



Girls' education in Malawi status report

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Abstract

The report has outlined barriers that affect girls' education in Malawi and gives the statistical outline of the status of girls' education in different categories and levels of education for primary and secondary schools. It also touches on the necessity of education, starting with the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills that are essential for survival in the fast changing world. The status report portrays the importance of education as if gives an opportunity to develop social skills among learners and especially the girl child. CARE Malawi (2010), emphasizes that Malawi is one of the countries that have keen interest to ensure every girl goes to school. This report explores possible solutions to barriers to girls' education that affect the girls in a negative way. These are harmful cultural practices, poverty, illiteracy of parents, cost of schooling, distance to school, lack of role models, pregnancy, marriage, gender based violence, lack of interest and lack of proper teaching and learning methods.

This report used data from Education Management Information System (EMIS) and other statistics booklets produced with an aim of capturing data on girls' education. Even though data on girls' education might be scanty in Malawi, however, this report provides a general picture which is showcasing on how important it is to educate the girl child for a nation as they contribute to the country's development agenda. It is in this respect that the status report highlights on what is working and what is not working with reference to the policies and strategies on girls' education in order for stakeholders to discover areas that need further improvement to achieve the intended purpose on the promotion of girls' education.

Although government, development and implementing partners and other stakeholders in the promotion of girls; education are working tirelessly to overcome the known barriers to girls' education, still girls lag behind in many areas such as in completion and survival rates. There is also limited participation of women and girls in decision making positions for working women. Girls spend very little time in school due to family responsibilities while boys are given ample time to learn.

It is therefore recommended that deliberate efforts should be made to give girls a platform to perform better in school, such as provision of bursaries, change rooms, WASH facilities, Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) to address issues of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in schools, communities and the workplace. And to make sure that the campaign on the implementation of the re-admission policy is taken seriously so that drop-outs are given a second chance to access education.

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Keywords: Barriers to Girls' Education, Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), Gender Based Violence (GBV), harmful cultural practices and Re-admission Policy

1. Introduction

Every child needs to acquire necessary literacy and numeracy skills to cope with life in the ever changing world. Besides this academic benefit, education provides the means for proper psychosocial development. When in school, children are safe and secure. In school, children operate under a structured environment. According to CARE Malawi (2010), when in school, receive emotional support from adults and get an opportunity to learn how to interact with other children and develop social networks. Schools benefit individual children, but can also serve as important safety net for vulnerable children such as orphans and girls.

Malawi is one of the countries that have keen interest to ensure every girl goes to school. This report searches into history to as far as the near possible when actions for bringing girls to school started taking the center stage. It tries to explore some of the major decisions and programs that have come into being to facilitate the girls' education agenda. In some cases, the report captures some specific examples to highlight some of the notable developments that have made remarkable impact in facilitating girls' education in the country. The report also appreciates the understanding that girls' issues vary from place to place and that such issues require different approaches to address them.

Girls' education is a social economic development issue that requires clear understanding to realize its benefits. The purpose of this report is to highlight the common philosophy behind girls' education and map the extent to which Malawi has moved towards ensuring that girls are educated to contribute to the country's development agenda. It also puts on the spotlight the prevailing gaps in pursuing the girls' education agenda. In this way, the report provides insight on what is working and the areas that need further improvement to realize this development goal.

1.2 Data Collection

In trying to dig deeper into the situation of girls in Malawi, the report relied mostly on existing findings from different studies within and outside the country focusing on girls' education. Considering the huge amount of reports in this area, the selection was based on those study reports that are relevant to the focus of this report. Only reports that provide some insights on efforts to bring girls to school were prioritized. Special interest was also on reports that highlight experiences from other countries showing significant improvements in girls' education were sought to provide a basis for learning and adopting into the Malawi setting.

Some of the data used in this report come from statistics booklets produced by the Ministry of Education. Although there are some challenges with data inconsistency, the report provides a general picture that illustrates the impact investment in girls' education have brought on the scene of education.

1.3 Outline of the report

The logic behind the presentation in this report is that the introduction points out the general picture of the status of girls' education in the country by describing the achievement in equalizing the number of girls accessing education to that

of boys. However, the inside of this achievement tells a different story as grade by grade analysis reveals a scenario that the early years of primary education are perfect but towards the end the girls' numbers drop. The report questions this pattern.

Following the introduction, the report presents the philosophy behind girls' education and why Malawi subscribes to it. This part summarizes the common understanding on the importance of girls' education.

The report then looks into the outstanding issues regarding the actual participation of girls in education. This part is important because it elaborates whether bringing girls to school translates into making them learn. The report also considers the prevailing challenges related to their persistence and learning and explains some of them.

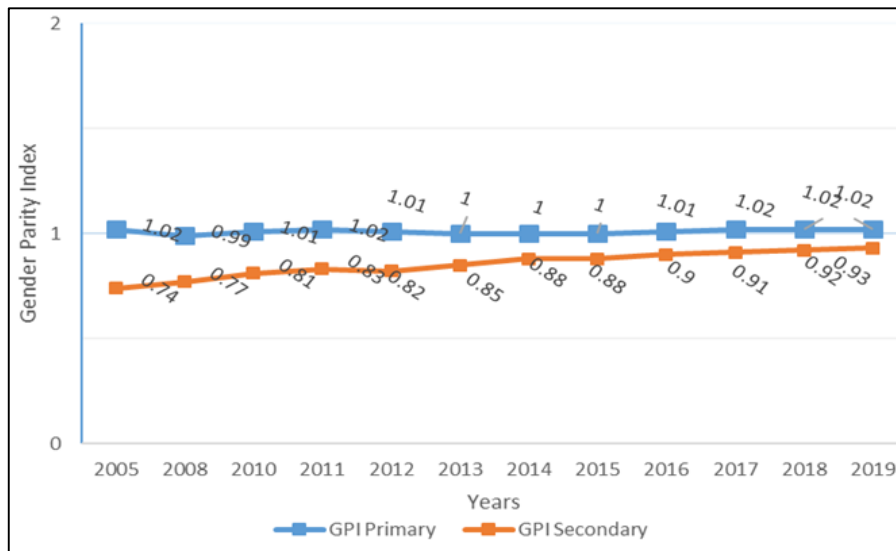
The final part of the report presents some of the notable actions that have been taken to address the issues that prevent girls from fully participating in education. This part brings out some of the specific actions that have made remarkable impact. It also proposes practical actions that might bring quick wins in addressing the challenges that keep girls out of school.

1.4 Background

The Government of Malawi in partnership with its development partners has taken every step necessary to equalize access to and participation in education. These efforts have extended to putting in place measures to keep the learners in school. As a result, there has been notable progress in moving girls from decimal to higher levels of representation in the education system, especially at primary level. Overall, at primary and secondary education levels, gender parity index has involved upwards over the years. Figure 1 shows a gender parity index at primary education level that has hovered around 1 in the years presented from 2005 to 2019. This picture represents a scenario that there are more girls than boys in primary education.

At secondary school level, there has been progress but not perfect as the number of girls still lags behind that of boys. As of 2019, the GPI at secondary school level stood at 0.93. There is more that needs to be done to increase girls' access to secondary school education.

The figure demonstrates achievements that have occurred due to the efforts government and its partners have made in ensuring that there is equal access to education. Malawi achieved the Millennium Development Goal of universal education.



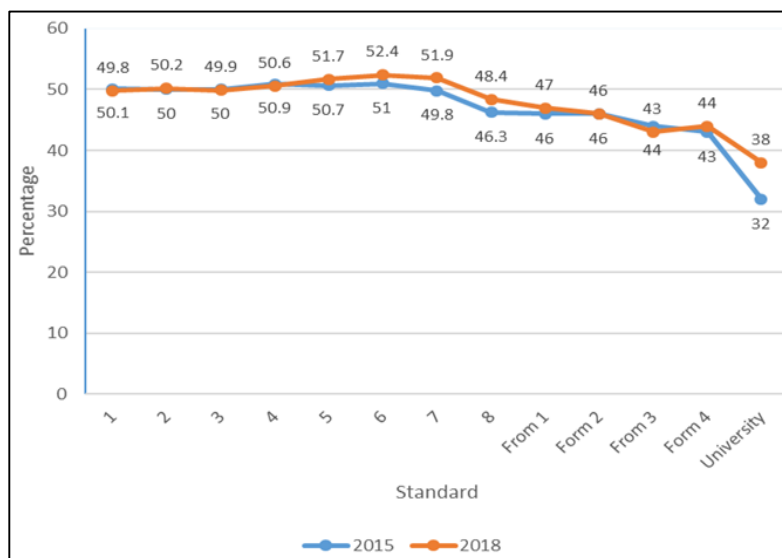
Source: MoE, 2019

Fig 1: Gender Parity Index at Primary and Secondary Education Levels

With a GPI at 1.02 at primary school, the overall picture Figure 1 is presenting is that there are more girls than boys at this level. In other words, the battle to bring girls’ access to education to the same level of boys is more than won. Grade by grade analysis, however, reveals a different devil inside the story. Statistics, as presented in this report, shows that moving up the ladder of the primary education system, some classes have less number of girls compared to their male counterpart. To explain this situation, the report reviewed and

used data from two years, 2015 and 2018, to see if there were any noticeable class level differences between boys and girls. Figure 2 presents the percentage of girls by education level in each of these two years.

