



University of Malawi
Centre for Educational Research and Training

Preliminary Fact Finding Consultancy on Japanese Assistance to School
Mapping and Micro-Planning in Malawi

A Report Submitted to JICA

by

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the major activities in the basic education sector in Malawi has been the preparation of the Policy Investment Framework (PIF) for the planning of education. Key features of the PIF include the enhancement of decentralisation of educational services to district and school levels. This has in general called for a micro-planning approach in educational planning and program implementation. It was the realisation of this that the government of Malawi (GOM) made a request to the government of Japan for support in conducting a school mapping and micro-planning project. Consequently, the Japanese Government, through the Japan International cooperation Agency (JICA), organised a contact mission to visit Malawi headed by Professor Nobuhide Sawamura. Other members of the mission were: Dr Robin Ruggles, Ms Reiko Akezumi, and Dr Joseph Chimombo. Dr Chimombo was a local consultant (henceforth the consultant) attached to the mission and was to act as the link person between the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture (MOESC) and the donors. The mission visited Malawi between 3rd March and 11th March 2000. During the Contact Mission's stay in Malawi, a series of discussions and interviews were held with various people and a number of documents and reports were also reviewed. This report summarises the results of the tasks performed by the Contact Mission as per the terms of reference below.

2.0 OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF THE CONSULTANCY

The principal purpose of the JICA Contact Mission was to understand and confirm any changes in the original request by the government of Malawi to the government of Japan on national school mapping and micro-planning. The general purpose of this consultancy was to collect and analyse the relevant information on school mapping as inputs to the incoming preparatory study mission, through discussions with various stakeholders and review of existing documents. The consultant was to assist the JICA Contact Mission in attaining the above objective. Specifically, the consultant was to:

- 1) Collect data and information related to basic education including the PIF for 1999 - 2009, sector analyses, national policy and plans, and sector development programs
- 2) Collect recent statistics and assess the issues of equity (urban/rural and male/female enrollment ratios etc), efficiency (grade repetition rates, primary school completion rates, etc desegregated by sex and by urban/rural) and quality (percentage of qualified teachers in urban and rural zones by district), and any relevant learning assessment or achievement test results at the end of primary level, etc;
- 3) Review ongoing and planned activities of GOM and the existing multi-donor initiative in basic education;
- 4) Review the results of school mapping exercise in the pilot district, and identify problems and constraints;

- 5) Collect information on availability, capability and fees of local consultants to be assigned under the project;
- 6) Attend meetings and joined visits as a member of the JICA Contact Mission; and
- 7) Prepare a report summarizing the results of tasks (1) to (6)

The report merely attempts to highlight the major areas in basic education by elaborating on the terms of reference above. In order to provide a common understanding of the basic concepts of school mapping and micro-planning, the report also gives an overview of the school mapping and micro-planning exercises. In Appendix 1, a series of activities to be performed by the JICA under the micro-planning component are outlined.

3.0 ISSUES IN BASIC EDUCATION

The major talking point in basic education in the past five to six years in Malawi has been the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy. Any policy implies an economic, and probably also a sociological understanding about the way the world works. According to MoE (1996:20), FPE policy was adopted with the objectives of:

- ❖ Increasing access to primary education;
- ❖ Eliminating inequalities in enrolment; and
- ❖ Building a strong socio-economic base within society and enhancing civic education on the socio-economic benefits of education at the community level.

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) observed that there are two distinguishing characteristics of policies: the amount of change involved and the extent to which there is goal consensus among the participants in the implementation process. It can be discerned from above that FPE was directed at altering the pace of education expansion and at promoting greater equity in access to and progression through schooling. And the evidence has shown that the immediate priority of the policy of ensuring universal access to primary education was largely achieved. The result of the FPE policy was a massive increase in enrollments from 1.9 million pupils to over 3 million. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) increased from 94% in 1993/94 to 134% in 1994/95 (MoE 1995). This is, undoubtedly, the greatest success of the policy. Most children in Malawi have set foot inside a school of some kind. Chimombo (1999) observed that although the introduction of FPE was not strategically planned and implemented and despite the fact that there were insufficient budgetary provisions, it was widely accepted by the Malawi's populace as a step in the right direction. The donor community also welcomed it as a correct and courageous decision.

But there was also the accompanying realisation of the considerable lack of resources in terms of classrooms, textbooks and teachers. FPE has aggravated the chronic shortage of permanent classrooms and too few trained teachers. This has led to exceedingly high pupil teacher ratio, especially in the lower standards, and in particular, in rural areas. The consequences of these facts are that the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom has deteriorated to a disturbing level. This low quality has negatively impacted on the efficiency of the system as exemplified by the high dropout and repetition rates (Chimombo 1999, Kadzamira et. al 1999). The low efficiency compounds the fact that in this inadequately financed system, the few precious resources that are available are not utilised sufficiently. The government of Malawi has responded to the challenges of the FPE policy by continually increasing the funding to primary education. While in 1988 the percent of the nation's expenditure that went to primary education was 6.4%, in 1998, the figure had risen to 17.8%.

It is obvious that the many changes that have been introduced in the education sector have put the government of Malawi under tremendous pressure. This can partly be explained in two ways. First, many of the changes that have taken place in the past six years have largely been unplanned for. They have been responses to emerging challenges and not part of a well-designed national strategy based on clearly articulated policies. Second, despite the high proportion of the Government budget going to education, the demands of expansion and quality education, leaves the sector seriously under-funded. It is the realisation of this that the Government of Malawi came up with a planned strategy known as the Policy and Investment Framework (PIF) for the education sector. The next section briefly outlines the key features of the PIF in the basic education sub-sector.

