and dilapidated, teaching and learning materials fairly adequate   |
| Mwiyora        | LEA             | 767 (50% girls)    | 18   | 42:1                | 3                    | Buildings in fairly good condition but insufficient   |
| Sitinire       | Catholic church | 2,517 (50% girls)  | 24+1 assistant (18 females)                | 100:1               | 10                   | Generally poor infrastructure, e.g. inadequate furniture, painted wood blocks used as chalkboards, minimal light in classrooms          |
| Chokare        | Catholic church | 467 (48% girls)    | 9 (4 females)                              | 51:1                | 4                    | Classrooms in quite good condition, boys' and girls' toilets separated by wall, pupils and teachers use same toilets                    |
| Lukulara       | Muslim school   | 1,251 (53% girls)  | 11 (3 females + 6 female trainee teachers) | 113:1               | 15                   | Generally poor quality infrastructure, e.g. classrooms have poor ventilation, rough floors and inadequate desks                         |
| Lindira        | Anglican church | 1,463 (51% girls)  | 16 + 3 assistants (11 females)             | 77:1                | 12                   | Buildings in fairly good condition  |
| Salumwera      | Catholic church | 566 (49% girls)    | 6 male teachers                            | 94:1                | 4                    | Buildings in poor condition (floor, blackboard and roof in bad state); no toilets (pupils use the bush), no individual desks for pupils |
| Mutuwara       | Catholic church | 1,262 (48% girls)  | 9 (2 females)                              | 140:1               | 6 +1 temporary       | Buildings in fairly good condition, inadequate infrastructure, (pupils learn outside while others use the makeshift classroom)          |

As noted in *Table 2*, almost all schools had a higher pupil/teacher ratio than the national recommended ratio of 60:1 (Government of Malawi, 2008). The classroom/pupil ratio was equally high and, apart from overcrowded classrooms, the other common feature of the schools was the presence of outdoor classes where pupils learnt under a tree. In this regard the most deprived schools were Tetere (City District), Njerera (Rural District), Lindira and Slumwera (Lakeshore District). Yanire, which was the largest of the schools visited, was operating a double shift system owing both to insufficient classrooms and overcrowding at the school due to the large pupil enrolment.

Tetere could look forward to more classroom blocks in the near future: at the time of the study they were being constructed by DfID. However, the rest of the schools had little hope of solving their congestion problems in the short term. This is despite the fact that all the schools had school block construction projects that were spearheaded by the SMC and PTA. At the time of the study, Mwiwora and Limwere schools had completed one school block, constructed with the help of their SMC, and were planning similar projects. In Lakeshore, no school block had been constructed by SMC except for Salumwera School where teachers had built an office for the head teacher and Mutuwara where the SMC had initiated the construction of housing for teachers. Most of the projects in the Lakeshore schools were still at the brick-moulding stage. Unfortunately, the religious proprietors of the schools did appear to control the provision of resources for the schools in an exclusive manner. In fact, there were examples of such proprietors refusing to grant infrastructural support even when it was available. For example, at Njerera School, the church would not allow the pupils to use the prayer house for classes during adverse weather conditions such as heavy rain or sun: 'The church is just the owner of the school, but they don't come in with help. For instance, in 2007, a roof of the classroom block was blown off by a rainstorm, so we wrote to the church for help, but they never helped us and they still do not help us even when there is heavy rain' (Head teacher, Njerera School).

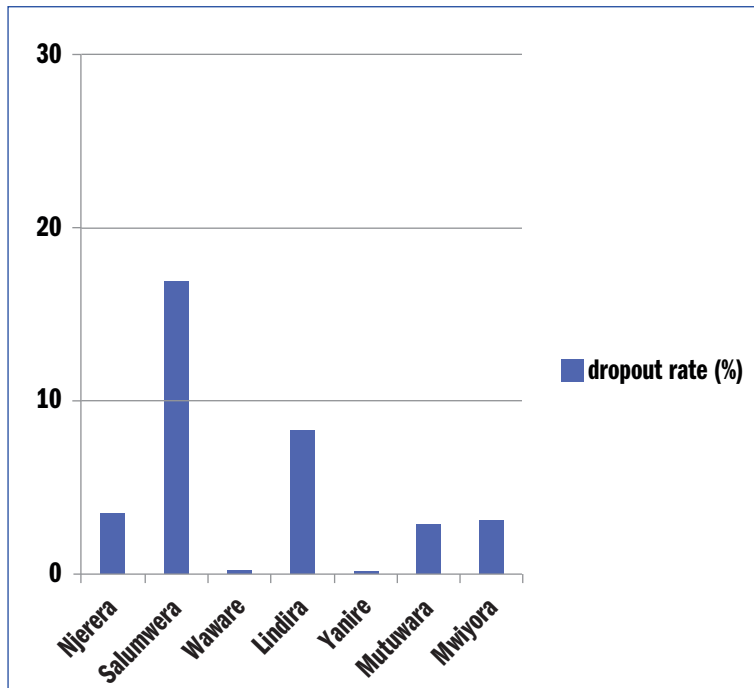
Each school had at most one government-constructed teacher house which was principally occupied by the head teacher. However, in almost all the schools, the SMC and PTA had built housing that was rented by the teachers; the income thus generated was used to meet school needs. But such houses were both inadequate and of a poor standard, forcing some teachers to rent houses far away from the school.

### **Enrolment, absenteeism, and dropout**

In general, the enrolment of the schools had increased over the years. Almost all the schools attributed this to the fact that learners transferred to their schools. 'This is because many pupils from these schools get selected to good secondary school', teachers would typically answer. However, another reason, rarely mentioned, was the growing population coupled with the increased interest in sending children to school. For the Rural District and peri-urban schools, 'mother groups' were seen to have contributed greatly to raising awareness about the importance of education. These groups are made up of mothers, designated by the SMC and PTA; they visit pupils and parents in their home to encourage the children to go to school. Parents in general may have had a growing awareness of the benefits of education, but for the majority of the respondents the increased interest of children and parents in attending school is linked to the school feeding programme. Parents at Tetere School said that: 'The school feeding programme has helped a lot as more pupils always want to come to school'. Similar sentiments were expressed by teachers, parents, and members of SMCs of all schools in the three districts. The Lakeshore District actors expressed this even more emphatically as the feeding programme had been recently introduced.

At first, respondents in most schools claimed that their dropout rate had been low in recent years. But despite this positive impression, the data provided by schools reveal that many of them do suffer from a relatively high dropout rate. In one school for instance – Salumwera – over 15% of pupils dropped out in 2010.

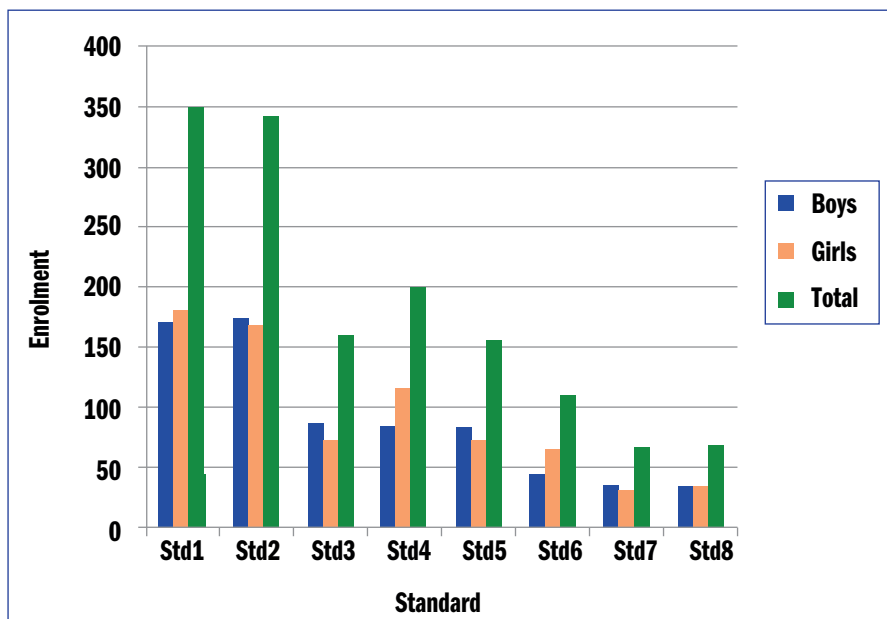
**Figure 1. Dropout rate in schools visited with available data in 2010\***



\* Data on dropout rates were available in 7 out of the 12 schools.  
 Source: Compiled from school data (2011).