In both years, 2015 and 2018, in the early years of primary education, the number of girls is bigger than that of boys. The last class, Standard eight, is where the number of girls dropped most. This drop extends to secondary and university education.



Source: MoE, 2019

Fig 2: Percentage of girls by level of education in 2015 and 2018

These statistics are an indication of the reality on the ground. From year to year, the MoE releases statistics that reveal that the early grades (Standard 1-7) of primary education have more girls than boys. Within the same year of entry, more girls than boys drop out. The trend continues up to the upper classes. The Malawi 2018 Education Sector Performance Report records that:

While there is approximate gender parity for the first 4 standards, for standard 5-7 female enrolment is on average 8% higher than male enrolment, while in the last standard, male enrolment is higher (MoE, 2018, pg41).

For development experts, especially those that understand the importance of girls’ education would think that the aim of the agenda for girls’ education does not stop at bringing the girls to school but also keep them there to learn. The discussions that follow try to examine the extent of achievement in this agenda of girls’ education. It also sheds some light on exiting gaps which the country would need to address to succeed in this agenda. Importance of girls’ education is discussed first to provide meaning to the issues.

2. Importance of Girls' Education

“Going forward, we should start raising the girl child to be economically independent first”

Nation Publications Limited (18 November, 2019)

Talks about education are in almost every sphere of life. The reason possibly being that education is a means to most of the professions that exist. To realize the various Sustainable Development Goals, education is a pre-requisite. This truth testifies to the fact education is not just a right but also a moral purpose that everyone must access and pursue.

The general and uncontested understanding is that education is a prerequisite for both individual and national development. Studies have revealed that at individual level, the more the years of schooling, the better one becomes in understanding the issues surrounding her or his life. This thinking translates into the fact that national development is dependent on individuals who act in awareness to improve their own life (UNESCO, 2008).

The issue that emerges from studies is that there are more benefits to girls' education in the sense that girls' education predicts the destiny of a nation because by investing in girls you are investing in their future, their family's future and their country's future. UNESCO (2003) pointed out that girls education break the cycle of poverty and poor health in the sense that adolescent girls who attend school are:

- Less likely to marry early;
 - Less likely to die in childbirth;
 - Less vulnerable to diseases, including HIV and AIDS;
 - More likely to have healthy babies;
 - More likely to send their own children to school; and
 - More likely to acquire the information and skills that lead to increased earnings.
- (UNESCO, 2003, pg. 59)

The Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) (2017) points out that when a girl goes to school to learn, the benefits associated with her education are that:

- She will earn up to 25% more per every additional year in secondary school;
- She will reinvest 90% of her earnings in her family; and
- She will resist gender-based violence and discrimination, and change her community from within.

CAMFED (2017) 26/10/2017 - <https://camfed.org/why-girls-education/>

Malawi, as a country, understands the fact that girls have been lagging behind boys in accessing education and have performed below the boys academically. This has been happening when the country had put in place measures to secure equal presence of boys and girls in education this is according to:

- 13(f) of the Constitution calls upon the State to provide adequate resources for free and compulsory education, and greater access; Section 25(1) entitles all persons to education.
- Government of Malawi (2013) education Act of 2013,

(4..i.a) which spells that it shall be the duty of the Minister to promote education for all people in Malawi irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability or any other discriminatory characteristics. (5.2) the national goals of the education system in Malawi shall be to promote equality of education for all Malawians by identifying and removing barriers to achievement.

- Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2017-2022),

In light of this commitment, Malawi ascribes to both international and regional commitments on education as provided in Article 28(1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Jomtien (1990) convention, Dakar (1991), Ouagadougou (1993), Copenhagen and Beijing (1995), and Education for All (EFA) (2000), Sustainable Development Goals (2015) which speak of making education accessible to all children. At the regional level, Malawi is a signatory to African Union (AU) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Protocol on education. All these efforts are meant to ensure that every person eligible enrol in school and get the needed education for personal self-reliance and effective socio-economic contribution to the nation.

3. Participation of girls in education

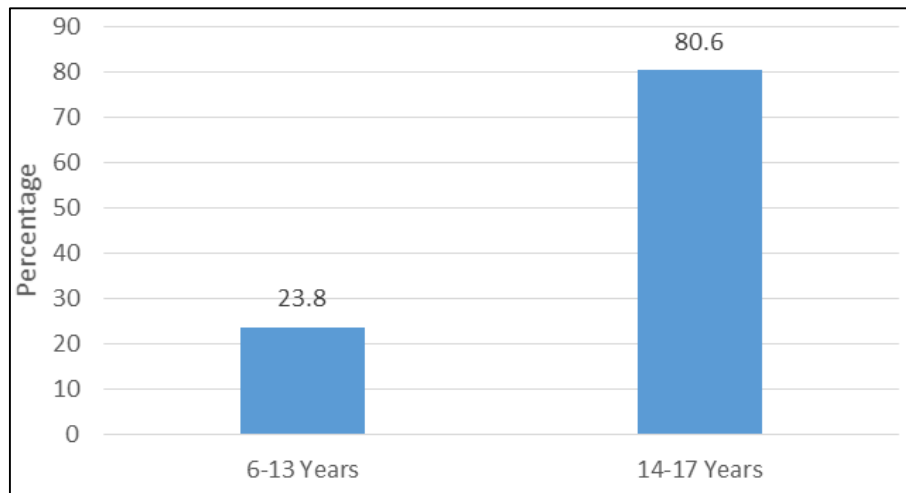
In respect of the country's desire to make education equally accessible to all children as demonstrated in its numerous efforts described in this report, some of the analyses reveal that there have been challenges in some areas of need and necessity with regards to access and academic achievement. As revealed in this report, not all school age children enroll. Those that enroll do not stay long. And those that persist, get little academic wise. These challenges are explained in the paragraphs below.

3.1 Limited access to education

Despite the fact that investing in girls' education makes a difference in the life of the girls themselves and the nation as a whole, not all girls have a chance to go to school. The Campaign for Girls Education (2016) noted that there are about 63 million girls out of school around the world. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF (2015, pg.14) estimates that around 43% of these children—or 15 million girls and 10 million boys—will probably never set foot in a classroom, if the current trends continue. These figures imply that girls still stand at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts.

According to the 2018 Population and Housing Census (NSO, 2019), the total number of out-of-school children of the population aged 6 to 17 in 2018 was 2.4 million, representing 41 percent. Of these 23.8 percent and 80.6 percent were girls aged 6-13 and 14-17, respectively. Figure 3 presents the breakdown.

The figure shows that many girls in the age band 6-17 were not in school and therefore not participating in educational activities. This situation shows that majority of out-of-school children are those of secondary school education age category.



Source: NSO, PHC 2018

Fig 3: Percentage of 6-17 year old girls out-of-school

More school age girls are not in school. As many as 23.8 percent primary school age girls are out of school. This statistic is a confirmation to the data in the 2019 Education Sector Performance report that indicates a girls’ net enrolment rate of 89 percent. Despite that there were more girls (276,811) than boys (269,897) at age 6 in 2018 (NSO, 2019), fewer girls than boys enrolled in school. With a lower intake rate of 82 percent compared to that of boys at 84.

Intake of girls is lower than boys’ revealing limited access of girls to school

Percent, is a revelation that access rate of girls is still lower than that of boys. Fewer girls than boys of the school entry age enroll in school. There should be some reasons the girls do not enroll in school when they are at the right age. The implication is that girls enter school at an older age than boys. Possibly that is why the girls gross enrolment rate (130 percent) is higher than that of boys (126 percent). The task at hand is to search into the environment to identify and analyze the situations under which the girls exist that prevent them from enrolling in school when they reach the school entry age of 6. It is also a message to the government that the campaign for girls education still requires

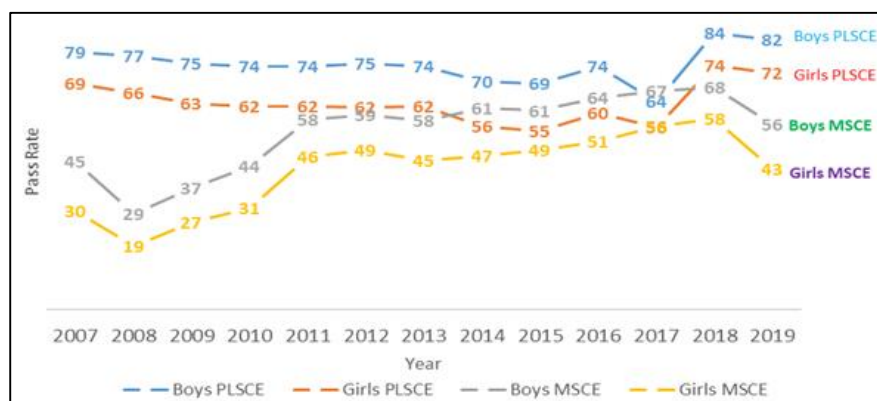
sensitization of the communities on the importance of education, most especially that of girls. The idea is to encourage parents to enroll their wards in school, irrespective of sex, as soon as they clock six years of age.