3.1.0 The Policy and Investment Framework (PIF)

The PIF is a document that defines the Government of Malawi's policies and outlines the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture's (MOESC) priority programs for the next 12 years. The PIF is based on a comprehensive analysis of the education sector in Malawi. It is education's response to the Government of Malawi's policy of poverty alleviation and addresses the national educational goal as spelt out in Vision 2020. It realises that an educated populace can best exploit Malawi's rich natural resources base and that an educated populace is fully able to participate in a democratic society, is full aware of its cultural heritage and the need to further develop its culture. The PIF also appreciates the fact that Malawi's education system cannot contribute significantly to the alleviation of poverty unless the main constraints facing the system are addressed. The major challenges in basic education can be identified to be: limited and unequal access to educational opportunities, declining educational quality, a school curriculum which does not effectively address individual and social needs, poor planning and management capacity and inadequate financing. Although significant policy changes have been made in the past decades, they were in most cases partial and aimed at redressing problems inherited from the

past and rarely did they seek to address the educational challenges of the future. The PIF outlines the key policy changes in basic education as follows:

- 1) Basic education is to be expanded beyond the provision of primary education to embrace pre-school provision, adult education and literacy as well as school health and nutrition.
- 2) Decentralisation will devolve responsibility for primary education to the district assemblies
- 3) The share of the education budget devoted to primary education shall increase from 62% to at least 65%.
- 4) Dropout and repetition rates will be reduced through a combination of advocacy and structural change.
- 5) Primary schools are to become full community primary schools through increasing the autonomy of school management committees.
- 6) A national assessment system will be established to determine minimum learning requirements at all levels.

It can be observed that the PIF underlines the importance of paying the greatest attention to the basic education sub-sector. This is in keeping with Article 28 of the UN convention of the human rights of the child which guarantees the right of the child to a basic education of minimum quality to which Malawi is a signatory.

3.1.1 An Assessment of the Policy Investment Framework

In summary the issues in the Primary Level Education are i) the need for adequate and relevant inputs (financial, human and materials); (ii) the need for effective teaching and learning process benefiting the learners; (iii) the need for proactive supervision, monitoring and assessment of the classroom processes; and (iv) the need for genuine and sound community and government interface of education provision and management.

A review of the initial PIF (1995-2005) by the Government of Malawi and donors revealed that the document was not based on thorough and comprehensive data and analyses. Hence it failed to fully highlight the extent of the challenges, problems to be solved and programs for solving such problems. Besides, the priorities did not come out candidly, apart from providing a basis for proper costing of the issues to be implemented. Furthermore, it was felt that the concept of a Policy and Investment Framework as an active document was not emphasized. So, the ministry in recognition that planning should be anchored in a sector wide policy program appointed a coordinator for reviewing the PIF. To ensure that the PIF is developed in a consultative manner, five working groups under the direction of a PIF task force, chaired by the Secretary for Education were formed. Under the review, emphasis was

also put on the: quality of primary education, and unifying the provision of secondary education and its democratization in order to accommodate the views of students. Overall, the process of reviewing the PIF brought into focus the concept of Sector Investment Program (SIP) and Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) at the planning level in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. In essence, the PIF's review made education to be seen in terms of: a sector in need of a long-term development strategy; hence, propagating sector reform programs and investment which required a systematic approach and guided interventions from donor supported projects, and an activity in need of appropriate management and monitoring mechanisms. There is need then to institute mechanisms for enabling these tasks hence the school mapping and micro-planning exercises.

In the opinion of the consultant the major problem still remains to be the lack of inter-marriage between the policies and the strategies and these are in general unspecific. For example, it is a known factor that after the introduction of FPE, the resource base in education was far inadequate. It is also a common fact that the need for more classrooms, teachers' houses, and books just to mention a few, that resulted from FPE was beyond the level of the ministry's provision. Hence the recent shift in policy towards the improvement of the quality of the education offered. As one of the policies on quality, the PIF says:

The MOESC shall ensure that each school has an adequate supply of instructional and teaching/learning materials, and that schools have some degree of control and choice over such a supply. The textbook ratio shall improve from an average of 24 pupils per textbook in 1997 to 2 pupils per textbook by 2002 (policy no. 10 :17).

An associated financial policy that was intended to enable the implementation of the quality concerns above stated:

The MOESC shall pursue policies that will increase the allocation of the education budget to primary school teaching/learning materials. The share of allocation to teaching/learning materials shall increase from 3% in 1997 to 13% in 2002 (policy 5 :20).

In the absence of information on how many pupils there will be in 2002 and at 2 pupils to a textbook, what amount of money will therefore be needed, it is difficult to see how the increase in allocation to teaching and learning materials to 13% will enable the accomplishment of the quality objective. It is only by going into the specifics of the details that we are able to know what proportion of the needed resources will be covered by the 13% rise and hence what balance need to be covered by other sources. Information from school mapping and micro-planning could become useful in this endeavor.

The achievement of the goals set forth in the PIF will require a challenging program of reforms at all levels. And this challenge requires an increasing level of both financial and human resources to overcome current conditions and resource shortages. It is currently estimated that today, the annual

public expenditure per primary pupil- of which there are about 3 millions,- averages K500. This low level of spending reflects current conditions in schools of overcrowded classrooms (see notes on Chinsapo primary school in Appendix 2), under and untrained teachers, lack of instructional materials and inadequate professional guidance and supervision. To provide the quality implied by the policy and standards in the PIF, will require, over time, at least a doubling of current per/pupil expenditures. While the PIF wholly subscribes to the philosophy of the medium term expenditure framework (MTEF), the consultant finds it difficult to see how the objectives set forth in the PIF can be achieved within this philosophy. His opinion is that the level of funding for the PIF policies will always be constrained by the financial ceilings set by the MTEF. Further, as the ministry and donors strive for the building of the capacity of the ministry personnel, the ministry need not be reminded that these efforts are not new and that the main constraint in capacity building in MOESC is the ministry's inability to train and retain its personnel within the education sector and indeed in the planning unit of the MOESC.

