



**RESEARCH ON HIDDEN COSTS OF THE FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION: FINAL
REPORT**

JUNE 2014

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Executive director

List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| CSEC: | Civil Society Education Coalition |
| CSOs: | Civil Society Organizations |
| DDPs: | District Development Plans |
| DEM: | District Education Manager |
| DEP: | District Education Plans |
| DESP: | District Education Sector Plans |
| DIPs: | District Implementation Plans |
| EFA: | Education For All |
| ESP: | Education Sector Plans |
| FGDs: | Focus Group Discussions |
| FPE: | Free Primary Education |
| KIIs: | Key Informant Interviews |
| M & E: | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MDGs: | Millennium Development Goals |
| MGDS: | Malawi Growth and Development Strategy |
| MoEST: | Ministry of Education Science and Technology |
| MTEF: | Medium Term Expenditure Framework |
| NGO: | Non-government Organisation |
| ORT: | Other Recurrent Transactions |
| OVCs: | Orphans and Vulnerable Children |
| PEAs: | Primary Education Advisors |
| PIF: | Policy Investment Framework |
| SIG: | School Improvement Grants |
| SIPS: | School Improvement Plans |
| SMCs: | School Management Committees |
| SPSS: | Statistical Package for Social Sciences |

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MIM conducted the study into hidden costs of the free Primary Education in Malawi that was commissioned by the civil Society Education Coalition in August 2013. The study was conducted as part of the coalition's process of developing an advocacy strategy for better access to and quality of the free primary education in Malawi. Data was collected through a survey that administered a semi-structured questionnaire to 300 respondents in Balaka, Lilongwe Rural West, Lilongwe City and Mzimba South. Focus group discussions and in depth interviews with school Management Committee members, Head teachers and Primary Education Advisors complemented the survey findings by probing into descriptive issues that the implementation of the FPE is facing in Malawi at the moment.

The study finds that each pupil has to make financial contributions of between MK2500 – 3000 per year to attend school. Additionally, the majority of consumers of the FPE in Malawi are among the lowest income bracket earners. This means that the financial contributions and school uniform requirements are constraining children from attending school which is against the principle of fairness and equity which are enshrined in the Malawi constitution. Ultimately this leads to lessening access to education while the limited availability of funding towards FPE leads to compromised quality of education outcomes. If the situation is prolonged at the current rate of repetitions, school drop-out and failure in national examinations, national human development capacity will be severely affected negatively. More importantly, the implementation of the FPE is a major constraining factor for low income households to effectively put their children through the school system as a way out of their current poverty levels. On the one hand, FPE is improving access at the household level while on the other it is leading to dwindling standards of primary education at the national level. Since primary education is the basis of the overall human development trajectory for the country, dwindling standards of education at the national level should be viewed as a serious flaw in the medium to long term human capital development of the country. More importantly, this long term effect will mostly be felt by the low income earners hence perpetuate their poverty.

The study recommends immediate address of the problem especially by speeding up equal and equitable distribution of the SIGs to schools, enforcement of the provisions of the guidelines to the implementation of FPE in Malawi as well as linking education infrastructure development to district development plans among other urgent actions. It is envisaged that once district education offices operate within the financing and management system of the district administration, it is more likely that more resources raised at the district level, especially in infrastructure development and maintenance, would go a long way in ensuring progressive and consistent development of primary school education throughout the country.

Supply of good quality primary schools needs to extend to other middle to low income consumers unlike as it is now that the FPE caters mostly for low income earners. The current enrollment of 4,188,677 Primary school pupils in schools around Malawi, 56,534 Teachers, 39,305 Classrooms and the poor educational outcomes, signify discrimination against pupils that come from poorer backgrounds based on economic status. The high net enrollment ratios, inadequate teaching and learning materials, poor or inadequate infrastructure and high pupil teacher ratios could be resolved by including middle-income earners in the education infrastructure development and especially maintenance and improved management. The education sector needs to revisit the strategy for

encompassing the middle to upper income earners in primary education service consumption with the aim of using the increased social capital for improving quality of education outcomes. Low standards of education are currently experienced throughout the education system in Malawi emanating from the poor quality basic education. The declining quality standards of education threaten to supply low quality workforce at all levels of the development matrix and ultimately declining development outcomes for Malawi in years to come. Thus all sectors of the society need to be sensitized and involved in the efforts towards improvement of quality of basic education in Malawi.

The current policy guidelines for the implementation of the FPE set a solid starting point for designing financing and school level management systems that should include concrete fundraising measures to ensure that primary education is effectively serving the nation. Once community participation in the provision of quality primary education includes the middle to upper income earners, there will be an adequate base from which to raise financing for primary schools. This could only be realized if government takes the initial step of increasing investment in primary school education so that middle to upper income earners may be lured back into the system as consumers hence help in providing resources for sustenance of standards of education.

1.0. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The civil Society Coalition for Education commissioned Malawi Institute of Management to conduct a study on the hidden costs of the universal free primary education in Malawi in August 2013. The study involved conducting in-depth interviews with school officials both at school management level and at district level in order to understand the policy expectation in the provision of the universal free primary education and practice on the ground so that the extent to which free primary education is free may be determined. Following a thorough understanding of the situation on the ground, the consultant made conclusions and recommendations regarding what more government could do in order to realize the universal primary education that is also of good quality.

The consultants find that the universal free primary education may not fully be accomplished due to the inability of government to fully cover the annual requirements for all schools in Malawi in terms of infrastructure development and maintenance, procurement of teaching and learning materials, care for orphans and vulnerable pupils and recruitment and maintenance of the required number and quality of primary school teachers. Parents of the free primary school pupils have to make substantial financial contributions towards their children's participation in the free primary schools. Despite the current efforts by both government and donors to improve supply and availability of the necessary teaching and learning materials to schools, the gap that is left is so huge that individual school management committees have had to devise other means in which they involve communities to raise monetary contributions towards provision of teaching and learning materials, maintenance of infrastructure and support towards orphans and vulnerable children.

This report looks at the FPE supply issues on the one hand and the FPE demand side in order to determine the extent to which FPE is free, how much it costs a child to attend primary school for a year and what impact does the cost have on the ability of a child to complete a class in primary school. In assessing the FPE supply issues, the report examines the prevailing education policy and practice environment in the execution of the free primary education while the levels of financial resources required by a single family to educate a child in a year will determine the ability of the household to send the child to school. The variance between the supply side opportunities considered alongside the ability of households to educate a child throughout a year will illuminate the extent to which FPE is free and how much the hidden costs to the FPE deter children from attending school and completing primary school within the confines of the FPE.

Ultimately the consultants find that parents of children that are attending FPE schools, are paying up to MK3000/child/year in various financial contributions and school uniform. This amount is rather high for certain income groups in the Malawi population hence there is need to identify alternative sources of resources that could help to relieve some of the poorest families from this cost burden. The study also finds that the major obstacle to children attending FPE schools in Malawi is school uniform and the sanction of choice for most of the schools is exclusion from classes which is against the policy guidelines for the FPE. However, the major cost that all FPE pupils, their parents and ultimately Malawi is and will pay is loss of quality of education. There is overwhelming evidence that supports the observation that quality of education has gone down and that current efforts are still not adequately responding to this issue. There is a lot of absenteeism, poor performance, and a very high repetition rate." In Malawi and some experts believe that these are one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa at 15 per cent of girls (three in every 20 girls), and 12 per cent of boys (three in

every 25 boys), dropping out between Grades Five and Eight.
(http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_902.html).

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Civil Society Education Coalition has commissioned this study in order to generate data that should be used in designing and executing the necessary policy advocacy in the promotion of access to education for all in Malawi. It is our understanding that the coalition has a long term commitment towards promoting access to and equitable quality education for all in Malawi in line with the government's commitments to international conventions and local policies such as the constitution of Malawi, the UN Millennium and Education for all Goals and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategies among others. The Coalition therefore undertakes policy research to inform its policy advocacy. As part of its annual activities for 2013, the Coalition intends to undertake this research study into the Hidden Costs of Free Primary School in Malawi.

1.2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which 'Free primary Education' is in real terms free and accessible to all. This involved unpacking all forms of costs that pupils are currently subjected to.

The specific objectives of the research were:

1. To identify, if any 'hidden costs' that pupils pay in order to access free primary education.
2. To compute the costs that each pupil pays in a school year and whether these costs are affordable for poor Malawian children or have the potential to deter other pupils from accessing education.
3. To examine how school management committees set various forms of fees and whether these fees are necessary and reasonable.
4. To review the relevant documents to determine whether and which school 'user fees' are constitutional within Malawi consequently proposing relevant policy reviews or actions.
5. To Determine the extent to which pupils miss classes because they are denied access due to user fee related challenges and assess the impact of this on their performance and learning achievements.
6. To Project the extent to which schools deny pupils access to education because of failure to pay 'user fees' that schools have set up
7. To recommend strategies and policy options that may be considered in dealing with the implication of hidden costs in accelerating progress in the education sector vis-a-vis in promoting access, equity and quality within the FPE and EFA framework

1.3. METHODOLOGY

The study took a mixed method design in order to ensure that both precise quantitative data and a wide range of perspectives on the causes, effects of the hidden costs of free primary education are captured but also recommendations from a wide range of key stakeholders are captured. Qualitative

interview guides and semi-structured survey questionnaires were used to collect data. This provided the consultants with specific answers to the questions that the CSEC would like to be answered through this study. The data also provided guidance to the consultants with regard to both policy and practice areas of the provision of primary education that need action and where advocacy may play a role to realize the desired improvements namely, improved access to quality basic education for all.

