3.5.0 Achievement Levels

If the success of education is to be gauged by what and how children learn, better ways must be found to measure the quality and relevance of the education offered. In Malawi there are no skill-based performance standards for the primary cycle[4]. From Standard 1 to 7, assessment is school based. This creates much scope for arbitrary assessment. All grade repetitions, as reported by schools, are not based on some standardised criteria-referenced academic performance but rather they reflect performance in relation to school-level norms, which in turn reflect the teachers' attitude towards the type of tests set, and their judgements in giving marks. Given the overall lack of orientation to the teaching profession, these can be very varied indeed.

The absence of standardised assessment means that there is no way of knowing how pupils' achievement levels have changed over time. However, other studies that have tried to measure the achievement of children in Malawi primary schools have indicated that there is a problem of low achievement levels. Williams (1996:201), in a study on reading, found that 41.4% of the pupils in Malawi had achievement levels below the threshold of English reading comprehension necessary to learn, through reading, in other content areas. He observed that if we recall that the language of the English test was taken from the year four books or below, and employed in narrative/descriptive genres with which pupils are familiar, then it is likely that the picture would have been bleaker if the materials had been taken from books at their levels (i.e. year 5) . In an earlier report on the tests of modified close testing at years 3, 4 and 5, Williams (1993) noted that from 65% to 89% of pupils at each year level could not demonstrate adequate comprehension of the texts. Williams was wary about the overall low level of achievement in schools studied and wondered whether children in schools were learning anything at all.

In another study, Miske et al. (1998) employed a pre-test and post-test design in three types of schools (Save the Children Innovative Village Based Schools (VBS), Save the Children Government Assisted Schools (GAS) and ordinary Government Schools (GS)), to test Mathematics, English and Chichewa skills using a test based on the national curriculum s Standard 2 content in these three subjects. In the pre-test, VBS pupils answered on average almost 55% of the questions correctly, GAS schools did so on 38% of the questions, and GS pupils got just below 30% of the total correct. At the end of the year, VBS pupils' post-test scores averaged 85% correct, GAS pupils averaged 51% correct and GS pupils averaged

[4] The PIF stipulates that the process of national assessment is to be reviewed.

37% of the questions correct. The study concluded that pupils in VBS gained significantly more in mathematics, English and Chichewa than pupils from the other two types of schools. The pupils in the VBS learn more over the course of Standard 2 school year than do their GAS and GS counterparts' (:23). These results mirrored those of Hyde et al. (1996) who observed that children in Village Based Schools performed as well or better than pupils in GAS and GS schools in the three subjects.

In their conclusion, Miske et al. (1998) noted that there were lessons to be learnt from the study for the enhancement of the quality of primary education in Malawi. These lessons included:

> *monthly teacher supervision by a locally resident supervisor, pupil-centred teaching, a class size cap, community mobilisation, participatory methods, and hiring teachers from the locality. ..Schools with greater learning gains had better rates of attendance and lower rates of repetition. In these schools, teachers gave pupils more opportunities to practice new material using more teaching aids. Teachers gave themselves more chances to check pupil learning. Supervisors regularly evaluated teachers, contributing to improved teaching practice. Teachers worked together with parents to follow up on pupil absences (:37-38).*

The consultant carried out classroom observations in all three types of schools during the Miske et al. study. The differences in the methods employed by teachers were very marked. In VBS schools, when a pupil made a mistake, she/he routinely remained standing until someone else answered the question correctly. Then the pupil repeated the correct answer and sat down. In this way, mistakes became tools for learning, not emblems of failure. This strategy was used occasionally but less consistently in several government assisted school classes. GS pupils who answered a question incorrectly were not regularly given the opportunity to correct their mistakes orally after the right answer had been given. Teachers in VBS emphasised varied teaching strategies that enabled pupils to practice new material and allowed teachers to check on pupil learning; this may be the key to understanding the significant differences in learning gains across the different school types in the study. The consultant was actually surprised that pupils in VBS classrooms appeared not to be embarrassed by their mistakes. Instead, they volunteered to make additional mistakes - still raising their hands even when they had already given several wrong answers. Developing this self-confidence in making mistakes and daring to try new things is important, especially to the whole learning process and may perhaps help explain the apparent success and the reduced dropout rates in VBSs.