3.2 Limited learning

Inequalities between girls and boys concerning access to and participation in education defeats the intentions enshrined by statutes that promote the benefits of education for everyone. To date, girls still lag behind boys in persistence in education. They also remain behind boys in academic performance. The reason of bringing girls to school is to give them a chance to learn and enjoy the benefits of education.

Measured by the results of the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE) and the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations, girls’ performance has been lower than boys’. This situation has been like that as noted from the results of national examinations in the years from 2007 to date displayed in Figure 4.

Irrespective of the examination, girls, over the years reviewed, have underperformed the boys. It is even worse at MSCE level. The figure shows that when boys do worse, the girls are the worst. In the latest examinations of 2019, less than half of the girls passed MSCE.



Source: MoE, EMIS

Fig 4: Performance of boys and girls at National Examinations

Girls spend little time on their education affecting their academic performance

There are many reasons that are given surrounding girls’ poor performance in school. It, however, be noted that some of the factors are general affecting both boys and girls. Some of the

factors work to more to the disadvantage of girls. A CARE International research study identified that girls can have six times higher domestic workloads than boys of their same age. A study 'Redressing Gender Inequalities in Education - A Review of Constraints and Priorities in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe' commissioned by the British Development Division in Central Africa (BDDCA) in 1995), revealed some challenges girls face at school that would possibly negatively affect their performance. According to the report;

Teachers consider that the main reason for poor performance of girls academically was that they are mainly interested in love, romance and sex, whereas boy pupils do not take such relationships seriously.

These are just a few of the many factors that contribute to girls' poor performance in education. As it will be observed later, girls in most cases bear the burden of heading families when their parents die. This condition causes them to not only abandon school but also have little time to concentrate on their education because they spend most of their time looking for food and performing household tasks in place of the departed parents.

The blame for girls' failure to attend school has always been placed on culture and other known factors. It should be understood also that when parents do not see benefits of education, it would be difficult for them to send their children to school. World Bank (2011) argues for increasing access to education through what they term as 'access for learning' to ensure that learners acquire skills that enable them become self-reliant. When girls find meaning in their education, they

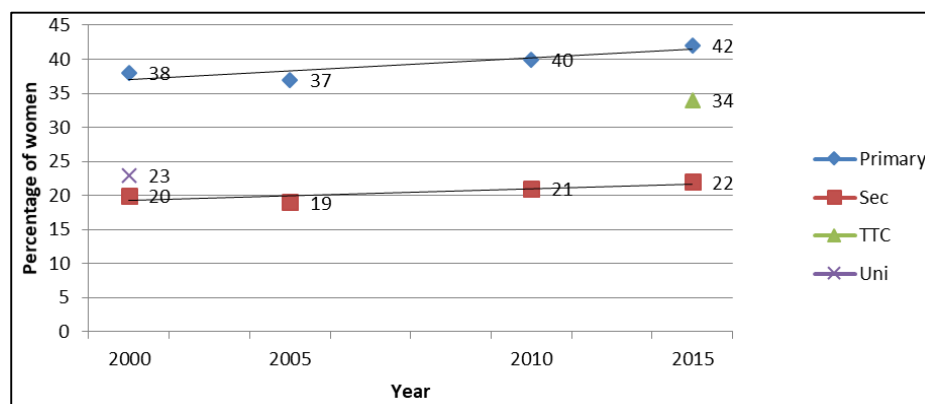
would be eager to enroll and stay in school.

4. The Consequence of limited participation of girls in education

The National Statistics Office (2019), in its 2018 Population and Household Census, indicates that literacy levels are different for males and females at 71.6 and 65.9 percent, respectively. Due to poor learning conditions, both at home and school, many girls leave school before they attain a reasonable level of literacy and numeracy. The limited number of academically successful girls reaching upper primary and higher levels of education results in low representation of women in decision-making positions and other positions of influence.

The Human Rights Watch (2014) observed that the quality of education in Malawi is largely poor and few students move onto higher education or obtain employment when they complete their education. As a result, many parents do not see the value of education, whereas children, mainly girls, can contribute to the family's income through petty trading, working in family farms, as well as through marriage when they receive dowry and other benefits.

During the Millennium Development Goals era, Malawi fell short of meeting the target for the equal opportunity goal. The main reason being that there were fewer women than men to qualify for higher positions of authority and late alone compete equally with their male counterparts in accessing economically empowering opportunities. In the education sector, for example, fewer women than men are seen to participate in paying jobs as shown in Figure 5.



Source: MoE

Fig 5: Percentage of women in paying jobs in educational institutions of learning

By 2015, female teachers constituted 42 percent of the teaching force in the primary education sub-sector. At secondary school level, the proportion of female teachers was as low as 22 percent. Limited access to data for tertiary institutions made it difficult to compute the percentages for female lecturers. However, the situation in primary and secondary subsectors depicts an imbalance between males and females in participation in professional jobs. There is a possibility that this inequality might also prevail in other professions. One of the possible causes of this challenge is that fewer girls proceed with their education to tertiary level where they get would opportunities for a professional qualification such as teaching, for example.

The essence of this report is to point out the barriers that make girls not attend school and let alone progress with their

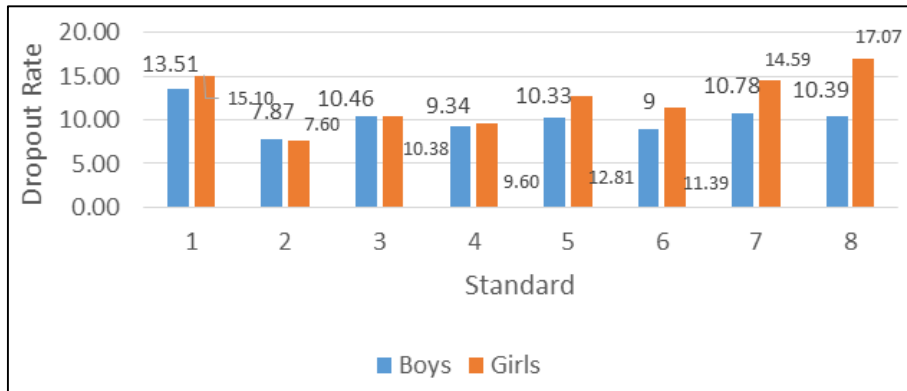
education. These concerns are addressed as a challenge because there are opportunities provided for girls to go to school but they fail to utilize those opportunities because of some limitations that surround them. The efforts the government and its partners are putting up to bring girls to school are paying off but not to the expected level. The next section narrates this challenge in detail.

5. The challenge girls face

Despite the numerous efforts the government and its partners have put up to eliminate the factors that prevent girls from going to school and participate in education, girls' presence in schools continues to be a challenge. A myriad of studies have provided some of the reasons why girls are not in school. A report by CARE (2000) suggests that globally, hunger,

lower social status, household chores, early marriage, pregnancies, school safety and sanitation are barriers preventing a girl from receiving a proper education. Most of these factors work more to the disadvantage of girls. This report analyses and presents some of the issues that prevent girls from accessing and continuing with their education. Education statistics reveal that more girls than boys enroll from Standards 1 to 5 and their number drops from Standards 6 to 8. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in its Education Sector Performance Report of 2018 indicated

that the average dropout rates for both boys and girls have been decreasing over the years. This report, however, observes that although this is the case, the average annual dropout rate for girls from 2000 to 2019 remains higher than that of boys as shown in Figure 6. The figure shows that on average there are more girls than boys who have dropped out of the primary school system. This problem starts from the very first class and worsens at the end of the school cycle.