It should be mentioned that the PIF is still to be approved by the cabinet. Until this happens, it appears that some donors are holding funds because PIF is not finalised yet. Thus, donors are using the PIF finalisation as a condition for further funding in education. The expectation from the donors community is that the PIF can be approved before the scheduled sector review in October which will be based on the approved PIF. The PIF therefore is the key document for further development of education in the current SWAP development.

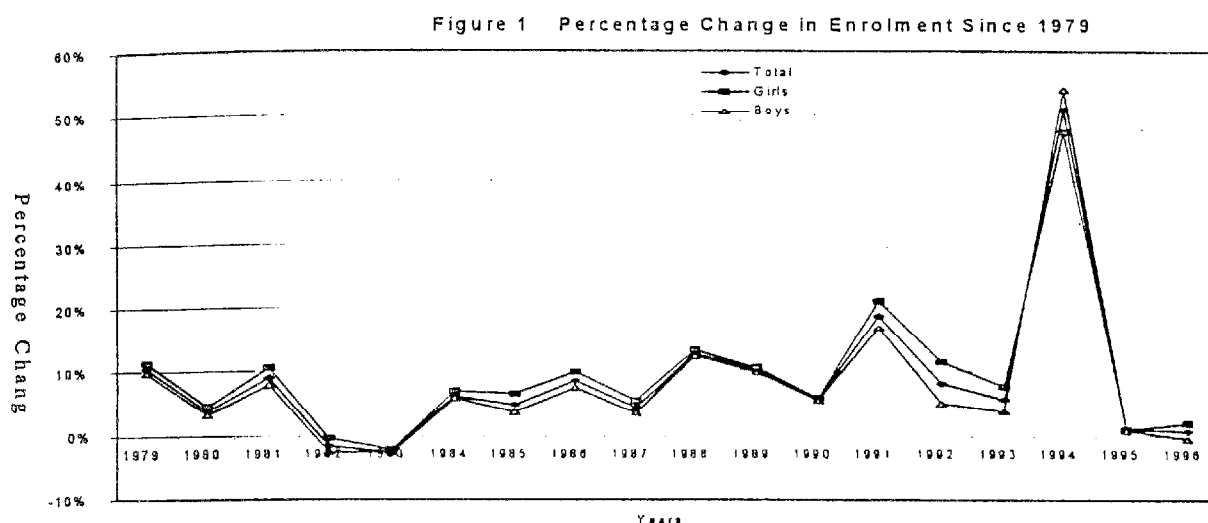
3.2.0 On Access, Equity and Efficiency

This section examines the issues of access, equity and efficiency. The demand for education can be broken down into two components: demand for access and demand to remain in the system. The demand for access leads to enrollment and demand for continuation becomes evident in parents' desire to keep their children in school and in pupils' desire to carry on. Demand reflections are enrolment, repetition and dropout. This section first looks at the trends in enrollment at national level.

3.2.1 Enrollment Trends

First, with no doubt, the Jomtien conference provided the impetus for both national and international bodies to seriously think about the provision of basic education for all in various countries and Malawi is no exception. Secondly, in the Malawian context, since the turn of the 1990s, the emphasis has been on the education of girls. If there is a country in subSaharan Africa SSA that has made tremendous strides towards the education of girls, then Malawi stands out. But when FPE was instituted, boys responded more favourably than girls did. Total enrolment for boys increased by 54% while that of girls increased by 47%. This is shown in figure 1 below. Could this be an indication of the disadvantage boys were subjected to following the selective policies of girls' attainment and basic education and literacy

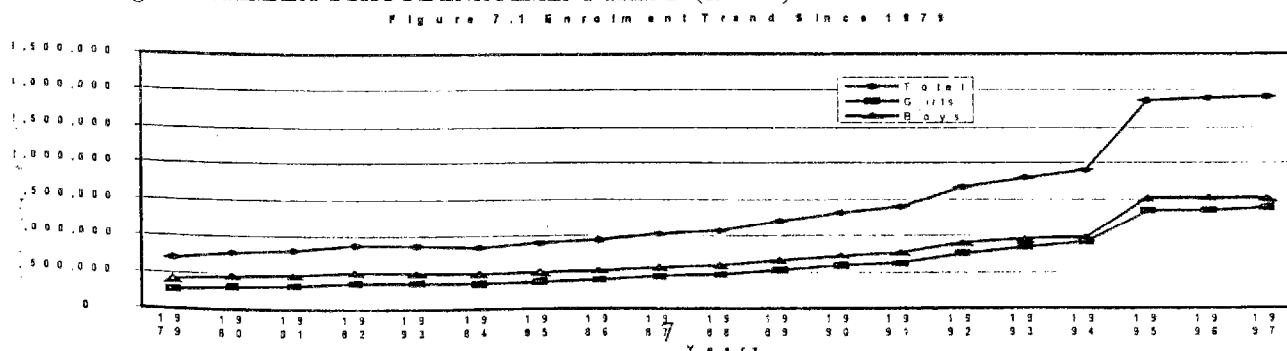
(GABLE)? Project. But the fact that girls enrolment also increased by 47% indicated that many girls were also still out of school despite the deliberate attempts to get girls into school and this casts doubts on the overall effectiveness of the GABLE programs.



The contrast between 1982-83 and 1994/95 in the above figure should be noted. In 1982, government of Malawi under the advice of the World Bank increased school fees. These contrasts run counter to the findings of Thobani (1983). Thobani theorised that school fees could be increased in Malawi without having adverse impact on the poor. He asserted: that a low user charge often hurts the very poor it is meant to help and that by raising user charges, the expanded (but more expensive) level of service is often more accessible to the poor (:14). The two graphs show that families are very sensitive to changes in fees in considering the school participation of their children. Thus, the trends show that primary schooling costs even where fees are very low feature importantly in family budgets and that small changes in the size of the burden to the family can have a big impact upon total enrollment (Colclough, 1996:597). As opposed to the theories of the World Bank's economists, this also means that when parents list lack of fees as a reason for not sending their children to school, it represents a very real reason and may be a factor of particular importance in rural subsistence-based communities.

