

**An In-depth Study on Innovative Models that
have Created Safe Learning Environment,
Strengthened Reading Skills and Reduced Drop-
out**

(Findings from Dedza, Lilongwe Rural East and Ntchisi)

Final Report

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Abbreviations

AOC	Agents of Change
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
CFS	Child Friendly Schools
CPEA	Coordinating Primary Education Advisor
CRECCOM	Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation
CSEC	Civil Society Education Coalition
CYESE	Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Activity
FAWEMA	Forum for African Women Educationists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLP	Family Literacy Project
KII	Key Informant Interview
KGiS	Keeping Girls In School
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NOYD	Ntchisi Organisation for Youth Development
NPC	National Primary Curriculum
NSO	National Statistical Office
PCAR	Primary Curriculum Assessment Review
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SEGREM	Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi
SMC	School Management Committee
SPR	School Performance Review
SWOT	Strength Weakness Opportunity and Threat
TfaC	Theatre for a Change
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children Emergency Fund

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Executive director

Executive Summary

This report presents findings of an in-depth study on innovative models aimed at creating safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reducing girl child dropout which are being implemented in Malawi. The study focused on three districts of Ntchisi, Lilongwe Rural East and Dedza. Field work for the study was undertaken between the 11th and 19th of January 2016. The study was commissioned by Civil Society Coalition for Education (CSEC) – a network of 84 organizations whose work in the education sector focuses on six strategic areas; Budget Tracking and analysis; research, capacity building of member organizations, policy analysis and advocacy, community mobilization and sensitization and networking, partnership and collaboration. The organization is represented in all the 28 districts of Malawi through the District Education Network.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research was to conduct an in-depth study to identify innovative models that have created a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop-out. This study is a follow-up to a mapping of interventions on girls' education, conducted with funding from the IM Swedish Development Partner in the three districts of Dedza, Lilongwe Rural East and Ntchisi in 2015, which was documented by CSEC. The study specifically seeks to answer the following key questions:

- What are the specific education interventions mapped out in the three districts and how are they implemented
- Among the interventions being implemented which ones would be considered innovative models that have created a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced dropout and who is piloting them and why are they considered innovative?
- What are the key principles underpinning the innovative model and what strategies are used in their implementation?
- How effective, relevant, efficient and sustainable is the innovative model?
- To what extent does the identified innovative model provide an opportunity for improving the learning environment, reduce drop-out rate and strengthen reading skills
- What are the relationships among the different types of innovation models being implemented in achieving the retention of girls in schools?
- Which innovative model can be easily adopted, replicated and adapted on a large scale and why?
- How far can learners, teachers, parents, guardians and the community embrace the innovative model and does it offer lasting solutions?

Significance of the study

This study is important because it could help serve as a basis for identifying successful models which could be replicated to promote girl child education in Malawi. The challenge of child dropout from school continues to persist in Malawi and the main culprit of this practice is the girl child. The persistence of child dropout is attributed to among others; detrimental cultural practices, gender based violence, poverty, lack of age appropriate reproductive health education and generally low quality education. Available evidence indicates that 58% of girls drop out of school and those remaining in school, 18% became pregnant while 8% married (see NSO 2012). In addition, learner outcomes are very poor regardless of the interventions by government, nongovernmental organizations and development partners to improve the situation. The mapping by CSEC therefore identified several innovative interventions that are being implemented to promote a safe learning environment, strengthen early grade reading and reduce dropout. The findings from this study

therefore will help establish workable innovative models that can be adopted as best practice in Malawi's education system.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach drawing from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Such an approach while helpful for triangulating findings, was also considered as key to identifying and gaining an in-depth understanding of the innovative models being implemented in the education sector in the three districts. The study utilised survey methods, Focused group discussions (FGDs), an analysis of Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) relating to the innovation and key informant interviews (KIIs) with key stakeholders in the education sector including: District Education Managers, Coordinating Primary Education Advisors (CPEA), Primary Education Advisors (PEA) and representatives of Non-government Organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Link Community Development, Ladder for Rural Development among others) in the three study districts among others. Prior to fieldwork, a literature review was carried out. This helped to inform the research in general.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary research included field visits to each study district. The study adopted purposive sampling both in choosing the schools to sample as well as identifying the individuals to interview. In consultation with CSEC, the consultant was advised to at least select two schools per district (one being a best example and the other one showing low/poor application of the mapped interventions aiming at providing a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reducing drop-out. As such in Ntchisi two Schools were visited namely Makanda Full Primary School and Nkhunzi Full Primary School; in Lilongwe Rural East the research team visited Kapedzera Full Primary School and Mwatibu Full Primary School; Finally in Dedza the schools visited were Moonekera Full Primary School and Aliberito Full Primary School. Data from the survey were analyzed to generate descriptive statistics using Excel while qualitative data was analysed by using thematic analysis.

Key Findings

In line with the aims of the study, the key findings were as follows:

- On the type of interventions being implemented in the three study districts; Ntchisi, Lilongwe Rural East and Dedza, findings indicate that the following are the interventions being carried out: WASH projects (including building toilets and hand wash basins and menstrual hygiene management through distribution of sanitary pads for girls, are being implemented by various organisations), there are also Mother Groups (these have been instrumental in promoting the re-admission policy and also serve as the link between girls and the school as well as the community), Bylaws targeting compulsory education for adolescent girls, Bursaries for girls in Secondary Schools, Girls clubs for girl child empowerment, CFS School Performance Reviews, construction of female teacher's houses. Early Grade Reading Activity, and Family Literacy Projects (FLP) and Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programs (aimed at bringing back dropout pupils to school via non-formal education).
- In line with the question addressing identifying innovative models, thus interventions that are new in their nature or their implementation depicts a process of introducing change to established approaches, the study focused on two innovative models being implemented in the study districts in line with the three focus areas; innovative models creating a safe

environment are Child Friendly School projects (such as building classes and sanitary facilities among them) and the EGRA.

- Results also showed that although each model employs different strategies, both the innovative models aimed at getting the community involved in ensuring that the aims of the intervention are met. For instance, EGRA focuses on reading fluency. In this approach, teachers are advised to focus on the following key areas in teaching pupils to read namely: naming letter sounds, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing skills and support resources. The main weakness in the approach is that there is poor link between the facilitators with the teachers and in some cases even with the SMCs. Furthermore, under EGRA community reading centres have been established in the communities surrounding the schools. Both these community based reading centres and reading clubs provide another options to create a culture of reading. However as much as they are created for after school, they ought to be taken seriously. While there are also community reading centres in the villages to instil a reading culture, the impact they are making is still unknown as their performance and seriousness differs from place to place.
- The study also found that the Child Friendly School model is generally understood to be a model that uses a combination of strategies aimed at providing a conducive and protected environment for learners. Some of the strategies include; the provision of essentials such as soap and sanitary pads to girls in school. Infrastructure development projects including; building sanitary facilities, classrooms and teachers' houses; provision of chalkboards and desks among others. It was, however, noted that the impact of some of the strategies would be short lived, as in most cases they were short term relief strategies for instance distribution of sanitary pads without training the mother groups to be producing them locally.
- On improving girl child retention in school the main strategy used in both the models is involving the School Management Committees, Parent Teacher Associations and the community at large through sensitization/mobilization on the need to send their children back to school as well as to assist them to continue reading in the village reading centres after school.
- In terms of effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability of the CFS and EGRA models, findings indicated that, in general both innovative models were relevant since they are in line with the policies being advanced and implemented by the government in Malawi. Furthermore, while there were limitations in implementation of the innovative models, generally the approaches had been effective but it varied from school to school basing on the contextual factors. However, for some the main challenge lies in their efficiency as they require a lot of money to run them.
- On sustainability, findings showed that in some cases the chances of sustainability were high especially where skills were acquired and internalised and where the communities were involved and took ownership of projects.
- Findings also indicated that there were various challenges facing the innovative models implementation including insufficient funding leading to difficulties with sustainability of the projects or initiatives, community reluctance to participate in the projects and in some cases a general lack of understanding and ownership of the innovative model can also affect the sustainability of the models.

Conclusions/Recommendations

In summary, child dropout from school remains a challenge. However, attempts are being made to ensure that children remain in school through strategies for a safe learning environment, strengthen reading skill and reduce drop out. To complement government efforts various Non-Governmental Organisations are implementing various projects towards the promotion of a safe learning environment, strengthening early grade reading and reducing dropout. Some of the interventions being implemented hold great potential to make a significant impact on girl child education if properly implemented. While there are several interventions being implemented including; EGRA, Child Friendly Schools model, Bylaws and Complementary Basic Education, Menstrual Hygiene management interventions and mother groups.

Of all the initiatives identified, this in-depth study focused on two innovative models having great potential for adoption and adaptation on a full scale namely; Child Friendly Schools and Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA). Of these two models, this in-depth study recommends the Child Friendly Schools approach for up-scaling. The view is that if properly adapted the approach could become best practice and easily incorporate EGRA. However, it would require ensuring that both schools management and communities work together to ensure that it is well implemented. While the other innovative model; EGRA and its other adaptations are being effective, the limitation is that it is limited to early grade reading alone and only primarily focus on strengthening early grade reading. CFS seems to be more complex but it targets all areas including literacy, health, rights and other. This study therefore highly recommends it for adoption and adaptation. However to ensure the success of the model, it is imperative that before implementing it both the schools and communities surrounding the schools should be adequately sensitized and mobilized so that they have full knowledge of and readiness to do what this model entails, some modification can be done on literacy to include EGRA and how they can get involved to ensure its success.

I. Introduction

This report presents the results and analysis of the findings of a study on innovative models implemented to improve education in the three districts of Ntchisi, Lilongwe Rural East and Dedza. The study was commissioned by the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC). CSEC's work in the education sector focuses on six (6) strategic areas namely; Budget Tracking and analysis; research; capacity building of member organizations; policy analysis and advocacy; community mobilization and sensitization; and networking, partnership and collaboration. These strategic sectors promote the notion of a network and in line with the government's decentralisation policy, the organisation has extended its reach to the grassroots level where it has a presence in all the 28 districts of the country through structures called the District Education Network (DEN).

In Malawi, the challenge of child drop-out from school remains poignant as only 32% (35% boys and 29% girls) survived to reach standard 8 in 2014/15 (MoEST, 2015). Children start school in greater numbers but the drop-out rates and repetition rates are significant the higher the standards leading to low levels of school completion especially among girls than boys. Available evidence (see MoEST 2015) indicates that from a total school drop-out of 177,653 pupils 52.3% were girls in 2014/15. The majority of such girl drop out was due to other unstated reasons (41.2%) and followed by family responsibilities (29.4%); whereas pregnancy and marriage as one grouping led to 16% drop-out amongst girls (MoEST, 2015). In addition, learner outcomes are very poor regardless of the interventions by government, nongovernmental organizations and development partners to improve the situation (Watkins, 2013, SACMEQ, 2011 and MTPDS, 2011 and 2012). The failure to retain girls in schools is largely attributed to cultural factors, violence in all forms, lack of age-appropriate reproductive health information and knowledge, low quality education standards including unavailability of teaching and learning resources, girl friendly infrastructure and qualified teachers (EduSummit Oslo, 2015). Moreover, in times of economic crisis, and thus particularly during the first quarter of the year there are also a lot of absenteeism cases as the children are mobilized for agricultural cultivation.

Since 1994, total primary school enrolment has seen a steady rises from 1.89 million in 1993/4 to 4.8 million in 2015 (MoEST, 2000 and 2015). This could be attributed to the introduction of free primary education and related interventions intended to improve access, equity, quality, relevance governance and management. Although gender parity is now reported at 1:1 in the lower standards (grades) of primary schools, disparities emerge as early as standard 4 with girls dropping out and repeating to a much greater extent than boys. As stated earlier in this report, ultimately, at least 29% of girls survive to standard 8 (MoEST, 2015). In accordance with its mandate – to complement government efforts in improving education in Malawi – CSEC has through its membership been proactive in initiating and implementing various interventions. Particularly the focus has been on implementing interventions that promote a safe and conducive school environment for learning, to strengthen early grade reading skills and to encourage learners, with special focus on girls, to remain in school until they complete a particular education cycle.

As a follow-up on the work carried out by its membership, in 2015, CSEC secretariat with funding from Swedish Development Partner embarked on a project to reduce child drop out, create safe learning environment and strengthen reading skills in primary schools by profiling and popularizing innovative models and enhancing accountability. Such a project entailed mapping of interventions on the education of girls in three districts of Ntchisi, Dedza and Lilongwe and it culminated into the

production of a related documentary. Realising that there are some commonalities in the challenges facing girl child education nationwide, it is imperative to continue seeking ways to improve the retention of girls in schools. A good place to start, therefore, would be by exploring currently implemented interventions that show positive results. This can also serve as a basis for replicating successful innovative models aimed at promotion of girl education in other districts and indeed nationwide.