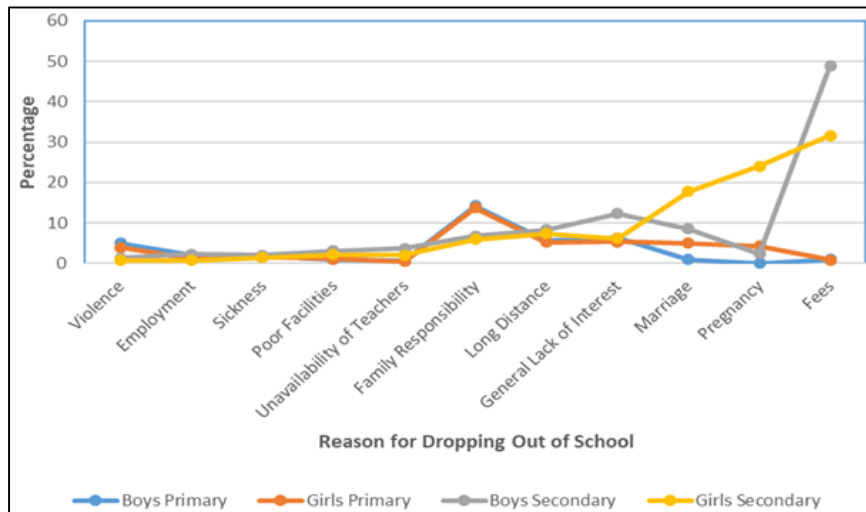


MoE, 2019

Fig 6: Average dropout rates for boys and girls (2000 – 2019)

This gloomy picture presents a challenge for Malawi considering the amount of support and effort that is being put in bringing the girls to school. The benefits of bringing the girls to school might take long to realize. Studies have shown that little participation of girls in education has miserable consequences in their adult life. Both boys and girls drop out of school. However, the concern is on the magnitude of girls that leave the school system. Figure 6 shows the reasons why

boys and girls dropout of school. This figure shows areas where there is high occurrence of dropouts. As shown in the figure, school fees were the biggest reason for all the dropouts in 2018 especially at secondary level. Marriage and pregnancy were high for secondary school girls. Family responsibilities were high for boys and girls at primary level. Lack of interest in school was prominent among boys in secondary school.



Source: MoE, 2018

Fig 7: Reasons for dropping out of school in 2018

As shown in Figure 7, marriage and pregnancy are the leading cause for girls’ tendency to drop out of school. A member of a Development Initiative Organization regretted the practice of early marriages saying, “It is unfortunate that in most areas girls are being denied their right to quality education by being married off at a tender age when they are supposed to be in school”. (Nyasa Times 27 February 2018).

5.1 Early marriages and pregnancies

Child marriage violates girls’ rights to health, education and opportunity. It exposes girls to violence throughout their lives, and traps them in a cycle of poverty. www.GirlsNotBrides.Org At least 42 percent of young girls in Malawi get married before reaching their 18th birthday; while the new marriage

law is yet to be enforced.

World Vision International, 2019. May be you can give

current status of the marriage law.

Exhibit 1

Govt bemoans child marriage

GLADYS KAMAKANDA
MALAWI NEWS AGENCY

Despite recent legal victories, child marriage remains a key challenge in the country, with Malawi having the 11th highest rate in the world and the ninth highest rate in Africa.

Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare Jean Kalilani said this in Lilongwe on Friday during a Gender Policy Dialogue aimed at catalysing and strengthening the ongoing efforts to end child marriages in Malawi.

She said the 2016 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) indicates that about 47 percent of women are married before the age of 18.

"This situation is socially and economically unacceptable and should be addressed at all levels," said Kalilani.



PHOTOGRAPH: NATION

Child Gender Marriages and Prevalence in the 2014-2015 Survey: Kalilani said the use of violence and a r marriage of the in. An o Develop said mar as a wa through

Kalilani: This is unacceptable

Source: Daily Times, 30/10/2017

Early marriage and pregnancy are common among girls in Malawi. The problem with these child marriages and pregnancies is that they are the cause of the fast growing population in the country. This challenge is continuing in the face of Article 5.2.e of the Education Act which stipulates that one of the goals of the education system shall be to develop in the student an appreciation of the impact of rapid population growth on the environment and delivery of social services.

The Human Rights Watch (2014) clearly states that child marriage has a negative impact on girls' and women's realization of key human rights, including their rights to health, education, to be free from physical, mental, and sexual violence, and to marry only when they are able and willing to give their free and full consent. The younger the age of marriage the more serious these impacts are.

Girls who become pregnant are more likely to leave school reducing their opportunity of accessing the benefits of education (UNESCO, 2017). Williams, (2016), reports that girls who start producing children at a tender age and without education have no clue of family planning, end up producing the whole of their fertile life, and would not appreciate the importance of education for their children. It is also reported that problems related to reproductive health and pregnancy, such as maternal death, obstetric fistula, premature delivery and anemia, occur most frequently among young girls.

Current interventions seem to produce no tangible results in stopping the behaviors that lead to early marriage and pregnancy (Daily Times newspaper of 30th October 2017). An Amref Health Africa's baseline survey (for their 'Yes I do' project) revealed that teenage girls under the age of 18 constituted 56 percent of clients accessing antenatal

(prenatal) facilities in Machinga District. In another article, the Daily Times Newspaper (June 2018) noted that in Mchinji district, there had been a 38 percent increase in cases of teen pregnancy.

5.1.1 Cause of the challenge

Child marriages and pregnancies in Malawi are persisting in the face of:

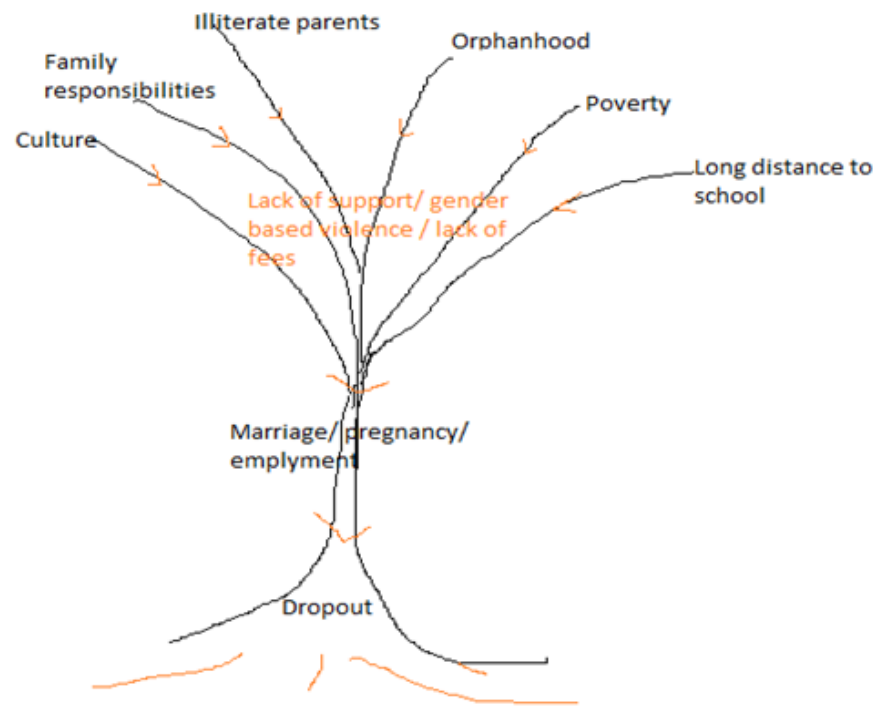
- Champions of rights of the girl-child and efforts being made to keep the girl-child in school.
- Country's revised marriage policy to 18 years to deter early marriages.
- Country's membership among 20 African countries committed to end girl child marriages by 2020 under the UN Ministerial Commitment on Comprehensive Sexuality, Education (CSE) and Sexual Reproductive Health Services for Adolescents. (SRHSA)
- Country's commitment to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals towards eliminating child, early and forced marriages by 2030.

This current situation raises a lot of questions and paints a picture that shows that there is little that is working towards eliminating the challenge of child marriage and pregnancies in the country.

After considering the factors that prevent girls from enrolling and staying in school, this report explains that some of the factors that are said to drive girls out of school are the actual causes for girls tendency to get married early or pregnant.

A problem tree analysis helps explain this relationship. Each of these factors is reviewed in respect to how they contribute to girls' tendency to get married early or pregnant.

Exhibit 2



5.1.1.1 Family responsibilities

According to Exhibit 2. Family responsibilities constitutes the largest burden preventing both boys and girls from continuing with their education. In many communities, family responsibilities are due to cultural orientation where parents give children tasks that in the end compete with time for education.

With the advent of HIV and AIDS, Orphanhood has emerged one of the biggest reasons many children are forced to stay away from school. Girls are mostly affected and forced to take care of homes. As a result, they have to leave school altogether as reported by Kadzamira and Ndalama (1997):

Orphanhood is having a differential impact on boys and girls. It is, however, usually the girl who has to leave school prematurely to look after the family if the mother or both parents have died (Kadzamira and Ndalama, 1997). This is becoming common as the AIDS epidemic takes its toll on communities, leaving many children as orphans. Poor communities have been unable to offer support to the large number of orphans.