The figure below shows enrollment trend from 1979 to 1997.

Figure 2 PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT TREND (1979-97)



It can be observed that since 1990, enrollment has indeed risen more than any other period with a marked increase in 1994 as a result of the FPE policy. Indeed, the greatest success in the drive behind the introduction of FPE policy reform has been in the provision of access to education for the majority of Malawians. By removing school fees and the requirement for uniforms the government removed a barrier to schooling that many people faced. In the hey days of FPE policy, there was a general aura of excitement among Malawi's populace. For the first time ever the door to getting out of poverty was opened and parents took the FPE policy seriously and enrolled their children in school. For this the new government had gained great political capital from the policy. This government's commitment and political will that prevailed at the time of the proclamation of the FPE policy still exists now.

The graph above indicates that there have been promising gains in enrollment, especially of girls since the 1990s. Our speculation is that the two graphs (for boys and girls) would probably have met in two to four years had it not been for the introduction of FPE. This shows how policies can be used to affect the schooling behaviour of boys and girls. It is however debatable as to the desirability of such policies that specifically target one gender or race while ignoring others (Swaisson 1997). However, it is no doubt that the GABLE project has made great strides in the attempt to improve the education system in the country. The budget conditionalities introduced in GABLE resulted in a strong and continued government performance since 1989 in terms of increasing the percentage of government budget allocated to education from 13.5% in 1992/93 to 27% in 1996/97. Further, the government under GABLE implemented measures designed to contribute to increased access and persistence of girls in primary education such as school fee waivers, social mobilisation campaign and the revision of the curriculum to make it more gender sensitive.

Despite the many achievements made by GABLE through these many interventions, it appears that USAID was not able to satisfactorily address the problems of quality and efficiency in the Malawi education system. The evidence indicates that one challenge still remains to the attempts of improving the education system in Malawi: to maintain current enrollment levels in primary schools and simultaneously improve the quality and efficiency of the education system. This was supported by the drafters of GABLE II project who in their analysis concluded with the following rather dismay picture:

the government of Malawi has improved its statistics on access and equity. It has succeed in rapidly drawing many more children, particularly girls, into the primary system through cost reduction. However, on many other criteria used to measure education caliber, Malawi's education system is sinking fast. There is no doubt that quality and efficiency are poorer than

they were four years ago when analysis for GABLE was undertaken. This would have deteriorated even further, however, had GABLE I not been launched. If children recently drawn into the education system are not to become disenchanted dropouts, rapid measures to improve quality need to be undertaken at once. Otherwise the commendable progress in access would result in an irreversible decline in school enrollment (Berbman et al 1998: 9).

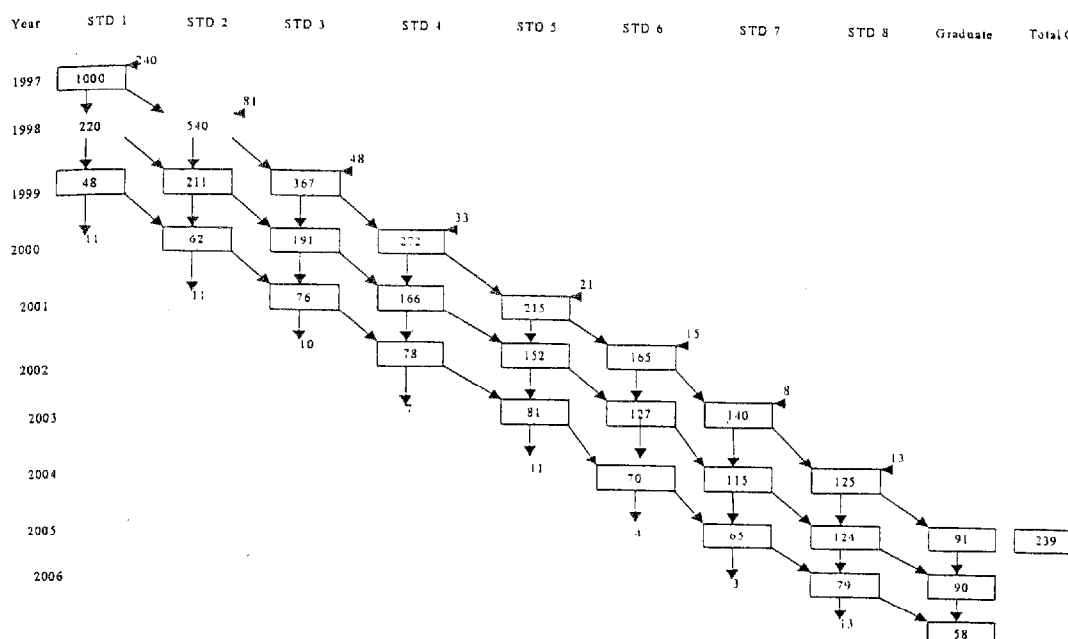
The consultant's opinion is that they are already disenchanted dropouts. There is a great deal of loss of opportunity which is resulting from the loss of the many children who show interest and start school, but find themselves not welcomed by the prevailing conditions of the system. Our major challenge in Malawi is to see to it that those children who start school remain in the system. This will remain our challenge for some time to come. It really does not help us much to woe so many pupils into a system that has a weaker holding capacity on the pupils.

Further, access, particularly in rural areas is not equitable. Enrollment of females in certain parts of the country can be as low as 40% of the eligible population. There is a wide disparity in the ability of the government and the community to provide pre-school facilities, and this has a direct linkage with the readiness of the children of the school age to make optimal use of the circumstances in which they find themselves when they enter school. There is also inadequate provision for children with special needs. In an attempt to make the necessary gains in improving quality, access, equity and relevance, a major challenge will be to get an accurate picture of the actual situation in schools. This can only be achieved by establishing an effective information retrieval system which can be used as a planning and policy tool to the benefit of all, hence the need for school mapping and micro-planing.