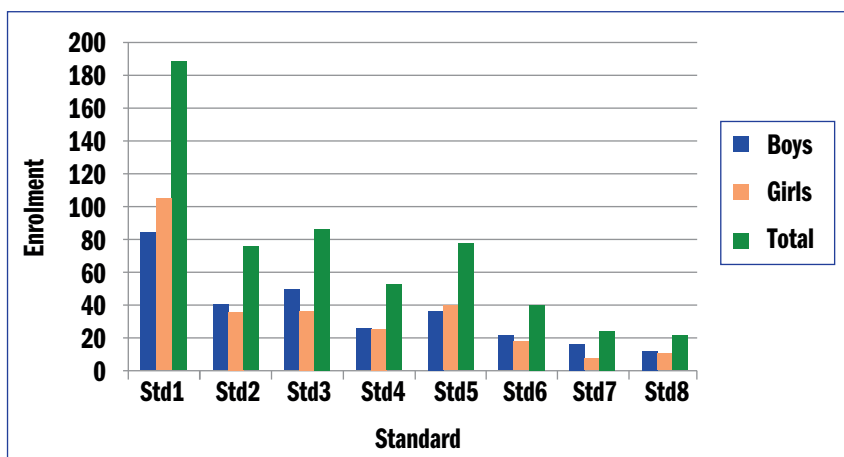
Further examination of the data showed that the enrolment is particularly high in Standard 1, the first class of primary school, but far lower for Standard 8, the final class. *Graphs 2 and 3* show the decline in learner numbers for Lindira and Salumwera schools, respectively. This was typical of all 12 schools.

**Figure 2. Enrolment by gender and standard for Lindira school (Lakeshore District) in 2011**



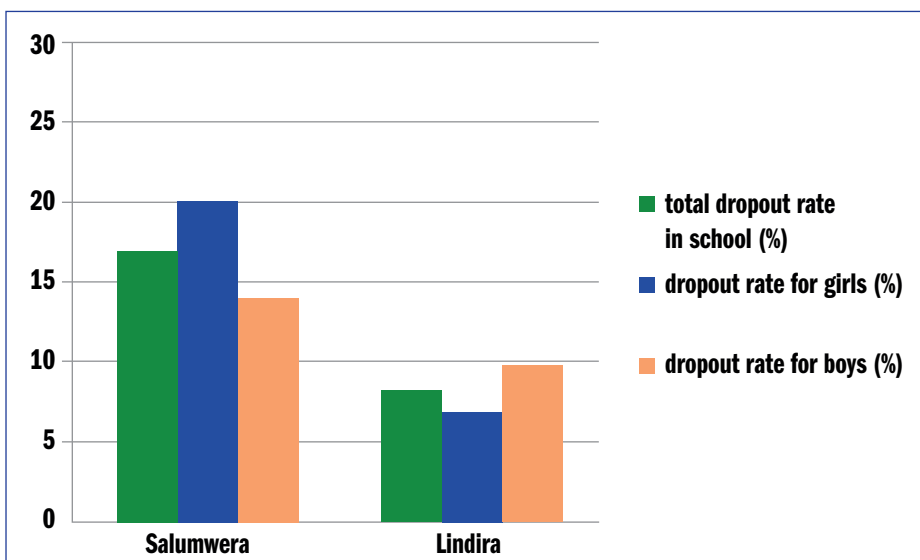
Source: Compiled from school data (2011).

**Figure 3. Enrolment by gender and standard for Salumwera school (Lakeshore District) in 2011**



Source: Compiled from school data (2011).

**Figure 4. Dropout rate by gender in Salumwera and Lindira schools (Lakeshore District) in 2010**



Source: Compiled from school data (2011).

Figure 4 reveals that whereas girls were more likely to drop out in Salumwera school, the opposite was true in Lindira school.

After they were directly asked where the rest of pupils went, many of the respondents shared their opinions on the reasons for dropouts in upper standards, in particular Standards 7 and 8. Early pregnancy and marriage were seen as a major cause of dropout of girls, while a lack of interest cut across both sexes. In Lakeshore District, the contributing factors were issues relating to the general occupations of the community. Boys and men tend to go to South Africa to work in the mines and as shop attendants. Similarly, fishing takes the boys out of school. These boys tend to do relatively well for themselves and inevitably pull girls out from school through marriage and pregnancy. This district shows the lowest enrolment of pupils in Standard 8, for both boys and girls: ‘South Africa is really pulling boys out of school here. They just come to school to learn how to read and write so that they can go to South Africa, so most boys from Standard 7 and 8 drop out’ (Teachers, Lukulara School).

Apart from dropouts, almost all the schools face the problem of absenteeism among pupils. School staff felt this to be mainly due to a lack of encouragement from parents and the

involvement of children in household chores during school hours. Teachers and principals from Sitinire school explained that they thought absenteeism was more common in the first years of primary school, as classrooms are very overcrowded and absent pupils can go unnoticed. However, the research team was not able to collect any data on absenteeism and it appeared that this is rarely recorded by schools.

The school feeding programme was perceived by the different respondents to have helped a great deal in reducing the problems of dropout and absenteeism in almost all the schools. For Yanire and Teterere schools, however, both with a high number of learners, respondents noted that some learners leave school after their meal without finishing the rest of the lessons. This was possible because of large numbers but also because most of the classes were held outside where there was so much movement of learners that no one could easily identify the learners who had quit the lesson.

### **School management**

As already mentioned, all the sampled schools had an SMC and PTA executive, both elected by parents at a PTA meeting. The different groups of respondents (with the exception of learners in some schools) knew that the committees have a mandate to work for two or three years before new elections are held. Despite knowledge of the duration of the SMC and PTA mandates, there were schools where members of such committees had stayed in their position longer than their mandate. One example of such a school is Njerera where new committees were recently elected after the previous committee had been in place for 10 to 15 years. The reason given by the head teachers was 'Resistance from the existing SMC members themselves'. Sitinire School in Lakeshore District had a similar experience.

While the National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management in Malawi stipulates that the membership of SMC is composed of nine persons, different responses were provided. While some respondents reported nine members, others reported that there are 10 members. Similar discrepancies in knowledge were observed for the composition of the PTA executive which officially consists of 10 members. The reason given by one PTA chairman was that 'PTA is not found in the Education Act and therefore its constitution and composition varies from school to school'.

In most of the schools there was no common understanding of the roles of the SMC and PTA executive by the different groups of respondents. They differed most widely on their understanding of the collection of parents/community contributions, called 'school fund' in the City and Rural Districts. At several schools, including Lukulara, Njerera and Mwiwora, parents said the PTA was responsible for collecting the money while in the rest of the schools it was perceived as the role of the SMC. The following extract from the Education Act was posted in the head teacher's office of Yanire School:

The role of the SMC is to look into the discipline issues of teachers and pupils, to collect school funds and ensure that money is used prudently, and also to see what is happening at the school, to assist on school development by mobilizing the community to undertake development work at school and to act as a bridge between PTA and parents (The Education Act, 1962).

The role of the PTA was often seen as monitoring the work of the SMC and mediating issues between learners and teachers.

Most respondents felt that the SMC and PTA committees cooperated with the school very well. However one observed shortcoming was the low education of the members of these bodies. For example, one head teacher said that: 'The SMC is helpful but the only limitation is education, so sometimes they do not fully appreciate the issues the school is experiencing'. In addition, not all the members of the committees are active and in some schools the SMC and PTA did not call regular parents' meetings to brief them on what was happening at the school.

## 2. School grants policy: Purpose, policy formulation, and dissemination

### 2.1 General information on free primary education

In general, the different school grants coming from central government can be linked to Free Primary Education (FPE) which was introduced in Malawi in 1994, soon after the first multi-party elections. However, this link was not seen by many of the respondents perhaps because the grants were introduced long after the FPE policy was in place. In most schools the parents and learners did not seem to know about the purpose of DSS and that the policy could be linked to free primary education. The different groups of respondents in the different schools were all aware of and familiar with the FPE policy, perhaps as a result of dissemination through radio, newspapers, and mentions in political rallies. This awareness was despite the fact that almost no respondents took part in any discussions leading up to the policy.

The respondents had the general impression that FPE has been very beneficial to the members of the community since, as learners of Lindira School said, ‘It has allowed learners who could not afford to go to school to do so’.