1.3.1. Data Collection

1.3.1.1 Quantitative data

Quantitative data was collected from the sampled pupils, school management committee members (combination of teachers, parents and community leaders) and CSOs present in the areas. A structured interview questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire mostly comprised of questions seeking to understand the description of costs that pupils and their guardians are actually bearing in association with the children's attendance in school. It also sought to understand;

- i. Level of resources required per child or household for each of the costs identified
- ii. Where these resources are obtained from?
- iii. Who pays for each of the identified costs?
- iv. If anyone is unable to pay for such what are the consequences that pupils have suffered before and expect to suffer?

Among such costs are the following

Table 1.1.1

Range of costs associated with primary school education

| Category of costs | Specific costs borne |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Essential services package for primary school - going-age children (05 – 15) | School Uniform |
| | Health |
| | Nutrition |
| | Clothing |
| | Shelter |
| | Water and sanitation |
| | Safety and security |
| | Transportation |
| | Learning materials |
| | Teaching materials |
| Local School administrative and Management Support Services | Infrastructure maintenance |
| | Cleaning Labour |

1.3.1.2. Qualitative Data

Qualitative data was collected alongside the quantitative data but it was specifically collected from head teachers or their delegated representatives, community leaders, CSO representatives from the study area and Ministry of education headquarters staff.

Interview guides were developed for:

- **Ministry of education headquarters respondents and head teachers** – this tool was used to collect data pertaining to perspectives on the policy objectives and how well they are being achieved through current practice in primary school education.
- **Community leaders and CSO representatives in the areas** – These were consulted for their perspectives on current practices in primary school education and how the burden of costs is affecting access to education for all. They were also asked for what recommendations they envisage in order to improve the situation especially on access as well as quality of education as these values go hand in hand.

The Ministry and district education officials represented the supply side of education services while community leaders, pupils and parents as well as CSOs represented the demand side of the education services as major sub-sets of the key stakeholder population. It is more likely that perspectives on the costs related to education, where they come from and what effect they may have on access to education for all would be different between the two sides.

Data collection was focused on accessing information regarding which of these and other school attendance requisite costs are pupils or their households bearing and how much in monetary terms they translate to so as to understand exactly how much primary school attendance costs and, therefore, analyze whether the” free primary school” motto as public policy is really an accurate translation of free primary school or not and what implications it is having on access to education for all. This analysis provided the consultants with insights into what practical recommendations they could provide in order to mitigate the effects of the burden of school attendance related costs

on access to education for all by 2015 for the Malawi population especially the bulk of the rural and urban poor segments of the population.

1.3.2. Study Team

Two teams of data collection assistants worked together. One group was to move from the Central region towards Southern region while the other was to move from the Central region towards the Northern region; 12 data collection assistants were deployed Lilongwe Urban, Lilongwe Rural West, Mzimba and Balaka. Research assistants collected data under the supervision of a researcher from MIM. This was so to ensure that the main investigator from MIM was focused on conducting qualitative interviews both in the regions and at Ministry of education headquarters while the research assistants consulted parents and pupils from various schools in the highlighted districts administering a questionnaire.

Annex 1 presents a list of all the respondents in the study both in FGDs and in-depth interviews.

1.3.3. Sampling

Districts that were covered in the study were identified purposively through consultation with the Ministry of education. Education Zones that would be easy to reach but also have a high concentration of schools were identified. This is because, there was a limited timeframe within which to conduct the study (18 days), therefore, the research team needed to access more schools within the time provided so that the sample would be significant and that the results could be reliable and authentic. Four districts were targeted in the study as follows; Balaka, Lilongwe Urban, Lilongwe rural West and Mzimba.

Data was collected from a total of 300 structured questionnaires across the urban, peri-urban and rural schools. Similarly, in the districts, areas that have a high concentration of schools and a few outliers were purposively sampled to ensure that remote experiences are not completely left out in the results of the study.

1.3.4. Data Analysis

All quantitative data was entered, cleaned and analyzed in SPSS. A data entry and analysis SPSS expert was engaged (identified from MIM's adjunct faculty) to design the data entry and analysis sheets that the MIM consultants used to analyze the quantitative data. All qualitative data was collated and analyzed separately using content analysis and identifying emerging patterns in the emergence of issues. All qualitative data was coded and analyzed under the pre-set themes of description of costs, those who bear the costs, effects on access to education for all, perspectives of supply-side of access to education for all and perspectives of demand-side of access to education for all and recommendations for improvement of the situation. Using content analysis, emerging issues were also identified and interpreted

1.4. Characteristics of the Respondents in this Study

A direct survey on the costs that either parents, community members or public primary school pupils incur in the course of attending the free primary school was administered to 300 respondents throughout the four education districts namely, Lilongwe urban, Lilongwe rural west, Balaka and Mzimba. Overall, the age of the respondents was above 18 if they were parents or primary care takers of the pupils and above 10 in the case of the pupils themselves.

The respondent population was generally in the income range of Mk20, 000/year or less and consisted of either parents/guardians and actual senior class pupils in a public primary school. Therefore it is not surprising that in most cases pupils in public primary schools depend on government to meet their expenses related to effective and efficient operations of primary schools. For example, the most common costs that schools have to meet even in the current event that public primary schools are tuition free, are related to learning and teaching materials, safety and security around the school premises and provision of water and sanitation at the school. In most cases, respondents identified government as the responsible authority that bears the costs related to their attending public primary schools as opposed to parents or guardians. The importance of understanding this perception as dominant in the perceptions of the community towards school administration and management is that it eventually affects the parents/guardians of pupils' willingness in participating in school governance and management activities. This includes how parents view their role in supervising pupils learning in the after school hours and decision making when the SMC needs to set new targets for community contributions towards school management activities. Table 2.1 below presents a summary of the characteristics of the respondents in this study distinguishing between urban and rural school respondents.

Table 2.1.: Respondents characteristics

| Characteristics | Rural | Urban | Total |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Total | 84.1 | 16.0 | 100 |
| Sex | | | |
| Male | 41.4 | 29.2 | 39.5 |
| Female | 58.6 | 70.8 | 60.5 |
| Age group | | | |
| 6-13 | 36.8 | 61.7 | 40.7 |
| 14-18 | 33.2 | 10.6 | 29.6 |
| 18-24 | 3.2 | 4.3 | 3.4 |
| 25-44 | 18.0 | 17.0 | 17.9 |
| 45+ | 8.8 | 6.4 | 8.4 |
| Income group | | | |
| Lowest-K20000 | 52.4 | 47.4 | 51.6 |
| K21000-K40000 | 8.6 | 5.3 | 8.1 |

| | | | |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| K41000-K199999 | 24.8 | 15.8 | 23.4 |
| K200000 + | 14.3 | 31.6 | 16.9 |

FINDINGS

2.0. OVERVIEW OF THE FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE IN MALAWI

The Malawi government adopted a free primary education (FPE) policy in 1994. The introduction of the free primary education immediately saw the soaring of net enrolment in public primary schools hence the need for more resources to be allocated. For example, the demand for teaching and learning materials, teacher training and the construction of classrooms throughout the country intensified. This reform was introduced without significant advance planning. As a result, the increased allocation of financial resources towards the primary education sub-sector ended up into pilferage, political influence and corruption. Some of the initial planning failures were addressed in the Policy Investment Framework (PIF) (2000–2012) of June 2000 and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) adopted for the fiscal years 2006/2007 to 2010/2011. Government investment throughout these years saw education as a key sector to attaining prosperity and a catalyst for socio-economic development. In 2008, an Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2008 was also adopted.

These new policies attempted to address the problems which had been brought about by the rapid expansion of service delivery in primary education through the FPE. Major expenditure lines included expanded primary school teacher training programmes, decentralisation and improved financial management. District education plans (DEPs) were also introduced from 2006. More importantly, the main ESP and each DEP are developed through consultative processes involving major segments of education stakeholders. During consultations, stakeholders identify the problems and solutions to providing access to FPE (especially for the poorest and most vulnerable) as well as improving the quality of education. However, even though the MoEST does involve other stakeholders in the strategic planning process, these meetings are not regular and not all stakeholders get invited; most of the participants are usually government bureaucrats. Most notable among the absent stakeholders are the local authorities that are expected to embrace the education sector plans at the district level in execution.

The MoEST has a research, monitoring and evaluation unit, whose main duty is to evaluate education programmes and make necessary recommendations for their maximum impact. Unfortunately, due to staffing and resource constraints, the unit is not performing as anticipated. The unit is yet to develop monitoring and evaluation programmes; instead its focus has been on participating in periodic reviews of the MGDS and in joint sector reviews on education, thereby diverging from its main focus.

The unit is crucial especially in that, if properly managed and equipped, it could advise the MoEST on the proper implementation of its plans – something that is seriously lacking in the ministry at present.

