

# THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN MALAWI: ACCESS AND RETENTION

JOSEPHINE MUNTHALI

---

## ABSTRACT

Governments and aid donor agencies worldwide have acknowledged the importance of female literacy as a prerequisite for development. At the Jomtien Conference (1990) the importance of universal education was delineated in the policy Education for All (EFA). Indeed, EFA is seen as a strategy for introducing children, especially girls, to conventional schooling. Whilst some progress has been made, retention of girls in schools presents a major obstacle to the fulfilment of the EFA vision, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa including Malawi.

External policies such as EFA are questionable in a country such as Malawi, which is one of the poorest countries in the world. Achieving the original Jomtien vision of EFA is a particularly daunting challenge with a poor economic environment, inhibiting cultural influences and a low quality primary education system. This article is based on research, which emerged from a concern about the quality and sustainability of educational programmes for female education in Malawi. It has been apparent that whilst there have been many positive developments in the implementation of EFA policy, there still remain various obstacles to the development and implementation of Education for All (EFA) in the Malawian context attributable to inadequacies and inefficiencies in the primary education system. Furthermore, the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is also affecting progress in the education sector.

The move towards the achievement of EFA policy is therefore, being constrained by a number of factors explored in this article.

## INTRODUCTION

This article will focus upon the African Commonwealth country Malawi, and her attempts to develop her human resources through the strategy of increasing girls' involvement in formal education. More specifically, it will explore the challenges that the Malawi government has faced whilst trying to implement a policy of Free Primary Education (FPE), and the subsequent negative impact that this has had on girls' access and retention in school. Additional attention will be given to the social and educational implications of HIV/AIDS and the role that the international donor community has played in attempting to increase the participation of girls in schools.

This article is based on the research study, which I carried out in three areas in Malawi: Mzimba District in Northern Region, Dedza District in Central Region and Mangochi District in Southern Region. Three districts in the three regions were selected for fieldwork research to ensure that the study's conclusions would be useful, of intrinsic validity and insulated from countrywide generalisations. The three districts are marked by differences in economic conditions, cultural practices, religion, geography, language, educational attainment and ethnicity. However, since the variations in economic conditions amongst these districts are slight, the implication is that ethnicity and cultural differences are responsible for the main distinguishing features in those areas.

The research focused on selected schools in three areas. Three zones, one from each district, were selected for my research: Ekwendeni in the North, Mthandiza in Central and Masongola in the South. The duration for field work in each zone was six weeks during which I interviewed Primary Education Advisers (PEAS), head

teachers, teachers and pupils in schools, dropouts, non-enrolees, parents, village headmen, the school committees and the Community Development Officers. The respondents expressed their views and opinion on the policy of free primary education and the impact upon girls' schooling. Before discussing the issues pertaining to access, attendance, attainment and achievement to girls' education in Malawi, it is important to explore the background of the developments of the policy of free primary education in Malawi. The policy was introduced with the view of increasing access, especially of girls, to schools.

#### GLOBAL CONCERNS ON FEMALE EDUCATION

“Women's literacy is the challenge of the decade. It is essential to development, which is impossible without the participation of women. But their involvement depends to a very large extent upon their education” (Gainza De Jauregui, 1992: viii). Researchers, educationalists and development agencies have acknowledged the importance of female education. For the past three decades, widening access to education has been a major policy goal in most developing countries. “Donor and government interest in gender inequalities in education has arisen from two main sources, (i) the rise of the international women's movement following the Women's Decade after the Nairobi Conference in 1985; (ii) from the evidence concerning economic benefits accruing from investing in female education” (Swainson, 2000: 49).

The deterioration of educational attainment in sub-Saharan Africa was especially noticeable during the 1980s. Industrialised countries became alarmed at the decline in quality and relevance whilst developing countries were deeply affected by economic recession. Growing debt burdens thwarted the pace of educational expansion, which had been achieved during the 1960s and early 1970s. Economic recession also had an impact on the quality of schools because of lack of textbooks, reading materials and other essentials.

The problems affecting educational attainment and the quality of school systems in both developing and developed countries drew together executive heads of United Nations, Educational and Scientific Cultural Organisations (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank at Jomtien, Thailand from 5-9 March 1990. The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) focused on the importance and impact of basic education, and forged a global consensus and commitment to providing basic education for all. Since the declaration of the proposed Education for All in Thailand in 1990, educationalists, donor agencies and researchers point to the increasing rates of illiteracy, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The contributory factors include the poor quality of education, socio-cultural factors, socio-economic factors, religion and political commitment.