1.1 General Profiles of Dedza, Lilongwe Rural East and Ntchisi

Administratively Dedza, Lilongwe Rural East and Ntchisi are in the central region of Malawi. However, two of the three districts (Dedza and Lilongwe Rural East) fall under Central West Education Division (CWED); whereas Ntchisi is under Central East Education Division (CEED). Furthermore, Dedza and Lilongwe Rural East border each other. Geographically, Lilongwe Rural East is largely on the plains with sparse hills throughout, whereas Ntchisi and Dedza are widely spread with hills. The western part of Ntchisi is largely part of the Kasungu plains; whereas Dedza is dominated by the third largest mountain in Malawi and a rift valley as part of Lake Malawi on the east.

The three districts under analysis are largely matrilineal with a strong Chewa culture influence although Ngonis are found in both Dedza and Ntchisi. Agriculture is the main stay of the three districts whereas all three districts cultivate maize, Dedza is re-known for growing “Irish” potato and rice as cash crops, Ntchisi and Lilongwe Rural East cultivates Tobacco as a cash crop. Most of the inhabitants of the three districts are subsistence farmers who live on less than a dollar per day. Dedza is also a reservoir of labours for big tobacco estates nationwide, mainly in the central and northern regions of Malawi. As a border district, Dedza faces illegal and child trafficking to Mozambique thereby negatively affecting education.

Table I below presents selected social factors of the three districts under scrutiny in this study.

Table I: General selected social factors in 2011 (percentage)

	Literacy above 15 year olds	Major and common illness (fever & Malaria)	Household operating Non-farm enterprise
Ntchisi	68.4	30.8	11.3
Lilongwe	49.3	53.8	14.2
Dedza	49.4	50.3	18.2

Source: Integrated Household Survey, 2011 National Statistical Office (NSO)

1.2 Education Profile of the districts under review

The total number of primary schools in the three districts was 591 (Dedza - 239, Lilongwe Rural East – 207 and Nchitsi - 145) out of a national total of 5641 in 2014/15 (Ministry of Education, 2015). The same three districts had 538471 learners (273697 girls) and 7855 teachers in 2014/15 school year. The teacher to pupil ratio in the three districts was 1:63 in Ntchisi, 1:67 in Dedza and 1:73 in

Lilongwe in 2014/15. These three ratios were either below, equal or above the national overall teacher to pupil ratio of 1:67. The actual teacher distribution in the three districts was: Ntchisi 1306, Lilongwe Rural East 2977 and Dedza 2784.

Ntchisi had a relatively equal distribution between boys and girls throughout standards 1 to 8 in 2013/2014. Likewise the number of pupils and reasons (family reasons – 450 boys and 451 girls and other reasons – 404 boys and 445 girls) for dropping out of school relatively did not differ much between both boys and girls. In the same year of 2013/14, the highest number of drop-out took place in standard 3 – 8% of boys and the same 8% of girls dropped out. While repetition decreased between standard 1 (30%) and 7 (16%) for both girls and boys; the situation was at its peak in standard eight where 36% of girls and 37 % of boys were repeaters in 2013/14. Promotion was highest in standard 6 (88% for both boys and girls) and lowest for both boys – 64% and girls – 68% at standard 8 in 2013/14. The schools had 1485 boys and 1308 girls with special needs. Most of those with special needs had learning difficulties (785 boys and 622 girls). There were 948 permanent classrooms and 372 permanent teachers' house in Ntchisi in 2013/14.

The grade enrolment between boys and girls for Lilongwe Rural East was not widely different between boys and girls in 2013/14. While family responsibilities and other reasons were prominent reasons for drop-out, more girls (1773) than boys (1477) dropped out due to family reasons than was the case with dropping out because of other reasons (1395 girls and 1408 boys). The lowest repetition was amongst girls (9%) in standard 8. Likewise, boys' repetition rate was lowest in standard 8 at 12%. The highest repetition rate was in standard one (21% boys and 20% girls). In 2013/14, girls had 100% promotion in standards 2, 6 and 7. The lowest promotion was for boys in standard 3 at 88%. The total number of learners with special needs was 2774 boys and 2608 girls with poor hearing (698 boys and 640 girls), learning difficulties (1125 boys and 1051 girls) and low/poor vision (699 boys and 687 girls) as major challenges. The district had 1336 permanent classrooms and 577 permanent teachers' houses in 2013/14.

The enrolment of boys and girls in Dedza was proportional but decreasing with every higher standard so much that by the eighth standard boys were 14.5% of standard one boys (27989) and girls were 11.6% of standard one girls (28963). Just like Ntchisi and Lilongwe Rural East the main drivers of drop-out were family responsibilities (2584 boys and 2452 girls) and other reasons (2658 boys and 2535 girls) in 2013/14. The lowest repetition was in standard 8 (3% for both girls and boys). The highest repetition was amongst boys in standard 5 (18%) in 2013/14. The highest special need was learning difficulties (1592 for boys and 1443 for girls). In terms of infrastructure, there were 1444 permanent classrooms and 673 teachers' houses in 2013/14 school year.

2. Purpose of the Study

In light of the preceding discussion, the purpose of this research was to conduct an in-depth study to identify innovative models that have created a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop-out. As already noted this study follows a mapping of interventions on girls' education, conducted in the three districts of Dedza, Lilongwe Rural East and Ntchisi in 2015, which was also documented by CSEC. Therefore, this study focuses on the following specific objectives:

- To understand and assess mapped out education interventions in the three districts.
- To identify innovative models by implements in the education sector that have created safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop out.
- To assess and analyse strategies used in the models

- To evaluate the models to determine their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance.
- To identify challenges and propose suitable solutions for more effective implementation of the models.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations as to which model can be adopted and adapted.

On the basis of the specific objectives outlined above, the analysis focused on the following key questions:

- What are the specific interventions that are being implemented in primary schools in the three study districts?
- Who is implementing the interventions and how are they organized?
- What specific innovative models are being implemented in primary schools in the three study districts?
- What are the key principles underpinning the identified innovative model?
- Why is the particular model regarded as being innovative?
- How effective, relevant, efficient and sustainable is the innovative model?
- How sustainable is the innovative model in terms of replicability, scalability and ownership and are there any hidden social costs or is there any cost which may prevent the education sector to embrace it?
- To what extent does the identified innovative model provide an opportunity for improving the learning environment, reduce drop-out rate and strengthen reading skills?
- What are the relationships among the different types of innovation models being implemented in achieving the retention of girls in schools?
- How far can learners, teachers, parents, guardians and the community embrace the innovative model and does it offer lasting solutions?

The identified innovative models will be presented as stand-alone and/or packages (interlinked/interrelated). Thus, the findings will help us to establish workable innovative models that can be applied in Malawi's education system.

3. Study Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach drawing from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Such an approach, while helpful for triangulating findings, was also considered as key to capturing both qualitative and quantitative aspects crucial for an in-depth understanding of the complex issues as well as facilitating the interpretation of the situation in a holistic manner. This evaluation used a survey tool designed for head teachers, teachers and learners. Focused group discussions (FGDs) were also employed targeting teachers and learners, embedded in the FGDs was an analysis of Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) relating to the innovation. Such an analysis was helpful in identifying the challenges in the implementation and the opportunities for scaling up as well as sustainability of the innovation among others. Finally, the study also utilised key informants interview (KII) with people in the know about the various interventions in the education sector and particularly the innovative models being implemented in the three study districts. These people included District Education Managers, Coordinating Primary Education Advisors (CPEAs), Primary Education Advisors (PEA) and representatives of Non-government Organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Link Community Development, Ladder for Rural Development among others) in the three study districts among others. Such an approach helped to enrich the findings of

the study. Prior to fieldwork, a literature review was carried out. This helped to inform the research in general.

3.1 Approach to the Study

In embarking on the study, the following steps were undertaken:

3.1.1 Consultation with CSEC

At the onset, the consultant engaged the client (CSEC) in consultations to learn more about the project and the mapping of the interventions which was documented and how it was carried out. This also provided an opportunity for clarification of aspects of the assignment where necessary including the proposed methodology to be followed by the consultant.

3.1.2 Documentary Review

Initially, the consultant also conducted a review of available documents (recommended by CSEC) including the documentary on mapped innovations in the three study districts of Ntchisi, Dedza and Lilongwe rural east. General documents relating to different types of innovations identified in the documentary were also reviewed to get a fuller understanding of what the innovative models are and what they aim to accomplish. Project documents from NGOs implementing some innovations were also reviewed where possible. This also helped the consultant to familiarise and have a clear picture of the available information relevant to the assignment and facilitating an in-depth understanding of the issues surrounding the innovative models. In addition, the documentary review also helped to shape the scope of the study and the items to be included in the report.

3.1.3 Field Visit

Primary research included field visits to each study district. The study adopted purposive sampling both in choosing the schools to sample as well as the individuals to interview. In consultation with CSEC, it was agreed that the consultant should select two schools per district (one being a best example and the other one showing low/poor application of the mapped interventions aiming at providing a safe learning environment, strengthening reading skills and reducing drop-out. As such in Ntchisi two Schools were visited namely Makanda Full Primary School and Nkhunzi Full Primary School; in Lilongwe Rural East the research team visited Kapedzera Full Primary School and Mwatibu Full Primary School; Finally in Dedza the schools visited were Moonekera Full Primary School and Aliberito Full Primary School. The field study helped to gain an in-depth understanding on how the mapped interventions are being implemented and also determine their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability if they were to be adopted on a national scale.

3.1.4 Data Analysis

Data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics through Excel. Data from learner (classroom) observations of teaching performance, teacher self-assessments of improvement and performance, and head teachers' assessments of teachers' improvement/performance were analyzed for both high and low performing schools. Data from learner (classroom) assessments of teacher performance and teachers' self-assessments of improvement were further broken down by gender and by the standard taught by the teacher. On the other hand, data captured through qualitative methods was analysed by using thematic analysis where emerging themes in the data from various sources were aligned with the themes under each aim of the study.

3.1.5 Limitation

The sample size was limited because of time and funding constraints. The schools were purposefully selected so they shared similar characteristics (e.g., on the one hand best application of the innovation and poor application of the innovations on the other hand). It could have been better to carry out a longitudinal study to gauge effectiveness of the innovative models and understand fully how they were applied. The limited number of schools targeted could also affect the findings in that some innovations initially mapped in CSEC's documentary were not being applied even in the schools identified as 'best schools'. Furthermore, the choice of schools could be biased as the schools were only chosen in consultation with district level officials. Despite the evident limitations, the consultant made a deliberate effort to minimize and eliminate any unrecognizable biases to ensure that the findings were objective. The belief is that the results of this study will help provide a detailed understanding of the mapped interventions.

3.2 Criteria for Determining the Innovative model

Innovation is 'change that creates a new dimension of performance'. In line with the purpose of this study, the criteria for determining the innovativeness of the models will thus be on the basis of whether the approach connotes a significantly improved intervention in terms of its implementation process, provision of a new or changed order in business practice, work place organisation (such as a school) and/or external relations (home and community) which leads to creating a safe learning environment, strengthening reading skills and reducing drop-out (Jere 2009).

Specifically, the study verifies and mirrors the implemented innovative models and related specifics against the criteria for determining an innovative model detailed below:

- Product innovation: the consultant looked for significantly improved service in terms of technicality including technical specifications, user friendliness and/or other functional characteristics, thereby leading to whether the new popularized and profiled innovative model has made a significant difference and enhanced accountability or not as a new product or an acceptable improvement in business practice, workplace organization and external relations;
- Process innovation: here the determination was based on whether the innovative model has brought forth new or significantly improved delivery method as techniques, equipment, materials and other changes amongst teachers and learners with a bias towards the girl child;
- Marketing innovation: On this the consultant examined whether the innovative models as per CSEC expectation for change have been conducted on the basis of repackaging as a novel education product that has explicit benefits and related promotion for improved buying in leading to ownership and sustainability; and
- Organizational innovation: This determination was rooted in verifying whether it is business as usual or not improved/changed business practices, workplace organization and external interests and relation are taking cognisance of and embracing the advanced innovative models as per CSEC's project (www.uis.unesco.org).