Many children who have lost their parent end up heading families and look after their siblings. They have to fetch for food for their daily living. They become parents before they are ready and as a result, they abandon their education. In most cases, girls fall victims of this problem. According to the NSO (2019), the 2018 PHC revealed that of the 0-17 age group, 11 percent (978,363) were orphans and 11.6 percent (113,941) of these children lost both parents.

The 2018 EMIS records that the number of orphaned children in school (both primary and secondary) were 459,386, representing a 47 percent access to education (MoE, 2018).

Exhibit 3



One of the surprises is that more children in primary school (boys 14.3 percent, girls 13.8 percent) than in secondary (boys 6.8 percent, girls 6 percent) had dropped out due to family responsibilities. One possible reason could be that those in secondary are old enough to take care of themselves and manage the burden unlike those that are still at primary age.

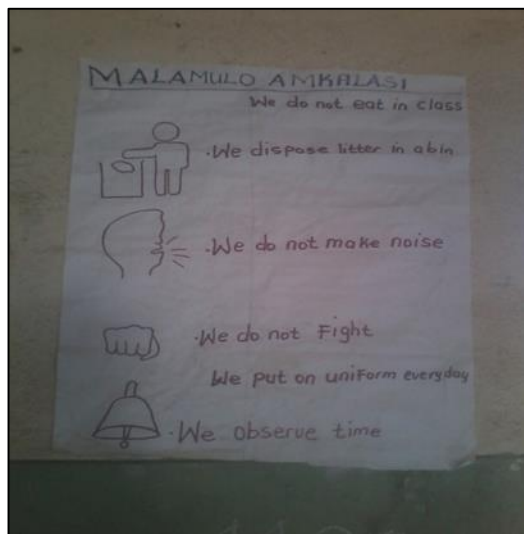
There is a high possibility that a majority of the orphaned children who are not in school are girls because research has it that it is normally girls who look after their siblings after the death of their parents. The side effects of child parenting are regrettable. While this experience disturbs their own education life, research has it that 'when kids have to act as parents, it affects them for life in many ways' (Lamothe, C. 2017). Their health, behavior and psychology get affected.

Family responsibilities are some of the factors forcing girls into employment or getting married to find means of survival to support their families. Some would get pregnant due to love affairs that were meant to support them financially.

5.1.1.2 Poverty and Cost of schooling

Apart from school development fund, there are numerous other cost related reasons that cause children leave school early. Despite government's decision to remove school uniform, some schools still expect learners to put on uniform. According to Davison and Kanyuka (1990) and Kapakasa (1992), the cost of school uniforms deter parents from sending girls to school because girls' uniforms are more costly than boys. (is this true?) Not true, its situational and quality of the uniform)

The implementation of the school uniform policy has been a challenge as schools continue to ask learners to come to school in this attire. As part of the Keeping Girls in School program, a member of the World Vision International observed that in the area they delivered their program interventions, most girls failed to attend classes because they lacked basic needs such as school uniform. Exhibit 3 shows a classroom of learners in school uniform.



Source: Author, 2019

In some of the schools, putting on uniform constitutes one of the rules that learners are supposed to observe when in school. These rules are visibly posted on notice boards written in bold so no learner misses the announcement. Though not mentioned explicitly, a uniform constitutes one of the financial burdens on children especially those from poor families. One of the respondents in the Human Rights Watch survey revealed that, *"I got married because I wanted to end my problems. I was going to school, but I did not have school uniform. We didn't have food at home. I stay with my father who sells buckets. My parents are separated and I have nine siblings"* (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Children who have no means to afford uniform and other monetary related demands would obviously opt out of school. Poverty in this case plays a big role in pushing the girls out of school. Some of them may get tempted to look for alternative sources of support and consequently fall prey to love affairs that put them at risk of getting pregnant. The Human Rights Watch (2014) observed that because of poverty;

- Many poor families view young girls as a financial burden, prompting them to marry their daughters off as soon as they can.
- Some families believe that marrying their daughters may give them a chance for a better life and better prospects for the future.
- Sometimes parents force girls to have sex with men to get money or food.

According to Williams (2016), in rural areas, stricken with [poverty](#) parents choose husbands for young girls to improve their financial status.

It is clear that if education proves expensive, parents would rather withdraw their girls from school and use them as means to alleviate their poverty. In societies where girls are not given an equal status to boys, poverty, compounded by the financial demands of school would tantamount to a reason enough to marry off their girl child and deny them from enrolling in school or pull them out if they already did.

5.1.1.3 Long distance and unsafe schools

Safety remains a critical barrier for girls to attend school. One of the crucial investment decisions for a family to put and keep their child in school is whether or not there is an opportunity for them to continue onto the next level of education in their local area. Winthrop, Kharas and Alexander (2015). If the journey to school and the school environment are not safe, parents will not enroll their daughters, and girls will not attend (CARE 2000). A study commissioned by DFID in 2000 revealed that 60 percent of the violence experienced by girls happened on the way to and from school.

The government policy stipulates that the maximum distance to school should be 10 kilometers. This target has been challenging to meet. As a result, some learners walk more than 20 kilometers to go to school. A research commissioned by UK-Aid, USAID and CDC (2014) revealed that the location of sexual abuse for 13 to 17 year old females in the 12 months prior to the survey was on a road (29.0%).

5.1.1.4 Gender based violence

Gender based violence has been recorded as one of the major factors preventing girls from going to school. A baseline survey conducted by USAID (2003) for their 'Safe Schools' project revealed that;

In Malawi and elsewhere schools are not necessarily safe for children, especially for girls. Inside primary and secondary schools, children—particularly girls—are victims of abuse often perpetrated by male pupils and teachers. Outside the school and within the larger community, girls also fall prey to their peers and older men (—sugar daddies).

USAID, 2003

The challenges girls face are detrimental to the effort to equalize opportunities of access to and completion of education. Because of this problem, most girls find it difficult to either enroll or continue with their education. The result is already observed in the sense that more girls than boys start grade one but in the end, fewer girls than boys finish their primary education. When schools or routes to school are not safe for girls, the alternative girls would have is to stay home where forces to get married become too strong for them to resist. They would end up getting married before they are prepared for it and consequently forget about school altogether.

5.1.1.5 Lack of support from society

In some societies, social status of girls remains lower than that of boys. The consequence is that girls are less privileged in many ways. They do not enjoy their rights to the full. According to Holden, Bell, and Schauerhammer (2015), because girls generally have a lower social status than their brothers, their education is valued less, when resources are scarce, and there are both real and opportunity costs associated with going to school, many families opt to educate their boys over girls. In such cases, girls are pushed to performing domestic roles.

Studies on education in Malawi attest to the fact that domestic tasks often compete with girls' time to attend school and to complete homework because they are often required to contribute to household chores such as fetching water, firewood, preparing and cooking food, cleaning the house and looking after siblings (UNICEF, 2017). As a result most of them fail to attend school, repeat, or dropout of school altogether.

This report identified education of parents as an important aspect in the girls' education agenda. According to Gouda, S. and Sekher, T. V. (2014), illiteracy compounded by poverty, inadequate earnings and poor living conditions of parents force them not only to withdraw their wards from schools but also put them in various types of jobs for contribution to the family income.

Family support is important for girls' education. A report on the review of the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) (2008 – 2017) by the MoE (2018) reveals that girls' performance was low because there was little interaction between children and parents on educational matters largely due to the parents' illiteracy and lack of adequate education, meaning that they are unable to provide support. Studies reveal that children from educated parents do well in school because they get support with homework and provision of school related materials.

Education of mothers is of particular importance on girls' education because, according to the BDDCA (1995), in the African context a relatively high proportion of households have a female head. The study specifically found that:

Educated women are the main influence with respect to their children's education and their own levels of education. In rural Botswana where 48% of

households have a female head, it has been found that investment in a daughter's schooling is higher for those households. A recent household survey in Botswana also found that the mother's literacy levels and reading practices were closely related to their daughters' level of school attainment (BDDCA1995).

Considering the high levels of illiterates among women in Malawi, there is a high possibility that girls get little attention from their mothers with respect to their education. Girls coming from female headed households would be the ones most affected by such parents who have no capacity to support their children. Such households are normally poverty stricken and would not have resources to meet the cost of schooling. The only thing such parents would think about is to get the girl child married. This problem could be one of the contributing factors to non-enrolment into school and dropping out of school by the majority of the girls.

5.1.1.6 Absence of role models

The absence of role models is seen as one of the factors contributing to low motivation of girls to enroll and remain in school. Role models are important in the sense that when a girl looks at a fellow female member perform task that are challenging she gains a sense of confidence that it is possible for her to do the same. That kind of admiration drives the girls into trying their best to achieve high in education and become one like the model they see or hear about. Teachers also play a role of a model to learners. It has been reported that female learners would look into female teachers as their models if they enroll and stay in school. The current situation is pathetic because most schools or communities lack a representation of female teachers unto which girls would consider as role models for their motivation in education.