Although celebrating the benefits of FPE, the respondents were also quick to mention the disadvantages of the policy. Parents, SMC chairpersons and learners agreed that some parents and learners do not take school seriously: ‘Since it is free, children are even late for school and others think they are at liberty to be absent from school because they pay no fees, and parents do not force them to go to school’. Learners bemoaned the ‘overcrowding’ as a result of FPE and the lack of seriousness of teachers. These occurrences reflect a laxity on the part of all the different stakeholders regarding schooling as a result of FPE policy.

### 2.2 Policy formulation process

The general impression from most of the respondents in the 12 schools was that they were not involved in the direct support to schools (DSS) and school improvement grant (SIG) policy formulation processes, although two respondents who said that they were involved formed an exception. These were the District Education Manager (DEM) for the Rural District and one retired teacher who was teaching at one of the schools in Lakeshore District. The DEM for the Rural District said she was actively involved in the preparation for the implementation of DSS. She explained that during ESSUP 1 (First Education Sector Support Project), she was ‘Invited to a series of meetings on DSS implementation and was part of the team, together with some selected primary education advisors (PEA), that developed the DSS implementation manual which was later distributed to schools’. The retired teacher said that he had participated in the deliberations leading to DSS when he was District Education Officer (DEO), now DEM.

It is thus evident that some actors were involved in the DSS policy formulation process at national level but those involved may be thinly spread and difficult to identify. What is not clear, however, is whether or not some school-level actors such as teachers and head teachers had any part to play in the policy formulation processes in addition to the PEAs.

The respondents targeted in this study did not take part in the policy formulation for SIG. However it is possible, as shown by the DSS policy, that some selected DEMs and PEAs were involved but were outside of the sample of this study.

## 2.3 Policy dissemination

### DSS policy

Knowledge of school grants varied greatly from school to school and from district to district.

In general, all respondents at the Rural District schools (Njerera and Mwiyo) mentioned the DSS grant and were able to state its aims and describe how it is implemented. This was perhaps because the schools had received their largest recent DSS grant a month or two before the study was conducted and this was fresh in their memory. The head teachers of the two schools said that they were trained on the DSS grant in 2006 and later in 2009, which was confirmed by the teachers. And, although the SMC chairpersons in the two schools said they received no training, they were quick to mention that they were informed about the grant by the head teachers. It is possible that the current SMC chairs were not yet on the committee when the training took place. The teachers in the two schools were also informed about DSS by their head teachers although they could not remember the details and said that 'They did not take the orientation seriously'.

Out of all four City District schools, only one school's respondents (Waware school) had information about the grant. This can without doubt be explained by the fact that although the remaining three schools had received DSS grants in the past, they had not in the present year. In these schools, only a few people knew about the grant, in some cases even the head teacher had to resort to school records for them to say anything about the DSS grant, even though they had received it one year (Yanire School) or two years (Limwere and Teterere schools) before the study. For example, at Teterere School, members of the SMC and PTA, parents, and teachers knew nothing about DSS and the deputy head teacher had to refer to a file in order to comment on the grant. This was also the case for Yanire and Limwere schools, although in these two schools at least the teachers had some scanty information about the grant.

The head teachers of the three schools said that they had attended a one-day orientation seminar at the Teacher Development Centre (TDC) together with other head teachers back in 2006. But they explained that they had received this orientation while they were head teachers of other schools. They remembered that the training they attended involved the SMC and PTA chairs as well. Surprisingly, the SMC and PTA chairs for these three same schools knew nothing about the training, arguing that it may be 'Because they were recently elected'. It appears that no files are handed over to subsequent committees once the term of office of the SMC or PTA expires. This indicates that information on implementation of the DSS policy may not have been widely disseminated at the school level in these areas.

In Lakeshore District, all the school-level respondents except learners in three schools (Sitinire, Chokare and Mutuwara), and parents as well as learners in two schools (Lindira and Salumwera) were knowledgeable about the purpose of DSS and how it is implemented. Surprisingly, in one school, Lukulara, the different groups of respondents were aware that the school receives a grant although they did not know the name of the grant. However, when they explained the use of it and how it is implemented, the information pointed to DSS.

Almost all the head teachers in the schools visited in Lakeshore District were aware of the DSS policy through training, although in two of the schools (Sitinire and Mutuwara) they had been trained while still at their previous schools. Head teachers attended training together with SMC/PTA chairpersons. In two schools, (Lindira and Salumwera), although head teachers were aware of the training conducted when DSS was introduced in 2006, the rest of the respondents, including the chairs of the SMC and PTA, had no idea that such training was being offered. Again, they may have been uninformed because they

were all newly elected. In Salumwera School, both the SMC and PTA chairpersons had been in office for two years at the time of the interview, while the SMC chairperson at Lindira school had replaced another member who had opted out of the committee. This indicates that the head teachers of the schools did not inform the new SMC and PTA committees accordingly.

The different head teachers said the training they received was on the procedures to be taken to access the grant, as well as on the criteria for allocating the grants to schools. They generally considered this training useful because it provided information on how to handle the grant.

After the training, each school was supposedly given two guidelines for DSS, one copy of which was to be held by the head teacher and another copy by the SMC chairperson. The SMC and PTA chairpersons in all the schools visited could not trace the guidelines and only the Rural District head teachers actually produced the guidelines for the research team to see.

### **SIG policy**

As said previously, four schools received SIG in total, two from Lakeshore District – Salumwera and Mutuwara – and two from the City District – Yanire and Teterere. Respondents in the schools in Lakeshore District knew of the grant. Yanire school respondents also had information on SIG, which was in sharp contrast to their lack of knowledge on DSS. However, the same could not be said about Teterere: the low level of awareness about the existence of the grant in the school was worrying because it had received the SIG grant in 2011, the same year the research was conducted.

Respondents from all but one schools visited in City and Lakeshore Districts said that different groups of school actors were trained on SIG, including schools that had yet to receive the grant. The exception to this was respondents at Lukulara school in Lakeshore District who had not been trained and knew nothing about the grant. The study found that at district level, the DEM, two accounts assistants, and the EDSA desk officer attended training on the implementation of the grant. These four later trained all the PEAs in their respective districts. Each PEA then trained the school-level actors including the head teacher, three Teachers Living Positively (TILIPO), the deputy head teacher, the SMC chairperson, the PTA chairperson, the ‘mother group’ chairperson, the school-level procurement committee, and a few learners. The emphasis of the training was reported to be on financial management and procurement and the preparation of SIPs.

The different actors considered the three-day training to be very useful because it helped them understand the grant and its implementation procedures. However, they complained that only a few teachers had been trained and suggested broader training for all teachers so that they knew what was happening with the fund and could easily follow up on it. Head teachers explained that they were given guidelines on how to manage the SIG grant although, similarly to the DSS grant guidelines, they could not find them in their offices.

It is worth noting that the school-level actors in the Rural District schools, who were not part of the pilot districts, knew nothing about SIG.



## 3. Criteria and mechanisms of grants distribution

### 3.1 Criteria

#### Direct support to schools (DSS)

The DSS guidelines stipulate that the DSS grant is given accordingly to enrolment and, as described in the introduction, enrolment bands were used to determine the amounts to be allocated to each school (Table 3).

**Table 3. School actors' awareness of criteria of DSS grant**

| District           | Name of school | Head Teacher aware of criteria of grant | Teachers aware of criteria of grant | Other actors aware of criteria of grant/ able to guess |
|--------------------|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| The City District  | Waware         | X                                       | X                                   | X  |
|                    | Limwere        | X                                       |                                     |  |
|                    | Tetere         | X                                       |                                     |  |
|                    | Yanire         | X                                       |                                     |  |
| The Rural District | Njerera        | X                                       |                                     |  |
|                    | Mwiyora        | X                                       | X                                   |  |
| Lakeshore District | Sitinire       | X                                       | X                                   |  |
|                    | Chokare        | X                                       | X                                   |  |
|                    | Lindira        | X                                       |                                     |  |
|                    | Lukulara       | X                                       | X                                   | X  |
|                    | Salumwera      |   |                                     |  |
|                    | Mutuwara       | X                                       | X                                   |  |

Most of the actors in the City District and the Rural District schools knew nothing about the criteria for disbursing the DSS grant, although they were able to guess. For example, parents at Waware School thought that: 'Perhaps DSS is distributed based on the size of the school'. At Waware and Mwiyora schools both the head teacher and teachers knew about the criteria. In the rest of the schools in these two districts, only the head teachers knew the criteria. The parents, school management committee (SMC), and parent-teacher association (PTA) were all completely uninformed about the criteria.