In addition to the four criteria above, the consultant was to determine whether the right innovative initiatives/models were pursued in terms of assessment of the following aspects:

- Relevance of innovative model: Assessment of relevance focused on checking the consistency and alignment of the intervention or innovative model with prevailing education

and other related policies, priorities and regulations; such as early childhood care and education, water and sanitation, Health, as well as Sustainable Development Goals;

- Effectiveness of innovative model: This focused on assessing what has been achieved in each intervention area, the “outcomes” of the project, appropriateness of the intervention, beneficiary participation, levels of empowerment, timeliness of implementation, accountability mechanism, stakeholder involvement;
- Efficiency of innovative model: This focused on cost best analysis/social returns, level of input against the output of the program focusing on resources injected in the project and achievements in line with the programme areas; and
- Ownership and sustainability of innovative model: The assessment focused on determining whether the community structures will/can continue with the activities under the innovative model with minimal or without any support from CSEC or its members currently supporting the innovations.

3.3 Activities/Areas for innovative models

The three districts under scrutiny have conducted the following activities in varying degrees:

- Child Friendly Schools (CFS): a place where the learning environment is conducive, the staff is friendly to children, and the health and safety needs of the children are adequately met. Furthermore, the school is community based and takes into account rights of all children irrespective of gender, religion and ethnic affiliation, physical and mental abilities and disabilities and other cultural congruence and differences (UNICEF, 2009 p.9).
- School Performance Reviews (SPR): Coverage is on four areas Leadership and Management, Teaching and Learning, Child Friendly Schools and School Governance, A questionnaire in the four areas is applied for verification and instituting action in line with 17 indicators that the categories base on.
- Early Grade Reading Activity and related Assessment (EGRA): Geared towards the development of basic literacy skills and knowledge (letter sound recognition – phonological awareness, alphabet principles – reading and naming letters, fluency, vocabulary – reading words and comprehension – reading sentences and paragraphs and answering questions) and naming letters, reading syllables and comprehension) and writing skills. Focusing on schools and wider community in which the school operates; where there is training of teachers, head-teachers, and Primary Education Advisors on effective teaching of reading in early grades; and provision of teaching and learning materials.
- Complementary Basic Education (CBE): whose curriculum is equivalent to the formal primary school; covered under a three year accelerated course but equated to five years of primary schooling focusing on literacy and numeracy spiced with agriculture and health topics; ideal for 9-13 year olds though 14-17 year olds are admitted; meant for drop-outs who have left school before completing standard five and those who have never attended school; and flexible in terms of learning time and venue but covering thirty six weeks each year.
- Introduction and related instituting of school bye laws and other related direct actions (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene [WASH], mother groups, girls clubs etc) by NGOs, the community and its leadership to curb drop out.

The question of innovative models centred on these five activities/areas which in turn provided the recipe for possible replication across Malawi whilst taking into account varying socio-cultural factors inherent in a Malawian society. In addition the areas of intervention were initiated by a variety of agents/donors such as UNICEF, Link Community, GIZ, USAID, UNESCO, EU, DfID among others with the endorsement of the Ministry of Education.

4. Findings of the Study: An In-depth Analysis

This section of the report presents findings in line with the main objectives of the study. As indicated in the preceding sections, the purpose of this project was to carry out an in-depth study to identify innovative models that have created a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop-out in schools in the three districts of Dedza, Lilongwe Rural East and Ntchisi. In carrying out this in-depth analysis, focus was on six specific objectives derived from the TORs. Since the study utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods, where appropriate findings are presented and analysed in tables and figures indicating numbers or percentages as well as narrative to help in the discussion and interpretation of results. Each of the subsequent sub-sections presents the findings in line with the specific objectives of the study.

4.1 Education Interventions Implemented in the Three Study Districts

This section addresses findings relating to the first objective of the study – ‘to understand and assess mapped out education interventions in the three districts’. To address this, a review of the documentary produced by CSEC in 2015 on the mapping of interventions being implemented in the three districts was carried out. In addition to the documentary review, the field visits to sampled schools and interviews with key informants also helped to identify the interventions.

Findings indicate that there are different types of interventions being implemented in the three study districts, the nature of these interventions include those that focus on improving reading outcomes for learners, those focusing on improving the quality of education by providing a safe learning environment for learners, those helping to provide learner stability to ensure that they remain in school. In implementing these interventions some were targeting the school environment directly while others were aimed at increasing education quality and access through community mobilisation.

It is important to bear in mind that each of these interventions has been formulated basing on what was perceived as a problem area relating to girl child education. As noted at the onset of this report, in Malawi girls continue to face many interrelated challenges. As a result many girls are affected and end up dropping out even before completing primary school. For instance, whilst in school many pupils struggle to read and write, some pupils lose interest in education due to peer pressure, family responsibilities and even early marriage.

4.1.1 Projects on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Projects on the need for safe water and hygiene in schools and amongst learners have been conducted in Ntchisi, Lilongwe Rural East and Dedza. These projects seek to promote girls health and hygiene in Schools to encourage girls to remain in school. Some of the organisations are combining all aspects of sanitation and related awareness. However, there are some organisations that are mainly focusing on Menstrual Hygiene Management (through provision of sanitary pads, building of toilets and hand wash basins and addressing other hygiene related issues). To that effect some organisations have been providing sanitary pads for girls and in some areas even teaching

mother groups on how to produce locally made sanitary pads. Such organisations include Forum for Women Educationalists in Malawi (FAWEMA), Nchitsi Organization for Youth Development (NOYD) and Save the Children Malawi among others.

4.1.2 Mother Groups

Mother groups have also helped in promoting the re-admission policy and linked with a particular group. The mother groups also help with decent dressing and behavioural issues. They have also been instrumental in being the link between girls and the school as well as the community. While being an effective arm of the school management, their level of involvement and productivity differs from school to school. In the context of this study, in most schools that were categorised as low achieving schools, it was found that mother groups were inactive.

4.1.3 Bye laws

To ensure that girls remain in school, communities are now formulating bye laws. This intervention is being used in all the three districts but it has so far been more prominently used in Dedza. Chiefs working with NGOs such as Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (CYECE) and Link for Community Development have been developing bye laws which are enforced. In fact, Dedza district council in conjunction with all traditional authorities has developed district bye laws on girl education which have been distributed to all chiefs in the district. Such bye laws are encouraging these chiefs to penalise any parent who become complicit in letting a girl drop out of school. Furthermore, these bye laws are discouraging early marriages and pregnancies among other things (for instance in Kanyenda Education Zone in Dedza this approach has proven very effective). Apart from bye laws from the district office, each Traditional Authority (TA) also develops locally applicable bye laws and determines the penalty. These bye laws are helping to prevent girls from getting pregnant and encourage them to remain in school.

Bye laws have become one of the effective approaches to reducing drop-out in primary schools in the study districts. Chiefs working together with their communities have been introducing bye laws aimed at making primary education compulsory especially for adolescent girls. Along with the bye laws they also determine the penalties for any failure to keep these laws. According to teachers interviewed for the study, these approaches are proving to be very effective. As one head teacher explained;

'Out of fear of paying a fine to the chief, the parents allow their child to go to school, unlike when there were no bye laws. To a certain extent these bye laws are working positively to reduce absenteeism. In fact apart from the bye laws, there is also the 'special forces team (Gule Wamkulu) which is also being used to force children to go to school. Both approaches are proving valuable to keeping girls in school.'

Bye laws are also helping to reduce cases of early marriages as it has been a common practice in most rural areas in the three study districts and in Malawi as a whole. Young girls are married off by their families instead of allowing them continue with school. The good thing about bye laws or any initiatives initiated by the villagers is that they take ownership. Once the law is communicated it does not require spending on the part of the enforcer, it is those who go against the law that will part with money or something in lieu of money; and in some cases, the fines are also being used to invest in school development activities. All they need as a community is to help them understand the importance of promoting girls rights among which is access to education. This helps to make

development interventions meaningful and successful. Bye laws are relevant interventions because they target both the parents and the pupil as they both are the cause for increased drop-out cases. Moreover, they reinforce what has already been indicated in other government policies towards educating the girl child. Overall, bye laws, if agreed by the community and when properly reinforced, do help to keep the girls in school.

4.1.4 Bursaries for Girls in Secondary Schools

One of the factors leading to girl drop-out especially at the secondary school level has been the cost of education. With many of the girls coming from poor families, they are unable to pay school fees. Organisations such as Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), CYECE among others have been supporting girl education through giving bursaries to girls for secondary education. The initiative is good as it helps the otherwise vulnerable girls to access education and focus on their studies instead of worrying about fees. Apart from programmes that focus only on fees and overlook other needs of the learner, plans are also at an advanced stage to start the implementation of a Cash Transfer program under the Keeping Girls in School (KGI S) initiative. This cash transfer project is being run by FAWEMA under Save the Children Malawi.

4.1.5 Establishment of Girls club

Girl clubs are aimed at empowering girls by providing them space where they can freely talk about issues affecting their lives and get their peers perspectives as well as enabling them to build their social networks. In some cases this provides a platform for learning life skills too. In the three study districts, organisations including Action Aid, NOYD, FAWEMA have focused on implementing girl clubs in all the three districts of Lilongwe Rural East, Ntchisi and Dedza. Although these clubs are in some places just known as girl clubs, in others places the girls are part of a mixed grouping of the youth. There are also some specific clubs called TUSEME being implemented by FAWEMA and Theatre for a Change (TFaC) has also been establishing clubs under the Tiphunzire Project which is phasing out this year. In these “clubs” the girls engage in activities that build self confidence, know their rights and encourage them to express themselves freely. Through girls clubs, girls also get the opportunity to engage with role models. While being a good initiative, it can sometimes exclude others as the membership in some clubs is limited due to management challenges. As such, programmes like these need be implemented not only in schools as is being done in Malawi but also at the community level.

Empowerment of the girl child can be an effective tool to changing the world. Most of the poor people in the rural areas miss out on opportunities because of the lack of information and knowledge about their rights. While in most cases girls are not able to know their rights only through formal education in the classroom, girls clubs are playing a vital role in sensitizing young girls about their rights and responsibilities. In the schools visited for this study, where girls clubs are present, it was evident that the girls who are members of girls clubs are more assertive and eager to have a conversation and share their views.

Even teachers agree that the girl clubs are helpful because the girls are provided a space to chat, learn and explore. However, while the approach is seen as very good, some feel it is still under utilised in most schools in places where there are girl clubs. One key informant while agreeing that girl clubs are one effective way of keeping girls in school pointed out the challenge with this approach:

'yes girl clubs are empowering girls to know their rights, but many of these groups are just doing these as projects, once the project ends they leave the girls hanging and the girl clubs die off silently There is an opportunity to maximise this innovation, in some countries girl clubs are used to promote businesses for young people and even assist each other meet needs, but here once the donor goes, the school does not have funds to support the activities of the girls club. Besides, sometimes a number of parents do not really let their children join such clubs. Once a child is in the know some feel they will be uncontrollable ... With the support of the community this initiative could achieve more for girls'

Girl clubs present many opportunities for growth for a girl, they could be trained as leaders, business persons and even general life skills. If a girl is empowered at a young age, it boosts her self esteem and reduces chances of being taken advantage of. While the model is an effective approach, it still requires some resources which usually are only available when it is sponsored by various NGOs. At times only few girls join these clubs because supporting organisations have limits on the membership due to finances and management. It could be good to ensure that girls engage in activities that will help to sustain the club beyond the project phase for those girl clubs supported by various organisations. Otherwise, if properly harnessed, this approach could yield positive results if implemented on larger scale. Usually for the clubs to begin, they are initiated from the outside by organisations running a project that targets girls. Maybe it could be good to sensitize communities on the importance of promoting girls' rights and the role girls clubs could play in and out of school so that communities themselves could be initiating the formation of girls clubs. Such an approach could ensure sustainability. One way is to promote the girls clubs through the mother groups or village development structures.

4.1.6 Constructing Female Teacher's houses

Another intervention has been constructing of school infrastructure. For instance, organisations such as Action Aid and World Vision Malawi have been constructing female teacher's houses and classrooms in the three study districts. It has been noted that one of the factors contributing to teacher absenteeism is the lack of housing at the school premises hence these organisations have taken special interest in this. This initiative is also good as it will help provide a safe learning environment, offer a daily and easy to reach model for girls and help solve the challenge of inadequate housing for staff.