Implementation guidelines of the Free Primary School Policy have only been developed in 2013 and released for use by all relevant implementation stakeholders for the policy. However, most respondents in the study indicated that they are not aware of these guidelines. The guidelines were developed in order to provide guidance to the practitioners in the free primary education service delivery considering that the policy was simply a presidential pronouncement at a public rally hence

it did not have implementation modalities thought through before-hand. Since the FPE was adopted in 1994, it has taken too long for the Ministry to really get down to regularizing the implementation of this policy through the development of these guidelines.

The Guidelines document itself is not well labeled as to show its intended period of operation and when it was published. However, the guidelines identify and clarify roles and responsibilities of various major stakeholders in the operationalization of the free primary education in Malawi. The following are the major stakeholders identified ; Ministry Of Education Science and Technology (MOEST), Ministry of Gender and Child development, Ministry of Youth Sports and culture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Water Development and Irrigation, Malawi National Examination Board, Malawi Institute of Education, Parliamentarians, Development Partners, Civil Society/Faith-based Organizations, Private Sector, Media, District Councils, District Education Offices, Schools/school management Committees, teachers and pupils.

This report assesses the involvement of a few of the key stakeholders in the design and delivery of the FPE in Malawi as follows:

Table 2.1.: Stakeholder involvement in FPE

| Stakeholder | Responsibility | Performance |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| District Education Offices | Ensure that schools do not collect any form of fees from children without any agreement with parents/teachers association | Trying but could do more |
| | Ensure that all schools have school improvement plans | System in place and currently being enforced |
| | Coordinate with all stakeholders to ensure that FPE is well funded | Lacking. No coordinated procedures in place |
| School management committees | Ensure that each pupil receives learning materials such as textbooks, exercise books, note books, pens and pencils and any other materials deemed necessary when available | Capacity in some cases especially rural areas limited |
| | Seek approval before any new levy is introduced at the school | Not happening currently |
| | Ensure that classes do not have over 60 pupils each | Not happening due to limited infrastructure |
| | Ensure that schools have clean water and children are accessing good sanitation facilities | Happening with support from NGO/CSOs |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Parents or Community around the school | Provide basic necessities to children to enable them attend school | In place |
| | Encouraging children to go to school at the right age of six | To some extent happening |
| | Avoiding preferences to boys over girls when sending children to school | Well understood and appreciated |
| | Participating in school projects and programmes | |
| | Protecting school property and land from being vandalized and stolen | Happening in most of the schools |
| | Participating in formation of school committees and monitor their activities at the school | In place |
| | Assisting children with school work and monitor their learning progress. | Not happening in most cases due to limited appreciation of the value of school especially in rural areas |
| | Supporting school activities in cash or in kind | Doing it to support most of the school level administration costs |

Although the policy guidelines identify the role of the district council in the implementation of the FPE at the district level, the council is not appropriately fulfilling its obligations. Ideally according to the decentralization policy, the council is supposed to be the primary responsible authority for district development through the development and implementation of district development plans, district implementation plans and district sector plans. Development and implementation of district education development plans (DEPs) is the responsibility of the district administration. Therefore, the FPE policy guidelines stipulate that the council was to ensure that the provision of educational services is satisfactory in that district. The district is expected to undertake this role in collaboration with the sectoral ministry (MoEST) that maintains the responsibility to set and enforce education service delivery standards through policy formulation and implementation monitoring. In terms of funding which is essentially the key issue in the implementation of FPE, the district education office gets funded from the Ministry of education hence little recourse is made to the district development plans and district implementation plans when funding is made. No wonder that some previous studies have found that national priorities are not clearly spelled out in the DEPs, although planning at the district level is expected to be guided by the same national Education Sector Plan (ESP) and Policy and Investment Framework (PIF). This could be a sign of either inability at the local level to comprehend the ESP and PIF or it could be an issue of poor communication between headquarters and local level on what needs to be done at the district level. It might also have to do with staff at the local level, who might have not been properly trained on how to manage the education sector development planning process at the district level (Ng'ambi, 2010:12). Either way, the districts (administration) are missing a big opportunity where they could spearhead and take charge of education development within their districts including developing and coordinating resource mobilization plans that would in turn fully cover the needs of schools to operationalize the FPE policy throughout the district.

Comment [U1]:

It is important to note that the policy guidelines for the implementation of the FPE in Malawi already acknowledge the public resource limitations in fulfilling the FPE nationally hence it earmarks resource mobilization responsibilities to both district education office and parents/communities. The responsibilities of the school and the district education offices clearly show the dilemma that district education service provision is presented with, namely; ensuring that schools are not collecting any fees from learners but also ensuring that school management committees mobilize resources from the communities around the school to bridge the resource gaps that exist between public resource allocation and the requirements of the schools to operate effectively and efficiently (FPE Implementation Guidelines, 2012).

2.1. EDUCATION POLICY PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The current policy framework that guides the implementation of the free primary education in Malawi consists of the PIF and the Free Primary Education Implementation Guidelines. Most of the stakeholders that were consulted in this study were familiar with the PIF but not so much with the FPE implementation guidelines. The Planning unit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology which is the primarily responsible for the development and dissemination of education policy in Malawi confirmed that the implementation guidelines have only been finalized and dissemination and usage by stakeholders is only beginning. District education offices also acknowledged attending some dissemination meetings for the same but that such dissemination and popularization of the policy implementation guidelines needs to go further down to PEAs and individual school heads, teachers and SMCs.

There are no clear mechanisms through which the ministry receives or solicits feedback from public education stakeholders regarding the performance of the policy, its strong areas and weak spots for improvement. Due to inadequacy of teachers, the teacher/pupil ratio is very high. For poor students FPE is good as it provides them with access. On the other hand, however, FPE compromises on quality.

Another big factor for the low quality of education is that teachers are usually stuck in the same (employment) grades or ranks for a prolonged period of time without any promotion. This demotivates teachers greatly. It is such challenges that could easily be dealt with at the district level if management of educational development programmes were to be done by the local authorities. Since FPE is so expensive it is imperative that such issues that may seem peripheral to making education tuition free are central to the delivery of service be dealt with effectively and promptly. Actually whether teachers are promoted on merit, promptly or not, both government and parents are spending large amounts of money relative to their incomes which is a great inefficiency within the system. So despite there being limited resources available to the system, Ng'ambi, (2012), points out that the inefficiency in the operations further depletes resources that would otherwise have taken delivery of positive outcomes in education higher.

There is a strong perception among respondents especially those on the supply side of FPE that pupils do not work hard. These sentiments were mostly expressed by district and school level authorities. The education officials believe that parents/guardians do not feel ownership of the school. This is because the parents/guardians are not investing in it in any tangible way. Therefore their level of interest is low in their children's education. In some schools, teaching and learning

materials are distributed once in 3 years and yet in the lean periods, parents are reluctant to dig into their own pockets to provide learning resources to their children/wards. This also further demotivates teachers. Additionally this is happening mostly in rural areas where inability to make financial contributions even in noble causes such as buying learning materials for their own children is a luxury due to their level of resources. Already this is one trend that contributes towards creation of inequalities across income groups in the way that they access FPE.

Due to inadequate infrastructure, other opportunities for increasing quality of education outcomes are denied. For example, the school may not offer boarding facilities and slow learners are not provided with extra tuition. This coupled with the large class sizes that teachers have to contend with, is hard for slow learners to be given the attention they so much need. Costs for extra tuition were not recognized by a majority of the respondents. The question that sought to enquire into the details of costs that parents or pupils bear with regard to extra tuition was very unsatisfactorily responded to. Out of 300 respondents, only 17.5 percent of respondents actually commented on the costs of extra tuition. For those that responded to this question, the cost was indicated at an average of MK500/child per month which is still high considering the major income bracket within which most children that are served by the FPE are located.

2.2. Stakeholder Involvement in the Development and Popularisation of the FPE

The study also sought to understand the level of consultation that was undertaken in the development of the guidelines for the implementation of the FPE among the major stakeholders including practitioners in FPE service delivery which are very crucial to determining the success of the policy. The rationale for assuming wide consultation in the development of the policy guidelines is that policies that are developed consultatively are more likely to be popularized and effectively implemented unlike those that are developed by central government agencies for implementation in districts and other peripheral areas of the governance process. Through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with SMC, head teachers and PEAs, the study team learned that teachers and PEAs were not involved in the process of developing the guidelines for the implementation of the FPE. Most of the respondents indicated that they just learned that free primary education had been introduced and of late they are vaguely aware that there are guidelines that have been developed to guide implementation of the FPE although most have not yet seen a copy of the guidelines. Respondents cited the fact that policy processes happen at the central ministry level (MoEST) hence they only get to be told of what has been agreed upon for them to implement. As implementers of the policy, PEAs, teachers and parents needed to be thoroughly prepared for the task and the guidelines needed to be widely popularized for the same purpose. The limited involvement of these essential stakeholders in the policy formulation and its performance monitoring as led to poor performance of the policy. Implementers are not familiar with the policy

and its guidelines. DEM's also confirmed that the policy guidelines have only recently (2012) been released hence most practitioners have not been sensitized yet.