The presence of a teacher in school is considered important to children for other important reasons. A teacher is a symbol of education. Where there is no teacher, it becomes difficult to expect learning to take place. It is common for learners to believe that teachers are the sole source of their knowledge they need to acquire in school. In some cases, teachers play a role of a parent, provide the care, and comfort which some learners need. If there is no teacher, parents do not find reasons for sending their child to school when they could use the time for performing other economically meaningful activities.

When parents and girls do not see the value of education through role models it would be difficult for them to appreciate the importance of education. This factor could be one of the reasons some of them lose interest in education. This condition is worsened if the parents are illiterate, there is poverty in the home to afford school costs, the culture does not appreciate the education of girls, the girl has to take care of the family and the journey to school is not safe. Girls engulfed in such environment may not have the chance to see the door of a school. If they do, their stay in the school would be cut short if learning seem not to take place and promise good returns for their education.

Exhibit 5



Lacking role models: Girls in science

Source: Nation Newspaper, 19/05/2014

The interrelatedness of the factors that lead to the challenge of child marriage and pregnancies call for actions that are linked. Failure of the customary and judicial systems compounded by poor coordination among stakeholders to redress the problem perpetuates its occurrence (Human Rights Watch (2014). This report considers some of the actions that have been tried and have made remarkable contributions in the agenda for girls' education. The idea is to bring to light the actions that are effective and could be scaled up to close the gap in the girls' education agenda.

5.1.2 Actions for addressing the challenge

This section narrates the various other interventions that followed the early actions of the NCWD and CCAM. It follows up on some of the actions that have directly targeted specific challenges facing girls. Most importantly is the uniqueness of these actions in the girls' education agenda in addressing the challenge that girls face to continue with their education.

5.1.2.1 Elimination of fees for basic education

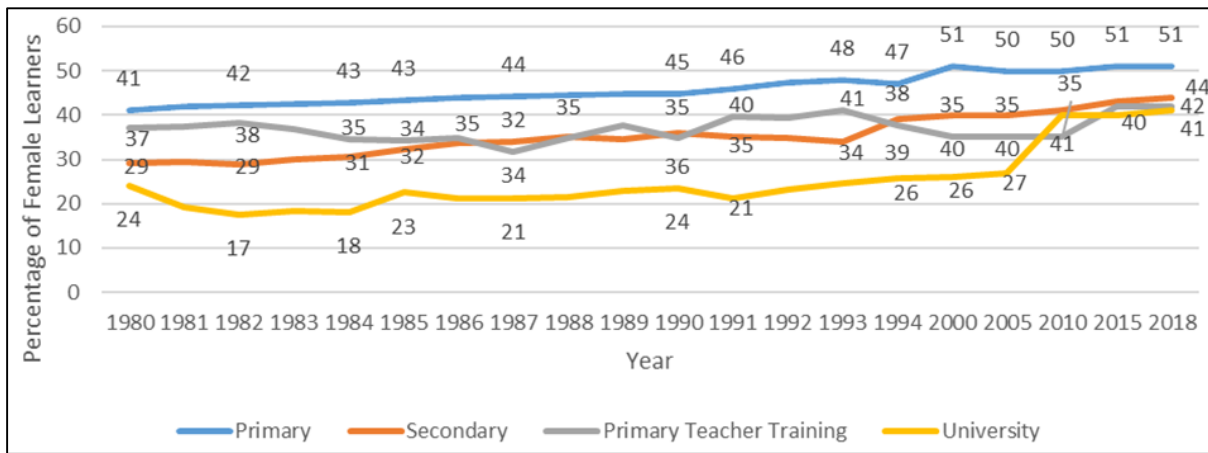
In support of the government's moral intention to raise the status of women and girls through education, several partners in development, both international and local have engaged in various interventions. Popular interventions date back to early 1980s with the establishment of the National Commission for Women in Development (NCWD) in 1984 and the Chitukuko Cha Amayi m'Malawi (CCAM) also known as Women in Development in 1985 to look into matters and policies that would promote women and girls in the Malawi society (World Bank 2016). These structures established programmes for women to actively participate in social, economic development and charity activities (VOA

31/10/2009). The programmes were meant to uplift economically the less privileged and marginalized rural poor women, orphans and the elderly (Nyasa Times, 22/3/2012). They also launched programmes that encouraged women and girls to enroll and participate in education and pushed for a waiver of fees for girls in the primary education sector (World Bank 2016).

One of the biggest interventions in the girls' education agenda is the removal of school fees and related costs at primary school level. In the early 1990s government introduced a phased approach for introducing a fee waiver for all eligible children. According to a World Bank (2016) report,

The implementation of this initiative started with those who entered Standard 1 in 1991. The fee waiver also affected all non-repeating girls from Standards 2 through the primary cycle. Children had to pay 3.50 Malawi Kwacha (about US\$1.35 basing on 1990 exchange rate) to enroll in school and buy uniform at the cost of 7 Malawi Kwacha (US\$2.70). Children that did not have money for the fees and uniform could not attend school as a result. World Bank (2016).

In 1994, in an effort to meet the goal of 'Education for All' the government removed all school fees for primary education as well as the requirement of uniform for one to attend classes. As a result of this policy, the representation of girls in primary education jumped from 45 percent in 1994 to 49 percent 1995 and has, to this day, remained at 50 or above as shown in Figure 9. Figure 9: Percentage of females in educational subsectors.



This figure represents a picture that fees are one of the biggest huddles to girls’ access to education. As noted earlier, the NSO (2018) demographic data shows that in Malawi there are more girls than boys. It is, therefore, expected that with free access to education, schools should enroll more girls than boys. This report observes that, despite, the free education policy, not all eligible girls are in school due to non-enrolment and dropping out. This finding shows that there is more work that needs to be done to make the free education policy achieve its intended results.

Recommendation
There is need to establish a package of school needs for girls education

One of the areas that require immediate action is the school uniform policy. As discussed earlier some schools still require learners to put on uniform for them to attend classes. This behavior completely defeats the idea behind the idea of scarping off the wearing of school uniform, which prevents learners from poor families to attend school. It is widely known that poverty has been one of the biggest challenges that cause many girls fail to go to and stay in school due to lack of basic needs, including uniform. Programs that have been effective on addressing such issues are those that consider all other needs that girls require for

them to be able to go to and stay in school. It is, therefore, recommended that in designing programs for supporting girls’ education, a thorough analysis of their needs would help to come up with real basic needs that girls’ require for their education. These needs could translate into a package for girls’ education to support the free education policy.

5.1.2.2 Sexuality Education

Early and unintended pregnancy can be prevented through good quality comprehensive sexuality education that includes content on gender equality, and linkages with services ensuring the availability of contraceptives.

UNESCO (2017, pg.1)

Because of the many ills associated with early marriages and pregnancies, countries are encouraged to devise systems that would bar their prevalence and encourage girls stay in school until they reach the required age for getting married and pregnant. The Nation Publications Limited (18 November, 2019) argues that gender based violence is fueled by dependence on the perpetrator for survival. The article specifically narrates that ‘for a long time a girl child has been raised to be married and nothing else. As a result in most cases education has always played a second fiddle to education. This has forced them to be the victims of gender based violence.’

Exhibit 6



Source: Nation Newspaper, 13 Nov 2018

In a study commissioned by Plan International in Uganda and Cambodia, Holden, Bell, and Schauerhammer (2015), report that gender based violence could best be addressed with a well designed and implemented Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). In their analysis and understanding of the results of the study, they observe that Comprehensive Sexuality Education – including learning about relationships, gender and gender-based violence, sex, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights can;

- Promote more gender equitable attitudes among young people,
- Improve young people’s life skills;
- Transform attitudes of the wider community including duty bearers; and
- Improve reporting and response to violence.

Holden, J., Bell, E. and Schauerhammer, V. (2015 pg.5).

An extract from the Nation Newspaper of 13th November, 2018 featured an article on ‘Education key to ending gender based violence’ by a non-governmental organization called Network for Youth Development. The NGO argues that ‘unless girls are empowered through education, they will continue to live in poverty and be victims of gender based violence.

Recommendation

Government should assess the comprehensiveness of the Life Skills subject in reference to CSE including the effectiveness of its delivery system.

One of the efforts the government has done in respect to CSE,

is to introduce Life Skills as one of the subjects in the school curriculum at both primary and secondary education level. According to the Human Rights Watch (2014), despite a “life skills” program that includes sexuality education, some girls who had been to school also lacked correct information on sexuality. The extent to which this subject meets the requirements of CSE needs to be considered to ensure that the boys and girls are given the necessary skills and knowledge that can reverse the current trends in child marriage and pregnancies.