Other studies that have assessed achievement at the primary level are Milner et al. (1998) and Kadzamira et al (1999). Milner et al undertook a detailed analysis of the reading literacy levels of standard 6 pupils in Malawi and concluded that

Only 21.7 percent of pupils reached the minimum level of mastery in reading as defined by the MOE. Hardly any reached the MOE s definition of desired level of mastery. Boys performed better than girls, pupils from rural and areas isolated scored much less well than did the pupils in town and cities. Pupils from higher socio-economic homes performed better than those from poorer homes (: 50).

Kadzamira et al (1999) compared the performance of standards three and seven boys and girls in Chichewa, Mathematics and English. Their findings showed that in all the three subjects and for both standards, the mean score for boys was higher than for girls. These two results show gender differences in the performance of pupils and indicate that these differences could be worst in the rural areas.

Given the overall poor working conditions in schools and hence the poor achievement levels, it is not surprising that in almost all of the schools (which are mostly GSs), overall enrolment tend to be one of decreasing numbers. Obviously, the bleak environment itself deters some children from attending school. Under such conditions, not much learning can take place. The introduction of FPE had placed the education system in Malawi under tremendous pressure. The rapid increase in enrolment had further taxed the education system and had undermined the overall level of quality. As put by MoE and UNICEF (1998), those who had entered the education system expecting to reap the benefits of this newly acquired access are confronted with low quality facilities and instruction, which may lead to their abandonment of the education system.

3.6.0 Regional and Rural/Urban Disparities

Disparities in enrollment between boys and girls are among the strongest predictors of low enrollment levels. Unless equal proportions of boys and girls are enrolled, it is difficult to see how the goal of EFA can be achieved. Evidence in Malawi (Kadzamira et al 1999 and Chimombo 1999) indicates that this gap is closing and does not exist in the lower sections of the primary schools. However, Chimombo also showed that in those areas where schooling is in general a problem, it is the girls who were affected most by the schooling problems.

There have always been significant differences in enrollment by region and socio-economic status. By region, enrollments have traditionally been higher in the Northern region than the other two regions of Central and Southern. The primary school gross enrollment ratio (GER) for example in 1991/92 for the northern region was 118 % compared to 78% for the Centre and 75% for the South, and the net enrollment ratio (NER) was 81% in the North, 52% in the Centre and 49% in the South. A study by MEPD CSR and NSO (1996) indicated that more villages were within one kilometer of a primary school in the North with 36% of children living less than a kilometer from a primary school compared

to 13% for the Centre and 16% for the South. The following table presents the GER by region, urban/rural and gender for 1991/92 school year.

Gross Enrolment by Region, Location and Gender 1990/91

Region	Rural		Urban		National		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Northern	118	116	142	119	119	116	118
Central	76	71	116	107	81	75	78
Southern	77	62	124	106	82	67	75
National	82	71	122	108	87	75	81

Source : Castrol-Leal 1996

It can be noted that the rural-urban gap in enrollment was wider in the Central and Southern regions than in the Northern region. Castrol-Leal (1996) argued that the regional disparities in enrollment rates are largely explained by the low enrollment in the rural South and Centre. And analysis of enrollment rates by standard and residence for the Central region revealed that GER for standards 1-4 was much higher than the GER for standards 5-8 an indication that children in the Centre were more likely to dropout of school after standard 4. In the South, GERs were generally low for both lower and upper primary levels suggesting that children were in general less likely to enroll in school in that region