2.3. HISTORICAL TRENDS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FPE POLICY

The introduction of FPE in 1994 in Malawi came in at a time when the general population regarded education as expensive and mostly parents in the lower income bracket were wary of sending their children to school due to the tuition fee requirements. Following the presidential declaration of the abolition of tuition fees, gross enrollment rates in all classes in primary school soared. Some of the new entrants into the primary school system were under-aged children as well as over-aged children. This led into classrooms generally getting overcrowded and worsening teacher/pupil ratios from an average of 1: 80 pre 1994 to 1:83 post 1994 (Nishimura, M. 2009). The soaring gross enrollment rates signify that access to education had been opened up and the population was fully utilizing it. This study also finds that 0.8% of respondents say that the school (where they go to or their children/wards go to) is 5 km or more away from their home while 55% said that their school is below 5 km away from home with 42% saying that the school they go to is less than 3 kilometres away. Thus the majority of pupils in primary schools live within walking distances to and from schools. In a way construction of new schools to deal with overcrowding in the classrooms should also be viewed as a significant step towards improving both access and quality of education on the part of government.

However, all schools that were visited both in urban and rural areas cited high teacher/pupil ratios sometimes as high as 1:90 (in Balaka). Shortage of learning and teaching materials like text books, exercise/note books, inadequacy of trained teachers, as well as dilapidating classrooms, teachers houses and toilets are still the major challenges that implementation of FPE is encountering. Poor or even in-availability of teachers' houses has led to teachers' wide spread dissatisfaction with their work. Besides not getting salaries and hardship allowances (for rural schools) in time, the issue of dilapidating houses or even non-availability of decent houses has further demotivated teachers according to the data collected in qualitative interviews. Additionally classroom overcrowding has made some teachers to resort to unconventional teaching methodologies. For example, teachers regularly put pupils up into big groups (for discussions) that are not well managed so as to try and get all pupils engaged in the lesson. However, such large groups for such young children like those in the lower standards may not be as effective as normal group work would be. In such overcrowded classrooms, it is very hard for teachers to organize and manage practical learning sessions. As a result even teachers are not satisfied that they are doing a good job because they would like to be able to ensure that they are giving each pupil in their class adequate attention and support towards learning.

Equally important issues in the execution of the FPE are; declining academic achievement quality among primary school pupils as well as increased school drop-out and repetition rates. The gains that are being achieved through increased access are quickly being lost through these unwanted results of the implementation of the FPE. Lower quality or inefficient teaching and learning processes are ultimately leading to these unwanted results. As much as high gross enrollment rates have been recorded, net enrollment rates keep declining. For example, net enrollment rates have decreased from 137% in 2002 to 106% in 2004. This could also better be explained by looking at the survival rate to standard 5 or to completion of the primary school as follows;

Table 2.2: Summary of performance of FPE in Malawi (by Survival Rate to Stds. 5 and 8)

| Year | boys | girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total |
|------|------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 2008 | 78 | 73.6 | 76.2 | 58.7 | 49.9 | 52.1 |
| 2009 | 62.7 | 65.2 | 62.7 | 41.1 | 37.9 | 38.8 |
| 2010 | 74.7 | 72 | 73.5 | 53.1 | 45 | 48.8 |
| 2011 | 75.4 | 74.8 | 75 | 53.8 | 47.2 | 49.7 |
| 2012 | 58 | 59 | 59 | 41 | 35 | 38 |

Source: (EMIS, 2012:23)

In addition to this, in 2006, the MoEST M&E system reported 21% repetition rate and 44% rate of survival in standard five (Masperi, P 2008, Nishimura, 2009). This means that the number of pupils that enter into the system either keep dropping out along the continuum all the way up to standard eight where only 55% of those who entered complete the primary school process or they repeat some classes along the way thereby reducing the number of those that eventually complete the primary school level. Even before the costs can numerically be calculated, the quality aspect which is lost within the system is hard to quantify. It is also projected that by 2015, net attendance of pupils in primary school at the national level could get as high as 85% (Masperi, 2008). Education Policy and strategies need to take this into consideration against the current failure rate of 40% in public examinations. Clearly, higher than normal net attendance rates need to be acted upon to ensure that by 2015, the primary school system should be well prepared to manage it with efficiency.

Another important perspective among head teachers PEAs and school management committee members is that since schools became tuition free, pupils and parents have increasingly exhibited a carefree mentality towards free primary education. Parents seem to be relegating their responsibilities of supervising children after school to ensure better learning outcomes. This could be as a result of the parents' feeling that they have not invested into the process as they have very little stake in monitoring its progress. This has been observed amongst parents who have little or no education and hence do not appreciate the value of education to their children. Nishimura, (2009) also suggests that this is a major issue that school management in the era of FPE is struggling with. Although parent involvement in their children's education may sound peripheral in the process of learning and teaching, it is key and has possibly contributed, in this case, to declining academic achievement rates, drop-out as well as repetition rates as shown in this report. Some observers have pointed to a "loss of national vision" at the macro level and the "corrosion of pupil, teacher and parent relations" at the more micro level as well as a loss of teacher professionalism (Masperi P., undated).

2.4. 'HIDDEN COSTS' THAT PUPILS PAY IN ORDER TO ACCESS FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION

The study sought to unearth costs that are associated with the provision of any of the items that constitute the essential services package for school-going age children which is 6 – 14 (FPE

Implementation Guidelines, 2012) in order to identify the specific costs that may be hidden in the provision of the essential services package. Additionally the study sought to understand who bears the primary responsibility for providing these essential services to children to enable them to effectively attend the free public primary school.

The study reveals a number of costs that pupils or their parents/guardians pay in order to enable effective teaching and learning as well as sustain attendance of children in any public primary school in Malawi. The most common of these costs can be grouped in the following specific categories of the essential provisions and services package necessary for the primary school going-age children:

- decent clothes or school uniform
- health and nutrition
- water and sanitation
- Learning materials
- School
- financial contribution towards the printing of test or examination result cards
- school fund.

According to the findings in this study, it is clear that lack of decent clothing, including school uniforms, is the main constraining factor to children's regular and consistent attendance to classes or for their drop out completely besides their ability to pay for community contributions for school administration and management. The data shows that approximately 70% of respondents identified either lack of school uniform or decent clothes as the major reason for their absenteeism from classes or for dropping out of school. Among the items that were listed in the essential services package for primary school-going-age children the majority of respondents cited school uniform as the most important provision that children are given to attend school. 68% of respondents think that pupils need a new set of uniform every 2 – 3 years. Each new set of school uniform costs MK2,000.00 on average. Both parents and pupils agree that this is a responsibility of the families to provide.

However, SMCs also indicated in FGDs that they do consider from time to time providing school uniforms to children with disabilities or the most vulnerable in the communities. They sometimes use resources that are provided to schools through the MoEST as direct grants to schools or the school Improvement Grants wherever it applies and school fund where they do not have the grants to provide support towards the orphans and vulnerable children. In certain communities SMC members even request parents including themselves to make out of pocket contributions towards support for OVCs. That way, the school is able to provide specialized care towards vulnerable pupils and ensure equity in accessing FPE at that local level. It is also important to note that there are no specific set procedures for dealing with orphans or the most vulnerable children that are not able to meet financial obligation for them to attend primary school. As a result, each school deals with the problem in ways that the officials including the head teachers and SMCs deem fit and some school show that they dealt with the issue in more favourable ways than others with regard to orphans and vulnerable children.

The table below presents a summary of the major costs that are essential to enable a child attend school for a whole year. The table also highlights the variance that exists in similar costs between schools along the urban/rural divide;

Table 2.3.: School uniform requirements, rural urban

| School Uniform | Rural | Urban | Total |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Percent reporting school uniform compulsory | 94.8 | 97.9 | 95.3 |
| What the school uniform comprise of | | | |
| Shoes and socks | 6.7 | 4.2 | 6.6 |
| Sweater/cardigan/jack | 4.7 | 12.5 | 6.0 |
| All of the above | 2.4 | 14.6 | 4.3 |
| How often is a new uniform purchased | | | |
| Once a year | 21.3 | 20.8 | 21.5 |
| Once every 2 years | 33.2 | 35.4 | 33.4 |
| Once every 3 years | 30.8 | 25.0 | 29.8 |
| More than once a year | 10.3 | 10.4 | 10.3 |
| Cost | | | |
| Average cost of uniform set (kwacha) | 956.7 | 1413.8 | 1185.2 |

95% of respondents view the uniform requirement to attend school as compulsory without much differentiation between urban and rural schools. SMC members, head teachers and PEAs reported knowing that the ministry demands that uniform should not be compulsory and that children should not be excluded from classes on the basis of not wearing uniform to school. Head teachers and SMC members also believe that uniform is the ideal type of clothing that all school pupils need to have as it minimizes inequalities in the way pupils present themselves in school. They understand the requirement for not excluding pupils from school but pupils and parents/guardians reported that children still get excluded from school if they do not present themselves in uniform at school. School uniform that is replaced once every 2 -3 years costs on average approximately MK1,000.00 per child in the rural areas and MK1,500.00 in the urban areas.