3.2.2 Efficiency of the Primary School System

The Malawi primary education system is beset by interrelated problems of educational quality and internal efficiency. As will be shown shortly, wastage is very high as reflected in high dropout and

Figure 3 Reconstructed Cohort Analysis for Case



repetition rates and completion rates are dismally low. The best way to obtain an accurate assessment of wastage is through an analysis of a cohort. This involves either a longitudinal study of a pupil cohort or a retrospective study of school records to trace the flow of pupils. These methods are time-consuming and expensive and require reliable data that are hard to locate. In this section, results of Chimombo (1999) are presented. Using a hypothetical cohort, Chimombo estimated the efficiency of the schools in terms of how many pupils survive from a given number of say 1000 pupils. The data were from a case study of ten schools. Instead of doing this analysis for each of the ten case study schools, it appeared more appropriate to aggregate the data and estimate the efficiency based on dropout and repetition rates of the ten schools. These aggregated data were assumed to be more stable than each of the single school's rates. It was assumed that promotion, repetition and dropout rates were valid from Standard 1 to 8 for a number of years. This was of course hypothetical since these were bound to change. The calculation therefore assumed that pupils could repeat a Standard three times. Figure 3 below presents the results of such an analysis.

The results were disheartening. Out of a thousand pupils who started school in Standard 1, only 91 (or 9.1%) graduated in the required eight years. This however increased to 24% if those who completed within the allowed three-time repetition were included. This figure supported the thesis that the main problem with schooling in Malawi is at the lower Standards where most of the dropouts and repetitions occur. From 1,000 pupils, the number dropped to 540 pupils by grade two. The system lost 24% of its pupils after one year after repetition is accounted for. Another 81 pupils were lost between Standards 2 and 3 in the next year. By this time, the system has lost 32.1% of its pupils. In fact less than a quarter (215) of those who started in Standard 1 completed the first four years of the cycle and started Standard 5 in the required time.

Chimombo (1999) was also able to estimate the average duration of study by graduates. This was defined by UNESCO (1984) as the total number of years graduates spent in the school system divided by the total number of graduates. In Figure 3 above, a total of 239 pupils graduated. This yielded a total duration by graduates = Total years used by graduates divided by total graduates = $((91*8)+(90*9)+(58*10))/239 = 2118/239 = 9\text{years}$. Thus, the average duration of study by graduates was nine years. This number is low probably because of the massive number of dropouts since pupils are spending less time in school.

The input/output ratio for the system, defined as the number of years used by cohort divided by the optimal number of years was also estimated. This yielded an input/output ratio of :

$$= (4711)/(239*8) = 2.5$$

For the above cohort, the input-output ratio was 2.5. A perfectly efficient system would have a ratio of

1.0 and thus the above cohort used 2.5 times the input that would be required in a system without repetition and dropouts. The Malawi education system can therefore be said to be 2.5 times inefficient.

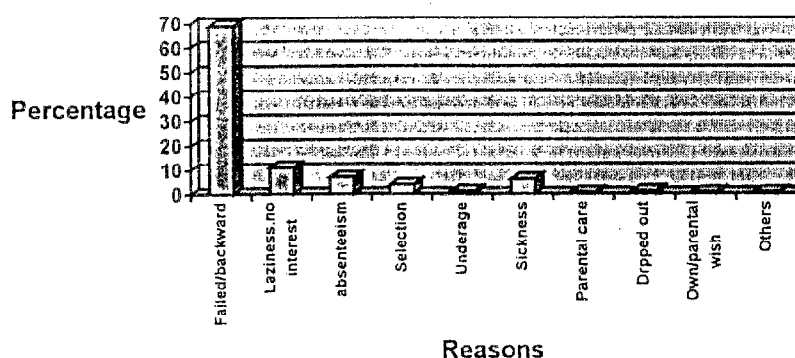
3.2.3 Repetition Rates

Promotion, repetition and dropout rates are the most widely used indicators to describe the internal efficiency of an education system (how many and how quickly pupils progress through the school system). These flow rates are used to assess the magnitude of wastage prevalent in a school system, evaluate the capacity of the system to admit new pupils, project future enrolment and the number of graduates who will enter the subsequent cycle of education or who will join the labour market and estimate the cost of operating the system' (Cuadra 1991 :1). Repeating a standard is regarded as a waste to the extent that it increases the number of pupils in the classroom and/or leads to increased costs of running the system.

The evidence to date has identified two types of repetition problems in Malawi. The first one is that which occurs at the lower levels of the system. The problem has been observed to be one that is induced by overall poor learning environment. Here the danger is that pupils who do not progress with their peers, invariably struggle with problems of self-esteem. It is probable that the high repetition in the early grades leads to further low retention down the road, which in turn leads to dropping out entirely. In Chimombo (1999) s study, the problem that was noted was that teachers attributed schooling problems in the early grades to the children inability to learn and not to the quality of teaching. *They are slow learners*, they observed. But clearly, repetition is the key for both overall efficiency and suitable levels of quality. In the Malawian context, repetition at this level of the system is acting as a signal that something is wrong somewhere, that achievement is inadequate, that the quality of learning is low and that learning disabilities brought from a deprived environment are present. This problem needs to be urgently addressed.