4.1.7 School Performance Review (SPR)

This is an intervention introduced by Link Community Development in Dedza. This review assesses various aspects, but particular focus is on whether there is a safe learning environment in the school. Link Community Development came up with 17 Indicators derived from Four Categories: Leadership and Management, Teaching and Learning, Child Friendly School, and School Governance. For each of the four focus areas reviewed, a specific instrument (questionnaire) is developed to ensure that the relevant issues are addressed. In terms of Leadership and Management the focus is on assessing access, equity and retention of pupils in school; School Governance focuses on the role played by the community members (includes: SMCs, PTA and the community in general) and how they help to ensure safety of learners. On assessing Teaching and Learning the focus is on determining whether the infrastructure available provides a conducive environment for learners thus assuring the safety of learners in the classrooms and availability of materials for teaching and learning among other factors. Finally a determination is also made on whether the school is a Child Friendly

School. Here issues of sanitation are taken into consideration (assessing the toilets, waters sources and general hygiene at the school among other factors). A Sample of 40 people who include student, headmaster, teachers and SMC members is drawn for this assessment. The mix of the sampled people helps to triangulate the findings. Thus a school performance appraisal is carried out. This SPR tool has been used in all schools in Dedza. The advantage of the School Performance Review process is that it helps schools to know where they are doing well and where they need improvement. Furthermore the SPR also helps in the development of a School Development/Implementation Plan. According to the Link Community Development officers, the SPR Indicators have also fed into the National Education Standards produced by MoEST (2015). However the Standards contain other added indicators bringing the total up from 17 to 26 Indicators.

4.1.8 Early Grade Reading Interventions

In promoting early grade reading, interventions that have emerged have been implemented on the basis of the Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) approach. These interventions have been implemented in all the three districts under study. In both Ntchisi and Lilongwe Rural East the schools are implementing the EGRA version under Research Triangle Institute (RTI). Whereas in Dedza, they are following the MIE's Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM) which is being collaborated by Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM). Apart from reading, the project also addresses gender stereotypes at home and school through enhanced dialogue in order to improve gender related learning outcomes. Another somewhat similar program is Family Literacy Program (FPL) which is implemented by Link for community Development with funding from Oxford University. FPL focuses on learners who are in school but have challenges to read. It utilises the formation of reading clubs and employs facilitators who run the programme.

4.1.9 Complementary Basic Education (CBE)

Finally another intervention being carried out by NGOs is Complementary basic education. The program is being implemented in Ntchisi and Dedza. One of the NGOs that have been a service provider for CBE is Link for Community Development in Dedza. CBE is a program initiated by then GTZ now GIZ and supported by the Government of Malawi in 2006. It is a basic education programme aimed at encouraging attainment of basic education among children of school going age that have dropped out from the formal school. Complementary Basic Education approaches are defined as models that work in support of the formal system, offering students an alternative route to achieving the same educational outcomes as students in the formal public primary schools. The programs are designed to feed students into the public formal basic education system at various entry points and are large enough to exhibit many of the same characteristics as mainstream schools. However, by using similar (though often compressed) curriculum as the public primary schools, providing instruction in the students' native language whilst including the learning of English, and ensuring that the teacher and learning materials are present in the classroom, the models more effectively keep children in school and help them learn (Moore, DeStefano & Gillies, 2008). Unfortunately, CBE has been shelved by the MoEST due to inadequate funding in the last two years (2013/14 and 2014/5).

The education is provided at a learning centre and through a facilitator. They have content areas which are restricted to 7 subjects. This education is offered for free and is usually offered in the afternoon after the regular schools have knocked off. Unlike the formal primary school education system where learners are divided into grades, for CBE, the learners are not divided into grades

instead they are grouped together and learn together for the three years. What is remarkable about CBE is that it follows innovative and flexible modes of education, which are appropriate and acceptable in different communities.

Overall, there are several interventions being implemented by CSEC DEN members to ensure promotion of girls' education in Malawi. In fact in some cases the community itself has been upfront. In all the three study districts people have been using Gule Wamkulu to help keep children in school. In Ntchisi for instance, there is a man called Dr. Kudambwe who has been using Gule wamkulu to chase students from the villages back to school. Where students absent from school are caught the parents pay a fine. Once Dr. Kudambwe's gule wamkulu chases or finds the student working with parents or confiscates their property they are charged a fine which is channelled back to the school to contribute to the school development fund. The use of Gule wamkulu has become a popular approach in all the three study districts. All in all there have been various efforts to improve girl child education which are being implemented in all the three districts. Although some elders have questioned the use of Gule Wamkulu in light of cultural dilution and timing (justification of seasonal specifications), the use of such approaches is paying dividend.

4.2 Innovative models Creating a Safe Learning Environment, Strengthening Reading Skills and Reduced Drop-Out

This section of the report seeks to address the second objective of the study 'to identify innovative models by implements in the education sector that have created a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop out.' As shown in the preceding section, there are many interventions that have been implemented in the three study districts. In line with the criteria for identifying innovations stipulated earlier, this section singles out interventions that can be categorised as innovative models. In reference to innovative models, the understanding in this report is that, a model is a system or thing used as an example to follow or imitate (a particular design or version of a product). Hence an innovative model can be interpreted as innovative system or method which could be emulated. Again, we should bear in mind that where we talk about innovation, 'we refer to the implementation of a new or significantly improved good or service. It could be a process innovation or product innovation' (Stephens 2014). Interventions that are new in their nature or their implementation depict a process of introducing change to established approaches could thus qualify as innovative models.

Essentially, this section of the report therefore, focuses on three innovative models that have led to the creation of a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop out namely; Child Friendly Schools (CFS) model, Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) and Complementary Basic Education (CBE). It should be noted here that there is a great overlap in most innovations as they are not limited to addressing only one problem; in some way all the identified innovative models contribute to all three areas of focus. However, there is no one innovative model that is comprehensive enough to adequately address the three areas of focus; promoting a safe learning environment, strengthening early grade reading and reducing dropout.

4.2.1 Child Friendly School Model

In the context of the broader literature and the understanding of the people interviewed for this study in relation to innovations that create a safe learning environment, enhance early grade reading and reduce dropout rates, the Child Friendly School (CFS) model encompasses it all. The model combines different strategies to ensure a conducive environment for learners. The view driving this

approach is that a school environment becomes a safe learning environment when it provides an environment where the learner feels comfortable to learn. Where learners feel threatened they may become under achievers which ultimately makes the student lose interest and opt to drop out (Chimombo et al 2000). Thus, many factors contribute to a safe learning environment among them; teacher ability, attitude and practice, availability of sanitary facilities, gender balanced and violence free environment. It is always important to be mindful that the school environment may affect girls differently than men. For instance, the absence of sanitary facilities such as toilets may affect girls more than would men. As such it requires a deliberate intervention to ensure that the learning environment is conducive to the learners.

The Child Friendly School model also known as joyful learning is premised on the understanding that children are in school for a reason as such it seeks to promote an environment for joyful learning. A Child Friendly School (CFS) model is a holistic, multi-sectoral and coordinated approach aimed at providing quality basic education. It focuses on 6 areas namely; (1) Rights based school, (2) Safe and protective school, (3) Gender sensitive school, (4) Community engaged school (5) Health Promoting School (6) Academically Effective School (see UNICEF 2006). An unfriendly school with scarce resources is a barrier to girls' education. Thus the CFS approach leads to a safe learning environment for the pupil. While being implemented in all the three districts, the complex nature of the activities under this approach makes people to simply single out certain interventions under it when reporting. There have been interventions targeting training of SMC/PTA/head teachers to make the school an effective school, building school blocks as well as health promoting innovations such as sanitary pads, toilets and urinals, hand wash basins, and provision of dressing rooms for ladies which have been implemented in the three study districts under this model (refer to section 4.1 for details on these interventions).

4.2.2 Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) Model

EGRA is considered an innovative model because it has introduced a new and deliberate approach or methodology in how teachers teach children how to read. Prior to its introduction in the schools, 'teachers had limited knowledge of specific methodologies for teaching reading in the early grades. The vast majority of teachers need to learn specific methods to effectively teach reading ...' (MTPDS 2011:36). Traditionally, teachers would focus on getting the students to mimic them but under EGRA it has focused on the five key elements that ought to be the focus in teaching children to read namely: naming letter sounds, phonics, comprehension, writing skills and support resources. Since it is yet to be scaled up national wide, it is still an innovation worth emulating as it is showing positive results. As noted earlier, EGRA has already seen some adaptations through Family Literacy Project (FLP) and Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM) both programmes are being implemented by NGOs.

Family Literacy Project (FLP) – through this project reading skills are enhanced. Some organisations such as Link Community Development with funding from Oxford University have established Reading Centres (clubs). The organisation hires two facilitators who run the programme and the project was piloted in 4 Zones with 2 extra control Zones and so far the project has had a tremendous impact in promoting a reading culture in the zones where it is being implemented. The organisation wants each school to have a reading club and the community in the catchment area should also have a reading club at the community level. FLP just like SEGREM and EGRA also targets standards 1 – 4 learners.

Strengthening Early Grade Reading In Malawi (SEGREM) – This innovative model is being championed in Dedza district by MIE/CRECCOM. SEGREM is improving early grade literacy by; strengthening the National Primary Curriculum (NPC) which was reviewed under the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Review (PCAR) on literacy instruction; improving large class management through in-service training for teachers; having an additional hour for learning to read where in some schools is timetabled as supplementary reading; providing quality and relevant literacy materials; and ensure community support. Additionally, the project implementation is addressing gender stereotypes at home and school through enhanced dialogue in order to improve gender related learning outcomes. This project's strategy institutes sustainable mechanisms that address literacy issues at school, home, teacher training, inspectorate and curriculum development levels by using innovative and good approaches/models in literacy instruction, teacher training, and social and community mobilization. The project has on-going research component to inform practices and decisions to be taken by various stakeholders.

4.2.3 Complementary Basic Education

Another innovative model is Complementary Basic Education (CBE). This model is considered innovative for a number of reasons, among others; First, it provides a fast track path for out-of-school children and youth to catch up and re-enter and complete primary education. Second, it enable disadvantaged groups including orphans, young mothers with children as well as those with special needs who have never enrolled or had dropped out of school to access basic education. Thirdly, it works on the basis of partnerships between community structures, district education officials, NGOs who act as service providers to work together to establish CBE learning centres and ensure successful implementation and accountability in delivering CBE and teaching and learning materials in some learning areas have been designed to depict an explicit, practical orientation to the lives of learners (see GIZ, 2009).

MOEST with the support of GIZ introduced the CBE program in September 2006. The program targets out of school children aged 9-13, with room for 14-17 year olds, who have been out of school for over a year. In general, CBE is for children who are not in school. CBE includes students who might have never gone to school or those that dropped out. CBE is a three-year course, covering two standards of education per year. Learners spend three hours per day for five days each week. There are nine terms of twelve weeks each spread out over the three years. The main emphasis is on literacy and numeracy. Closely aligned with National Primary Curriculum of standards 1 to 5, 30 books have been developed for learners in the core subject areas, as well as 12 supplementary readers; 9 facilitator guides (one per term) have also been created. In a CBE community, a learning centre is established along with a management committee.

CBE facilitators – often out of work school leavers and sometimes regular teachers – are selected and trained in a 15 day induction, with a 5 day training session before each term as well. Supervisors provide regular visits and feedback. Results indicate that by the end of year one, learners are able to read and write in their mother tongue. MoEST implements CBE through local NGOs which are called Service Providers in this case. The NGOs train the facilitators. This education is offered for free and is usually offered in the afternoon after the regular schools have knocked off. CBE is an accelerated learning programme which helps children who have missed out on schooling to catch up with their peers. Unlike the formal primary school education system where learners are divided into grades, for CBE, the learners are not divided into grades instead they are grouped together and learn together for the three years and at the end join the formal education in standard 6. The

advantage is that CBE welcomes even married people to participate and also included is training on Livelihoods. In Malawi, the CBE program has been run in four (4) phases and now Phase 5 has been taken over by government but is in a limbo due to financial constraints.

Complementary Basic Education has become a convenient way of increasing literacy levels and providing basic education at community level (Rose, 2007). It is also registering change in terms of people's attitudes, values and beliefs especially as they reflect on their culture and way of life because it is taking education out of the classroom to the people's villages and homes (MoEST, 2011). In doing so, the government, working with NGOs through CBE, have encouraged the community to take responsibility of educating its own people; and thus complementing efforts in dealing with the problem of drop outs and reducing illiteracy. Together, communities and NGOs establish specific criteria for developing the local programme.

CBE is a slight shift from the traditional education system because it emphasises interconnectedness, active learning, shared decision making and higher levels of achievement for all students (Anderson, 1993). The shared responsibility helps other stakeholders like NGOs to help in providing training and support to the school management committees, helping to set up systems for enrolling students, reaching decisions about when school should meet and even monitoring student and teacher attendance (Save the Children Fund, 2008). This shared responsibility is particularly important because CBE is dealing with students who can be considered 'rejects' of the formal system and, as such, need attention and assistance in different aspects.

The CBE model has been highlighted in this study because, it is one of the innovative ways to ensure that learners return to school, thereby curb permanent drop-out. However, while the field visits for this research managed to capture the views of the service providers on CBE, it was not possible to fully assess it by engaging with other stakeholders as well as the learners accessing CBE. As such, the focus in this report will centre on the two innovative models; CFS and EGRA.