In 2000, countries and representatives from different organisations met at Dakar, Senegal, to assess the achievements of EFA. The statistical analysis, which was represented at Dakar, Education for All 2000 Assessment on Jomtien vision, revealed that despite the move towards the provision of Universal Primary Education (UPE) with the aim of increasing access to, and retention of girls in schools, the EFA goal — education for all by 2000 — was not accomplished. Moreover, it is evident that the gender gap still persists in less developed countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Factors such as socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions have diverse impact upon girls' schooling. Therefore, more research is needed to be done in order to address questions of why girls are not being enrolled or retained in schools despite the move towards EFA. This doctoral research contributed to that goal by providing evidence of the situation of girls' education in Malawi.

#### THE DEVELOPMENTS OF FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION POLICY IN MALAWI

The idea of implementing Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Malawi gained strength after the Ministry of Education presented a paper on the proposals of the launching of UPE at the Jomtien Conference on Education for All in 1990. Among other factors, this led to the elimination of fees for non-repeating girl students in Grades One through Four in primary school in 1992 by the former President Hastings Banda's government, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The move towards the elimination of fees by Banda's government was significant because researchers and educationalists argued that fees were one of the hindrances to girls' schooling. However, the former government did not declare the policy of UPE. It was not until 1994 when the newly elected government, the United Democratic Front (UDF) implemented a policy of free primary education. The UDF government is committed to its long-term strategy of increasing the participation of girls in education. This is linked to improving the quality of, access to and equity in the provision of education services. Equity is defined in terms of geography, education distribution and gender balance. Gender issues emphasises girls' particular needs and their security in schools.

Before the introduction of free primary education, as argued by an official from the Ministry of Education, the education system was under-resourced. Schools in Malawi lacked adequate classrooms, teachers and teaching materials. In some schools pupils were forced to study out-of-doors, under trees and there was a shortage of exercise books. When FPE was introduced, however, it made things worse. The move by the UDF government towards the provision of UPE attracted a number of donor agencies with the aim of funding educational projects and programmes. Moreover, aid agencies made fresh commitments of assistance. Both internal and external agencies have been involved in the FPE reform and implementation processes. A number of programmes, which have been put in place by the donor agencies, are geared towards provision of quality education and to promote equal access to basic education. Most programmes are aimed at retaining, particularly, girls in schools. It is against such background that it was important for me to assess whether the World Bank, donor agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) took into the account the practical realities faced in implementing their aid programmes in the field.

The next section discusses the research methods, which were employed in identification of economic constraints, educational constraints, and socio-cultural constraints, which continue to impact upon girls' schooling.

#### RESEARCH METHODS

Fieldwork was conducted in Malawi using qualitative methods. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, life story, interview, observation, historical documents, interaction and visual texts. These describe routine moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2). Qualitative methods focus primarily on the kind of evidence (what people tell the researcher, what they do) that will enable the researcher to understand what is going on. Their great strength is that they can illuminate issues and turn up possible explanations; essentially a search for meaning (Gillham, 2000: 10). Qualitative methods were appropriate for the study, the aim of which was to record the opinions and thoughts of respondents by using interviewing processes and participant observations.

The duration of fieldwork was six weeks in selected schools in three districts in the North, Central and the South – Mzimba, Dedza and Mangochi, respectively. These districts differ culturally, in socio-economic status and educational achievement. I interviewed Primary Education Advisers (PEAs), head teachers, teachers, pupils in

schools, dropouts, non-enrolees, parents, village headmen, the school committees and the Community Development Officers.

*Table 1: Number of respondents in each category*

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mzimba</b>	<b>Dedza</b>	<b>Mangochi</b>	<b>Total</b>
Headteachers	1	1	1	3
Teachers	3	3	3	9
Girls in schools	15	15	15	45
Girls-dropouts	15	15	15	45
Girls-non-enrolees	-	-	25	25
Village headmen	4	4	4	12
School committee	1	1	1	3
Parents	30	30	25	85
Primary Education Advisers	1	-	1	2

The number of respondents of each category was restricted to 15 and 25 because of the limited time I had to spend in the field. In addition, the aim was to acquire qualitative data using in-depth interviews. Therefore, rather than talking to a large number of people, the aim was to focus on a few people representing each category, some being key individuals such as local leaders, teachers and headteachers. By talking to a limited number of people, issues were considered in detail and points that emerged followed up. Respondents were selected because of their involvement with educational activities in Malawi.

The study used research methods of case study, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing, participation observation, focus groups, documentation and statistical analysis. The next section presents the findings on constraints to girls' education, which continue to inhibit girls' from taking full advantage of free primary education policy.

#### ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

Malawi is ranked as the world's 16th poorest nation, with 60% of Malawi's 10 million population living below the IMF/World Bank poverty headline of US\$1 per day, while annual salaries of the small group in the formal sector of the economy average only US\$940 (African Eye News Service, November 8, 2000). Malawi's economy is based on agriculture. 80% of the population live in rural areas and depend upon subsistence farming for their survival. Durston (1999) pointed out that poverty is more prevalent within rural areas, where people move in and out of poverty. This is particularly true in the rainy season where food is scarce. This affects education because it means inconsistent school attendance. In 1995 the Malawi government noted that Malawi's continuing high level of poverty is "the result of insufficient good agricultural land made worse by rapid population growth and environmental degradation. Moreover, Malawi is not endowed with mineral wealth and there is little mining, little fishing for export and little industrial production" (UNICEF/Malawi Government, 1996: 4). The majority of people living in villages own customary land, which is controlled and allocated by the traditional leaders, i.e. chiefs and village headmen. However, villagers have very limited access to land. During the interviews in the villages, I observed that villagers did not possess land holdings

but had land just sufficient to cultivate crops for subsistence farming. Most farmers appeared to lack basic materials such as fertilisers, resulting in low yields, which do not last the whole year.

Poverty was very evident in three areas of the districts, which I surveyed, and it affected pupils' education. I interviewed a number of pupils (see Table 1) who dropped out or were absent from school because of hunger. Lack of clothes, food and soap are factors causing absenteeism and dropouts. In the villages I noticed that a number of children, especially girls, wore ragged clothes. They opted to stay at home as they were embarrassed to go to school with dirty and torn clothes. Both boys and girls were affected by poverty. However, as the school committees pointed out, "boys were able to do piecework in order to acquire money to buy notebooks, clothes, etc; whilst girls are disadvantaged because they spent most of their time doing household chores and helping parents at the home".

I noted that there was evidence of inconsistency in school attendance due to poverty crisis. In villages I interviewed boys and girls, especially younger ones who dropped out or just missed classes because they told me they were tired, hungry and lacked food. I also observed in classes that pupils looked tired and lacked concentration. When I discussed with pupils my observations, most told me that they go to school without breakfast and have one meal only a day. Most children explained to me that they did not go to school because "usiwa wachuluka" (poverty is rife). The appalling living conditions, which pupils experienced, contributed to a lack of interest in schooling as I confirmed in all three areas I surveyed. In some cases, early pregnancies and marriages (from the age of 12) were partly due to economic pressure.

Poverty is also affecting the development of schools. The village headmen and the school committee in the North argued that the community was unable to participate fully in construction of community schools, partly because of poverty and hunger. The communities were asked to mould bricks, fetch sand and firewood but instead members of the community engaged in other activities such as looking for food and finding work that will bring in money.

It was evident that in all villages in three areas, which I surveyed, economic under-development was entrenched. The village headmen in all districts told me that the communities were affected by poverty and that there were no social services in the villages. The economic factor provides the context for understanding educational achievement, schooling generally, and girls' retention rates in particular. Therefore, education is seen as a determining factor in any discussion of Malawi as an economically disadvantaged country. Yet even though Malawi is economically disadvantaged, attempts have been made to promote education as the vehicle for increasing economic performance, i.e. by self-employment and agricultural education.

Indeed economic crisis has affected the education system. Furthermore, the head teachers, the school committees and parents in all schools in the North, Central and Southern Regions challenged the policy of free primary education. The head teachers argued that since the introduction of FPE the quality of education has deteriorated because of untrained teachers, and a lack of classrooms, teaching and reading materials. The recent report by The Nation Newspaper, (December 8, 2003) states that the World Bank's Senior Education Advisor, Bierger Fredriksen, mentions that "the declaration for free primary education was "a political declaration" which had no accompanying resources. He said it is sad to see pupils sitting so close together in classrooms that "they cannot even move their elbows". Moreover, schools still lack properly trained teachers and textbooks.

I observed that in all three areas schools lacked adequate chairs and pupils were forced to sit on the floor. This too had a tremendous impact upon pupils' schooling, as they could not learn properly. For instance, girl pupils in classrooms at Mangochi

in the South complained that it was not comfortable to sit on the floor because they struggled getting up to answer questions. Clothes got dirty, the pupils were uncomfortable sitting on logs, and it was difficult to write notes.

Lack of educational materials affected pupils' attendance in schools. Parents and female-headed households told me that they did not have money to buy educational materials for their children. They explained that pupils did all kinds of piecework such as working on the tobacco estates<sup>1</sup> or selling firewood and selling doughnuts in order to buy notebooks, soap and other necessary materials for their education. I observed that in classrooms some girls had small baskets with homemade doughnuts or mangoes, which they sold during break times.