It is worthy mentioning that these differences in educational development have some historical origins. The Scottish Missionaries who settled in the North had established an education system which encompassed literacy, numeracy, religion, agriculture, sports and artisan skills such as carpentry, bricklaying and metal work. The Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries from South Africa who settled in the Central region and the Roman Catholic Missionaries from Holland and France who settled in the South only emphasised moral and religious education. Literacy and numeracy were only taught as means to achieving their goal of conversion evangelism and preaching. It was not surprising therefore that when the British colonial government took over education and indeed at the time of independence, education was more advanced in the North than the other two regions. This formed the basis for the historic differentiation of education development between the North and the other two regions and these differences have persisted in the post independence era. Education in the centre and south was also restricted because of the presence of large plantation estates and also partly due to deep-rooted cultural practices.

Chimombo (1999) attempted to examine whether there was any differential effects of the FPE policy on enrolment across the sexes and across the rural/urban divide? Was there any inherent bias in favour of any sex or location as a result of the policy? Since there have been several projects in favour of girls in Malawi, a question of interest would be to see if the change in policy benefited boys more than girls, and whether there were differences between urban and rural settings. A contingency table of enrolments of boys and girls, by location and policy regime period (before and after FPE) was constructed[5]. A single boy/girl dichotomous variable featured as the independent variable together with location. The interest was to check whether the period after FPE brought about a shift in enrolment in favour of boys. To answer this question explicitly, odds ratios (Demaris 1992, Mukherjee et al. 1998) were used. In general, the odds ratio is defined with respect to the dependent variable (enrolment in school) at different values of the explanatory variables (sex, location etc).

The analysis indicated that there were virtually no differences in response to the FPE policy between boys and girls in the urban areas. This was to be expected. However, when the odds ratio for rural areas was examined, it was noted that boys benefited less, relative to girls. The same was true for the policy period. Boys were worse off after the FPE policy as their odds ratio of schooling was reduced to 0.864 from 0.905. This implied that girls were the ones who benefited more from the policy, since girls enrolments were worse in the rural areas. Indeed if equity was to be achieved, girls enrolments had to improve more than those of boys. This is what has happened, indicating the balance of the judgement that equity was being approached. This then casts doubt about the overall effectiveness of the GABLE projects. But more importantly, this points to the fact that in the rural areas, which are poorer than urban areas, there was (and probably still is) more to the schooling of girls than just the waiving of fees. Thus, to be successful, interventions aimed at improving the education of girls will have to be supported by a concomitant array of changes in the society in which the school operates (Stromquist 1997).

4.0 A REVIEW OF ONGOING AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

This section adds to the already mentioned efforts by the GOM at improving basic education in the country. The section also highlights some of the major activities of the various donors.

4.1.0 GOM Local Government Decentralisation Policy

A major turning point in the structure of government and its affairs has emerged in Malawi. This is the attempt to decentralise government services. In 1995, a draft policy on decentralisation was produced by a team of three-man consultants. The main rationale for decentralisation was seen as the provision of the opportunity for the promotion of good governance and development through the creation of a conducive

[5] See Appendix 6

policy environment, establishment of effective institutional arrangement and provision of adequate resources. The emphasis in this approach is devolution where powers and functions are passed down to the ruled.

The mode of operation in this decentralisation is that line ministries are to retain responsibility over the areas of policy formulation, policy enforcement, inspectorate, establishment of standards, training, international representation etc. In undertaking these responsibilities, line ministries will have direct inspectorate links to local authorities in order to ensure that operations are done within the standards established by line ministries. However, policy and all other issues affecting local authorities will be channeled through the ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD).