4.3 Analysis of the Strategies Used in implementing the Innovative Models

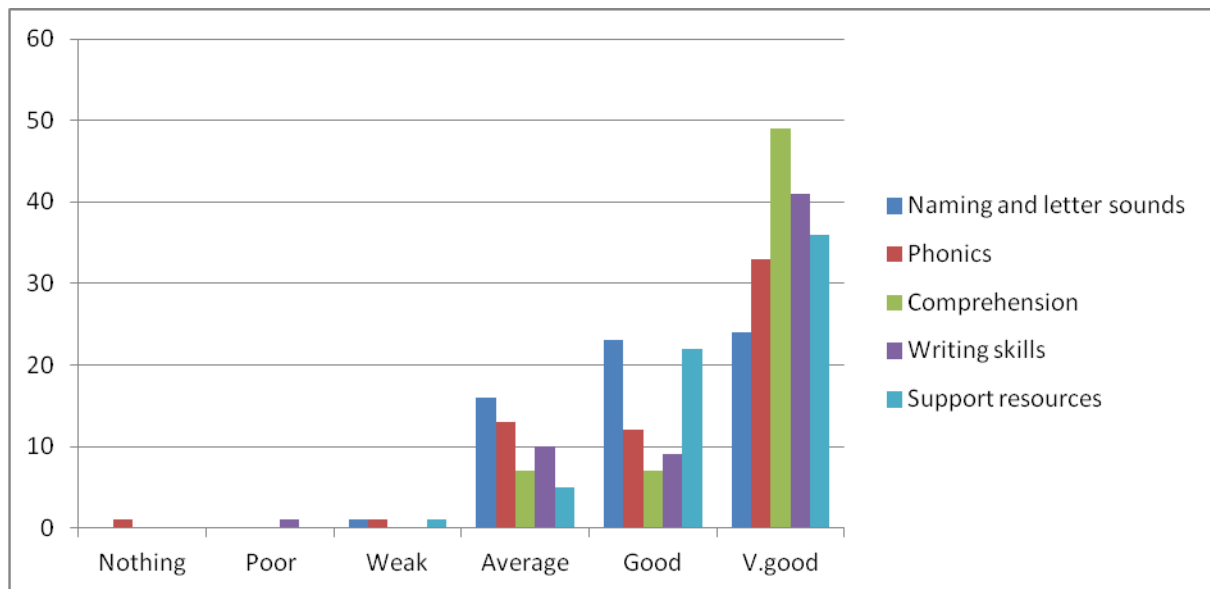
The purpose of this section of the report is to evaluate the approaches used in the implementation of the innovative models. Particularly, this section seeks to address the third objective of this study; *'to assess and analyse the strategies used in the models'* This entails identifying the strategies used and evaluating how they are translated in practice. Any intervention or innovative model employs a certain design and organisation that can impact its effectiveness. This includes for example, systems for the design and evaluation of stakeholder involvement, implantation issues, and the organisation of key delivery structures (USAID 2010). As such, there are those that have been a great success and there are others which depending on the context have registered varying degrees of success. In fact, as noted in the methodology section, the field visit for this study targeted two types of schools, those doing much better or high performers and those deemed to register low performance in relation to the implementation of the interventions. The subsequent discussion focuses on the strategies that have been employed in the implementation of the innovative models aimed at improving early grade reading, promoting a safe learning environment and reducing dropout rates.

4.3.1 Examining Strategies Utilised in the Implementation of the Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) Model

It has been argued that Malawi needs to invest heavily in quality improvement so that pupils can reach higher levels of competence in reading (see SACMEQ 2011). This means that there is still a

need to employ innovative ways that can help improve the learner abilities in reading. In the context of this study, in terms of strengthening early grade reading, EGRA has been the approach being implemented as an intervention in this area. At its core, EGRA focuses on reading fluency. As noted earlier, in this approach, teachers are advised to focus on five key areas in teaching pupils to read namely: naming letter sounds, phonics, comprehension, writing skills and support resources. But to what extent are teachers utilising these strategies to improve early grade reading? See figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Use of Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) and other literacy strategies



Source: In-depth study 2016

Findings from the field visit also reveal that while EGRA is a good approach focusing on improving reading for both Chichewa and English for learners in standards 1-3 and now going to standard 4, the main weakness in the approach is that there is no link between the reading facilitators in community reading centres with the teachers and in some cases even with the SMCs. Respondents also explained that the timing for monitoring visits has also been poor. For instance monitoring was last done in October and not November when schools are “truly” in session.

Findings from field visits also indicate that under EGRA community reading centres have been established in the communities surrounding the schools. Both these community based reading centres and reading clubs provide another options to create a culture of reading, however as much as they are created for after school, they ought to be taken seriously. While there are also community reading centres in the villages to instil a reading culture, the impact they are making is still unknown as their performance and seriousness differs from place to place.

Under EGRA, the strategy to strengthening reading skills for standards 1 to 3 learners also include teacher training on teaching methodologies for both Chichewa and English. Currently for Chichewa the teachers are trained every term. There is a possibility of homework being given to learners through story cards under EGRA. Furthermore, one of the strategies included having a print rich environment in the classroom. On this the results have been varied, in both high performing and low performing schools some classes portrayed a print rich environment while others did not. The situation is also compounded by the fact that some schools do not have adequate classes and/or

classrooms with secure doors and windows as such some learners still learn under a tree or in dilapidated classrooms and makeshift classes (Figures 2: a-d below).

Overall, on strategies to enhance early grade reading, findings indicate good results. Both key informant interviews as well as this survey show that there has been good use of the five key elements of EGRA and other literacy strategies in teaching by teachers.

4.3.2 Examining Strategies Utilised in the Implementation of the Child Friendly Schools Model

Specifically for the Child Friendly School (CFS) approach, several strategies including provision of soap and sanitary pads were used in some schools. There have also been separate toilets built for both girls and boys. However in most schools the toilets are not adequate. In terms of infrastructure, such as classrooms, chalkboards and desks among others are few. In most classes pupils sit on the floor which as one teacher explained ‘is not conducive for girls’. The teacher elaborated that ‘when a girl is menstruating it becomes uncomfortable for her to stand up as she is scared of embarrassing herself if blood spills. Besides, it is even difficult for her to stand at all’. To ensure a Child Friendly School, some NGOs also assist by providing sanitary pads and other necessities for both girls and boys by the NGOs. It could be good to train mother groups in the production of locally made sanitary pads unlike over relying on the ones that are purchased and distributed because once the project ends the problem will persist. It could be good for organisations seeking to assist to be able to present lasting solutions than focus on short term measures in implementing these innovations.

In the context of ensuring a conducive learning environment interventions employed under the Child friendly School have focused on different aspects. One important factor is the availability of desks for pupils to sit on. While pupils need desks, most schools have very few desks in the classroom. In addition, there is no sitting plan followed and where few desks are available pupils seat only on ‘first come first serve basis.’ While some positive developments are taking place including the building of extra toilets, classrooms and teacher’s houses in the sampled schools, there is still a lot to be done to ensure a conducive learning environment for students. Thus while a Child Friendly School approach is appreciated and understood by the school management and communities, the inadequacy of resources continue to constrain the success of the model.

The photos below are examples of varying situations of the Child Friendly Schools and EGRA.

Figure 2 a-d: Photos portraying a print rich environment and those without



a. Print rich classroom with hangings (source: In-depth study 2016)



b. Print rich school on inside classroom walls (source: In-depth study 2016)



c. lassroom without any text rich environment (source: In-depth study 2016)



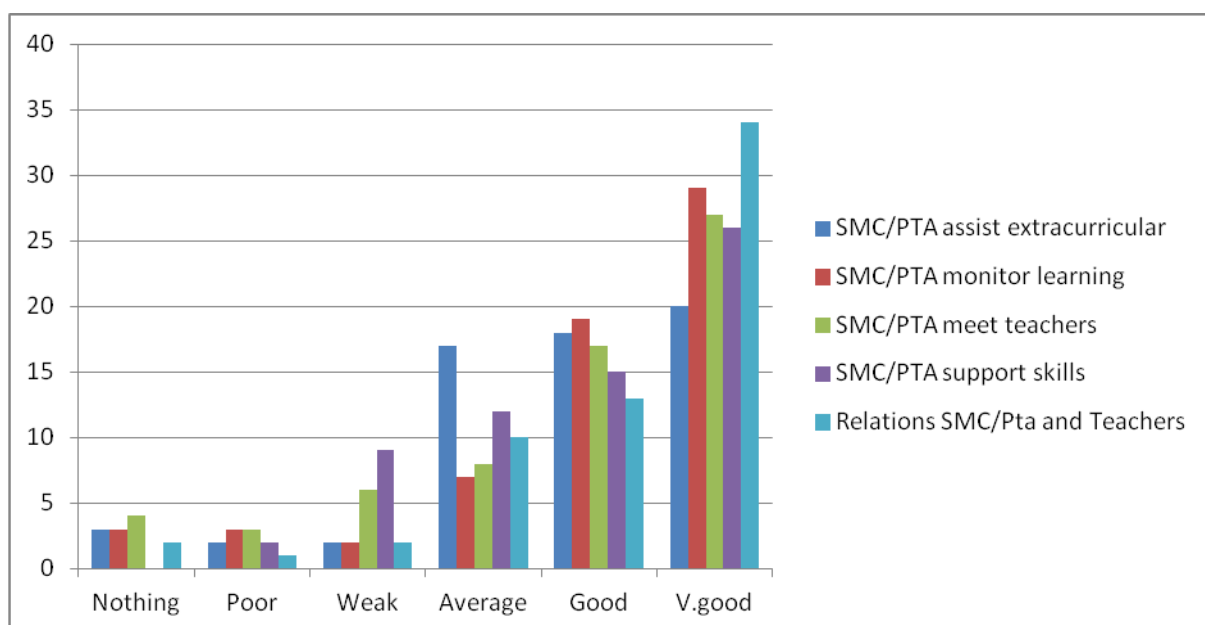
d. Dilapidated classroom in use (source: In-depth study 2016)



e. Makeshift classroom with no text rich walls (source: In-depth study 2016)

As pointed out at the beginning of section 4.3., some strategies are common to both the CFS and EGRA model as they both aim at concerted efforts to ensure that pupils improve their early grade reading, promote a safe learning environment and reduce drop-out rates. As such, under both the EGRA and Child Friendly Schools model, one strategy that has been very vital has been to sensitize/mobilize the communities to get involved in the welfare of their children at school. In fact, ensuring community support is seen as vital to the success of the models. For instance, attempts have been made to ensure that the community gets involved in school management as well as ensuring a safe learning environment. Thus empowering communities to participate in their children’s learning is central to providing a conducive environment for learning, strengthening reading skills as well as keeping girls in school (SACMEQ, 2011). In this study, teachers and students were, therefore, asked to rate how active the community has been in participating in school related matters. The results were as presented in the figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Community participation in school issues



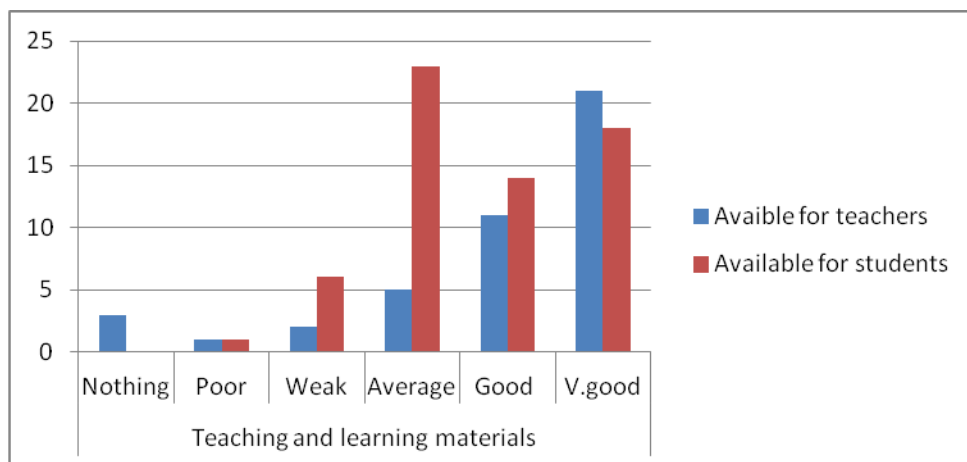
Source: In-depth study 2016

Head teacher and teachers’ perception of the community participation in school issues was favourable. For instance in terms of relations between School Management Committees (SMCs) and

Parents Teacher Associations (PTAs) with teachers, findings of the survey showed that it was generally good. As indicated in the figure 3 above, over 80% of teachers rated the relationship between average and very good. Complementary qualitative findings showed that generally in schools that are more organised and performing well, the community has been involved in school monitoring, supporting skills development and engaging with teachers. However, in the poorly rated schools, the common complaint was that the community is not interested and even the SMCs and PTAs are largely inactive. Notwithstanding such complaints, it is a fact that in the context of the EGRA model, communities have been assisting with the village reading centres, though in varying degrees, to ensure the success of the model. Facilitators from the community are helping children to read at the village level. The challenge however has been that village centres in some areas are seasonal and do not follow a proper time table. It all depends on the availability of the facilitator. Despite the limitations identified in some communities, interviewees were of the view that a strategy that incorporates community mobilization and participation is critical to the success of the interventions under these innovative models.