Table 2.4.: Other obstacles that hinder Children from attending FPE)

| Obstacles to education | Rural | Urban | Total |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Reasons for not attending School | | | |
| Do not have uniform | 7.1 | 0.0 | 6.4 |
| Are unable to pay for school contribution | 9.8 | 7.1 | 9.5 |
| Do not have decent clothes to wear | 1.8 | 0.0 | 1.6 |
| The school is too far | 0.9 | 7.1 | 1.6 |
| Other reasons | 4.5 | 0.0 | 4.0 |
| Married/pregnant | 5.4 | 0.0 | 4.8 |
| Not interested | 1.8 | 0.0 | 1.6 |
| Distance to school | | | |
| 2 km and below | 42.0 | 42.6 | 42.1 |

| | | | |
|------------------|------|------|------|
| Between 3 - 5 km | 57.2 | 55.3 | 56.9 |
| Over 5 km | 0.8 | 2.1 | 1.0 |

2.4.1. School Feeding Programme

Approximately 6% of urban schools and 60% of rural schools visited in this study reported operating a school feeding programme. Beyond stating that they do or do not operate a school feeding programme, respondents did not have a lot to say concerning its importance, whose responsibility it is or how much it costs. This could be as result of them being involved in the programme minimally hence their knowledge of what is necessary or needs to be done is limited. Essentially, if the school is not providing this service, it means that the community/parents are bearing this cost. Respondents were asked what sort of food items they/their children/wards carry to school on a daily basis or regularly. Majority of them mentioned usual food stuffs that children eat at home whether they are in school or not. For example they mentioned such food stuffs as roast maize, roast groundnuts, chigumu (mealie meal cake), fruits in season etc. Since parents or guardians are used to meeting this cost, they did not view it as a separate cost towards the education of their children. Besides, lack of food was not identified as one of the main reasons why some children of school-going age do not attend school currently.

Presented in table ... below is a summary of the survey responses with regard to the types and prevalence of costs that are incurred pertaining to the management and sustenance of the school feeding programmes at a school level.

Table 2.5.: School feeding programme

| School feeding Programme | Rural | Urban | Total |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Percent having school feeding programme | 59.0 | 6.5 | 50.7 |
| Percent where parents/guardians | | | |
| Provided Firewood | 35.2 | 4.2 | 30.5 |
| Paid for Labour | 35.2 | 2.1 | 30.1 |
| Paid for cooking and cleaning | 31.6 | 2.1 | 27.2 |
| Paid for Flour | 22.5 | 0.0 | 19.2 |
| Paid for Relish | 22.1 | 0.0 | 18.9 |
| Paid for Salt/sugar | 25.7 | 0 | 21.9 |
| Pays for utensils | 22.9 | 0.0 | 19.5 |
| Average costs in (kwacha) | | | |
| Firewood | 20.6 | 0.4 | 10.5 |
| Labour | 274.1 | 0.0 | 137.0 |
| Cooking and cleaning | 295.9 | 0.0 | 148.0 |
| Flour | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Relish | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Salt/sugar | 5.3 | 0.0 | 2.6 |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Utensils | 4.4 | 0.0 | 2.2 |
| Total School feeding programme | 600.3 | 0.4 | 300.4 |

2.4.2. Water and Sanitation

Toilet construction projects are among the major areas that attract donor funding either through Ministry projects, individual school partnership with an NGO or donor partner. The DEMs in all districts cited examples of schools that have reported to the DEM at some point that they entered into a partnership with either a donor agency or NGO that has constructed some infrastructure in their school. The data collected in this study shows that 70% of respondents (in urban schools) do not incur any costs towards the construction of toilets. This rate may seem very high hence indicate lower prevalence of costs in schools towards toilet construction. However, it has to be noted that on the one hand, toilet cleaning has a high prevalence in urban schools due to the fact that in urban schools, the flushable pans need to be cleaned regularly (a number of times per day) depending on the number of children as compared to the number of toilets. Additionally, the modern flushable toilets in the urban schools are usually built as permanent structures so the burden of renovating or upgrading is lifted from the communities. On the other hand, the toilets in the rural schools are pit latrines covered by semi-permanent or even temporary shelters. This raises the burden on parents/communities to repair, renovate or even rebuild these toilet sharks more regularly. Consequently, 70% of respondents in rural schools indicate that they do not make contributions towards cleaning of toilets at the school. This is because in rural areas schools mostly use pit latrines which are cleaned using mud smears and it is not done on a daily basis. However this also needed to be probed further to ensure that pupils are not the primary responsible persons for keeping the toilets clean as this may be detrimental to their health. For those communities that are incurring toilet construction and cleaning costs, it is usually between MK100.00 – 200.00 per household per term. This toilet cleaning cost is especially incurred by parents/guardians in urban areas. This could be the reason why only about 14% (of the total sample, urban and rural) of respondents indicated that they incur this kind of cost since the urban sample was smaller than the rural sample in the study.

Table 2.6 below, presents a summary of survey responses on construction and care for toilet facilities in the schools;

Table 2.6.: School toilet facilities

| Toilets at School | Rural | Urban | Total |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| % reporting school has toilet for boys | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| % reporting school has toilet for girls | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Who built | | | |
| Government | 62.8 | 89.4 | 67.1 |
| Donors | 23.6 | 8.5 | 21.1 |
| Community/Parents | 13.6 | 2.1 | 11.8 |
| How much did it cost | | | |
| Average cost for building toilet (kwacha) | 29.9 | 45.8 | 37.9 |
| Average cost for cleaning toilet (kwacha) | 7.7 | 561.3 | 284.5 |

2.4.3. Local School administrative and Management Support Services

The major areas of expenditure related to administrative and management functions of the school include; building and maintenance of teachers houses, toilets and security fences, (maintenance) of water taps or boreholes, post box rental fees, and printing services for examination and report card papers and salaries for watchmen. Some of the costs affect urban schools more than the rural ones and vice versa. Costs of hiring and maintaining watchmen, cleaning of toilets and printing examination and report cards are predominantly affecting urban schools while sinking of boreholes, maintenance of classrooms and teachers' houses are predominantly affecting rural schools. However, for those who are incurring the cost of printing and reproducing examination and report cards in rural areas do so at a higher cost since they also have to provide transport money for the teacher or head teacher who will travel to the urban area to access these services.

Table 2.7.: Summary of community contributions towards getting test papers typed and printed / class/ year

| Amount (in MK) | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| 0 – 100 | 75 | 28 |
| 100 – 300 | 60 | 22 |
| 300 – 500 | 76 | 28 |
| Above 500 | 56 | 20 |

Both rural and urban schools sometimes have to ask pupils or their parents to contribute towards purchase of additional teaching and learning materials. For example, in Emfeni – Mzimba, it takes about 6 months before the DEM's office responds to their requests for any materials that they need. SMC members in FGD as well as the head teacher and PEA agree that this state of affairs equally affects schools that are located far from the District Education Offices. Such materials include schemes of work, pupil attendance registers and writing pens. Looking at the significance of the materials that teachers are let to go without, it is understandable that they do at times request the SMC to make a decision of asking parents/guardians to make contributions so that one teacher may be sent to purchase the required items or items that may be improvised to serve the same purpose.

The task of ensuring that pupils have adequate note/exercise books, text books and other writing pens, largely remains with parents/guardians. In almost all schools that were consulted in the study, pupils report that they receive at least 1 note/exercise book per subject per term. This is not adequate and usually supplies from the DEM's office do not arrive in the schools on time. Distribution is usually erratic which makes it hard for the schools to manage the resources efficiently as they could otherwise be able to. Therefore, parents have to supplement notebooks whenever they are able to or risk affecting their child's learning process, negatively.

In urban schools, parents also have to shoulder costs for extra tuition whenever they find that their child is not doing well in class. There are no organized school sponsored remedial classes. This is an anomaly as the existence of some learners that might be slower than others is almost guaranteed in any group of learners. It is actually a responsibility of any teacher to ensure that they are assisting

their pupils to learn as much as they can. Not surprisingly, this trend is not so pronounced in the rural areas. So the parents in the rural areas are avoiding extra or remedial classes all together which works to the disadvantage of their own children. However, there is little else they can do if they cannot afford to sponsor remedial classes for their children.

Guidelines for the implementation of the free primary education in Malawi stipulate areas of participation in education service delivery for various stakeholders including for; parents or community members, school committees, mother groups and parents/teacher committees. Incidentally with the exception of school uniform, SMC's act within their mandate whenever they make a decision to ask for community contributions on most of the types of expenses that have been outlined in this report.

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that the real cost of FPE per pupil per year has been underrepresented in official government documentation. It is important that this be clarified with openness to encourage responsibility and accountability in execution of FPE. Government and consumers of primary education in Malawi need to mutually agree on whether calling primary education in Malawi free is an accurate representation of the situation or not. The actual cost of primary education is shared between government and parents (communities) even though government still covers a greater share of the costs per pupil. Table 2.8 below represents the sharing of primary education costs between government of Malawi and communities around the schools/parents and guardians.