Female-headed households find it hard to cope with the education of their children because of a lack of resources for basic needs. Mkandawire (1997) noted that female-headed households are largely confined to the production of food crops, mainly for own consumption. These households constitute a disproportionately large percentage of the "core poor". Various studies show that female-headed households have less land and poorer access to credit than male-headed ones. In the field it was seen that female-headed households had less land and were poor. The lack of resources and poverty affected enrolment and dropping out of children from school. Women complained about lack of money to buy clothes, food and educational materials.

Economic forces and direct cost of schooling continue to impinge upon pupils' schooling. Moreover, the quality of education has been affected because the government has failed to offer resources due to economic constraints. The World Bank Senior Education Advisor, Bierger Fredriksen, said that "the lowering quality of education in Malawi's primary and secondary schools has now reached critical stages and should be treated as an issue of great concern" (The Nation Newspaper, December 8, 2003). As already mentioned, donor agencies continue to support the education sector through programmes and projects. However, the study revealed that more aid is needed in order to sustain the Education for All policy. Such aid could be focused upon provision and storage of adequate educational materials for pupils and teachers and construction of more classrooms.

Lack of retention in schools is indeed common as a result, not only of these economic factors, but also of additional socio-cultural constraints, which will be explored in the next section.

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

##### *Initiation Ceremonies*

The study identified initiation ceremonies as a factor which continued to affect girls' education in particularly two areas of study: Mangochi in the South and Dedza in the Central Region. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) advanced evidence which showed that initiation ceremonies bring dilemmas for girls, affecting their school attendance and academic performance and even leading to dropout. Furthermore, initiated girls find it difficult to return to formal school or to concentrate on their own studies because their next expectation is marriage. Studies which were carried out in Malawi by Robb et. al. (1998), suggest that problems affecting girls' are acute in the Yao and Chewa dominated areas. Indeed initiation ceremonies in Mangochi and Dedza Districts, which are Yao and Chewa- dominated areas, affected pupils' attendance at school and dropping out of pupils from school. Girls were affected more than boys because once they went through initiation ceremonies, which taught them facts of life; they started having sexual relationships followed by pregnancies. The "nsondo"<sup>2</sup> initiation ceremony in Mangochi, which involves girls between the ages of 6-10, was seen to be a cause of high drop out rates. Many girls narrated their experiences at the nsondo ceremony and the impact upon their schooling. At the nsondo girls were taught sexual practices and were also encouraged or indulged in sex. What girls were taught was contrary to how they were expected to behave in school.

This was a major factor because young girls were told that they were “adults” and they were advised to practise what they learnt at nsondo ceremony. Yet the school still regarded them as juveniles and not adults. Moreover, the ceremony was at odds with what the school expected of girls as after girls had been kept in a period of seclusion (required in the nsondo) they were expected by their community to carry out tasks at home, i.e. looking after the homes and their young siblings and cooking.

Nsondo has very strong identity among the Yao. Parents agreed that nsondo is still a very important influence among the Yao and many parents encourage their children to go and attend initiation ceremonies. However, some girls whom I interviewed felt that nsondo must stop as a number of girls dropped out of school.

Similarly, girls in Dedza District go through nyau<sup>3</sup> initiation ceremony (chinamwali) from the age of nine years and also when they reach puberty. It lasts about a week. The nyau ritual provides a strong identity for the Chewa, who belong to this society. This initiation ceremony for the Chewa is a public acknowledgement that a person is passing through childhood to adulthood. During the initiation ceremonies girls are prepared for marriage. In a transition period, the initiates are taught many facts of life concerning life, customs, values, beliefs, sex education and ritualised behaviour. Girls drop out of school because of the “chewa nyau cult” a secret society among the Chewa ethnic group. This is a traditional religion involving masked dancers and is practised among the Chewa in Central Region. Teachers and pupils explained that after a girl has gone through the nyau ritual, she does not remain in school, but quickly drops out. Girls dropped out mainly as a result of early pregnancies.

Pregnancy regulations were changed in 1994 to allow girls return to school after having given birth. However, the study showed that girls did not go back to school after pregnancy. One pupil told me that it was difficult to go back to school because she had to look after her baby. Furthermore, she said that it was not easy to cope in the classroom once a girl had a baby. It was revealed that many heads were not in favour of re-admitting girls as they suffered prejudice from teachers and fellow pupils. UNIRIN (2002) notes that if girls became pregnant, the Education Department allowed them to return to school once they had given birth, but this policy had not been properly disseminated so girls still aborted and hid pregnancies. Moreover, the processing for applications for re-admission often took two years which was another set back for young women already battling community pressure to get married rather than return to school.