The executing agency at the district level is the District Assembly (DA). Any sectoral policy such as in education that impinges upon the realisation of practical decentralisation within the district will be reviewed by the DA and the MOESC with full knowledge and participation of the MLDGLD. The actual decentralisation process will be as follows: First the MOESC will transfer all the human resource management responsibilities to the district. District Assemblies will be given the autonomy to improve on the conditions and terms of service if they can raise the requisite resources. Second, the DA will also be free to build say additional schools if they are able to mobilise their own resources. In this case, the role of the MOESC will be to advise on the implications on staffing and on the overall national budget. The draft decentralisation policy observed that, the implications of the foregoing is that the MOESC will be left with the role of policy formulation and evaluation at the national level. It will also actively participate in international or Regional Fora while the co-worker - the District Assembly - implements the national polices with some local initiatives. These initiatives will enrich education at the local level by creatively improving on its quality over and above the basic requirements. For example, if the national teacher/ pupil ratio is 1:30 and a particular local authority wishes to create one of 1:15, then it could do so as long as it is financially able to do so (:29-30).

There are obvious implications here for school mapping and micro-planing. In order for the local authorities to identify where schools are needed or where imbalances exists in terms of teachers or textbook distribution, they will need to be equipped with accurate and timely information. School mapping will provide them with a vision of how spread the educational services are and which areas are of greatest needs. On the other hand, micro-planning will enable the satisfaction of these concerns to improve the functioning of the educational system by reinforcing regional and local planning activities. It will ensure greater equality in the distribution of educational services, a better adaptation of these to the needs of the local communities and a more efficient use of all the available resources. Micro-planning suggests as a working method, participation by the local communities in planning efforts,

which is in line with the current decentralisation process in Malawi.

4.2.0 Current Donor Activities

The initial introduction of FPE in Malawi was widely given an accolade. Some people were reported to have abandoned marriages to go to school and start from where they had left off, (Daily Times, 1995) and the electorate was beginning to be satisfied that here was a new government which had started to fulfil its promises. Chimombo (1999) s cases studies revealed that the message that one got as one interviewed the general public was one of unanimity among various groups of sectors in perceiving FPE as a good thing . It is no wonder that even the donor community supported the FPE and provided its support in various forms. The overall frame of operation in the education sector by donors has and continues to be provided by the PIF. As a living document, the PIF is continuously reviewed both to incorporate new policies and reshape direction in the light of experience. This is a very important exercise in the development of education in Malawi since it provides direction to both donors and the GOM. In the section that follow, the various activities by the GOM and the donor community are reviewed. The focus here is on the activities done in the area of basic education.

4.2.1 Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

The CIDA project Joyful Learning has been Implemented by UNICEF. In this project, CIDA has assis the Malawi government in the construction of schools. These have been constructed in Mangochi (Lilongwe and Mchinji and Kasungu had 8 schools each. CIDA has also provided learning materials used what is called Joyful-learning . Under this project, CIDA is funding the development and printing of a n series of textbooks and teachers guides. It is expected that CIDA will continue to provide more classroo and teachers house. Phase two is also expected to include furniture.

4.2.2 Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA)

This section describes the sub component of the task being performed by Danida in the education sector. Danida is supporting improvements in the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the education system in Malawi through support to the consolidation and further development of a unified and decentralised national education system. This support is intended to expand access to primary and secondary schooling, allow for greater local autonomy and public participation in education decision making and for more active involvement of the private sector at the secondary school level.

At the primary school level, Danida is supporting the construction of primary schools, selected from the most needy areas. Under the preparatory phase, 40 junior schools have been constructed in 3 districts: Mwanza, Ntcheu and Nkhatabay. Each school has a borehole and most school committees for these schools were trained. Desks were also delivered to these schools. The quality aspect of the primary

school is being addressed through the development of teacher development centres (3 in each district). The main focus of Danida s support is on secondary education. Assistance has been given to integrate the previously neglected distance education centre (MCDE) into a unified national system of education. These have now been renamed Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS). It is envisaged that special programs will be put in place to address the need to increase girl s participation and achievement in secondary schooling. It should be mentioned however that despite the renaming of the MCDEs to a nicer name, problems of quality which have beset these institutions for a long time still remain grievous.

Democratisation of the education system is to be addressed through improved information systems, greater transparency in decision making and the strengthening of stakeholder interest in education. And decentralisation, initially through de-concentration, will be the main strategy towards achieving greater efficiency and accountability within the system. Danida s support has been planned for a period of five years and is being implemented through both national and private sector institutions.