In Lakeshore District, there were mixed views on the criteria for DSS. Although most of the respondents in schools mentioned enrolment or school size as the criterion used to give money to schools, some teachers in two schools thought that all schools received the same amount of money and knew nothing of the criterion. Parents and learners in almost all the schools did not know about the criterion, with those from Lukulara reporting that 'they heard that enrolment is the criterion being used'. In contrast, all respondents from Salumwera School, including the head teacher, reported that they did not know the essential criterion.

It is important to note that although some respondents mentioned enrolment as the criterion for allocating grants in all the schools, none of them mentioned the enrolment bands. This shows that the respondents did not have a complete picture of the grant.

Overall, the criterion for DSS grant disbursement received mixed reactions from the different respondents who knew something or even guessed it. Among the City District schools, the head teacher for Limwera School was the only respondent who said that the criterion was good and that it made sense. His only problem was that 'The grant is too small'. The remaining various groups of respondents were not happy with the criterion for various reasons. They felt that the money allocated in this way may not adequately meet the needs of the wide range of schools and their locations. The argument by the chairman of Njerera School, which was typical of other chairmen, was that 'While schools surrounded by richer communities in urban centres may not necessarily require infrastructure, other schools such as those in rural areas may need it'. To have any success, they recommended that the grant should be based on the needs of the individual school.

There were mixed reactions among respondents in Lakeshore District, with some stating that the criterion was good while others complained that it was not fair. Most agreed that while some schools have large enrolments, they already have adequate resources and do not need more money, while small schools often have no resources at all.

### **School improvement grant (SIG)**

The criteria for disbursement of SIG were not clear to the different groups of respondents in both the pilot and non-pilot districts. This was true even for schools that had received the grant twice at the time of the study, such as Yanire and Teterere in City District and Salumwera and Mutuwara in Lakeshore District. However, the head teachers of the pilot schools were able to guess part of the criteria, arguing that: 'It must have been based on the number of identified orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and care, treatment, and support (CTS) children at the school'. This was confirmed by the PSIP/EDSA desk officer at the DEO for the City District who added that: 'The grant is given based on both the school enrolment and on the numbers of OVC and CTS submitted by head teachers to the DEM's office'.

The descriptions of SIG given by the different school actors showed that, unlike for the DSS grant where the grant is assigned to the school, the SIG allocated a certain amount of money to selected learners.

At Yanire and Teterere schools, CTS learners were allocated MWK 7,500 (\$22.5) each per year while the OVC's were allocated MWK 5,500 (\$16.5) each per year. This was confirmed by the EDSA desk officer. It appeared that different allocation criteria were decided upon by the DEO in Lakeshore District as respondents there said that each child, irrespective of whether they were OVC or CTS, received the sum of MWK 4,000 (\$12) per year. Based on information provided in a USAID report, a standard rate per child had been determined for OVCs and CTS at the national level, at MWK 4,500 (\$12.9) for OVCs in primary schools<sup>4</sup> and MWK 7,000 (\$20) for HIV positive learners (USAID, 2009). The research therefore established that slightly higher amounts of funds (although only marginally) arrived at schools than was originally planned in the EDSA programme.

With the exception of one TILIPO teacher, teachers and the SMC chair could not say how much was allocated to each learner. The parents also knew nothing about the amount of money allocated to each beneficiary.

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4. According to the USAID report, in addition to the MWK 4,500 (\$12.9) provided for OVCs attending primary school, an extra MWK 1,000 (\$2.9) was given to recipients in Grade 8 to cover their primary examination fees. The standard rate allocated to secondary school OVCs was MWK 4,000 (\$11.5) with an additional MWK 1,300 (\$3.7) for secondary examination fees in Form 2 and Form 4 schools.

Although there has been extensive training on SIG in the two pilot districts, there has not been much emphasis on the important details of the grant itself and the criteria for its disbursement. Part of the problem may be that the SIG experimented in a few schools of a number of pilot districts in 2010, was not designed in the same way as the SIG being rolled out in all the schools of these districts. For example, while the first pilot schools received various amounts of money, according to the number of OVCs and HIV-positive learners in each school (as explained above) in 2010, it was intended that in 2011 all schools would receive the same amount of MWK 250,000 (\$750) as a baseline allocation. The DEM of City District reassured researchers that funding will remain to some extent proportional to the size of a school as, ‘When the enrolment of a school is less than 3,000, the amount will be MWK 250,000 (\$750). When it is more than 3,000, additional MWK 100 (\$0.3) will be added per child per year’. Similarly, the primary education advisor (PEA) was well informed about the changes to be made to SIG and added extra details to the information given by the DEM. According to him, in addition to the MWK 250,000 (\$750) each school will receive, each OVC will receive MWK 4,000 (\$12). It became clear through these interviews that not all actors had the same level or type of information on the SIG.

### 3.2 Mechanisms for grant distribution

#### DSS

The different actors in all three districts were aware that the DSS grant does not reach the school in the form of cash, but rather through a cheque that is made payable to the supplier of the materials purchased.

The DEM for the City District explained that DSS money earmarked for specific schools is first sent from central government to the district assembly account where it is transferred to the other recurrent transactions (ORT) account of the DEO. Once the money reaches the ORT account, the DEM sends messages to schools through the PEAs on how much each school has received. Schools are then asked to come up with a list of needs for the year. Based on the needs, the schools are asked to source three quotations from shops, discuss them as a group (i.e. PTA, SMC, teachers, and head teacher) and choose only one shop where the materials would be bought. It was learned that schools are then expected to submit the quotations to the district office together with the minutes of the meetings where they decided on what to buy. Once the quotations are scrutinized and approved by the district office, a cheque is issued directly to the supplier. Previously the cheque was issued to schools who would later present it to the supplier. Once the money is credited to the supplier account, the schools are called to collect the materials purchased.

The different actors, including the SMC chair, parents, and teachers, especially in the Rural District schools, were aware of the mechanism for the DSS grant as described by the DEM. However, they added that four learner representatives and mother groups were also involved in deciding the schools’ needs. They added that the purchased materials were collected by the SMC chair and the head teacher who later gathered the mother group, PTA, and learner representatives to check whether the materials were the ones ordered. The head teacher of Mwiwora school said that: ‘The process being used currently has a problem in that sometimes more expensive items are bought from the shops recommended by the DEO rather than the local shops around’. This view was shared by other teachers who said: ‘Schools should have the liberty to go and check items from the various shops’.

In Lakeshore District, although most of the school-level actors, except parents, learners, and a few SMC members, were aware of this mechanism, there was a general outcry that in 2009 the schools were directed to obtain quotations from specific shops and the materials were bought by the DEO. This was obviously contradictory to the agreed mechanism and

the practice for the other two districts. Respondents from this same district complained that there was too great a delay in the delivery of goods to the schools and that most of the goods were not of the quality that they wanted. There were even instances when the goods did not come at all. For example, at Salumwera teachers said that: 'They gave us iron sheets of different sizes than what was on the quotations; we wanted to buy hoes and were given handmade instead of factory-made ones, "*makasu osula*", and we wanted some paint but never got any'. At Lindira, Satinire, and Chokare Schools, goods bought were not worth the money paid for them, and some items on the quotation were not delivered at all. Mutuwara school received handmade hoes as in Salumwera, and expired cement. However, the DEM could not confirm these instances. He was also unable to provide an explanation as he reported that at the time he had not yet been posted to the district.

Most of the respondents expressed frustration with this mechanism and believed that schools should be allowed to buy the materials on their own or even be given the money directly.

Similar anomalies were not observed for all three districts. The only common irregularity is that of the DEM selecting suppliers to obtain quotations in the first cycles of the grant. However this was improved in subsequent years so that for 2011, teachers said: 'Unlike before, this year schools were free to get quotations from any shops'.

Although the mechanism for DSS distribution and implementation went well in most schools in all three education districts, some shortcomings were noted. The Rural District DEM, for example, complained that some schools had to be pushed to get quotations because most of them found it difficult to understand government procurement procedures. Although most parents and SMC chairpersons expressed satisfaction with the issuing of cheques to suppliers instead of providing cash to the schools, because 'Money is evil' they said, nevertheless, they observed that it took a long time between the time the school got quotations and the release of cheques to suppliers. For instance, in 2011, the Rural District schools obtained quotations in February but only received the goods in April; this resulted in fewer goods being collected because prices had increased.