Table 2.8.: Financial Allocation per District and average cost per learner

| District | Total Allocation | Cost/learner | Parents contribution/learner | Est. Total Cost of Primary Education |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Chitipa | 546,348,024.00 | 7,854.00 | 2,500.00 | 10,354.00 |
| Karonga | 57,808,340.00 | 6,077.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,577.00 |
| Rumphi | 534,385,970.00 | 8,153.00 | 2,500.00 | 10,653.00 |
| MzimbaNorth | 74,991,212.00 | 6,246.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,746.00 |
| Mzimba South | 827,547,878.00 | 6,096.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,596.00 |
| Mzuzu City | 360,249,317.00 | 6,310.00 | 3,000.00 | 9,310.00 |
| Nkhatabay | 507,525,467.00 | 6,562.00 | 2,500.00 | 9,062.00 |
| Likoma | 53,193,380.00 | 15,207.00 | 2,500.00 | 17,707.00 |
| Lilongwe Urban | 957,839,093.00 | 6,512.00 | 3,000.00 | 9,512.00 |
| Lilongwe rural East | 1,003,633,416.00 | 5,330.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,830.00 |
| Lilongwe rural West | 1,311,632,484.00 | 6,620.00 | 2,500.00 | 9,120.00 |
| Mchinji | 776,909,365.00 | 5,664.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,164.00 |
| Dedza | 831,040,158.00 | 4,731.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,231.00 |
| Ntcheu | 846,080,578.00 | 5,279.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,779.00 |
| Kasungu | 107,954,621.00 | 4,815.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,315.00 |
| Ntchisi | 456,617,041.00 | 6,961.00 | 2,500.00 | 9,461.00 |
| Nkhotakota | 562,407,735.00 | 5,616.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,116.00 |
| Salima | 548,727,734.00 | 5,762.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,262.00 |
| Dowa | 883,278,435.00 | 5,165.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,665.00 |
| Blantyre Urban | 843,168,864.00 | 5,428.00 | 3,000.00 | 8,428.00 |
| Blantyre Rural | 584,036,824.00 | 4,965.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,465.00 |
| Nsanje | 408,635,457.00 | 5,577.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,077.00 |
| Chikwawa | 578,678,974.00 | 4,426.00 | 2,500.00 | 6,926.00 |
| Mwanza | 227,982,154.00 | 6,808.00 | 2,500.00 | 9,308.00 |
| Neno | 222,851,670.00 | 5,662.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,162.00 |
| Zomba Urban | 236,249,117.00 | 9,741.00 | 3,000.00 | 12,741.00 |
| Zomba Rural | 938,617,267.00 | 5,240.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,740.00 |
| Machinga | 691,835,660.00 | 5,000.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,500.00 |
| Balaka | 598,140,801.00 | 5,568.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,068.00 |
| Mangochi | 901,950,966.00 | 4,450.00 | 2,500.00 | 6,950.00 |
| Mulanje | 704,116,618.00 | 4,329.00 | 2,500.00 | 6,829.00 |
| Thyolo | 955,978,700.00 | 5,197.00 | 2,500.00 | 7,697.00 |
| Phalombe | 675,256,173.00 | 6,338.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,838.00 |
| Chiradzuru | 610,520,810.00 | 6,414.00 | 2,500.00 | 8,914.00 |

Source: Extracted and adapted from table 31.5 (EMIS, 2011/12)

The table above shows that government is contributing a larger share of the costs per pupil per year in public primary schools in the country as compared to the parents' contribution towards the same. However, the table also shows that the contributions that communities around the schools/parents and guardians of public primary school pupils are making is also significant. In Mangochi where the costs of primary education is lowest (MK6,950), parents are contributing approximately 36.6% of

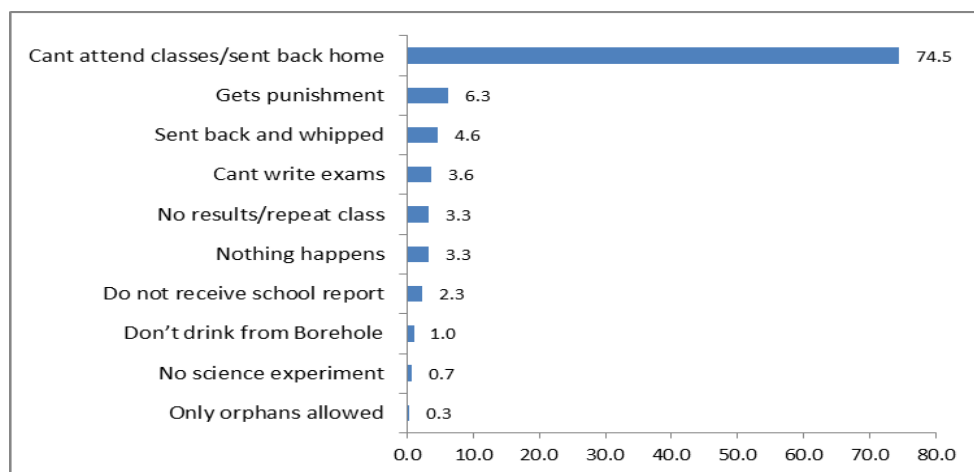
the costs per pupil per year towards their children's primary education while in Zomba urban where the cost is highest (MK9,741) parents share is at 30.8%.

2.5. AFFORDABILITY AND POTENTIAL OF HIDDEN COSTS TO DETER SOME PUPILS FROM ACCESSING EDUCATION

Major sanctions that pupils that are unable to wear school uniform to school, pay financial contribution towards any requirements for school administration and management are being sent back from school or being given some other punishment. Almost 75% of respondents reported being sent back home from school as the punishment of choice in many schools when one is unable to wear uniform to school or fail to make financial contributions. This exacerbates the current state of affairs in the quality of FPE. Excluding pupils from school directly affects their level of academic achievement hence directly leads to high repetition and drop-out rates that have been reported by other studies before (Masperi,P., 2008). There is very little else that pupils in public primary school are punished with besides excluding them from classes. All the punishment options that schools choose to punish pupils who fail to make financial contributions according to this study (Figure 2.1 and table 2.6) are detrimental to effective learning of the child. However, the policy stresses the need for schools to ensure that children are not missing school in the event that they have not been able to comply with uniform or community contribution demands of the schools.

The figure below summarises most common forms of sanctions that pupils face as a result of their inability to make any of the identified requirements for financial contributions towards the school administration and management;

Figure 2.1.: Consequences to students that do not pay school contributions



A majority of respondents said that they are excluded from sitting for tests (assessment) as their punishment for failure to meet their financial contribution obligations (table 2. 9) Even though only 48% of respondents said that their school does administer typed tests, 84% said that they suffer this punishment while 6% say they do not get a school report and another 6% get sent back from school even in the period before the tests as their punishment.

Table 2.9: Administering typed exams

| Administering exams | Rural | Urban | Total |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Percent reported schools administer typed exam papers | 43.5 | 75.0 | 48.3 |
| Percent reported schools have type writer | 4.0 | 10.4 | 5.0 |
| Cost | | | |
| Average cost of typed exam papers (kwacha) | 259.6 | 186.1 | 222.9 |
| How schools deal with non payers | | | |
| Don't write exams | 87.0 | 68.8 | 84.1 |
| Sent back home/not attend classes | 5.1 | 12.5 | 6.3 |
| No School report | 5.5 | 8.3 | 6.0 |
| No results/marking | 2.4 | 10.4 | 3.6 |

Limitation of access to school could be said to be the major cost that pupils are incurring when they fail to comply with their parents' obligations in contributing financially towards the cost of their children's education. As a nation, the major cost that Malawi is incurring in limiting access to education for some pupils is the declining quality of education which is negatively being felt throughout the education system and the national economy. Within the education system, the effects of lowering standards of education (partly due to a majority of pupils that come from poorer backgrounds) have been observed to be high dropout and repetition rates as well as poor performance at national public examinations. If pupils from poorer backgrounds continue to perform worse at national examinations, than their counterparts (that attend private and mission

primary schools) their access to public universities will continue to diminish. Such a situation threatens to systematically institute discrimination of some pupils from participation in public universities based on their economic status.

There are also no specific resources set aside for teaching children that have disabilities besides the specialized special needs schools that are not easily accessible due to the fact that nationally there are only a handful of such schools. As such pupils with disabilities are usually not focused on or not attended to at all in the regular schools. School management committees at individual school level have had to take the initiative to mobilize resources within their communities to help support such children. This issue was also identified in an earlier study where the author argues that despite the increased allocation of financial resources towards education some sub-groups (street children, out-of-school youth, those with special needs, orphans and illiterate adults) still have limited access to education (Riddell, 2003). In agreement with the findings of this study, Riddell also concluded that major disparities in accessing to free education still exist between different income groups.

2.6. CURRENT PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL FUNDING SYSTEM AND MECHANISMS

Currently, there is a World Bank funded project which has introduced a system of direct school funding. The school is usually asked to identify the types and quantities of school teaching and learning materials that are required. Schools are provided with MK350, 000 per school year in Balaka and Lilongwe Urban, the DEMs indicated that the amount is uniform to all schools that are receiving it. The fund is now called the school improvement grant (SIG). The grant is used to procure teaching and learning materials besides smaller infrastructure maintenance materials like iron sheets and cement (for repairing cracked classroom floors and teacher's houses). This fund also serves to help the ultra poor pupils who cannot afford a set of school uniform in certain schools. The school management committee may decide from time to time at its own discretion to help such pupils using the school improvement grant besides meeting their other school administration and management requirements.

In addition to this fund, contributions are requested from parents from time to time especially to cover such costs as; salaries for guards (watchmen especially in urban schools), borehole sinking (mostly rural schools) and infrastructure repair works. Wherever the school administers typed exams, they usually ask for contributions from parents. Head teachers, PEAs and SMCs believe that ORT that the DEM's office receives is only for the DEM therefore they feel that it does not trickle down to use at individual school level. However, they perceive that the supplies unit of the ministry is the one that procures and delivers to them items like register books, pens chalk and notebooks.