4.2.3 Department for International Development (DFID)

Current DFID support in Malawi is through two massive and enormous projects: the Primary Community Schools Program (PCOSP) and the Malawi Schools Support Systems Program (MSSSP). Together, the two projects had the following components

1) School building (construction)
2) Community mobilization program - to make school the property of the communities and
3) Education component aimed at providing quality education through inset and other kinds of support.

Both of these programs are due to end by early 2001. DFID is committed to exploring the potential of new approaches, first through co-ordinated funding, and to strengthening those elements of MOESC activities, e.g. financial management, human resource management, information/communication strategies, operational planning, which will be needed to develop the programs that deliver the national policy.

A total of 120 community schools were planned for, but initially, the construction of 3 schools per district was embarked in the then 31 schools (a total of 93 schools). It was reported that it became clear during the PSCOP that the provision of a uniform package of schools was not necessarily meeting the needs of the different communities. The main problem here was that decisions about where schools should be located were not determined by rationality but rather they were influenced by politics and loud voices . The result of this was that the schools that were being provided under the project were not appropriate. In some cases, big schools were built where they were not needed and in others, schools provided were too small to satisfy the needs of the communities. It became clear therefore that attempts

were needed to base such decision on some information. But it soon got discovered that the information that was available in the MOESC was inaccurate, inefficient and incomplete. It was as a result of this that a decision was made to embark on a school mapping and micro-planning exercise. Money was made available through unused funds from the PSCOP and the exercise was done in Chiradzulu district on a pilot basis.

The school component is essentially the MSSSP whose main objective is the professional development of teachers. The work of MSSSP is coordinated by the Teacher Development Unit (TDU) within the MOESC. TDU works closely with a number of partners, particularly the Malawi Institute of Education. MSSSP aims at enhancing the quality of learning in primary schools through developing sustainable systems for the continuing professional development of teachers. MSSSP is providing resources for professional development of teachers through the construction of Teacher Development Centres (TDC). A national training team was formed with representation from MIE,TDU, teachers colleges and the Education methods advisory servises (EMAS). These are in turn responsible for the training of the zonal training teams which comprise of the zonal PEA and two senior teachers from each zone. The following table indicates the trainings done to date.

Table Number of people trained under MSSSP

Cohort	**Zonal Trainers**		**Zonal Training of Senior school Staff (SS**		
	PEAs	**SSS**	**Schools**	**SSS**	
				Expected	Actual
1	44	88	611	1833	1710
2	39	78	543	1629	1455
3	39	78	454	1362	1322
4	35	70	504	1512	1472
Total	157	314	2112	6336	5959

Residential training of zonal training teams takes in 1 PEA and 2 SSS from each zone. Each team facilitates the training of SSS in each zone at the TDC. Zonal training of SSS takes in 1 headteacher, 1 deputy head and 1 section head from each school. Each SSS team facilitates the professional development activities in their school.

4.2.4 Gesselschaft fur Technische Zusammearbeit (GTZ- German aid)

This section is based both on the documents read and the interview the consultant had with Ms Tapiwa Msisha; the GTZ Technical Advisor in Zomba. It summarises the various activities under GTZ in the basic education sector. Indeed GTZ is one of the main players in basic education. Here, two main projects are identified: the component that largely has concentrated on the teacher development and

support systems and that which has concentrated on improving on the management of the system and the teaching learning environment especially in the Southern region.

Under teacher development, GTZ has manly been involved in the cascade mode of training called the Malawi Integrated In-service Teachers Education Program (MIITEP) both in teams of technical and material support. To respond to the enrolment increase as a result of the FPE policy, the government recruited about 20,000 untrained teachers. The new teachers were mainly from among secondary school leavers, who were given only three weeks of training before being dispatched to schools. With some 3,400 untrained teachers already in the system, 48.7% of the primary teachers were temporary (1997 MoE database). The major task for Government was the training of these TTs. Consequently, a TDU was established to co-ordinate teacher support and in-service training through the two related programs – MIITEP and MSSSP. It was intended that a combination of on-site training by senior staff and PEAs would provide a support system to raise the general level of teaching competence and strengthen teacher professionalism (Hughes et al. 1996:5).