When girls were able to return to school, they found that their old school saw them as a bad influence and preferred them to go to another school. In this connection, programmes should be introduced to cater for girls who have dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy. Moreover, at the local level, the government should monitor and evaluate pregnancy policy to ensure that indeed girls go back to school after pregnancy.

Cultural practices such as nsondo and nyau appear to have led to an increase in the number of AIDS cases. A report by BBC suggests that experts believe that a number of traditional sexual practices may be significantly assisting the spread of AIDS cases across Africa (December 6, 2003). Moreover, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has affected pupils’ schooling and the education system.

#### *HIV/AIDS Epidemic*

Malawi is one of the countries which has been greatly affected by the AIDS epidemic. It is estimated that 11% of the population is HIV positive and the number of orphans totals 300,000. The DFID stated that “the growing number of AIDS orphans is a significant challenge to achieving UPE, especially in Africa” (DFID, 2000:10). The impact of AIDS upon schooling is that where resources are scarce it may be girls who are kept out of school so affecting their future economic prospects. The Deputy

Director of Basic Education in the Ministry of Education, McKnight Kalanda states that HIV/AIDS pandemic is affecting girls' education, as it is contributing to the increase in girls drop out rate (The Chronicle, December 8, 2003). He said that in most cases it is the girls who are forced out of school to help take care of HIV/AIDS victims, or to take care of orphans whenever someone has died leaving children behind. "A lot of children are pulling out of school because their parents have died of the pandemic, girls are the main victims because they are usually the ones who are forced to take care of orphans".

The impact of HIV/AIDS on Malawi's education system is enormous as the virus infects teachers. The Deputy Director of Basic Education points out that teachers fail to perform the way they are supposed to because they themselves are infected by the virus or their relatives are suffering from HIV/AIDS related illnesses. "When teachers are failing to perform the pupils are the victims because at the end of the year they don't learn what they were supposed to learn", he said (The Chronicle, December 8, 2003). Teachers' deaths result in a continuing shortage of instructors. Local school officials spend much of their time at funerals (MOESC/UNICEF, 1998:6). Teachers are also dying faster than the Ministry of Education (MOE) can train new ones. In addition, to childhood diseases, AIDS has had a devastating effect on children's participation in schooling. Children lose their parents, constantly attend funerals, and they may be infected as well.

In the field I observed that teachers and pupils were absent from school because they were attending funerals. In addition, girls were absent from school because they cared for the sick relatives whilst mothers cared for patients at hospitals or home. Orphans were unable to go to school because their relatives could not pay for educational materials because of limited resources. A village headman in Dedza District said that there were a lot of orphans in the village mostly because of the AIDS crisis. They stayed with other relatives and it was difficult to keep them. Single mothers also found difficulties in looking after their children. The MOE is doing its best to address issues concerning AIDS. This is achieved through the school curriculum and drama groups. Drama groups go to schools and warn children of the effects of AIDS. Girls were particularly encouraged to say "no" to sexual advances by men and school boys. However, the Deputy Director of Basic Education admits that "HIV/AIDS is one of the major problems that are frustrating the efforts by the government and other internal organisations which are trying to promote girls' education" (The Chronicle, December 8, 2003).

It was notable in the field that child labour has increased due to HIV/AIDS epidemic as young girls were taking more responsibilities of looking after younger siblings after a death of a mother. This has increased the number of child-headed households.

#### *Child Labour*

Studies by researchers indicate that the high opportunity costs continue to affect girls' education. Odaga and Heneveld noted that "child labour is indispensable to the survival of some households, and schooling represents a high opportunity cost to those sending children to school" (Odaga and Heneveld, 1995:17). As a result of the demand for domestic labour in urban areas, poor rural households have also responded by sending their daughters into the domestic labour market in exchange for regular cash income. Studies conducted by Robb et. al. (1998) in Malawi revealed that parents often send their children, especially daughters, to do chores such as collecting wood and fetching water during school hours.

### *Girls' Household Role*

UNIRIN (2002) states that the study conducted by the government and UNICEF's Basic Education Programme found that girls were weighed down with "burdensome involvement" in household chores while trying to find time for their schooling. Moreover, gender differences, encouraged through segregated activities at home, continued at school. Girls were tasked with collecting water for teachers if the school did not have its own taps. In the field, I observed that some girls were absent from school because parents asked them to do tasks at home. I interviewed a Standard Seven girl pupil carrying a sack of maize on her head during school hours. When I asked her where she was going, she revealed that her mother asked her to go to the grinding mill. Teachers explained that it is common practice for girls to be sent to the market and grinding mill during school hours.