## **SIG**

In the two City District SIG pilot schools, different actors, especially the head teacher and the TILIPO teachers, were able to explain the mechanisms of the SIG grant. These respondents said that one of the requirements for the grant was the preparation of a school improvement plan (SIP) and provision of a list of CTS and OVC learners. During the training and orientation on the grant, those attending were informed about the process of developing a SIP. This entailed pupils, teachers, and parents sitting down separately to identify the needs of the school, consolidating these needs and prioritizing them. As explained previously, according to the SIG/EDSA desk officer, the SIPs must aim to cater for the three National Education Sector Plan (NESP) goals which include quality and relevance, access and equity, and governance and management.

The SIPs were seen posted on the notice boards in the head teachers' offices for all schools in the City District. This included schools that had received the grant in the previous two years and those schools that were just anticipating receiving the grant for the first time in the 2010/2011 academic year.

The situation was similar for Lakeshore District where most of the school-level actors, including head teachers, members of the SMC and PTA, teachers, and a few parents, could explain the mechanisms of the SIG grant. For the most part, learners only knew that the school either received the grant or would receive the grant and that some learners attended training sessions. Learners could however also explain how the beneficiaries were identified, especially in those schools that had already started receiving the grant,

such as Salumwera and Mutuwara. At Lukulara school, there was no mention of the grant, probably because they had yet to receive any training on its implementation.

According to the head teachers of the pilot schools, once the schools submitted the SIP, different school actors, including SMC, head teacher, teachers, traditional leaders, PTA, and the village development committee (VDC), were asked to identify and produce a list of OVCs and CTS children. The head teachers explained that the OVCs were identified together with the SMC, PTA, local leaders, and teachers. The teachers already had records of single or double orphans for their class and had to submit the names of the most vulnerable children to the head teacher, who asked the SMC, PTA, and VDC to verify their status. In some cases they had to visit the children's homes in order to confirm their status. They then all sat together to come up with the final list. The teachers added that, 'In some cases orphaned learners who are well taken care of by their guardians are left out to give room to those who are most vulnerable and are not orphans'.

The identification of CTS children was confidential so as not to publicize their status. At PTA meetings, parents were informed on the support from the SIG and were asked 'to see the head teacher privately' if their children were HIV-positive. There they had their hospital records (health passport booklet) checked and were registered. In some cases, teachers observed the health of learners in class and 'suspected learners were invited to the head teacher's office' where they were asked to call their parents. The head teacher held private discussions with such parents and if it was established that the children were infected with the virus, they were also added to the list. All this was confirmed by teachers and the SMC chairperson. The final list of the names was then sent to the DEM's office.

However, it was learned that in both Lakeshore and City Districts, there were cases of schools having been instructed on the exact number of OVCs and HIV-positive learners they could provide to the DEO. This was the case in Salumwera for instance. A PEA from City District confirmed that this occurred, explaining that there is a limit on the number of OVCs a school can declare.

While in the process of identifying the learners, the schools were asked to establish a procurement committee consisting of teachers and SMC members. In addition, the schools were asked to open a bank account. The money allocated to the school was directly deposited into the school account from the EDSA office. This is unlike the case of DSS where money was disbursed through the DEM and did not reach the school in the form of cash.

Once the money was paid out, it was deposited into the school account and the school authorities were informed that it was in the bank. To collect the money, the head teacher and teachers explained that there were two categories of signatories, including the head teacher and the deputy head teacher on one side, and the SMC chairperson and the PTA chairperson on the other. The actual collection of the money involved one signatory from each category.

Generally, the school actors in the SIG pilot schools were happy that their grant came to them in the form of cash and that they could procure materials on their own. The process has helped some local business people in their community, especially the tailors who made school uniforms for the beneficiaries.

## 4. Use of grants at the school level

### 4.1 The school budget: general characteristics

The general picture coming from the 12 schools was that before the two grants came in, the schools were not putting together serious budgets. However, the receipt of the two grants has provoked the creation of some form of a budget, although the money mainly comes from other sources besides the direct support to schools (DSS) or school improvement grants (SIGs). In fact, other sources of funding play an important role in the school budget. The City District schools, for example, obtain the majority of their funds from fund-raising activities organized by the schools. These activities include hiring out of classrooms to churches for conducting prayers and the renting out of school grounds for different occasions such as engagement ceremonies, bridal showers, etc. Since the schools in Rural District do not have government-provided teachers' houses, the communities had built them themselves. The houses were constructed by the SMC and PTA, sometimes with the help of the church, and rented out for a small fee to teachers. This rent raises funds for the schools.

Contributions from parents constitute a source of funds for all the schools visited. In the City and Rural Districts, this money is commonly known as a school fund, a term that was not used by the school actors in Lakeshore District schools. Whatever name is given to this money, the concept is the same. A parent contributes per child enrolled at the school and the contribution is usually for the academic year although in some schools this contribution is split into three terms. The amount of money to be contributed is decided upon at a PTA meeting and the money is collected by the SMC. In some schools where larger amounts of money are collected due to either the higher numbers of pupils or a higher amount contributed, the money is generally kept in the school bank account. *Table 4* provides details of the other sources of funding that contribute to the school budget for the different schools visited.

However, not all parents contribute and, as a result, most schools reported that only about two-thirds of the learners pay. The reasons for non-payment by parents varied from school to school. However, for rural schools, the main reason was a lack of money, while for the urban schools it was a combination of lack of money and defiant parental attitudes, claiming 'Education is free'.

**Table 4. Sources of funds by school and the estimated annual amount (not including the grants)**

| District       | Name of school | Location   | Sources of funds  | Estimated amount/year (MWK) |
|----------------|----------------|------------|---|-----------------------------|
| City District  | Waware         | Urban      | Learner contribution                                    | 200.00/learner (\$0.60)     |
|                |                |            | Occasional contribution                                 | 250.00/learner (\$0.75)     |
|                |                |            | Fundraising by partner school in UK                     | Not quantified              |
|                | Limwere        | Urban      | Learner contribution                                    | 200.00/learner (\$0.60)     |
|                |                |            | Occasional contributions, (moulding bricks)             | 400.00/learner (\$1.20)     |
|                |                |            | Rentals (classrooms and school grounds)                 | 144,000.00 (\$0.44)         |
|                | Tetere         | Peri-urban | Learner contribution                                    | 150.00/learner (\$0.45)     |
|                |                |            | Learner contribution                                    | 500.00/learner (\$1.50)     |
|                |                |            | DfID (funding provided for construction of class block) | Not quantified              |
|                | Yanire         | Peri-urban | Learner contribution                                    | 100.00/learner (\$0.30)     |
|                |                |            | Classroom rentals                                       | 576,000.00 (\$1,736)        |
|                |                |            | School grounds rentals                                  | 720,000.00 (\$2,171)        |
| Hire of chairs |                |            | 25.00/chair (\$0.10)                                    |                             |
| Rural District | Njerera        | Rural      | Learner contribution                                    | 150.00 (\$0.45)             |
|                |                |            | Teacher house rentals                                   | 32,400.00 (\$97.70)         |
|                |                |            | School alumni   | Not quantified              |
|                |                |            | NGO Freshwater  | Not quantified              |
|                | Mwiyora        | Rural      | Learner contribution                                    | 300.00/learner (\$0.90)     |

| District           | Name of school | Location | Sources of funds   | Estimated amount/year (MWK)   |
|--------------------|----------------|----------|--|---|
| Lakeshore District | Sitinire       | Urban    | Learner contribution   | 300.00 (\$0.90)   |
|                    |                |          | Other contributions  | 60.00/learner for photocopying; (\$0.18)<br>200.00/learner for extra classes (\$0.60)     |
|                    | Chokare        | Urban    | Learner contribution   | 60.00/learner (\$0.18)  |
|                    | Lindira        | Rural    | Learner contribution   | 120.00/learner (\$0.36)   |
|                    |                |          | Other learner contributions                                  | 200.00/learner - (\$0.60) for head teacher's house; 10.00/learner for casual day (\$0.03) |
|                    |                |          | Teacher house rentals  | 96,000.00 (\$290)   |
|                    |                |          | UK-based charity (infrastructure and installing electricity) | Not quantified  |
|                    | Lukulara       | Rural    | Learner contribution   | 60.00/learner (\$0.18)  |
|                    |                |          | Other contributions  | 150.00/learner (\$0.45)   |
|                    |                |          | Teacher house rentals  | 36,000.00 (\$108)   |
|                    | Salumwera      | Rural    | Learner contribution   | 90.00/learner (\$0.30)  |
|                    | Mutuwara       | Rural    | Learner contribution   | 60.00/learner (\$0.18)  |
|                    |                |          | Occasional contributions                                     | 250.00/learner (\$0.75)   |
|                    |                |          | NGOs (CAMFED)  | 80,000.00 (\$241)   |
|                    |                |          | CRECCOM  | Not quantified  |

Source: Compiled from school data (2011).