The other kind of repetition problem is that which occurs at the last grade. Here pupils are repeating not because they have failed but because they want to increase their chance of being selected for secondary school. The evidence from Chimombo s limited data showed that standard eight pupils in Malawi gained

Figure 3 Reasons for Repetition



both in terms of chances of being selected and in increased scores, if they repeated Std 8 once only. It was observed in this study that repetition is not as attractive as it is believed to be. It is only driven by the will to succeed, which in reality does not occur to many pupils. However, since the belief is that pupils can increase their chances by repeating, the tradition has been that of wanting to belong to the chosen few. The best policy option indicated by the evidence would be to allow for one repetition only, though the issue is so politically sensitive that attempts so far to implement it have been unsuccessful¹. But what were the factors influencing repetition? In Chimombo (1999) s study, the results of such an analysis are replicated in figure 3 below.

It can be seen from Figure 3 that the single most important factor determining repetition, according to the teachers, was failure or backwardness. Many teachers subscribed to the following explanation as to why there were so many failures:

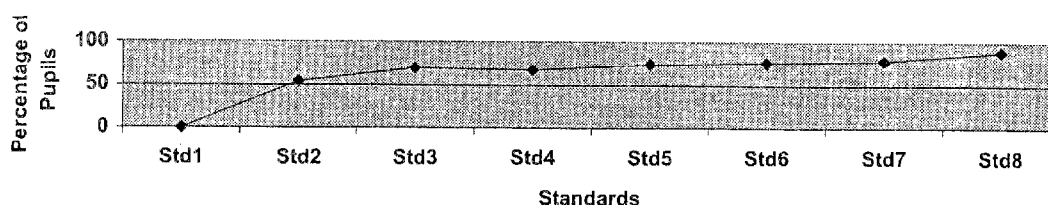
Most pupils fail because they are backward or slow learners. The problem is that of poor background or beginning. With overcrowded classes in the lower standards, many pupils are promoted without having mastered the content of the syllabus. As a result, the next level s work tends to be harder for them and they therefore fail.

What was surprising was that none of the teachers alluded to the fact that the problem of failure and repetition could also be due to the teaching methods in such overcrowded classrooms or indeed to the incompetence of the teachers themselves. But the sentiments expounded by the teacher above give support to the earlier assertion made that there is need for more attention to be paid to the lower standards so that these pupils are given a solid foundation. As one teacher put it:

with too many pupils in the infant section, there is no room for individual help, no marking of exercises and the majority of the pupils are promoted without knowing how to read and write. Our major problem in the system is that pupils do not get the necessary foundation'.

This demonstrates a lack of system interdependence and integration here between subsystems. The syllabus presumes an intra-system integration and cohesion such that each level is related to the other in a meaningful whole. Work in one lower level is assumed to lead to the higher levels, i.e. spiral which altogether make a complete coursework. This indicated that the absence of a good foundation for the

¹ This policy was actually instituted in 1993 but interviews at MANEB revealed that it is extremely difficult to enforce because of cheating at various levels of the system.



beginners was leading to system fragmentation and disintegration as exemplified by the high dropout and repetition rates in the first two or three standards. This is exemplified by the following table, which shows repetitions rates for all the standards in 1997 at national level.

Table, Repetition Rates by Standard and Sex for 19997

Sex	Std1	Std2	Std3	std4	Std5	Std6	Std7	Std8
Boys	17	16	16	13	12	11	10	21
Girls	18	17	17	14	14	13	13	21

The information in the table shows that the magnitude of repetition is greater in the lower standards and that for almost all standards, repetition rates were higher for girls than for boys. The most common cited reason for repeating a standard by both male and female pupils and indeed by teachers was poor performance in school (Chimombo 1999, Kadzamira et al 1999, Chimombo and Chonzi 1999). Since most of the repetitions are occurring in the lower standards, it means that it is in the lower standards where there are more teaching and learning problems.

3.2.4 Dropout Rates

The most disturbing feature as one examines enrollment figures in Malawi is the tendency for enrollment to decrease as pupils progress to higher Standards. In the lower sections, class sizes are largest often by a factor of 5 or more when compared with Standard 7 or 8. In 1997 for example, the number of pupils enrolled in Standard 8 at the national level was only 17% of the number enrolled in Standard 1. This gives an idea of the magnitude of the attrition (Kunje and Lewin 1999). The situation seems not to have changed. Kamundi's (1989) examination of dropouts found that from 1978/79 to 1985/86, 23% of the pupils reached Standard 8, from 1980/81 to 1987/88 only 18% reached Standard 8. The most plausible explanation for this is that in almost all schools, the lower Standards have the worst learning conditions. Shortages of furniture mean that it is Standards 1 to 4 pupils who have to sit on the floor and who have no classrooms. Qualified teachers are disproportionately allocated to the upper Standards where pupils are preparing for the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations. As a result, repetition and dropout rates are greatest in the lower Standards suggesting that learning is least effective at this level. Figure 4 shows the rate of promotion from Standard 1 to Standard 8 from 1997 MoE statistics.

It can be observed that the likelihood of a child being promoted to another grade increases as a function of the Standard. The probability of a pupil being promoted from Standard 7 to 8 is almost double the

probability of promotion from Standard 1 to 2. This is in part due to the poor conditions of schooling as indicated earlier. This means that pupils reaching Standard 8 (even more so those reaching secondary school), the survivors, are strictly screened by the system and that they are not the same as their peers who were eliminated at earlier stages.

Table 5 below shows enrolment data for the schools again by location, class and gender.

Table 5 Enrolments and Dropouts

Standard/Sex	Rural			Urban		
	Enrolment	Dropouts	%age drop	Enrolment	Dropouts	%age Drop
Stdb1	2459	507	21%	1763	197	11%
Stdg1	2385	495	21%	1697	200	12%
Stdb2	1694	257	15%	1543	159	10%
Stdg2	1566	259	17%	1397	145	10%
Stdb3	1326	171	13%	1396	112	8%
Stdg3	1343	201	15%	1256	109	9%
Stdb4	1008	102	10%	1023	48	5%
Stdg4	935	98	10%	896	44	5%
Stdb5	883	100	11%	815	36	4%
Stdg5	723	86	12%	649	28	4%
Stdb6	710	77	11%	622	30	5%
Stdg6	598	71	12%	548	36	7%
Stdb7	635	78	12%	596	23	4%
Stdg7	448	55	12%	475	35	7%
Stdb8	711	57	8%	655	17	3%
Std8g	385	53	14%	405	26	6%

Source: Chimombo and Chonzi (2000) page 46

This table shows data on dropout and enrolment which we recalculated by Chimombo and Chonzi (1999) from school records² and these figures therefore were not the same as those provided by class teachers and pupils and school records. Indeed, the authors observed that there were marked differences in these figures; an indication that the information provided by schools contains great margins of error.