The findings revealed that girls spent considerable time doing different chores at home before going to school, and also after school. It was seen that most girls spent two to three hours on chores in the morning and four hours was spent on different chores after school. One hour was spent relaxing before they prepare evening meals. Girls in all three areas of study complained about not having enough time to do their homework.

Girls interviewed in all three districts told me that the community expects them to do work at home and this is part of the training they are given at the initiation ceremonies. In addition, the time spent doing household chores instead of homework cause many pupils, especially girls, to have to repeat classes. When I asked girl pupils why they repeated classes they mentioned work at home as a contributing factor.

In some districts, girls drop out of school because they go and work as house girls in cities. These girls usually work for richer African families. Reports on domestic workers revealed that their well-off employers grossly abused them. The Pan African News (August 4, 2000) reported that Peter Chupa, the Labour and Vocational Minister in Malawi, described the problem of child labour in the country as serious and said it needed to be given a human face in order to eradicate it. The Minister stressed that "child labour was evil since it denies young people a chance to acquire formal education in order to realise their full potential in future". Indeed some girls I interviewed in villages told me that they dropped out of school because they were encouraged by their parents to work as a house girl.

Indeed it was notable that other socio-cultural constraints such as matrilineal practice, religious influences, illiterate parents and communities' attitudes affected participation of pupils, especially girls in schools. It was also evident in the field that educational constraints contributed to a lack of access and retention to basic education.

### *Educational Constraints*

Teachers play an important role in delivering education to pupils. However, in the field it was evident that teachers were de-motivated because of a lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, teacher's living conditions, salaries, poor working conditions, unqualified teaching staff and work load. Studies carried out by Kunje, *et al.* (2003) shows that the schools lack adequate teaching and learning materials to support students and other teachers in their work. Basic materials like teacher's guides, chart paper and pens were lacking in most schools. "Head teachers generally found themselves unable to do anything about the lack of teaching materials in the schools; this was one of the elements which frustrated and undermined their ability to support training at the school level" (Kunje, *et al.*, 2003: 99).

The findings reveal that negative aspects of the teaching career have impacted upon teachers' performance in schools. In the field I observed that teachers were not dedicated to their work. Teachers maintained that the government was not concerned about teachers' living conditions and salaries. In addition to poor salaries (which are

considerably lower than the well established private schools) their houses often leaked during the rainy season. The Malawi government EFA 2000 Assessment document<sup>4</sup> admitted that teachers' salaries are a major burden in basic education expenditure. The increase in expenditure is mainly due to the recruitment of the 18,000 untrained teachers in 1994 upon the introduction of FPE (MOESC, 2000). Untrained teachers were given a two to three week induction course before being sent to schools along with 5000 retired teachers (Kunje and Stuart, 1999). The Ministry of Education with the support of international donors set up on-the-job training programme for teachers, known as the Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) to train the unqualified temporary teachers.

On the other hand, teachers were also frustrated with the curriculum, which they found it difficult to implement as many were not trained and qualified. Teachers' incompetence, actions and interaction with pupils were observed in classrooms. Teachers' behaviour at schools was seen to have contributed to dropout rates, especially for pupils in lower classes. Young boys and girls who are not in schools told me that they did not want to go to school because teachers beat them. They couldn't understand why teachers beat them when they were speaking to friends in the classroom. However, I also discovered that there were serious issues concerning the teachers' behaviour, which profoundly affected girls' schooling.

#### *Teacher-Pupil Relationships*

Sexual harassment by teachers was evident in some schools which I surveyed. APILAR/UNICEF (1999) noted that within school, male teachers and students sexually harass female students. Studies in Malawi in 1998 by Robb, *et al.* revealed that teachers and schoolboys propositioned girls. In the field it was evident that teachers do ask girls for sexual relationships. Girls in one of the schools I surveyed mentioned that male teachers tried to involve themselves with girls in school. Studies conducted by Leach, *et al.* (2003) found that there is evidence of teachers and male pupils writing love letters and proposals to schools girls. Sexual harassment consisted of unsolicited physical contact such as pinching or fondling of breasts, beating and abusive language by teachers and pupils. UNICEF (2002) reports on gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in education in Eastern and Southern Africa also contain further evidence of systemic sexual harassment and abuse in schools. UNIRIN (2002) stated that reports revealed that some teachers were responsible for pregnancies of girls in school.