The money collected from parental contributions is used similarly in all three districts. In general, the money is used for maintenance, stationery, transport for the head teacher when going to zone-level meetings, buying chairs, paying watchmen. At urban schools, the money is also used for payment of utility bills.

The SMC, with the help of the head teacher, decides what to use the money for and informs parents during PTA meetings on how the money has been used. During such



meetings, which are normally held once a month at the school, the SMC is also responsible for accounting of school fund money and therefore exercising control.

Donations from different organizations, including partner schools from other countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), were another source of funds for some schools. For example, Waware School benefited considerably from a partner school in the UK, while Njerera School was helped by the NGO Freshwater. Similarly, Teterere school benefited from DfID funding that led to the construction of many classroom blocks. Lindira school received funding from a UK-based charity organization working with the Anglican Church which installed electricity in all the teachers' houses and the head teacher's office, and constructed a school block and a small hall. Additionally, some orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) from Mutuwara school received school uniforms, fabric for making clothes for girls and boys, maize, blankets, shoes, and porridge flour from the Ambassadors' girls scholarship programme run by the Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM).

In addition to the fundraising activities and the school grants, all schools benefited from a school feeding programme. This programme is funded by different donors but is being implemented by the organization Mary's Meals. At the time of the study, the programme had just started in Lakeshore District, whereas in City District it had been active for some time. The school feeding programme is implemented in such a way that the schools receive the maize meal for a given period of time, as well as pots and firewood. Once the designated period ends, the school receives a new consignment of maize meal. The school community provides the labour with parents of the school learners taking turns to make the porridge for the learners on a daily basis.

In most of the schools, no problems were reported concerning the school feeding programme. However, one problem at Yanire School was that there were too many students and therefore not enough food for distribution.

## 4.2 The amount of the school grant

### The DSS grant amount

According to the manual for the implementation of DSS (Government of Malawi, 2008), the allocation of grants to schools is based on the enrolment of pupils. This is regardless of where the school is located or the resources available to the school. As described earlier, the enrolment of pupils is categorized into groups or bands of enrolment.

According to *Table 5*, schools were meant to receive amounts according to their enrolment band. It is difficult to establish a general figure on how much is allocated to each pupil because the amount is not based on the exact number of pupils. Therefore, the amount received for each pupil varies a lot from school to school. In 2008, when DSS grants were meant to be spent on teaching and learning materials only, the lowest amount a school could receive was MWK 72,000 (\$216), with a low pupil enrolment of 10 to 500; the highest was MWK 122,400 (\$370), with a pupil enrolment of above 4,501.

When asked about the amount of DSS grant received over the years, the respondents in all schools visited had different answers regarding the years in which they received the DSS grant and the amounts. Parents and students in particular were not sure of the amounts of DSS grant received over the years. It was difficult for the researchers to tell how much was received and when, owing to a lack of consistency in the information.

Figures shared by the District Education Offices (DEOs) showed however that generally the intended amount of the DSS grant – based on the enrolment bands – was provided in full to schools. For example, the size of the DSS grants received by schools in Lakeshore District in 2009 corresponded to the set amounts. Lindira, Lukulara, Salumwera and Mutuwara

schools for example all fell under the 501 to 1,500 enrolment band and, according to the Lakeshore DEO, each received the MWK 57,600 (\$165)<sup>5</sup> in 2009 (Table 6). Unfortunately, 2009 was the only year when there was complete data for the schools, so this conformity should not be generalized to the other years.

At the same time, a look at data collected from the DEO on all the schools in the district in 2009 showed that some schools received more than what they had expected, while others received less. For instance, 18.7% of schools within an enrolment of 501–1500 received less than they had expected.

**Table 5. DSS grant and enrolment bands (2008)**

| Grant purpose                   | Band 1 enrolment 10-500 | Band 2 Enrolment 501-1500 | Band 3 Enrolment 1,501-3,000 | Band 4 Enrolment 3,001-4,500 | Band 5 Enrolment above 4,501 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Teaching and learning materials | MWK 24,000 (\$72)       | MWK 27,000 (\$81)         | MWK 30,000 (\$90)            | MWK 33,000 (\$99)            | MWK 36,000 (\$108)           |
| Maintenance and rehabilitation  | 40,000 (\$121)          | 48,000 (\$145)            | 56,000 (\$169)               | 64,000 (\$193)               | 72,000 (\$217)               |
| Discretionary                   | 8,000 (\$24)            | 9,600 (\$29)              | 11,200 (\$34)                | 12,800 (\$37)                | 14,400 (\$43)                |
| Total                           | 72,000 (\$216)          | 84,000 (\$253)            | 97,200 (\$293)               | 109,800 (\$331)              | 122,400 (\$370)              |

Source: Government of Malawi, 2008.

**Table 6. DSS amounts by enrolment band for all schools with data in Lakeshore District in 2009**

| Enrolment Band | Expected DSS amount | Total N° of schools with data | Percentage of these schools that received expected amount | Percentage of these schools that received more than expected amount | Percentage of schools that received less than expected amount |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 10-500         | MWK 48,000 (\$137)  | 105                           | 95% (100)   | 5% (5)  | 0   |
| 501-1500       | MWK 57,600 (\$165)  | 123                           | 73.9% (91)  | 7.3% (9)  | 18.7% (23)  |
| 1501-3000      | MWK 67,200 (\$192)  | 10                            | 90% (9)   | 10% (1)   | 0   |
| 3001-4500      | MWK 76,800 (\$220)  | 2                             | 100% (2)  | 0   | 0   |
| 4500 and above | MWK 86,400 (\$247)  | 0                             | -   | -   | -   |

Source: Lakeshore District education office.

### The SIG amount

Within the sample of schools that received the SIG, there were two categories of schools. The first category consists of schools involved in the pilot programme, which had already received the grant twice at the time of the study, both in 2010 and 2011. In total, it was

5. In 2009, only the maintenance and rehabilitation grant (MWK 48,000 for this enrolment band), as well as the discretionary grant (MWK 9,600 for this enrolment band) were received by schools.

learned that there were nine such schools in City District and 41 in Lakeshore District. Schools in this category visited by the research team were Yanire and Teterere for City District and Salumwera and Mutuwara for Lakeshore. The remaining schools in these two education districts were to start receiving the grant in 2011 and the various actors had already been prepared for the grant.

Despite the fact that, in theory, all schools in the two districts were to receive the funding in 2011, it was learned that so far only the pilot schools – which had received the funding in 2010 – had received the funding in 2011. The 2011 grant was expected to be MWK 250,000 (\$750) for each school in the two districts and was targeted at SIP with OVC and CTS as sub-components.

Interviews with actors in the City District revealed that the SIG grant was paid in two parts. While one part was meant for OVC learners, the other combined CTS and the SIP. According to the school actors, the SIP money for 2010 was used to pay teachers who were providing CTS learners with extra lessons, running workshops for teachers on CTS learners, and other similar activities targeted at CTS and OVC learners. In 2011, SIP activities were not included but the grant given was meant for CTS learners only.

The experience with the first category of schools – those that had already received the grant twice – was that different schools received different amounts of money for the two groups of learners, OVC and CTS, and were therefore supporting different numbers of learners. According to the DEM in Lakeshore District, in 2010, each school received on average MWK 83,000 (\$249) for OVCs while in 2011 each school received MWK 137,000 (\$411) for OVCs. The DEM also added that all schools, including those that had already received the grant for two years, were to receive MWK 250,000 (\$750) as a SIG in 2011. They had yet to receive this sum at the time of the study.

It is interesting that there were differences in the amounts of the grant and the number of beneficiaries in the different schools in the two pilot districts. *Table 7* shows the amounts of SIG for schools within the sample as reported by head teachers, in Lakeshore and City districts.

*Table 7* shows that Yanire School received the largest grant, no doubt because of its large enrolment. It is also important to note that the Lakeshore District schools received the same amount as they had the same number of beneficiaries (all OVCs) in 2011.

This table also shows that despite the revised allocation formula introduced in 2011 for SIG grants, the amounts allocated to schools were calculated based on the criteria in place the previous year. As explained previously, supposedly each school in the City and Lakeshore Districts was to receive a fixed amount of MWK 250,000 (\$750) per school, with additional amounts added if the enrolment of the school is over 3,000 and if there are OVCs attending the school. In reality, this funding had not been received by the schools. As a result, as explained by an education decentralization support activity (EDSA) desk officer at the DEO in City District, the DEO had carried on the previous year's policy, allocating the grant to the pilot schools in their district and calculating the amount based on the number of OVCs and HIV-positive learners reported by the head teachers from these schools. It is likely that the district education office in Lakeshore district made the same decision.