The difference in dropout rates between the rural and urban schools is clearly noticeable. For all the standards, dropout rates were higher in the rural areas than they were in the urban areas. This is an

² Details about problems with MoE data are outlined in Chimombo (1999)

indication of the overall schooling problems in that area. And considering the large numbers involved, the loss of opportunity which results when many of those who enroll in school drop is obvious. In percentage terms, girls seemed to be affected more than boys in both locations. It seems that despite the attempts at improving girls' education in Malawi, the problems of girls' education are far from over. As it will be argued throughout this report, while Malawi might have succeeded in getting girls into school, the main challenge that still remains in the primary school system is to improve the holding power of the system. The strong diminution shows that many things are going wrong in primary schools in Malawi and are overwhelming the system and challenging the efforts towards the achievement of EFA.

3.3.0 On The Quality of Education

Many educators and commentators in Malawi (Bernbuam et al. 1998)) have alluded to the fact that the influx of pupils as a result of FPE has meant that past qualitative standards could not be maintained. Indeed the major problem, quality-wise, was that FPE was imposed onto an already weak system.

Case studies in Chimombo (1999) showed that Malawi's educational infrastructure was extremely weak. There were few T/L materials. The shortage of good physical facilities was serious and widespread; e.g. Kabwabwa School in Lilongwe urban district had only ten of the thirty-seven classrooms needed³. In the rural areas, sometimes whole schools did not have a single stick of furniture. Classrooms were extremely overcrowded and the 1996 education statistics estimated that the pupil/classroom ratio was 189:1. The consequences of this situation were succinctly put in a report (MoE and UNICEF (1998:51) where it was observed that:

Malawi was faced by difficult quality problems before the introduction of FPE, and its problems remain extremely serious after the reform. While admitting that the poor quality of education is an obstacle to the achievement of educational goals, the actors involved in education have failed to address poor quality as a major factor in dropout or decreasing enrolment.

Another indicator of deteriorating quality is the increased number of unqualified teachers. While about 13% of the teachers were unqualified before the announcement of FPE (World Bank 1995), the percentage of unqualified teachers rose to 48% when more than 20,000 temporary teachers were employed. This points to the fact that the search for solutions to improve schooling in Malawi must begin with the attempt to provide minimum levels of essential school inputs—hence the need for school

³ A visit to Chinsapo with the contact mission showed that 40 classes were being held outside

mapping and micro-planning exercises.

In realisation of this, the FPE reform carried with it explicit goals for education quality. In an interview with the then director of planning in the MoE (quoted by Chimombo 1999), he observed *our major challenge now is to improve the quality. We have had to change our priorities. Our priority first is improving quality and the second one is continued expansion of access*. This change in priority was also confirmed by the principal secretary responsible for basic education who said that *the ministry's priority was how to improve the quality of education offered*. It would appear then that there was a general consensus on an urgent need to improve the quality of education in Malawi in addition to increasing access. But it was obvious that the MoE faced the difficulty of balancing the two priorities. It would appear that a better approach would be to give quality education to a manageable few. The truth is that while 'nominal' access to schools has increased, effective access to education has not improved in Malawi. The quality of education which was already low has fallen further and the education system is in a crisis. Unless the pressing needs of the system are addressed, the public's enthusiastic support for education could easily evaporate and be succeeded by cynicism and apathy' (World Bank 1995:4).

But although the policy makers conceded the need for improving the quality of education, what was found missing in this change of orientation by Chimombo (1999) was an operational definition of quality and how the improvements in quality were to be brought about. Chimombo observed that he found no document that explicitly defined what quality meant in the Malawian context. Education quality is dependent on the quality of the components that make up the system and one of these components is the teacher. In the next section, we examine how quality might have been affected by the way the temporary teachers employed to implement FPE were and still are being prepared for their job.

3.4.0 Teacher Training

Of the many factors identified by Craig (1990) as influencing the fate of reforms, none is of greater long-term importance than the status and competence of the teaching profession itself. The teacher is perhaps the greatest factor influencing the teaching-learning process and hence the quality of education. Government policy is to increase the number of trained teachers and reduce the T/P ratio from 1:62 at present to 1:45 by the year 2005 (MoE 1999). Given the present conditions, this is a tall order. In the mean time, the temporary teachers (TTs) recruited to service the flood of pupils into the system, face

enormous challenges - from extremely overcrowded classes and lack of teaching materials to difficulties with the curriculum (Kunje and Stuart 1996). In their preliminary conclusion, Kunje and Lewin (1999: 39) observed that the college curriculum of the temporary teachers upgrading course did not fully recognise the conditions under which many untrained teachers were working.

Chimombo (1999) s fieldwork illustrated that quality training was being undermined by logistical problems. The then TDU project co-ordinator observed that the major problem with the MIITEP program was that of supervision. In a report as of January 1998, the co-ordinator observed that it was very difficult to institute the field supervision as planned as Government was unable to make funds available for this project when it was needed (TDP progress report, 1998). This was also confirmed by Chimombo (1999) s an interview with EDMU and discussions with the trainees and staff at schools indicated that there were further implementation problems. One trainee who had been at Blantyre Teachers College pointed out that:

the three-month course in college is not enough and tutors in college did not come to class regularly. Water and electricity supplies were irregular, making studying difficult. In addition, the food was poor and was not always available. At one time, we used to eat at 3 am because the electricity company had cut-off power for non-payment and food had to be prepared elsewhere. At the school, most of the things that were scheduled had not yet been started. Ten to eleven months into the MIITEP program, no head, let alone PEAs have started to supervise us.