One pupil recounted how her classroom teacher targeted her and this I confirmed with the teacher concerned. Other girls at school and parents confirmed their awareness of teacher-pupil relationships. The teacher-pupil relationship is a serious and complicated one as it contributes to dropping out of pupils from school. For instance, a Standard Seven girl pupil told me that her schooling was very unsettled as she kept moving from one school to another because of a teacher who kept asking her for a relationship. The District Education Offices (DEOs) and the MOE are apparently aware of the relationships between teachers and pupils. It is therefore, recommended that the MOE should take tough measures in punishing teachers who ask girls in schools for relationships. Moreover, the community (especially the illiterates) and pupils should be mobilised and encouraged to report such incidents to the government. In addition, donor agencies programmes should focus more on programmes to address issues concerning teacher-pupil relationships.

It should emphasise on how girl pupils can abstain and deal with the relationship issues. It is essential that girls should feel it is normal for them to be attending school in furtherance of their education without being apprehensive of being taken advantage of by teachers. It is important to undertake tough measures against sexual abuse of girls in schools, as there is a danger of contracting HIV/AIDS virus. A report by BBC states that "a breakdown in the school environment in Africa has led to growing

number of cases of HIV amongst young girls being caused by teachers” (December 6, 2003). Other educational constraints such as job opportunities and role models have affected educational attainment in schools.

#### *Job Opportunities and Role Models*

It was notable in the field that girls were discouraged to complete their education because there were not many role models. Oxfam (1999) argued that one of the most significant determinants of education quality for girls is the presence of a female teacher. Yet in the field, it was seen that there were variations in the number of female teachers in schools. Some schools had more female teachers as compared to others. UNIRIN (2002) states that the government of Malawi, and UNICEF’s report, revealed that schools had fewer female teachers so girls did not have role models and female teachers were often allocated infant classes.

However, in all schools which I surveyed, there were more male teachers than female. Mothers of girls in schools (especially in the Central and Northern Region) suggested that girls in their areas did not go to school because of a lack of role models. One mother went on to say that people like me, the researcher, were scarce. If pupils saw role models like me they would work hard in school. Fathers in the North had more aspirations for their daughters’ education than in the Central and Southern Region. The North has a history of advancement in education because of the role which the Free Church of Scotland played, in the establishment of industrial training and schools by missionaries.

Parents also complained about a lack of job prospects in their areas which was a discouragement for children. In the field, it was seen that non-agricultural activities<sup>5</sup> were popular among both adults and the dropouts from school. Many non-agricultural activities require little investment or schooling (Tellegen, 1997:2-3). Teachers explained to me that parents did not encourage their children to go to school because they felt it was a waste of time.

Lack of jobs for pupils, especially for girls who complete schooling is a major setback for communities and pupils. Education is seen as a means of securing children for future employment. Therefore, if there are no jobs in rural and urban areas for pupils who have completed their education, parents and pupils in schools become discouraged. Therefore, in addition to accessing children to school, the government should come up with strategic schemes of boys and girls, which can be useful in their communities and environment. Support for rural development would be appropriate in ensuring that after education pupils can find something to pursue in their villages.

Other constraints to basic education included more issues pertaining to school practices and social political forces, which impinged upon pupils’, especially girls’ education. In some cases boys were equally affected as their performance was hampered by other conditions such as poor teacher knowledge and training, inadequate teaching materials and un-stimulating class environments.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that historical factors continued to affect access to, and retention of girls in schools. Recent reports show that economic, educational and socio-cultural constraints continue to affect the achievement of girls’ education. Moreover, educational standards are deteriorating (see *The Nation*, December 8, 2003). The situation has become worse as a result of HIV/AIDS crisis. However, coordination between stakeholders and policymakers is important in the formulation of policies, which are geared towards the local conditions, especially issues concerning cultural practices.

The study recommended that the government should continue to work hand in hand with the donor agencies and stakeholders at the local level. It should come up

with different strategies and policies based on nuanced support, which interweave policies designed to overcome inhibitors to girls' education.

The research contributed to the knowledge that Education for All can be achieved but requires suitable provision of quality education and the involvement of stakeholders in the identification of those problems which continue to inhibit pupils from taking full advantage of FPE/EFA. The study was important in identifying constraints, which continue to affect access to, and retention of girls' education. It is therefore important to explore best practices and programmes, which have been successful in combating constraints in different Commonwealth countries. Moreover, research should be carried out in order to assess projects between 2002-2006, which are being developed by the government, and UNICEF to ensure that girls are retained in schools.

#### NOTES

1. This was particularly true in Mangochi District in Namwera. Greeks employed children to work on tobacco estates. Parents encouraged children to work on the estates especially during reaping season (January to March). Children did piecework or tasks based on productivity. The work involved mainly weeding and reaping.
2. *Nsondo* is connected with the Yao culture. Both Christian and Muslim girls go through the *nsondo* ceremony. However, Christians try to avoid some aspects of the initiation ceremony such as those concerning sexual matters.
3. *Nyau* is a ritual of the Chewa ethnic group in Central Region which involves masked dancers.
4. Malawi: Educational for All 2000 Assessment document was prepared for the Dakar Education for All 2000 Assessment.
5. Non-agricultural activities are defined as all income-generating activities of rural households through self-employment outside the agricultural sector (see Tellegen, 1997:3).