**Table 7. SIG amounts for sampled schools and number of beneficiaries (Lakeshore and City Districts)**

| School Name | 2010                     |               |   |               | 2011                     |               |                            |               |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------|---|---------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|
|             | CTS                      |               | OVC   |               | CTS                      |               | OVC                        |               |
|             | Amount                   | Beneficiaries | Amount  | Beneficiaries | Amount                   | Beneficiaries | Amount                     | Beneficiaries |
| Salumwera   | -                        | -             | MWK 72,000 (\$217)+<br>MWK 83,000<br>(\$250)<br>for SIP | 14            | -                        | -             | MWK 137,500<br>(\$415)     | 25            |
| Mutuwara    | -                        | -             | -   | -             | -                        | -             | MWK 137,500<br>(\$415)     | 25            |
| Yanire      | MWK 502,500<br>(\$1,515) | 67            | MWK 687,500<br>(\$2,073)                                | 125           | MWK 502,500<br>(\$1,515) | 67            | MWK 1,925,000<br>(\$5,804) | 350           |
| Tetere      | MWK 120,000<br>(\$343)   | 16            | MWK 600,000<br>(\$1,716)                                | 75            | MWK 120,000<br>(\$343)   | 27            | MWK 675,000<br>(\$1,930)   | 150           |

Source: Compiled from school data (2011).

### 4.3 The decision-making process for the use of the school grant at the school level

#### The DSS grant

The general picture from most actors in the three districts was that decision-making processes for the DSS grant follow a participatory approach, although in practice not all actors are involved. The process of identifying needs for the DSS grants in almost all schools involved the SMC, the PTA, and the head teacher. It is only at Lindira School in Lakeshore District that teaching staff, parents, and learners reported being involved at this stage. In the remaining schools in the City and Rural Districts, parents and learners were only involved when the purchased items were collected and displayed.

In the majority of Lakeshore District schools, parents seemed to be completely neglected at both stages. Some parents said that: 'We were not told how much the school received, how the money was used, how much was used or how much was left'.

#### The SIG

The SIG is administered by an EDSA/SIG committee that is selected at the school. The committee includes four teachers and two members of the SMC as part of its membership. While the head teacher identified the teachers to sit on the committee, the SMC representatives were elected at a SMC meeting. The committee is responsible for deciding what to do with the grant once it reaches the school. The EDSA/SIG committee largely deals with the OVC funds. The members are responsible for checking the list of beneficiaries that is suggested by class teachers. They sometimes visit the families of the learners they have identified, purchase and distribute materials to the learners. The CTS funds are administered by the Teachers Living Positively (TILIPO) and while the head teacher keeps a record of all beneficiaries who sign for any materials bought for them, this is not made public. The TILIPO are responsible for identifying the learners, purchasing and distributing the materials to the learners. The materials are given to the learners in secret and only the TILIPO and the learners and their parents know about them.

The school however has a procurement committee that is responsible for purchasing materials for the learners for the OVC funds. For the school uniforms, the committee buys materials and identifies local tailors to make them at the school level. All the materials for the learners are given at the same time at a function that is attended by both parents and teachers but also the media. This is conducted as an open function and materials are distributed to the beneficiaries, one after the other, as the audience ululates.

### 4.4 Use of school grants

#### Use of the DSS grant

The DSS grant was initially meant for purchasing teaching and learning materials only, but this was later reviewed to include maintenance and rehabilitation. This was understood by the different actors in the three districts, especially the district level actors such as the DEM and the head teachers, teachers, and the SMC and PTA at the school level.

In general the schools purchased teaching materials such as flip charts, exercise books, pens, seeds for agriculture lessons, and blackboard paint. During the third phase in 2009, most of the schools used the grants to buy maintenance materials such as cement, lime, wheelbarrows, hoes, rakes, rim locks, timber, doors, and taps for both the school infrastructure and the teachers' houses. In Lindira school, in Lakeshore District, the timber was used for maintenance of the school block which had been damaged by strong winds while cement was used to replace steps to some classrooms which had been washed

away by floods. In this same district, in Salumwera and Mutuwara schools, head teachers' offices were constructed using cement and lime procured using the DSS grant, while at Lukulara most of the broken window panes were replaced with breeze block windows. Although some respondents were not sure of the amounts their schools had received, they were able to explain how the money had been used.

There was a general outcry among the various respondents that the grant amount was not enough to cater for the many needs of the schools. Most respondents in all the schools visited, especially head teachers and teachers, recommended an increase in the grant amounts given to schools.

## Use of SIG

As explained previously, there are three categories of uses of the SIG grant: support of the SIP, of OVCs and of HIV-positive learners. However, the findings of the study showed that in the first phase of 2010, SIG was exclusively earmarked for OVC and CTS support. The DEOs in Lakeshore and City Districts provided the schools with instructions on how these funds could be spent.

In the case of CTS support, in both districts, no child was given any cash to buy materials except for the money that they were to use for transport to collect antiretroviral (ARV) drugs from the hospital. Instead, the schools bought materials which were distributed to learners. For instance in City District schools, they bought blankets and nutritious food for each HIV-infected child, who was also given MWK 1,000 (\$3) for a maximum of three hospital trips.

As for OVCs, DEOs provided schools with lists of items on which OVC funds could be spent. It is unclear whether these were government guidelines or whether the district composed these lists autonomously; however, the research pointed out that the lists of items in both districts were very similar thus indicating that they would be government guidelines rather. The items included uniforms, shoes, umbrellas, school bags, note books, pencils, pens, and mathematical instruments. In addition, money that learners had paid for the school fund in 2010 was reimbursed; the same was done in 2011. Furthermore, toiletries such as bath soap, washing soap, and Vaseline were bought for OVCs in the City District, in addition to paying for the examination fees for learners in Standards 7 and 8. This was not the case in Lakeshore District.

Table 8 shows how the OVC and CTS funds were used in Tetere school in the City District.

**Table 8. Uses of the OVC and CTS funds in Tetere school in City District**

| Type of grant | Amount (MWK) | Use   |
|---------------|--------------|---|
| OVC           | 2,000        | School shoes  |
|               | 2,000        | School uniform  |
|               | 500          | Umbrellas   |
|               | 1,000        | User fees (for reimbursement of other school costs including school fund, examination fees) |
| CTS           | 2,000        | Blankets  |
|               | 2,500        | Nutritious food   |
|               | 3,000        | Transport to collect ARV drugs  |

Source: Compiled from school data provided by head teacher at Tetere primary school (2011).

## 5. Monitoring and control of the use of the school grants

### 5.1 Monitoring at the school level

Generally, most respondents in the schools visited explained that monitoring and control of the use of the direct support to schools (DSS) grant at the school level was mainly carried out by the head teacher, the school management committee (SMC), and the parent-teacher association (PTA). However, not much explanation was given as to how monitoring was conducted in most schools. For instance, at the Lindira school, teachers explained that the SMC and the head teacher check the materials when they arrive and how they are being used. However, it was found that the SMC did not know much about this. At Mwiwora school the items bought were displayed for different stakeholders to see. Generally, however, it was observed that there was no systematic way of monitoring the grant as most schools relied on showing the materials bought to different stakeholders. This was the same for school improvement grants (SIGs) which are ‘checked’ by the parents when they come to witness the distribution of materials to their children.

However, as for the SIG grant, no records were kept as to how the funds were being used. In one school, Mutuwara, parents, the SMC and the PTA reported that a committee made up of one SMC representative, one PTA representative, one parent, and the village chairperson checked development projects and how the materials were used. However, this could not be verified as teachers had never mentioned it.

### 5.2 Monitoring by external actors

In general, there was little indication of proper arrangements for external monitoring of the DSS grant in all the schools. There is no external audit of the DSS grant although occasionally the primary education advisor (PEA), as part of his normal duties, would check what developments had taken place at the schools as a result of DSS. However, some schools had posted the list of materials they had bought for stakeholders to see and so felt that the grant was being monitored.

In addition, officials from the education decentralization support activity (EDSA) office in Lilongwe visited the schools during the first year to check the cash sales. It was learned that, as part of his monitoring duties, the DEM also verifies whether the school improvement plan corresponds to the budget.