A second strategy that has been employed in both the two models has been the provision of teaching and learning materials. Providing quality and relevant literacy materials is considered a very important strategy for the success of interventions aimed at strengthening early grade reading (including EGRA and FLP). Figure 4 below shows the results relating to availability of teaching and learning materials in the sampled schools:

Figure 4: Availability of teaching and learning materials



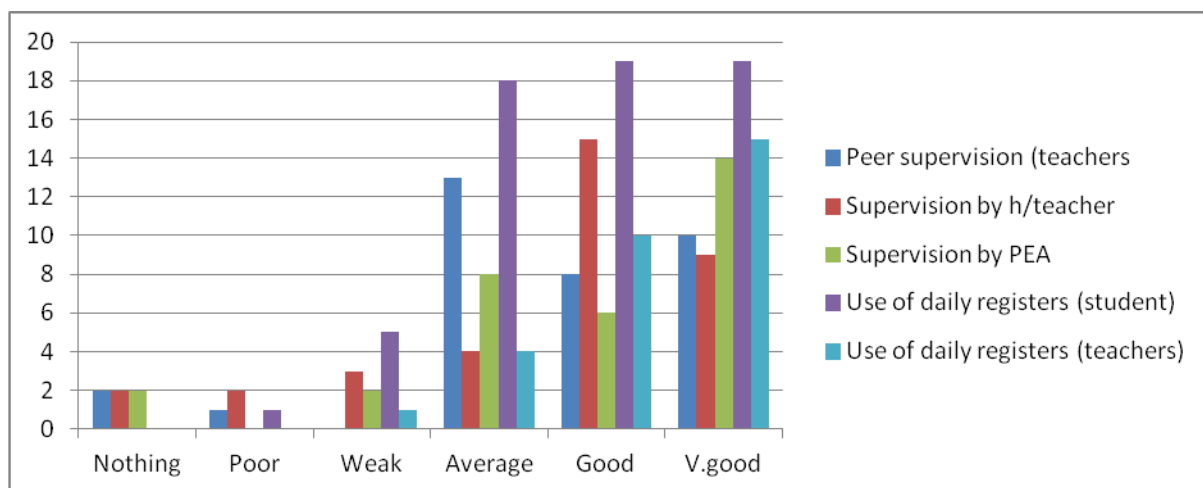
Source: In-depth study 2016

Over 53% of pupils indicated that the teaching and learning materials were available in their schools as compared to materials available for teachers; only 37% indicated that the material availability was average to very good. A follow up on this revealed that while materials are available, it is mainly those for EGRA in the lower standards. In fact in some of the schools the books were inadequate. For instance, at one of the schools in Lilongwe there were only 50 books for a particular subject for a class of 200 pupils. Even for teachers, in some schools there are no teachers' guides for some subjects. Although there are materials available indeed, usually they are not adequate for pupils as in most cases students have to share a book in groups. Moreover, most of the teaching and learning materials are also worn out. Teachers' guides contain a structured and detailed schemes of work/lesson plan hence the lack of these could affect the effectiveness of the innovations being implemented. In addition, the teachers even in poorly resourced schools were preparing lesson plans

as a sign of preparedness for their work. Of interest to this study is the extra hour (supplementary reading hour) timetabled for learning to read as indeed it can be argued that it is bearing fruits amongst learners.

Both the EGRA and Child Friendly Schools models also incorporate as a strategy to improve learning outcomes; building teacher effectiveness and strengthening classroom and school management. Again this helps in addressing the three areas under focus in this study.

Figure 5: School supervision and management



Source: In-depth study 2016

In general, findings (see figure 5 above) showed positive results on all the options; the results ranged between average and very good with a higher number indicating that supervision was generally very good. However, while findings indicate that there was good use of student attendance register, teachers do not mark the registers in some schools. It was found that some attendance registers for students though available were blank. One pupil explained what happens: ‘when we come to class the teacher just asks if anybody is absent and once they know who it is they just continue on and start to teach, they don’t really mark the register’. This could create a challenge on follow ups for those who have dropped out as there will be no records of attendance. It could be good to enforce attendance registers by making them mandatory to ensure that they are able to differentiate between absentees and drop outs. Generally, head teachers explained that during the first 4 months of the calendar year absenteeism is high as the students join their families for farming.

4.3.3 Applicability of the Strategies

Findings from the field indicate that the success of innovative models has been dependent on context, availability of resources, as well as the existence of a clear strategy and ability and capability of the head-teacher. As such, even though the innovative models identified are being implemented in various Education Zones within the districts; even where the schools are in the same Zone, it does not guarantee a successful implementation. For most of the schools which are registering some higher level of success in implementing the innovations, they are also supported by some donors and head-teachers are active. For instance, in Dedza one of the schools identified as a good school is supported by a donor from Netherlands the same goes for one school visited in Ntchisi which also had several NGOs working with the school and even pumping money into infrastructure development. While the communities in the better performing schools have been more active and

involved than those communities in areas where there is no sponsor, one could safely conclude that, for the active communities, the level of support they receive from the head-teacher and outside sources, instils in them the drive to take ownership to some extent as they see things improving unlike where no support has been rendered. However, if both communities and schools would get more organised to follow the strategies in implementing the innovations, they could as well produce better results.

Overall, the strategies employed by both the EGRA and the Child Friendly School model have been applied to varying degrees in different school settings. Despite the continued existence of limitations, the strategies utilised under these innovative models are helping to improve the quality of education depending on the extent to which they are followed and applied.

4.4 Determining Successes and Failures of the Innovative Models

The purpose of this section is to evaluate the identified innovative models to determine their suitability for the promotion of a safe learning environment, strengthening reading skills and reducing dropout. This section will focus specifically on the fourth objective of the study: *‘To evaluate the models to determine their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance.’* As explained in Section 4.2, the analysis in this study focuses on two innovative models namely; Child Friendly Schools (CFS) and Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA). The discussion in the subsequent sections will evaluate each of these models.

In line with the type of interventions and innovative models being implemented in the schools in the three study districts, during the field visits a questionnaire was used to gauge the impact of the interventions on the following areas; the quality of teaching, teacher ability to strengthen reading and numeracy skills, appropriateness and availability of resources for reading, availability of teacher and learner resources, level of community involvement in school management and linkages between the two as well as teaching management. Both teachers and learners were also engaged through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to gauge their understanding on these issues.

It must be pointed out initially that having evaluated both the identified innovative approaches in terms of their relevance, it can be safely concluded here that all the innovations being implemented in Malawi are relevant in the sense that they are in line with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST)’s policies and strategies for the promotion of girls education. MoEST has developed a plethora of policies and strategies towards the promotion of equity and particularly girls education in Malawi including; The National Girls Education Strategy which is running from 2013 – 2018 (see MoEST 2013), The Child Friendly Schools Policy which became operational in 2008 (See MoEST 2008); The Malawi National Reading Strategy 2014 -2019 (see MoEST 2014) and the Malawi National Education Sector Plan (see MoEST 2008) among others. The innovations are also considered appropriate in the context of Malawi because, even where the model has been borrowed from elsewhere, under each approach there has been some adaptation and contextualization to the local situation. Moreover, at a time when the challenge of girl child school drop-out is persistent, any innovation that helps to curb the problem – as long as it takes into consideration the local context – can be regarded as relevant since the goal is to help improve the situation.

4.4.1 Evaluation of the Child Friendly Schools (Joyful Learning) Model

To recap, as explained in section 4.2.1, the Child Friendly School (CFS) model is a holistic, multi-sectoral and coordinated approach aimed at providing quality basic education. It places emphasis on

ensuring that schools are: rights based, safe and protective, Gender Sensitive, Community engaged, Health promoting and academically effective. The view is that the presence of these elements in the schools will help to provide a conducive learning environment for the pupil. It is important to note at the onset that, the complexity of the CFS approach makes it even more complex and difficult but robust for the nature of activities relating to each focus area embedded in this model to be fully addressed. Having been implemented in the three districts, however, there have been areas in which schools have done well and where they have not done so well.

Findings from the field visits and the documentary review reveal that in terms of effectiveness of the model in promoting a safe learning environment, strengthening reading and reducing drop out, there have been mixed results. Although being implemented in all the three districts, the complex nature of the activities under this model and the lack of comprehensive understanding and consideration of the approach coupled with financial limitations have led to partial implementation – where certain interventions within the packages are singled out for application. As MoEST (2014:3) explains when certain innovations are adopted, ‘implementing all components with the same rigour may not be feasible. Feasibility refers to the likelihood that the components can be implemented with fidelity. The two factors associated with feasibility are funding and capacity.’ Also, depending on the time it would take to satisfy all elements of the CFS the partial application of the model still serves the purpose.

As an innovative model, therefore, CFS is very appropriate and relevant to the primary school context in Malawi. All the visited primary schools continue to face challenges – though at different levels – in providing a safe learning environment, strengthening reading skills and improving pupil retention. As noted, schools visited in this study were in two categories, low and high performers. Findings indicate that some schools in all three districts continue to have inactive SMC/PTAs, girls and boys still struggle to read fluently and excel academically, there are persistent health and hygiene challenges within the school environment due to among others inadequate sanitary facilities in the schools. As such on the basis of the aforementioned, any innovation that targets addressing safety, reading ability and pupil retention should be regarded as relevant.

But, has the CFS as an innovative model been effective in its implementation? Evidently under the CFS approach, effective interventions that have been implemented including; training of SMC/PTA/head teachers to make the school an effective school, building school blocks as well as health promoting innovations such as Sanitary pads, toilets and urinals, hand wash basins, and provision of dressing rooms for girls which have been implemented in the three study districts. However, as noted before the results have been mixed to a certain extent; there are both positives and negatives depending on each school and in some cases the positives outweigh the negatives.

For instance, the common challenges for most schools have been the inadequacy of classrooms (pupils continue to learn in open spaces under a tree or in makeshift classes), latrines and large classes leading to higher pupil teacher ratio. The student teacher ratio for some schools is very high, although the averages for the districts range from 65:1 for Ntchisi and 73:1 for Lilongwe respectively. In reality the schools in the most districts in Malawi have an average teacher to student ratio well above 110:1. This shows that a teacher has more students to attend to, therefore making it difficult for one on one interaction with the student. Statistics show that for the 88,549 learners in Ntchisi there are only 1306 teachers; In Lilongwe Rural East 228048 pupils have 2977 teachers and in Dedza 213266 pupils have 2784 teachers available in 2013/14. Again, in all the schools visited and in Malawi in general pupils including girls still seat on the floor due to inadequate desks.

Some schools still lack teaching and learning materials and in some schools there are still inadequate sanitary facilities including toilets for girls. On the other hand in some schools they have built special toilets for older girls to cater for Menstruation hygiene (see figure 6 below). With the help of NGOs and in some cases the PTAs and community these facilities are being built. Even in terms of academic achievement there has been a remarkable increase in pass rates and selection to secondary schools over the years.