#### REFERENCES

- African Eye News Service (South Africa) (2000) *Malawi Prepares to Persecute Three Axed Cabinet Ministers*. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200011070415.html>, November 8, 2000.
- BBC News (2003) *Teacher-Pupil Sex Blamed for HIV Rise*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/world/africa/3281619.stm>, December 6, 2003.
- BBC News (2003) *Sex Traditions Spreading HIV*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3285061.stm>, December 6, 2003.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications.
- Durston, S. (1999) *Poverty and Education: A Case Study of Implementation Strategies of an Education Programme in Malawi* (Draft) Presented to the Oxford International Conference on Education and Development 1999: Poverty, Power and Partnerships. 9–13 September 1999.
- Department for International Development (DFID) (2000) *Strategies for Achieving the International Development Targets: Education for All – The Challenge of Universal Primary Education*, Consultation, London: DFID.
- Gainza, De Jauregui, M. L. (1992) Preface. In *Women and Literacy*. Ballara, M. (ed.), London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.
- Gillham, B. (2000) *Case Study Research Methods*, London and New York: Continuum.
- Kunje, D., et. al. (2003) Primary Teacher Education in Malawi: Insights into Practice and Policy. Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER). *Country Report Three*, London: Department for International Development.
- Leach, F. et. al. (2003) *An Investigative Study of the Abuse of Girls in African Schools*, London: Department for International Development.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) (1990) *Malawi Towards Education for All*. A Paper Presented by the Malawi Government for the World Conference on Education for All. Thailand, March 5th-9th 1990, Lilongwe: MOE.
- Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MOESC)/UNICEF (1998) *Free Primary Education. The Malawi Experience 1994–1998*. A Policy Analysis Study. Conducted by MOESC in Collaboration with UNICEF: Lilongwe.
- Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MOESC)(2000) *Malawi: Education for All 2000 Assessment. Draft Country Report*, MOE: Lilongwe.
- Mkandawire, T. (1997) *Malawi Agriculture, Poverty and Employment*. Unpublished Paper.

- NAPILAR/UNICEF (1999) *Situation Analysis of the Girl-Child Southern Africa*. Papers Presented at a Workshop on the Situation Analysis of the Girl-Child. Gauteng: NAPILAR/UNICEF.
- Odaga, A. and Heneveld, W. (1995) *Girls and Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa. From Analysis to Action. World Bank Technical Paper No. 298*, Washington, DC: World Bank.
- OXFAM (1999) *Education Now: Break the Cycle of Poverty*, London: Oxfam International.
- Panafrican News Agency (2000) *Malawi Steps Up Campaign Against Child Labour*. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200008040023.html>, August 4th, 2000.
- Robb, J.L., et. al. (1998) *GABLE Social Mobilization Campaign*. Final Report. GABLE SMC. A Government of Malawi Project, USAID: Lilongwe.
- Swainson, N. (2000) Knowledge and Power: the Design and Implementation of Gender Policies in Education in Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. In *International Journal of Educational Development. Special Issue, Gender and Education*. Vol. 20, No. 1, pp46-64.
- Tellegen, N. (1997) *Rural Enterprises in Malawi: Necessity or Opportunity?* African Studies Centre Research Series. Vol.12, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- The Chronicle Newspaper (2003) *HIV/AIDS Affecting Girls Education*. <http://www.malawihere.com/viewnews.asp?id=1910>, December 8, 2003.
- The Nation Newspaper (2003) *Malawi's Education Worries World Bank*. <http://www.nationalmalawi.com/articles.asp?articleID=6204>, December 8, 2003.
- UNESCO (1992) *Education for All: An Expanded Vision*. World Conference on Education for All, Thailand: Jomtien.
- UNESCO. (2000) *Education for All 2000. Assessment: Statistical Document*, World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal 26-28 April 2000, Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- UNICEF/Malawi Government (1996) *Malawi Social Indicators Survey 1995. A Survey of the State of Health, Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Education of Children in Malawi*, Lilongwe: UNICEF.
- UNICEF (2002) *Young People, Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Education: A Summary of a regional research study*, Nairobi: UNICEF, ESARO.
- UN Intergrated Regional Information Network (UNIRIN) (2002). *Malawi: Girls Face Obstacles to Education*. <http://aegis.com/news/irin/2002/IR020707.html>, December 8, 2003.