It should be noted that this apparent absence of monitoring by external actors should not be put down to a lack of interest on their part; PEAs in particular argued that there should be greater emphasis on school reporting on how DSS money is used. The PEA for Chimbende zone (Lukulara school) said that: ‘PEAs should not be sidelined in the monitoring of the grant. We are the people who know the schools better and we know the type of people surrounding the school’. Their monitoring activities are no doubt hampered by a lack of resources.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Contributions of the grants

#### The direct support to schools (DSS) grant

The general picture from the various respondents in the 12 schools was that the DSS grant has had a positive impact on the schools by improving both the learning environment and the morale of teachers and learners.

The learning environment was also improved by means of the maintenance and rehabilitation grant which allowed many schools to repair classroom floors, doors, and broken windows. For parents, this improved the safety and discipline of the learners as they were no longer able to exit the classrooms through the broken windows.

When the windows were open, learners could get out of the class through the windows, a practice that resulted in some injuries and disturbance of others in class.

With the rehabilitated windows this is no longer practised (Interview with parents).

As a result of these repairs to the windows and doors, trespassers were no longer able to get into the building and go into the classrooms unattended. Learners would thus come back to a clean classroom; before they would have to clean up the dirt inflicted by people passing by. In all the schools, this had the effect of increasing learner motivation to go to school.

The improved learning environment had an impact not only on learner discipline, motivation, and safety, but also on teacher motivation. Teachers were confronted with learners who were more disciplined than before and were no longer talking while the teacher was teaching. Teacher motivation also improved as they could now leave their charts in the classroom without fear that someone would steal them. Many classrooms were painted and in some schools, like Njerera in the Rural District, teachers' houses were also painted using DSS money. Teachers were happy to stay in better houses and the painted classrooms offered a better teaching and learning environment for both teachers and learners.

The general impression among respondents was that DSS has had some impact on enhancing learning. In addition to the provision of teaching and learning materials that increased the motivation of teachers, DSS money was also used to repair broken desks for learners. Teachers felt that the change from sitting on the floor to sitting at the repaired desks motivated learners, especially the older ones. In the long run, this could lead to better learning.

There was no evidence however that DSS money had any impact on the internal functioning of the schools or that it had improved the partnership between the schools and the community since in most schools parents had always been active.

#### The school improvement grant (SIG)

It is early to assess the impact of SIG as this programme is very new to the education system. Different groups of respondents in the four SIG schools said that the major impact of SIG was that it has helped ensure equity among learners:

The orphans and other needy children now look the same as the children from well-to-do families. They have a school uniform and they wear decent shoes, so there are no differences with other children (Interview with parents).



This alone motivates the learner to go to school and many school-level actors stated that they felt there has been a notable improvement in the absenteeism rates of such children. Some respondents, teachers particularly, felt that parents and guardians of the orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and care, treatment, and support (CTS) were encouraged to send their children to school because of the materials they received. Nutritious food for CTS also improved their health and improved their school attendance.

## 6.2 Strengths and challenges of the grants

### The DSS grant

Although the DSS had strengths linked to the way it contributed to the improvement of learning in the long run, a number of challenges were cited by different respondents. For example, most teachers and the SMCs in all 12 schools believed that the DSS grant was too small for the requirements of teaching, purchasing of learning materials, and the maintenance needs of the schools. In addition, the grant almost always arrived late, sometimes even after the schools had closed for the year. In addition, all respondents complained that the allocation of the grant was not regular; in some years the grant was not received at all.

Another challenge experienced by all schools was that the suppliers who had provided quotations but who had not been selected were not cooperative and willing to give quotations the following year. The head teacher of Limwere school explained that: 'Sourcing of quotations was a problem in subsequent years because some local shop owners were not happy that we did not buy from their shops and thought that we are just wasting their time'.

### SIG

It became apparent that parents and learners appreciated being involved in the decision-making of the SIG funds. This is reflected in the comment of parents of Limwere School who said that: 'the DSS people should follow the example by SIG. Training is important and they should not train only very few people but include more parents and learners. This is important so that all stakeholders know clearly what they are supposed to do'.

Few challenges were expressed about the SIG, perhaps because the grant is relatively new. The head teachers of the initial pilot schools had noted as a major challenge the fact that the grant was not large enough for all the OVCs and CTS in the schools.

## 6.3 Recommendations

The grants received by schools throughout Malawi have been positively received by all stakeholders, whether they are teachers or parents within the locality, or regional and central officials. However, the workings of the grants, their ability to address the specific needs of each school, large or small, rural or urban, and catering to children with special needs, have yet to be carefully studied and adjusted. The timeliness of payment, the flexibility of the grants for payment of goods and services, the way they are disbursed, and, particularly, the amount paid to each school continue to be problematic for most schools. Until these issues are addressed, the quality of primary education in Malawi cannot be improved and universal primary education continues to be elusive.

Based on the issues raised by the respondents and a number of suggestions for improving the DSS made by the different groups of respondents, the following specific recommendations for each of the grants emerged from the research.

## The DSS grant

Based on the issues raised by the respondents, a number of suggestions for improving the DSS were made by the different groups of respondents in all of the 12 schools visited.

**Increasing the amount of the grant.** The most widely mentioned recommendation, stated by teachers, the SMC and PTA chairs, and head teachers was that the amount of the grant had to be increased. All those interviewed perceived the grant as not being enough to meet the needs of the schools.

**Disbursement in a timely manner.** A related recommendation, put forward by the same actors, was that the grant should be disbursed regularly to the schools every year and should be given in a timely manner so that the schools can plan for it. In almost all the schools the grant did not come every year or, if it did, it came late.

**Based on the needs of the school.** DSS should not only be based on school enrolment but rather on the prioritized needs of the school. Specifically, head teachers and teachers of mostly rural schools of the Rural District and Lakeshore District emphasized that their schools had many needs.

**Transfer of the grant directly to the schools.** All the respondents (except learners) suggested that the DSS grant should be transferred directly to the schools and not to the DEM so that the school could buy what it needed straight from the shops. The government could also consider giving the school actors more flexibility in the choice of shops.

**The DSS grant should be monitored effectively.** There is a need for proper monitoring of the grant at all levels to ensure that the materials bought are put to good use. Primary education advisors (PEAs), in particular, argued that school reporting should put more emphasis on how the DSS money is used.

**The DSS grant should include money for transportation.** In the Rural District schools in particular, the general view of actors was that the grant should include transport money, to be disbursed in a timely and transparent manner.

**Accountability of the DSS grant.** A recommendation made by parents from almost all of the schools visited was that involvement of parents and learners should be emphasized in the DSS, as it is the case for the SIG. These school actors should be trained adequately on the grant and its implementation.

## SIG

**The SIG grant should be increased to help more OVCs and provide CTS.** The need to increase the amount of the grant was pointed out by the head teachers in the four schools which had already received the SIG grant. They stressed that there were some OVCs and HIV-positive learners who were entitled to this support but they did not benefit from the grant as it was too small. This could also be linked to somewhat worrying quotas mentioned by a PEA from City District and admitted by the DEM from Lakeshore District, who both explained that there is a limit on the number of OVCs and HIV-positive learners that a school can declare.

**The grant should be timely.** Several schools in City and Lakeshore Districts had been trained in the use of the funding but had not yet received the grant at the time of the study. Parents, learners, teachers, and head teachers from schools which had received training on SIG were firmly of the opinion that the delay between training and allocation of the grant should be reduced to a minimum. Actors from the District Education Office (DEO) in City District specifically requested that the transition stick to the original time-plan and that clear instructions be provided to the district office employees on the new funding criteria.

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## The paper

In a growing number of countries, a significant reform in educational management is under way: schools which, in earlier years, had very little or no say in financial management, now receive grants directly from central authorities. The actual impact of school grants on quality and equity needs deeper investigation because it involves a series of factors related to the design and implementation of grants; the simple existence of such grants does not guarantee success.

IIEP-UNESCO and UNICEF coordinated a research programme in Eastern and Southern Africa from 2010 to 2012, in order to better understand how the school grants policy is implemented in and by different schools, and to learn what its real contribution is to the grand policy objectives it is intended to serve. The research was implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, and Uganda, in collaboration with Ministries of Education; National research institutes; and the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD, South-Africa).

In Malawi, the research was implemented by researchers from Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the UNICEF Country Office in Malawi.

The present study examines the use and usefulness of this school grants policy in Malawi, with specific attention given to six key themes: the policy formulation and dissemination process, criteria and mechanisms for grant distribution, the actual use of the funds at the school level, the existence of control mechanisms, and the contributions of grants to access, equity and quality. The last chapter provides a set of recommendations for improvement of each grant.

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