Figure 6: Improved and traditional latrines in schools



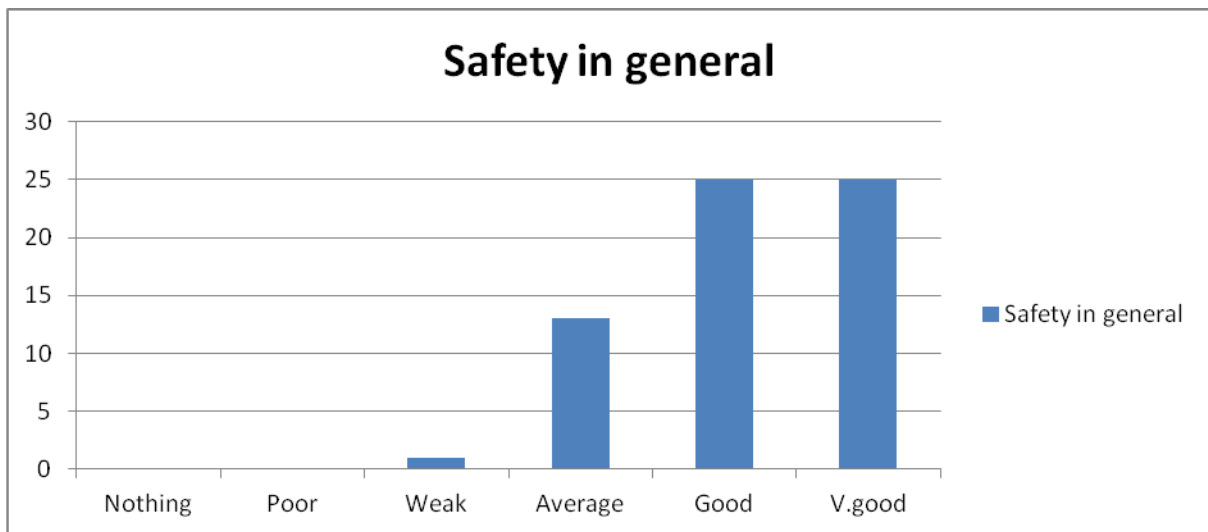
a. Improved latrine with a hand washing facility in front (Source: In-depth study 2016)



b. Traditional latrines without a hand washing facility nearby (Source: In-depth study 2016)

Despite all the challenges, when asked if they feel safe at school, pupils and teachers agree that the schools are safe places for the pupils generally. The teacher and student survey also revealed several aspects in terms of effectiveness of the intervention. Figure 7 below looks at the respondents perception of the effectiveness of strategies aimed at promoting safety in schools

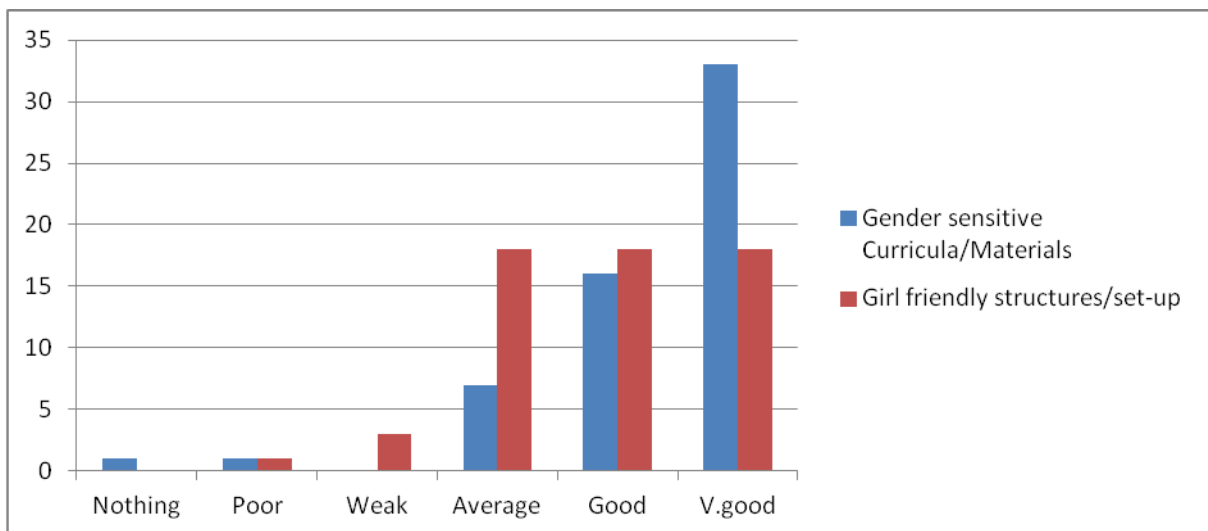
Figure 7: Effectiveness of the strategies in improving the safety of the learning environment



Source: In-depth study 2016

Furthermore, a CFS approach espouses a gender sensitive school environment. On improving the gender inclusiveness of the school, findings indicate that there has also been some positive impact thus far by the approaches employed (see figure 8 below). While there are still challenges remaining in terms of ensuring that structures in schools are girl friendly, there has been some improvement. In fact, apart from the gender inclusivity on the part of the students, unlike in the past when schools were dominated by male teachers, in both the high and low performing schools visited there were higher numbers of female teachers than their male colleagues.

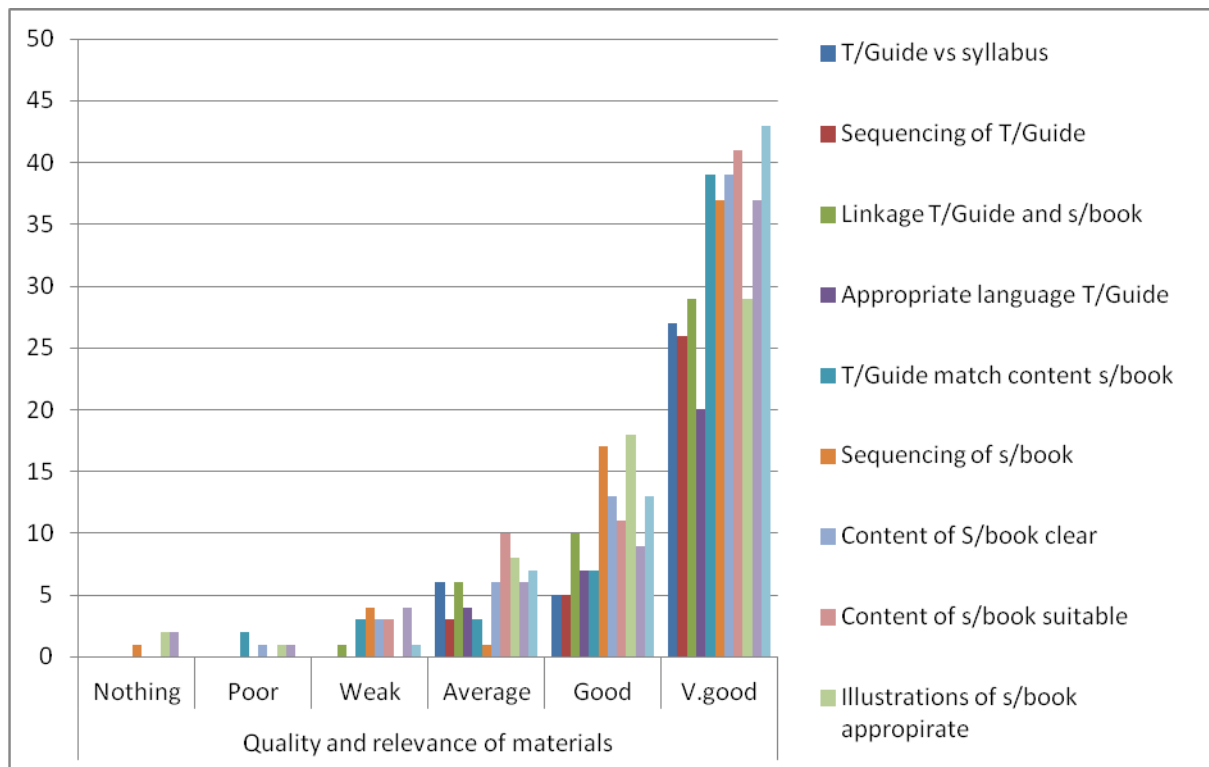
Figure 8: Improving gender dimension of schools



Source: In-depth study 2016

Furthermore, the initiatives to improve the quality of teaching have also brought with them improvement in the quality and relevance of teaching materials. Programmes like EGRA for instance have been developing own material to ensure that it is effectively implemented. As evident in Figure 9 below most of the parameters are rated highly with very few weak points.

Figure 9: Quality and relevance of teaching and learning materials



Source: In-depth study 2016

In terms of efficiency, the investment made in providing the structures to provide a safe learning environment cannot surpass the costs of not having pupils learn in a conducive environment. As such, investing in child friendly schools is evidently a worthwhile thing to do.

Finally in terms of sustainability, the question remains; Are these innovative models sustainable? While foreign designed programs such as the CFS are usually looked at as models and sources of information for designing initiatives in Malawi if properly contextualised they could help improve the provision of education. The key is to ‘considering whether a program would still be as effective once key elements are adapted’ (USAID 2010). The Child Friendly Schools approach depends on the response of the communities to make a difference. Hence if the whole SMC/PTA/Mother groups are trained and properly sensitized on what a CFS approach is all about and the role they can play, it would ensure sustainability of the innovations. The challenge is usually that sensitization and community mobilization is done on a one-off basis instead of being periodic or ongoing. Again the sustainability of the initiatives depends on communities taking it upon themselves to improve the schools for their own children’s sake. In essence, it is important to institute community ownership and civic duty if CFS is to be successful.

4.4.2 Evaluation of EGRA Model and its Adapted Versions

For a long time many teachers have had an underdeveloped understanding of teaching reading and writing because they have not been explicitly trained to teach reading (MoEST, 2014). However, with the implementation of the EGRA innovative model which includes teacher training, teachers are now more confident in teaching pupils how to read. Results of the early grade reading assessment baseline conducted in 2010 made it clear that in general children in the primary grades were not learning to read. However, projects in targeted areas have demonstrated that it is possible to change

instruction and improve student outcomes (USAID 2010). Findings from the field indicate that the approach is relevant and very effective. A teacher at one of the schools visited explained why using the EGRA model has been an effective approach:

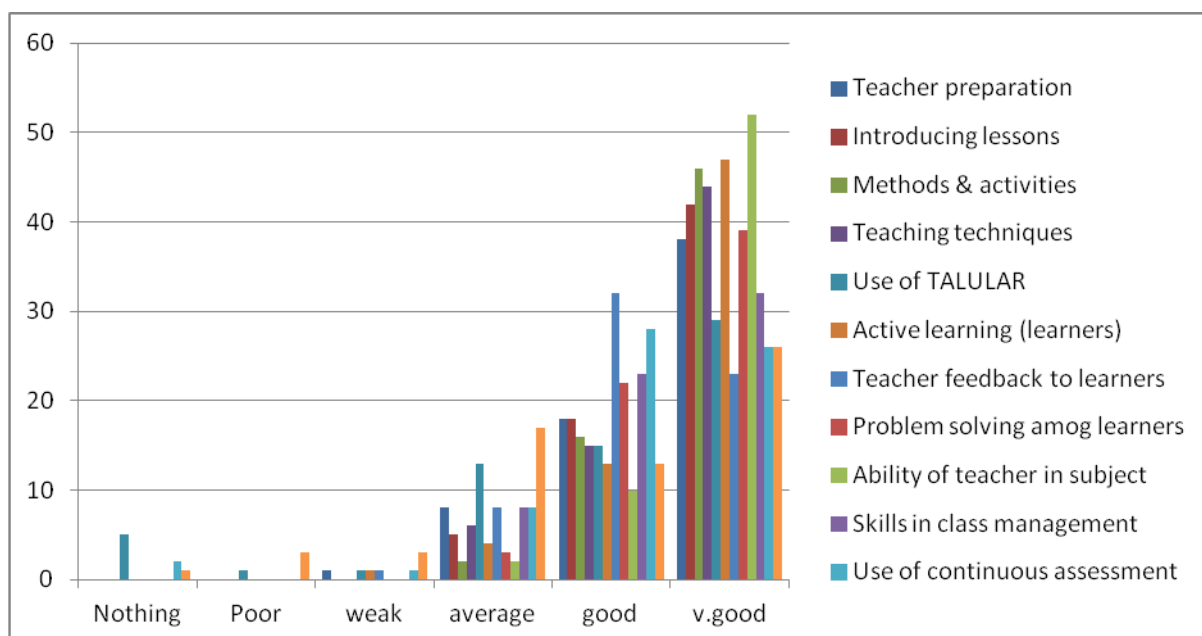
‘In the past the way we used to teach made it difficult for learners, but now with the use of phonetics and other devices, it has tremendously helped to improve things. Now learners are able to read even within the first 4 weeks of their first term in school, at least they can read simple words. There is a great improvement in the pupils’ ability to read and write.’

The effectiveness of the EGRA Model is also supported by Ministry of Education Science and Technology officials who agree that EGRA is an effective Model. One Coordinating Primary Education Advisor (CPEA) interviewed in this study also explained that:

‘Teachers now receive training on how to teach pupils to read unlike the traditional approach where the approach was different as teaching to reading was assumed. The use of letter sounds in line with the local language (Chichewa) has helped to simplify things and the approach is very effective.’

Findings from the Survey also support the view that teachers’ ability and skill to teach have improved (See Figure 10 below).