The course structure for MIITEP consisted of residential training (one term), self-study through self-instructional materials (four terms), supervised teaching in primary schools (five terms), one-day seminars in zonal teacher development centres (12 one-day seminars), 12 assignments (one assignment per subject) and 4 projects. According to MIITEP News (1997), MIITEP is expected to improve the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools in Malawi by increasing the number of qualified teachers in the education system who are able to demonstrate enhanced professional skills and knowledge' (:1).

Alongside MIITEP, the GOM put in place a Malawi School Support System Project (MSSSP) under DFID as observed above. MSSSP was a school support project to promote teacher professionalism and strengthen the supervision of schools and in-service training of teachers at the school and sub-zonal level. The project was intended to provide long-term school support. With MSSSP, time is given for the development of teachers support materials and its use in class and MSSSP, it was hoped, could make a substantial contribution to MIITEP in its designated task by providing the infrastructure for the school-based component. But have these programs delivered is probably the question to be answered?

In Zomba, the initial assistance centred on management training for Zomba district education staff (both urban and rural). This also included study tours abroad. This component is now being extended to Machinga district. It was also learnt that GTZ has also procured computers for the district education offices of Zomba (both rural and urban), Machinga and Balaka. The office has also provided science kits to schools.

GTZ has also provided assistance to five districts (Zomba Urban and Rural, Machinga and Lilongwe West and East). The focus here has been on the provision of temporary shelters to schools. The design was basically an improvement on the locally provided temporary shelters. With this improvement, the structures have been observed to last between 5 to 10 years. Schools were given a grant of K5,000 towards the construction of these temporary shelters and priority was given to those school where there was a greater element of community involvement. The money was paid to the DEO and these were accountable for the proper receipting of the activities.

Recently the Zomba based GTZ has been focusing on the classrooms. This was due to the realization of the existence of gaps in terms of the syllabus and the availability of teaching learning resources. So far, 3 schools in Zomba urban, 5 schools in Machinga and 7 schools in Zomba rural have benefited from the program. The focus here is on games which are intended to make the learning process a little more interesting with the hope of improving on the retention of pupils in school. These games are initially in Chinyanja and are in the areas of writing names at least once a week, making of words through combining phrases, domino, and others. The next step will be to expand the games to mathematics. Other initiatives have been through extra-curricular activities such as sports, with junior and senior teams formed at the schools, and the giving of gifts to good attenders and achievers. Al these are in the lower standards (1-4) because of the realization that it is in these standards where a lot of attrition is taking place in Malawi.

4.2.5 Norwegian Assistance for Development (NORAD)

Assistance to education by NORAD has been through the project keeping kids in School . This was implemented by UNICEF in 19996 in six districts: Chikwawa, Mangochi, Dedza, Dowa, Mzimba and Nkhata-bay. Keeping kids in school was a combination of physical infrastructure and quality improvement components. The building of partnership between government and communities, capacity building at the school level to support FPE were the main strategies adopted in this project. The main objectives of this project were:

1) Assist 40 communities in the six districts in constructing a double classroom block with water and sanitation facilities.
2) Provide teaching and learning materials to children in the newly established community schools
3) Train paraprofessionals teachers by providing shorter-term courses and regular long term courses to enable them upgrade to the status of qualified teachers;
4) Ensure that every paraprofessional teachers is supported at least once in every school term;
5) Provide training to all members of school committees and chiefs in the area.