5.1.2.3 Partnerships for girls’ education

Recommendation

A detailed survey should be launched to assess specific actions and areas of coverage to determine the gaps in the agenda for girls education

Since early marriages and pregnancies is a multifaceted challenge, a concerted effort is necessary in dealing with a problem of this nature. The work of bringing girls to school requires corporate efforts. The issues that force girls into child marriage and pregnancy are cross-cutting and have no single solution. Each relevant actor must take part according to the expertise and resources they have. This report presents some of the core actions that have been on the ground by various actors with an intention of establishing the extent of the effort. It is, however, important to launch a survey to establish a detailed coverage in view of the understanding the gaps that still exist. Table 1 presents some of the actions in the girls’ education agenda.

Table 1: Some of the major actions by development partners

Period	Government Actions	Partner Actions
1980s	Preferential selection of females into university colleges in the 1980s and this allowed females to occupy 30 percent of university places.	
1980s-1990s		USAID funded a Human Resources and Institutional Development Program from 1987 to 1995 and several females got a master's degree
1990s		From 1990 to 1994, USAID funded a bursary scheme targeting high achieving learners in Standards 1 to 8 (3 girls to 1 boy benefitted from a total of 26,000 learners).
1992	The Malawi Institute of Education established a Gender Appropriate Curriculum Unit in 1992 that worked on removal of all curriculum related restrictions from the curriculum.	In 1992, USAID launched the Girls Attainment in Basic Learning and Education program and 500,000 girls in Standards 2 to 8 benefitted from this program.
1993	In 1993 the government introduced a revised version of the re-admission policy.	- Provision of bursaries, mentorship and role modeling programs to re-admitted students
1994	In 1994, the Government of Malawi introduced the Free Primary Education Policy.	= provision of additional classrooms, textbooks
	The Government of Malawi introduced a 50:50 selection policy to secondary schools in 1994	
		In 1994, USAID funded an attitude change program through a GABLE Social Mobilization Campaign.
1998	In 1998, government selected girls into secondary schools dominated by boys.	
2002	Provision Of Government Bursaries to vulnerable students in all the 34 educational districts.	World Bank supported a Bursary Scheme
2012		UNICEF supported girls access to education
2015		DFID introduced and supported a Keeping Girls in School program
		Norwegian government started support for marginalized and girls education
2016		USAID's introduced support towards girls education
2019	In 2019, the government announced a Free Secondary Education Policy	-provision of financial support on other fees and entitlements
	In 2019, the government introduced a revised re-admission policy for primary and secondary education.	- Awareness campaigns and sensitization of the general public through meetings and media

In the spirit of partnership for girls' education, the government together with some development partners has provided bursaries and cash transfers to enable more marginalized girls to enroll and stay in school longer and complete their education (World Bank, 2016). The government has also engaged local communities in the effort of encouraging girls to go to school and participate in education. Mother groups are a community-based structure that has been mainstreamed in the education system to work with girls in places where the girls reside. The concept of 'Mother Groups' has been widely accepted in all communities in the country. These mother groups, being community based, are an easy reach for the girls within the community where they reside. Their role includes counseling the young girls as they reach puberty and help them cope with adolescent challenges. In places where they are active, they have encouraged girls to stay in school and motivated those who dropped out to return to school.

Recommendation:

More Partnerships should be created and encouraged to ensure concerted efforts in dealing with issues affecting girls' education.

In an effort to promote private sector involvement in the partnership for girls' education, UNICEF started working with the New Building Society bank and Standard bank. The importance of these partnerships is seen through making available additional resources for supporting initiatives

promoting girls education. They also serve as a means to provide practical interaction between the girls and members of the concerned institutions. A standard Bank Chief Financial Officer mentioned that 'Standard Bank employees go on the ground to provide mentorship and life skills training in areas such as career development, avoiding early marriages and financial literacy' (Nyasa Times 8 April, 2016). The UNICEF Deputy Director hailed the initiative saying, 'UNICEF believes that collective efforts and partnerships can secure girls right to access to education' (Nyasa Times 8 April, 2016).

In view of the need to engage all stakeholders in delivering the national agenda for education, developing and promoting functional partnerships would make a bigger impact. This is because through such arrangements there is an increase of additional resources, exploitation of expertise for addressing the diverse issues surrounding the challenge, and promotion of joint efforts. It is therefore encouraged that partnerships should be sought where feasible as a way of strengthening the efforts needed to address the challenge preventing girls from accessing and participating in education.

5.1.2.4 Infrastructure for attracting girls to and keep them in school

During menstruation period we could go home to help ourselves and at times we would stay home for a week to finish our menstruation'.
(Nyasa Times, 9 May, 2017).

Schools need to have the basic facilities that will attract girls and keep them in the school. To achieve this goal, the government embarked on a girls' Hostels Construction programme mainly in day secondary schools. Other partners joined in the execution of this strategy by including a component of girls-only hostels in their school construction projects. The purpose of the hostels is to allow girls stay safe in the schools preventing them from being exposed to the challenge of walking long distances to school every day, being victims of violence on the way and spending time performing domestic responsibilities in their homes.

Recommendation

Since most of the GBV happen between school and home, government should extend the hostels for girls initiative to all secondary schools

In addition to hostels, the concept of girls only school has proved effective in promoting improved learning outcomes for girls. According to BDDCA (2017), educational outcomes for girls attending single sex schools are better than girls enrolled at mixed schools. The report further explains that, in part, due to the fact that most heads of single sex girls schools are mostly female to provide positive role models for girls, and, equally important, an atmosphere that is free from sexual harassment.

Walking long distances to school is one of The challenges at both primary and secondary school level where girls are not provided with hostels and mode of transport like bicycles.(statement not making sense?) However, it is recalled that during the first days of the introduction of the Free Primary Education policy, the government encouraged communities to use any facility that was nearby to allow young children and girls attend classes within easy reach. This initiative saw the proliferation of small schools most of which were junior schools. Some of such schools have grown to bigger schools but not to full primary schools. The

Exhibit 7

challenge such incomplete schools offer is that when the children reach the last grade of the junior school, they are left with no class for the next Standard. It is either they brave the long distance to the next school which has all the classes or drop out completely.

This report worked out the difference in dropout rate between boys and girls in each education division and compared among the divisions in relation to the number of schools that are 10 to 15 kilometers away from the nearest school.

According to MoEST (2019), in all the education divisions, the dropout rate for girls was higher than that of boys. With the exception of SHED, the bigger the number of schools that were 10 to 15 KM away from the nearest school, the larger the difference or the more the girls that dropped out.

Table 2: Comparison between dropout rate and distance to school

Division	Difference in dropout rate between boys and girls	10 - 15 Km Distance to Nearest School
CEED	0.1	9
CWED	0.1	8
NED	0.2	10
SEED	0.3	10
SHED	0.3	4
SWED	0.4	11

Source: MoEST, 2019

One possible reason of drop out due to long distances between schools is the existence of junior schools. The SHED is a good example where only 4 schools are 10 to 15 kilometers away from the nearest school. This division, however, proved to be one of the divisions with larger number of girls dropping out of school.

One of the biggest supports towards girls' education should earmark reducing the distance girls walk to school. The junior schools must be identified and expanded to full schools to allow girls continue with their primary education at the same school.

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WaterAid
PRESS RELEASE

WaterAid Malawi calls for action as report warns 620 million children's education and health is compromised by lack of decent school toilets

As we commemorate World Toilet Day this year, WaterAid in Malawi is urging government to prioritise sanitation for all, following a new report showing that the education and health of millions of children is threatened by lack of access to toilets at school and at home.

The *Crisis in the Classroom*, WaterAid's fourth-annual analysis of the world's toilets, highlights that one in five primary schools and one in eight secondary schools globally do not have any toilets. A shocking one in three of the world's schools lack adequate toilets, compromising children's human rights to sanitation and leaving them to either use dirty, unsafe pits, go in the open, or stay at home.

In Malawi, 25% of schools are without a toilet and around 5 million children do not have a toilet at home. This means that children are being dangerously exposed to illnesses that could kill them. Repeated bouts of diarrhoea increase their chances of being malnourished, and sanitation-related illnesses result in missed school days and the loss of potential.

Source: Nations Publications Limited, 21/11/2018

Toilet facilities are also critical in the girls' education agenda. One of the staff members of World Vision International mentioned that *'we have observed that lack of sanitary facilities for girl learners that have started their menstrual cycles is one of the major reasons why many girls drop out of school'* (Nyasa Times, 4 May, 2016). The toilet facilities act as change rooms for girls. One of the girls at Kaputu Primary School in Salima district where Assemblies of God Care donated toilet facilities explained that *'We were not able to fully participate in school activities every day because the school environment was not so conducive and favorable to us'* (Nyasa Times, 9 May, 2017).