The main problem with MIITEP appeared to be the fact that the school based component of the program lacked the necessary support for effective implementation. As a result, most of the components (e.g. seminars, school-based supervisions, and manuals) were not in place and most qualified teachers expressed fear about the quality of the teachers to be produced by the program. The inadequacy of the delivery of the school-based support to trainees was also noted by Kunje and Lewin (1999). Further, many trainees reported in Chimombo (1999) that they often had to leave their classes to attend to bureaucratic issues, the most common being delayed or unpaid salaries. The MIITEP students complained that they had been given too much to do at home - 4 projects and 12 essays - while being required to be full time teachers in the field. Indeed Chimombo s case studies indicated that these TTs also had the heaviest teaching loads in the schools. Thus the teacher training programs under the FPE reform have not been able to focus on in-depth professional development of the trainees. The main challenge is how to provide an appropriate high standard of training in what is normally a relatively short period of training time and with limited resources. The issue is not simply one of what teachers should teach, but also how they should teach in order to foster effective learning (Sylva et al. 1995:34).

Further, it seems imperative that as Malawi struggles with problems of providing EFA, a decision is needed regarding the mode and type of teacher training program that is to be followed in addition to ensuring that trained teachers are equitably distributed among schools, districts and divisions and hence the need for school mapping and micro-planning exercises.

One other problem that is causing a lot problems to teaching and indeed contributing to low quality education is pupils absenteeism. Given high levels of absenteeism, the wide age range and cultural heterogeneity among pupils in the schools, the system can not meet all the student s basic needs and inevitably generates low achievement and high repetition rates. Schiefelbein (1997) observed that in the frontal system for tutoring of students, many students are unable to catch up with class-work once they return to school following absence. He observed that many end up repeating the grades and because of the seasonality of their work, miss the same lessons originally skipped, and be forced to repeat the same grade yet another time.

This points to the practical problem of how to develop and use a common curriculum in diverse contexts. Commenting on the problems caused by absenteeism in Chimombo s study, one standard one teacher noted:

There is too much absenteeism in std1 and this causes a lot of problems when teaching. You do not know where to start from the next day if half the class is absent today. Because many pupils are absent, you look as if you are not teaching.

The case studies indicated that up to 70% of pupils could be absent from class on a single day. The temporary and seasonal work requirements by parents and the consequent absenteeism generates a vicious cycle that constrains any possible further learning for those temporary dropouts and prolonged absentees. What is needed is a change in strategy towards greater flexibility in the formal education system that could provide time for remedial work in cases of absence or slow learning. At the moment, nothing is in place to accommodate the many seasonal dropouts. Attention needs to be devoted to identifying, understanding and defining key problems associated with the relationship between child labour and learning.

In Malawi, we need to move towards alternatives. Teachers need more time to use their professional training in helping students with problems. The high repetition rates call for such an approach. Given the high levels of absenteeism and dropouts, we need to move towards giving each pupil a chance to learn at his or her own pace. Those who must work during harvest time, or attend to initiation ceremonies for

two months, for example, should be able to continue their learning from the point they left off when they return to school. This is where the use of modules within curriculum development comes in. Using this innovative approach, the Escuela Nueva in Columbia (Schiefelbein, 1997) managed to reduce repetition and dropout drastically. Families will continue to rely on the labour of their children and consequently absenteeism will continue to be a problem, hence the need for more innovative strategies to teaching and curriculum design in the Malawian context. School mapping and micro-planning could prove useful in this endeavor.

In terms of teacher distribution, calculations in Chimombo (1999) indicated that only 15% of the schools met the 60:1 target for Standard 1 classes while 93% of the schools met the target for Standard 8. This national picture obscured the disparities between urban and rural areas, between districts within regions and indeed between schools within districts, as can be seen in Appendix 3 which shows teacher distribution between Lilongwe city and one other zone in Salima district. It is obvious from the 1997 statistics that teachers were concentrated in urban areas. In all the four urban centres as many as 50% or more of the schools were meeting this target of 60:1 even for Standard 1. This contrasted heavily with only 4 or 5% in some rural districts. One of the factors contributing to the high concentration of teachers in urban school is the presence of female teachers. An analysis of the percentage of female teachers across standard by district showed that urban districts had by far the highest percentage of female teachers.

It would appear that the recruitment of temporary teachers to cope with the influx of pupils as a result of FPE benefited the urban or semi-urban areas more than the rural areas. The evidence in Appendix 3 indicated that at a 60:1 P/T ratio, the urban schools of Lilongwe had at that time 1,004 teachers extra while the schools in one zone of Salima district had a shortage of 38 teachers. This was a problem the ministry recognised, as testified by a letter of 13/8/97 from the government (Appendix 4). The observation was that many TTs were being employed in or transferred to urban areas where they were not needed. This resulted in some TTs being removed from the urban centres to the rural areas. This introduces an element of the planner's paradox (Lewin 1995). The employment of TTs resulted in an over-supply of teachers in urban areas at the expense of the rural areas where they were needed most. Several DEOs have pointed out that there is always a long list of teachers waiting to be accepted into urban schools or areas. The implication of this is that as long as there is a teacher shortage in Malawi, the interests of rural schools will only be served after the needs of the urban areas have been satisfied. Second, but perhaps more serious, while TTs in urban schools were sharing classes with one or more trained teachers, (or were distributed on 1:60 T/P ratio basis), in rural schools, they were assigned to a class by themselves and sometimes to more than one class. As long as these circumstances last, rural schools continue to be at a disadvantage.