Most of these activities were reported completed by July, 1999. However, a workshop in preparation for phase II of the project observed that the 40 communities involved in phase I had progressed at different paces. In general, the communities failed to complete what they were supposed to complete in the first two years. They consequently, also failed to spend the funds allocated to this phase by the Nowergian government. It was therefore resolved that in the second phase, emphasis should be put on monitoring, and that districts should share experiences through a newsletter. The workshop also resolved that budgets should include purchase of motor vehicles, fuel and travel allowances for monitoring, the need for clearly defined management of the vehicle to ensure that it is confined to the project activities, and the capacity building of the districts personnel. Capacity building was seen to be crucial in any innovation or project.

4.2.6 United Nations Children s Fund (UNICEF)

In addition to implementing the keeping kids in school project above, UNICEF has also implemented two other related projects: Closing the Gender Gap and Cohort Tracking. The major objective of this community school strategy is to improve the quality of primary education and ensure access to educational facilities within walking distance, especially for girls in close collaboration with communities.

4.2.6.1 Cohort Tracking

UNICEF has assisted MOESC by embarking on a cohort tracking of pupils as an attempt to systematically record and track pupils progress using both the teacher, parents teachers Association and the community with a view to reduce drastically dropout, absenteeism and pregnancy. Cohort tracking is one of the activities under the component Monitoring and Evaluation in keeping kids in school project. The main objectives in cohort tracking are:

1) Checking that primary school pupils enroll in std1 at the age of six and attain the last standard in primary school at the age of thirteen,
2) Ensure that all six-year olds within the schools catchment are enrolled in std1;
3) Maintain a consistent and reliable daily attendance record in schools by ensuring that teachers use the official daily attendance roll-call;
4) Check that information from the registers is transferred for official use from the teachers to the head-teacher to the PEA, to the DEO and to the division;
5) Enhance a more systematic documentation procedure of school records on vital information such as absenteeism, dropout and repetition rates and transfers at all levels.
6) Enhance the already existing collaborative relationship between the ministry of education and other ministries in combating certain problems such as dropouts due to malnutrition or

absenteeism due to cholera outbreaks;

7) Intensify a good working relationship between school committees and school administration in investigating and sorting out problems of dropout and absenteeism etc.

In 1998, a total of 88 head teachers, 187 teachers, 76 PEAs and 168 school committee members were trained in cohort tracking from the following nine districts: Chikwawa, Mangochi, Dedza, Lilongwe, Mchinji, Dowa, Kasungu, Nkhata-bay and Mzimba. The following year, over eight hundred standard one and two teachers and head teachers in Kasungu and Mchinji were also trained in cohort tracking. Registers were also distributed in all schools where training took place. The major constraint in this project was reported to be serious shortage of transport which resulted in activities always lagging behind. Due to failure to follow the schedules, some trainees made serious mistakes in the registers while others tended to think that the MOESC was not serious about cohort tracking and therefore treated the activity casually.

4.2.7 United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

This section summarises the activities of the USAID Strategic Objective 4 (SO4) in Malawi. SO4 s objective is to increase access and improve quality and efficiency of basic education especially for girls. Below are the projects under the SO4 activities.

4.2.7.1 Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE).

GABLE is a sector reform program. It had its origin in the late 80s when the African Bureau was funded by the US Congress to step up its activities in basic education in the African region. Over the period 1989-91, USAID organised consultancies with the GOM and Malawian educators, and carried out a number of focused sector analysis. On September 30, 1991, USAID and GOM entered into an agreement for a five year program (GABLE) totaling US$20 million whose overall objective was to increase girls attainment (defined as assess, persistence and completion) in primary education. Visible features of GABLE I were a fee waiver program for non-repeating primary school girls designed to attract girls and keep them in school and a social mobilsation campaign (SMC) designed to encourage parents and communities to send and keep girls in school. GABLE I was amended in 1994 into a second phase with the objectives of increasing the long term financial base for education, improving quality, availability and efficiency of primary education and improving the relevance of primary education for girls. GABLE II was further amended on September 30, 1998 for a three year span up to September 30, 2001, focusing on quality. The overall strategy now is to support the development of an education sector wherein effective schools provide an environment in which the majority of the children are learning.