Recommendation

The government should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the availability of WASH facilities in all the schools and embark on a program of constructing some.

Within the 'Keeping Girls in School' framework, various participating partners have implemented a number of interventions related to water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to encourage girls to stay in school. Construction of toilets to provide privacy for adolescent girls has been one of the tenets of the WASH programs. As observed in Figure 2 the largest number of girls that drop out is found in Standard eight. This is the class that hosts most mature girls who need privacy and functioning WASH facilities. In schools where these facilities are missing, there is a high possibility that girls are forced to stay away from school.

5.1.2.5 The re-admission policy

Less than 35% of the households that were affected by

school dropouts expressed the possibility of sending all the children back to school while about 5% said they would send some but not all back to school, and the majority (about 53%) ascertained that under no circumstances would their children return to school. The major reason for this was that they were married (55.4%) and could not leave their spouses. Other reasons for not sending the dropouts back to school include inability to pay school fees (13.3%), family responsibilities (7.2%) and because the children had already secured some kind of employment (6%) – indicating opportunity cost of sending children to school. This is also a manifestation of child labor, which is common among rural households in Malawi.

2013 Household Basic Education Cost Survey report (Gov. of Malawi, 2013, pg. 66).

In 1993, the government introduced a readmission policy to encourage pregnant female learners to return to school after delivery of their child. This policy, however, received mixed reactions and it has been difficult to implement in some parts of the society. Difficulties associated with sending pregnancy related dropouts back to school are clear from the 2013 Household Basic Education Cost Survey report.

The re admission policy was revised in 2018 to address the shortfalls and implementation barriers the previous one experienced. The revision of this policy is an indication of the seriousness and continued commitment the government has towards girls' education.

Despite the implementation challenges, the readmission policy is one of the interventions that have received popular support from all corners of the society. Both international and local NGOs have joined in delivering the policy through various interventions.

Exhibit 8



BACK TO SCHOOL—Some of the readmitted girls

BY PETER PHIRI,
CONTRIBUTOR

Creccom hails school readmission policy

CREATIVE Centre for Community Mobilisation (Creccom) has commended various players supporting quality education programmes in rural areas across the country, saying the interventions are yielding results.

Creccom Project Manager for Improving Quality Education in Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS), Linice Sanga, made the remarks when Kasupe CDSS in Thyolo District awarded eight girls who had returned to school after marriage.

The girls also passed their

Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations.

Sanga said the success of the eight girls who married after dropping out of school and were later brought back to school by mother groups is an indication that communities understand the readmission policy being implemented by Creccom and other players.

"We are celebrating with the community; we want to motivate the community on what they are doing in ensuring that girls are brought back to school. We worked hand in hand with

traditional leaders and other stakeholders to ensure girls who are readmitted remain in school," she said.

Head teacher for Kasupe CDSS, Liston Mpheza, said they decided to award the girls as a way of encouraging mother groups to rescue more girls from early marriages and bring them back to school.

Mpheza added that that the project has been successful as a result of punitive by-laws set up by community leaders for parents who recognise child marriages.

Concurring with Mpheza, Traditional Authority Mbwela of Thyolo District, who is also championing the readmission programme, said the development has motivated his subjects from surrounding areas to end adolescent marriages.

"Our main source of motivation has been what Creccom and the government are preaching on the importance of educating girls," he said.

Since 2017, Creccom has been implementing the programme in 36 CDSSs in Thyolo, Mulanje, Ntchisi and Chitipa districts.

Source: Nation Publications Limited, 2018

Recommendation

An observance of the needs of girls should accompany the implementation of the readmission policy

In view of the other factors that force girls into early marriage and pregnancy, the re-admission policy would not work in isolation. It has to take into consideration of those factors to

make it effective and bring the expected results. The implementers of the policy, therefore, need to understand that:

- The policy itself is multi-sectoral, which implies that the place of other relevant stakeholders must be clearly understood and observed;
- There are factors that send the girls into the predicament

of early marriage and unwanted pregnancies, which means that the implementing partners need to be conversant with the package of girls' education;

- all sectors of the society need to be familiar with the policy for their active participation, which means that the policy must be translated into languages which can be understood by the local members;
- the coordinating structure is functional to ensure that there is continuous stock taking of the actions that are supporting the implementing the policy as well as monitor the actions with the most impact for possible scaling up.

Recommendation

Institute a task force for the readmission policy

Leadership and coordination are essential to achieve the intentions of the readmission policy. Like it is done for other special programs, the readmission policy would have a special task force to oversee the actions surrounding it. This approach would ensure that all the necessary requirements for the success of the policy are observed and acted upon.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Considering the importance of girls' education to national development, the government and its development partners have been implementing interventions for addressing factors that prevent girls from going to school. The effort has realized some meaningful result but still more needs to be done to ensure that all girls are brought to and kept in school. The current situation is that the total number of girls equals that of boys. However, there should have been more girls than boys in the schools if all school-age girls enrolled and if the dropout rates of girls was eliminated.

This report focused on discovering the main issues that prevent the girls from enrolling in school and why most of the enrolled girls drop before they reach the last grade of the primary education. Although secondary education faces similar challenges, the biggest concern is on primary which is considered as a foundation for education. Addressing issues at this level would automatically reflect in the secondary education level where representation of girls would also increase as a result.

The main issues that come of the report relate to the complexity of the factors that are associated with the challenge girls face with their education. Studies have revealed that some of these issues are related to culture, poverty, illiteracy of parents, cost of schooling, distance to school, lack of role models, pregnancy, marriage, gender based violence, lack of interest and more other unknown factors. In this report, it has been argued that the main challenge girls face is the early marriage and unwanted pregnancy. The reason being that, if all the other factors did not exist, issues of child marriage and pregnancies could also prevail.

Behind this understanding the report lays out actions that have made remarkable impact and would need scaling up or continuing to get maximum results in the girls' education agenda. Considering that the issues are multifaceted, the report recommends a holistic approach in addressing the challenge. Developing a comprehensive package of the necessary needs of girls would support this idea.

The MoE will need to assess the effectiveness and

sustainability of its policy and programs, including those by partners, to scale and consolidate accordingly, and avoid a scattered approach in addressing the challenge.

6.2 Recommendations

The report lays out several recommendations worth noting and implementing to ensure that the work on girls' education is complete and free of loop holes or gaps that would derail the effort. These include:

- 6.2.1 A deliberate effort should be made to review the school uniform policy
- 6.2.2 There is need to establish a comprehensive package of school needs for girls education
- 6.2.3 Government should assess the comprehensiveness of the Life Skills subject in reference to CSE including the effectiveness of its delivery system.
- 6.2.4 A detailed survey should be launched to assess specific actions and areas of coverage to determine the gaps in the agenda for girls education
- 6.2.5 More Partnerships should be created and encouraged to ensure concerted efforts in dealing with issues affecting girls' education.
- 6.2.6 Since most of the GBV happen between school and home, government should extend the hostels for girls initiative to all secondary schools
- 6.2.7 The government should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the availability of WASH facilities in all the schools and embark on a program of constructing some.
- 6.2.8 An observance of the needs of girls should accompany the implementation of the re-admission policy
- 6.2.9 Institute a task force for the re-admission policy

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It is the hope of the author that this report will be used solely for increasing the interaction among all actors that play a big role in making decisions and promoting actions for advancing girls' education in Malawi. As such, the report does only speak to the impact of the support for girls' education agenda but also provide feedback on the current situation in terms of gaps and achievements made so far.

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Acronyms

AU	:	African Union
BDDCA	:	British Development Division in Central Africa
CAMFED	:	Campaign for Female Education
CCAM	:	Chitukuko Cha Amayi M'Malawi
CEED	:	Central East Education Division
CRECOM	:	Creative Center For Community Mobilization
CWED	:	Central West Education Division
EFA	:	Education for All
EMIS	:	Education Management Information Systems
GPI	:	Gender Parity Index
HBECSR	:	Household Basic Education Cost Survey Report
HRW	:	Human Rights Watch
MoE	:	Ministry of Education
NCWD	:	National Commission for Women in Development
NED	:	Northern Education Division
NESP	:	National Education Sector plan
NGO	:	Non-Governmental Organization
NSO	:	National statistics Office
PHS	:	Population and Housing Census
SDG	:	Sustainable Development Goals
SEED	:	South East Education Division
SHED	:	Southern Highlands Education Division

SRHSA : Sexual Reproductive Health Services
For Adolescents
SWED : South West Education Division
UIS : UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK : United Kingdom
UN : United Nations
UNESCO : United Nations Educational, Scientific
And Cultural Organization
USAID : United States Agency for International
Development
US : United States
VOA : Voice of America
WB : World Bank