The funding that schools are getting currently covers approximately 20% of the needs of the schools per year. The major items that are covered by the school funds are note books for pupils, pens and stationery for teachers, textbooks and wherever possible school uniforms for orphans and vulnerable children. However with the limited funding that they get, only a few of the requirements are met. For example, at Mponda primary school in Balaka, their budget for 2011/2012 school year, was at MK500,000.00 and yet they got a direct school improvement grant of MK350,000. This is one of the most highly funded schools being a semi-urban environment and yet their funding requirements fall far short of the budget. In order for the school management to do their job, the head teacher agreed with the school management committee that parents need to make

contributions towards the reduction of the gap left by the inadequate funding so that they are able to increase the level of materials available in the school. This arrangement according to the SMC is going on very well. Families are asked to pay MK100/child/term.

Similarly in all other schools SMCs expect parents to cover the remaining gap in provision of financial resources. This is especially in procurement of teaching and learning materials. For example, junior section primary pupils need 20 exercise books per year while senior section pupils require a minimum of 38 notebooks per year. Most respondents at school level showed lack of knowledge of what is contained in the policy guidelines for the implementation of the FPE in Malawi. They are not sure what the policy guidelines say regarding parents or community contributions but the school decides based on the need that they identify in order to improve on learning outcomes when they institute certain contributions from community members. At the discretion of the SMC, the school management is able to exempt some ultra poor children from sanctions against non-payment of community contributions towards school management. It was clear from all FGDs and in-depth interviews that there is a kind of understanding between DEMs and head teachers as well as with SMCs that whenever it is imperative for the SMCs to call for a round of community contributions, special precaution has to be taken to ensure that no pupils are excluded from schools on the basis of their inability to make contributions.

Each school develops its own school management or school improvement plans every year. Such plans are generally funded through the DEM allocations. So far what has been happening is that the DEM's are able to supply teaching and learning materials, infrastructure development and maintenance resources to all schools within their jurisdiction depending on the level of resources that they get.

In very remote schools where the district office is located at the boma like at Emfeni – Mzimba allocation for the school comes from the DEM's office which is sometimes very far away. This makes it difficult for the school to undertake procurement of teaching and learning materials so sometimes the DEM's office prefers to provide to the school materials and not cash in order to help the school access to the materials at a lesser cost. However, this sometimes leads to even greater inconveniences to the school as more regularly than not, it takes so long for the DEM's office to deliver supplies to the schools and sometimes materials are actually delivered too late for use. When they get supplies, they are not told where materials were procured but they are told that the materials have been bought with their allocation. This limits transparency as the school management committee is not involved in decision making with regard to procurement of materials using their school's allocation. This issue also affects other remote areas that depend on the DEM's office to procure items on their behalf due to the complexity of the logistics involved to complete the procurement process from such a remote area. The allocation is usually not enough for both maintenance of school infrastructure and teacher's houses which are both currently in great need of rehabilitation and procuring school learning and teaching materials. The gap between what is provided and what is needed is by far wide. Even with what the communities provide, the need is not fully met.

School management committees have also taken up the responsibility of looking after orphans and vulnerable children in most of the schools. This means that besides the usual requirements of note books, text books and pens which are not fully provided by government even through the direct school improvement grants to individual schools, schools have an additional requirement for financing for the care of orphans and vulnerable children. Lack of financing for infrastructure

development and maintenance also depletes most of the direct grants to schools as this is the main funding that schools get for all their other needs that require financial resources.

At the school level, an elaborate system is in place to ensure transparency in the way that the money is used. Each school has established a school management committee which also has a financial management sub-committee. This ensures that every time money is drawn from the school account, there are three or more members to counter check each other. As a result, respondents believe that finances are being prudently used at the school level. The involvement of chairperson, Treasurer Secretary and a local chief in the disbursement of school grants strengthens the transparency element in managing these resources. In some areas a chief may not be involved but from schools in Balaka, this element came out clear that chiefs are involved besides the SMC officials to guarantee utmost transparency and responsibility in the management of school funds.

The lack of knowledge of what is contained in the policy guidelines among SMCs and parents is a worrisome state of affairs. This is because the guidelines require that SMC's and head teachers seek approval from the DEM to impose any levies or contributions on communities. Without knowledge of the policy provisions with regard to soliciting community contributions towards the running of schools, schools run the risk of crossing the thin line that the policy draws between mandating schools to mobilize resources to ensure smooth running of the FPE and schools not being allowed to impose any fees relating to pupils' attendance of school. Specifically the policy guidelines require schools to seek approval from the DEM to impose any levies or contributions from the communities around the school. However in practice this rarely happens.

A number of schools have approached their DEM's to either inform them that a donor has funded a project proposal that they had submitted or to invite them to attend a handover ceremony of some infrastructure that a donor has helped to build. Rarely are DEMs given project proposals in advance to check on quality or to coordinate infrastructure development in their districts. Despite the benefits that individual schools get from this approach to infrastructure development, individual partnerships with non-governmental development agencies, the districts run the risk of creating inequality or rather disregard the principle of fairness in the way their jurisdiction is being developed. There is need for coordination of such partnerships by the district education authority so as to ensure equity and fair distribution of resources within the district. Such beneficial development partnerships are absolutely important as even MGD no. 8 cites the forging of development partnerships at different levels in order to achieve the MGDs. District councils and education authorities also have a responsibility to ensure thorough coverage of developments within any given district.

3.0. CONCLUSIONS: THE EXTENT TO WHICH SCHOOLS DENY PUPILS ACCESS TO EDUCATION BECAUSE OF FAILURE TO PAY ‘USER FEES’ THAT SCHOOLS HAVE SET UP

Policy and Investment Framework (2008 – 2017) (PIF) which was first published in 2000 anticipates funding for the ambitious plans that were put in place in the PIF as the need for a major “shift of resources from higher to lower levels, increased aggregate expenditure and substantial improvements in the cost effectiveness of the relatively substantial resources allocated to education”. The overall assumption of the development of the PIF banked on resources to be garnered through more cost effective management of resources within the education sector but also by strengthening partnerships between the government, civil society and external partners. More specifically, the PIF envisaged the education sector in Malawi raising resources from; i) an increased level of public finance for education, ii) greater cost-sharing and cost recovery from those who benefit from education, iii) higher levels of private sector financing, including the contribution from communities served by schools; and iv) increased external financing in response to clearly identified needs, policies, strategies and the effective management of the reform.

The PIF being the major anchoring education development plan for Malawi in the medium to long term from 2000 had also predicated its hope for increased statutory financial allocation on anticipated national economic growth levels. The major assumption on which the optimism for educational development in Malawi was based was hope for improved performance of the public sector in raising revenues which would in turn allow the state to maintain a sustained commitment to allocate in excess of 27% of the statutory recurrent budget to education. However, there is no evidence to suggest that additional resources have been identified besides the conservative increments that the education sector has been experiencing in financial allocation since 2000. At the household level, parents of the pupils that patronize the FPE services are continually digging deeper and deeper into their pockets to maintain their children’s attendance to primary schools.

The other important issue that continues to limit the effectiveness of the FPE is that donor or development partner support was also counted in as a major source of financing for the development to be undertaken in education in Malawi. However, the PIF also highlighted the importance of improved co-ordination and the adoption of common financial reporting systems between Malawi government and the various development partners that it would work with. Previous assessment reports for the FPE in Malawi have identified capacity challenges both in terms of staff competencies and systemic in the MoEST planning and budget unit. These capacity issues have limited the ability of the MoEST to change and move towards institutionalisation of an outcome based budget system in which emphasis is on linkage between budget cost and related activities. This is also very common at the various budget execution stages where the controlling officers fail to spend the money on planned activities (Ng’ambi, 2012). Just like the previous studies pointed out, sometimes this trend is influenced by politicians in the ministry that are often outside the ambit of education activities and controlling officers feel intimidated to refuse any orders that may be non-supportive of the delivery of results of the education sector plans.

Besides that, the budget does not reflect per capita financial requirements to ably meet the needs for instance of a child to go through an 8 year period in primary school. The MoEST should at least devise a system that would assist proper budget allocation to meet the needs of FPE

in the country. To do that the MoEST would need to identify needs, and activities to address them during implementation. The MoEST is currently not able to analyse expenditures for their impact on these groups in order to find out if they are meeting their needs or if they are obtaining value for money. Without such analysis, the MoEST would not be able to address inequalities to access to education because the present budgeting system uses a one size fits all policy. Yet it should be possible with the available data in the NSO, MoEST and other sources, to produce a disaggregated budget showing how the ministry plans to meet needs for women and men, boys and girls, as well as to estimate the incremental economic benefits of implementing programs that plan ex-ante to respond to gender issues with reference to the low levels of cost effectiveness in the use of resources, the following improvements to the efficiency of the financing system are envisaged: First, the PIF allows clear links to be made between policy, the MTEF and the annual budget. This should facilitate better expenditure prioritisation and improve co-ordination of the bottom up activity-based budget by the MoES&C budget committee. Second, the recurrent cost implications of development expenditures have been analysed in the PIF leading to better co-ordination between the 2 budgets and their eventual integration. Third, external funds and activities should increasingly be assessed in relation to the implementation of the PIF and the management of the MTEF.

In the education sector, the Policy and Investment Framework 2008–2017 (PIF) and the Education Sector Plan 2008–2017 (ESP) present a national strategic plan for the MoEST. These documents translate the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), MDGs and other international instruments that promote the right to education. However, an adequate capacity for planning and managing the education system is lacking, constraining the delivery of educational services (Ng'ambi, 2012:44)

These include the establishment of a secretariat to manage the ESP, improvement of financial systems and management arrangements for the implementation of the plan, and agreement on a memorandum of understanding that defines how the ministry and the development partners should cooperate in the financing and implementation of the plan. There is also need to update the plan's costings, which were made in May 2005, and present them in MTEF. In 2005, the plan's cost projections were US\$ 925 million for primary education and US\$ 297 million for secondary education for the 10-year period of the plan.

At the district or education division level, the District Education Plans (DEPs) present a coordinated way of implementing district education plans within a specified period of time and budget. For instance, Lilongwe Rural West has a two-year strategic plan whose overall objective is to improve quality of education in the area. The DEPs are based on the National Education Sector Plan 2008–2017 and other related policy guidelines in the education sector. The DEPs have summary statistics on achievements in the priority areas of access, equity, quality, relevance, management, planning and finance. Their problems and priorities are stated by zone; and by level of education and they also have additional issues, for example, management, planning and finance.

In essence the free primary education concept has basically been so termed in Malawi to match the regional trend. Primary education is not free as there are a lot of costs associated with one's children attending school that meeting them significantly may determine whether your children attend classes

or not. It also has to be borne in mind that by removing tuition fees that were already very minimal at the time – MK250 for primary schools, government was making a huge gesture to the population with regard to seriously intending to enable more children to access education at least through primary level. The fact that enrollment soared in direct response to the pronouncement of the abolition of tuition fees speaks volumes regarding the population's response to the FPE policy in Malawi. Despite operational, management of schools still needs a lot of financial resources that the Malawi government may not fully meet all. Education development and management policies clearly open up the space for financing the FPE to all kind of stakeholders. Such stakeholders include communities around the schools and parents of the school going age children. Effectively the strategy has really been to allow communities around the schools and any other well wishers to work together led by the school management committees to mobilize resources and support implementation of the FPE. So as much as school may be tuition free, the cost of children attending FPE has been diffused throughout the national population.

The major findings in this study are consistent with findings of previous studies that have been carried out in Malawi but also other countries like Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. In a study that was commissioned by Hiroshima University, such issues as overcrowding in classrooms, increased number of schools to cater for the increased enrollment numbers and inadequate FPE grants are also identified as major problems that FPE is facing in the above mentioned countries. These issues are deemed to be as a result of the way through which FPE was conceptualized in these countries. Some factors that lead to these major issues as ineffective delivery of FPE include; lack of local level education funding mechanisms e.g. at district council level which was also admitted in Lilongwe as applicable in Malawi. Some respondents believe that district or city councils should be responsible towards resource allocation to schools within their jurisdiction since the communities that are served by the schools pay various levies and fees towards service provision from the local councils. For example, such costs as hiring and maintenance of security guards, toilet cleaning and basic infrastructural maintenance could easily be covered by these authorities.

4.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Education development financing mechanisms need to be revisited. Education is one of the major capital development strategies that anchor economic development of the country. Therefore, it should be accorded due attention especially to ensure equity in access but also to maintain quality of delivery and outcomes at the least and upgrade at the most. Specific education development resources need to be identified by developing an additional funding strategy that would be achievable and sustainable. One way to do so would be to encompass the middle to upper income earners in primary education service consumption with the aim of using the increased social capital for improving quality of education outcomes.

Since there has been a steady reduction in statutory education financing since 2004, there is need for the NESP to be revised to take into account realistic resource expectations as opposed to the current basis on economic development and debt relief which have already been eroded by the global economic down turn. FPE is expensive as also acknowledged by previous studies and the education sector policies hence the need to clearly identify alternative public financing means to cover up the huge gaps in resource allocation that currently exist at individual school level. Monitoring and evaluation function within the Ministry and at the district level needs to be strengthened. As could be seen through the

findings of the study, all schools including those that have started receiving the school improvement grant agree that there is a huge gap between what resource allocation level has been available and the resource requirements of individual schools. On average, respondents put the gap in funding requirements at between 40 – 80%. Clearly this means that funding availability towards education needs to be urgently looked at. Additionally, principles of equity have to be exercised in the distribution of the SIGs. Some schools especially in the urban areas reported never having received any direct grants to schools and yet the sector has already moved towards a SIG. This means that those schools that are around the urban areas have had more problems in implementing FPE than their rural counterparts.

2. Low standards of education are currently experienced throughout the education system in Malawi emanating from the poor quality basic education. This is a huge risk towards national political and socio-economic development goals of Malawi. If Malawi is to attain its Vision 2020 and the target impacts of the MGDSII the development of adequate and quality human resources is key. If the low quality basic education that is apparent even from the results of this study continue, it is more likely than not that the conceptualization and management capacities for national development and service delivery will be poorly done. Therefore, the inclusion of the middle to upper income basic education consumers will influence improved community potential to garner resources locally in addition to the allocation that individual schools get from government. The ability especially of the local government and individual schools to fundraise successfully will enable schools to be better equipped with well maintained infrastructure, supplied adequately with teaching and learning resources and conduct staff motivation programmes for more effective positive education service outcomes.
3. Continued education management capacity development needs to be intensified in addition to institutionalization of an outcome based budget system in which emphasis is on linkage between budget cost and related activities - . Just like the previous studies pointed out, institutionalization of outcome based budgeting would help to increase efficiency in the delivery of education outcomes throughout the system but also empower controlling officers to ward off politician influences in undertaking the ministry business. The MoEST should at least devise a system that would assist proper budget allocation to meet the needs of FPE in the country. The MoEST should be able to analyse expenditures for their impact to find out if they are meeting their needs or if they are obtaining value for money. Without such analysis, the MoEST would not be able to address inequalities to access to education because the present budgeting system uses a one size fits all policy. Yet it should be possible with the available data in the NSO, MoEST and other sources, to produce a disaggregated budget showing how the ministry plans to meet needs for women and men, boys and girls.
4. The MoEST should intensify civic education and mobilization activities around the development and monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of SIPs. Parents and school management committees need to be motivated to take up their roles as well as provide them with information on the proper channels for reporting offences or contravention of policy provisions by the school authorities. This recommendation was also made by Ng'ambi (2010) with regard to the need to provide adequate guidance towards how school authorities may maintain their balance between garnering resources within the communities around the school and maintaining a high standard of transparency and

accountability in financial management. Review of the FPE policy may also help to more realistically put in place measures that would enhance efficiency, effectiveness, improved education outcomes and adequacy of education management capacities in a more systematic policy statement.

5. There is need to strengthen the link between education sector development plans and the decentralization system especially at the level of joint financing of education plans at the district level by all concerned ministries like Gender, Women and Children Affairs, water development, Youth, sports and culture and other requisite development agencies in order to institute a result-oriented approach to budgeting and education activities management. The district administration officials should in effect be the overall responsible office for all education development plans and resource allocation at the district level while MoEST maintains its standards and quality setting and maintenance role. That way, specific funding issues that arise in the districts would be directly taken into account in the DDPs, DIPs and DESPs. If DESPs are seriously taken up as district responsibilities with the Ministry merely monitoring and enforcing standards, the districts will be able to make more funding available to education hence FPE. This is especially more true when infrastructure development and maintenance is concerned. It is more practical and prudent that the district administration be responsible for this in finance allocation, monitoring and development. It does not make sense to have education infrastructure development managed by the Ministry whose expertise and focus is on standards and policy management.
6. Government needs to institutionalize the SIG within its system and this should be reflected in the M&E system (EMIS) for the ministry. Institutionalisation of the SIG will ensure that performance of schools is linked to resource allocation and management services. Such kind of monitoring and evaluation in education service provision will help to objectively lead the ministry to manage for results. Currently, the way education service provision is being managed is hard to see what is working and what is not in relation to funding availability in relation to results – education outcomes and quality. If this system is designed and well managed, the ministry should be able to better manage meaningful stakeholder involvement in managing education service provision.

Ultimately government has to identify resources to ensure that the children that may not afford to make financial contributions are not excluded from schools. This may mean speeding up popularization of the guidelines for the implementation of FPE in Malawi. Popularisation should also be coupled with setting of sanctions for schools that are excluding any children as a result of failure to make financial contributions. As the provisions currently stand, the practice of sending children away may continue since there are no sanctions against anyone who contravenes the policy provision. This recommendation only makes sense once government identified specific resources to help schools manage. This is because, failure of the schools to raise adequate or reasonably adequate resources for managing teaching and learning resources will mean compromising quality as already demonstrated in this report and other previous studies. For example, if schools are not sending children away from school and yet the school does not have adequate materials like chalk, schemes of work, report cards, etc it will mean managing for less and that should not be the goal of this recommendation. The key to implementing this recommendation is efficiency. FPE can only be realistic if the ministry is managing efficiently – achieving more for less as a principle.

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