Figure 10: Teaching ability and skills among teachers



Source: In-depth study 2016

For a long time many teachers had an underdeveloped understanding of teaching reading and writing because they have not been explicitly trained to teach reading (MoEST 2014). However, with the implementation of the EGRA model which has a properly structured approach to teaching reading and includes teacher training, teachers are now more confident in teaching pupils how to read. Also shown in figure 10 above, observed against the teachers preparation and presentation of lessons, results show that the majority of teachers rated above average and in fact many of the teachers were rated very good which means many teachers have improved on ability and skills to teach. This

could also be attributed to the provision of already scripted lesson plans for use as well as the enforcement by head-teachers for teachers to use such lesson plans. This will in turn have a positive impact on student learning. As such, the interventions implemented in these schools are already showing positive results.

Despite the general consensus that EGRA is an effective model for strengthening early grade reading, the major challenges lies in the efficiency of the model in terms of costs. The costs are high since it requires a pupil to have both the main materials as well as complementary reading materials which are useful and are used in the community reading centres also established as part of the intervention and then teachers also require guides and training for them to be able to teach effectively, hence the relative high cost. The benefits however, outweigh the costs in that unlike in the past pupils are now able to read at an early age since the EGRA approach helps teachers to improve delivery and learners to grasp the concept quickly since the teachers teach effectively. This also gets the pupil excited about school hence it helps to reduce absenteeism.

But, how is sustainability of EGRA? In terms of sustainability, beginning with teachers, the training they receive once internalised could help to nurture the skill and with time improve their ability to teach using the EGRA model. Furthermore, the engagement of voluntary facilitators from the community serves to ensure continuity even after the end of the project. However, there is need to incentivise the process, it could be by the community itself contributing a little something to pay the facilitator, through organising trainings periodically for the facilitators and refining the volunteering process to get “true” volunteers. Otherwise, the voluntary nature of the reading centre facilitators impacts on the seriousness with which the facilitators approach their work as they also have to find a means to earn for their own livelihood. At times they may choose to attend to other chores rather than facilitating reading at the reading centre. Also, while the community reading centres are strategic and if taken seriously could positively contribute to developing a reading culture, the materials they read at the reading centre are received from the schools. There is need for parents and communities to create alternative avenues for accessing and receiving books apart from the school on behalf of their ward. This could be better handled and sustained if the reading centres are associated with public libraries. Furthermore, the reading centres should be custodian of reading materials in order to enforce care and rigorous library procedures for lending and storage.. Furthermore, apart instituting library procedures and standards, the use of bye laws to enforce reading times in the community reading centres could help to promote a reading culture from a tender age. After all why not ultimately move towards libraries set-up systems that are sourced through and manned by community representatives.

Overall, the major challenge with innovative models being implemented in Malawi is that they are largely dependent on external funding. For instance, where interventions target girls, as the projects or funding ends, new cohorts of girls become adolescents but the program may have stalled. The funding for these initiatives therefore needs to be available for a longer span. In addition to that, it would be important to ensure that communities get more involved in this. Mlanga (2008:25) underscores the importance of involving the community in the implementation of innovations:

“Effective innovations are those that are premised on sound school community linkages and integration. Initiatives that have the strong support of the community, where the school has established and manages strong networks with the community stand better chances of being more sustainable. Such integration facilitates ownership and support of school innovations by the community.”

These innovative models are already in line with what the Government of Malawi espouses: Thus promoting girls' education in Malawi. As such it would be good to draw from the existing political will for gender equality, to seek more funding towards promotion of such innovations in primary schools and help keep girls in school. However, a lasting impact, can only come through if communities get involved and participate.

4.5 Challenges and Possible Ways of Improving the Implementation of the Innovative Models

This section addresses the fourth specific objective of the study: 'To identify challenges and propose suitable solutions for more effective implementation of the models.' This section of the report pinpoints the challenges and opportunities that exist for improving approaches to implementation of identified innovative models. As noted at the onset, despite the implementation of various interventions and innovative models, girls' drop-out from education still remains a challenge. Thus it could be helpful to identify challenges and suggest ways of addressing them to ensure that the models make a significant impact towards creating a safe learning environment, strengthen reading skills and reduce drop out.

Findings from the field visit as well as reviewed documentary evidence indicate that while there are successes, there have also been some limitations in the implementation of the innovative models for the purpose of addressing the three areas of focus for this study. The varying levels of success and failure in application of innovative models (practices) among all the schools in this study suggests that different factors come into play hence different schools (in different or similar contexts) can be performing at different stages of this process even if the innovative approaches cover the same area in which the schools are located. Therefore, for the implementation of the identified models to be more effective, it is necessary to identify the factors currently impeding the process of implementing the models. Identifying challenges also helps to determine the options for improving how the innovations are being implemented.

This section draws from a SWOT analysis of the two innovative models in relation to how they are helping to provide a safe learning environment, strengthen reading skills and reduce drop out. Particularly, the focus here is on the weaknesses and opportunities present in implementing the innovations. Several factors emerged from the FGDs and KIIs with various stakeholders during the field research pertaining to the identified innovative models. The following Matrix presents the findings on the constraints relating to each model and the possible solutions for effective implementation:

Table 2: Challenges facing implementation of the two innovative models and possible solutions

A. Challenges facing the Implementation of EGRA and Suggested Solutions

Type of Innovative Model	Implementation Challenge	Possible Solution
EGRA	There is poor link between the Community Reading Centre facilitators and the school teachers or SMC/PTA	School heads must help facilitate engagement between community reading centre facilitators and the teachers in grades 1 – 4.
	No incentive for facilitators as they operate on voluntary basis in most cases and so their priority will in some cases be on earning a living over facilitation of reading activities	Could also establish reading clubs in the school and link them with the community reading clubs. They could both be holding reading fairs together Incentivise facilitation of village centres and ensure that the reading times are properly scheduled and reinforced
	Although learning is child centred, the training for EGRA seems to be teacher centred hence teachers are trained for each standard instead of continuation with the same teacher for the cohort	Training teachers to move with a cohort starting from Standard 1 – 4 could help improve the effectiveness of EGRA by making sure that learners are familiar and used to their teacher
	Sometimes teaching and learning materials are delivered to schools late thereby disturbing the whole process of implementation of the innovation	Ensure that teaching and learning materials are delivered to schools in time (before beginning of school year)
	Some standard 3 teachers are still struggling with pronunciation of some words	Moving a cohort with a trained teacher from Standard 1 - 4 could help address the struggles with pronunciation as by the time they reach standard 3 they are already used to the approach

B. Challenges Facing the Implementation of Child Friendly Schools and Possible Solutions

Type of Innovative Model	Implementation Challenge	Possible Solution
Child Friendly Schools	There are still some weak linkages between the school management and the communities in some cases which affect the effectiveness and sustainability of efforts to bring about a conducive environment for learning	Promote dialogue to create common knowledge between the NGOs, school management and the communities to influence change in behaviour which leads them to see the need to develop the school for the sake of their own children (taking ownership)
	Some members of the community are usually reluctant to take part in school related assessments or activities they always want some rewards for participation.	Provide “focused” training to strengthen the capacities of SMC and PTA representatives for child friendly school management with a view to encourage them to raise their level of commitments towards quality education
	No clear understanding on the part of the community on what a typical child friendly environment entails	Sensitization and mobilization on what a child friendly environment entails
	Sanitation facilities are old, poor and insufficient in some schools	Build new and separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls include WASH facilities
	Lack of support from the community towards building sanitation facilities as well as inadequate funding for school infrastructure development	Sensitize and mobilise communities and NGOs to help in building sanitation facilities
	School based WASH education is not prioritised in some schools as it is not part of the main curriculum rather it is addressed by a sanitation club which may be limited to few members	Include Wash Education as part of the main curriculum and provide training to sanitation club members to conduct sensitization campaigns within the school and community
	Inadequate sanitary facilities for girls contributing to drop out	Engage the community/NGOs to help provide improved

	sanitary facilities to cater for girls' sanitary needs in the school
High pupil to teacher ratio and enrolment causing overcrowding in most schools	Encourage the community to get involved and build more classrooms/teacher's houses etc and engage NGOs to assist with funding where possible
Lack of a cost effective model for infrastructure development	Identify or design simple and cost effective models for infrastructure development to be implemented in schools.

Overall, no approach is perfect especially where it is being applied in different contexts. As such, while there are still challenges with the implementation of the innovative models identified above, if the suggested solutions could be taken into consideration, these innovative approaches could become more effective and ultimately make a significant impact on girl education in Malawi.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section is a conclusion of the report and offers suggested recommendations on what could be the way forward. Specifically it recommends the type of innovative model that could be adopted and adapted for implementation on a wider scale. As noted at the outset, the purpose of this research was to conduct an in-depth study to identify innovative models that have created a safe learning environment, strengthened reading skills and reduced drop-out.

Overall, findings of the study indicate that there are different types of interventions being implemented in the three districts, the nature of these interventions include those that focus primarily on improving reading outcomes for learners and those focusing on improving the quality of education by providing a safe learning environment for learners, those helping to provide learner stability to ensure that they remain in school. In implementing these interventions, some have been targeting the students and the school environment directly while others have aimed at increasing education quality and access through community mobilisation. While there are those interventions that have been a great success, there are others which depending on the context have registered varying degrees of success. In fact, as also noted in the methodology section, the field visit targeted two types of schools, those doing much better and those deemed to register low performance in relation to the implementation of the interventions.

5.1 A Reflection on the Key Findings

In line with the aims of the study, the key findings were as follows

- On the type of interventions being implemented in the three study districts; Ntchisi, Lilongwe Rural East and Dedza, findings indicate that the following are the interventions being carried out: WASH projects (including building toilets and hand wash basins and menstrual hygiene management through distribution of sanitary pads for girls, are being

implemented by various organisations), there are also Mother Groups (these have been instrumental in promoting the re-admission policy and also serve as the link between girls and the school as well as the community), Bye laws targeting compulsory education for adolescent girls, Bursaries for girls in Secondary Schools, Girls clubs for girl child empowerment, CFS, School Performance Reviews, construction of female teacher's houses. Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA), and Family Literacy Projects (FLP) and Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programs (aimed at bringing back dropout pupils to school via non-formal education).

- In line with the question addressing identification of innovative models, thus interventions that are new in their nature or their implementation that depicts a process of introducing change to established approaches, the study focused on two innovative models being implemented in the study districts in line with the three focus areas; innovative models creating a safe environment are Child Friendly School projects (such as building classes and sanitary facilities among them) and the EGRA.
- Results also showed that although each model employs different strategies, both innovative models aimed at getting the community involved in ensuring that the aims of the intervention are met. For instance, EGRA focuses on reading fluency. In this approach (EGRA), teachers are advised to focus on the following key areas in teaching pupils to read namely: naming letter sounds, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing skills and support resources. The main weakness in the approach is that there is poor link between the facilitators with the teachers and in some cases even with the SMCs/PTAs. Furthermore, under EGRA community reading centres have been established in the communities surrounding the schools. Both these community based reading centres and reading clubs provide another options to create a culture of reading. However as much as they are created for after school, they ought to be taken seriously. While there are also community reading centres in the villages to instil a reading culture, the impact they are making is still unknown as their performance and seriousness differs from place to place.
- The study also found that the Child Friendly School model is generally understood to be a model that uses a combination of strategies aimed at providing a conducive and protected environment for learners. Some of the strategies include; the provision of essentials such as soap and sanitary pads to girls in school. Infrastructure development projects including; building sanitary facilities, classrooms and teachers' houses; provision of chalkboards and desks among others. It was, however, noted that the impact of some of the strategies would be short lived, as in most cases they were short term relief strategies for instance distribution of sanitary pads without training the mother groups to be producing them locally.
- On improving girl child retention in school the main strategy used in both the models is involving the School Management Committees, Parent Teacher Associations and the community at large through sensitization/mobilization on the need to send their children back to school as well as to assist them to continue reading in the village reading centres after school.
- In terms of effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability of the CFS and EGRA models, findings indicated that, in general both innovative models were relevant since they are in line with the policies being advanced and implemented by the government in Malawi. Furthermore, while there were limitations in implementation of the innovative models, generally the approaches had been effective but it varied from school to school basing on the

contextual factors. However, for some the main challenge lies in their efficiency as they require a lot of money to run them.

- On sustainability, findings showed that in some cases the chances of sustainability were high especially where skills were acquired and internalised and where the communities were involved and took ownership of projects.
- Findings also indicated that there were various challenges facing the innovative models implementation including insufficient funding leading to difficulties with sustainability of the projects or initiatives, community reluctance to participate in the projects and in some cases a general lack of understanding and ownership of the innovative model can also affect the sustainability of the models.

In summary the study has shown that various interventions are being implemented and their success has been at varying degrees depending on the context in which they are implemented. Whilst the two innovative models singled out in this study touch on all the three areas namely; promoting a safe learning environment, strengthening early grade reading and reducing dropout, in most cases the main focus falls primarily under only one of these areas. In some cases, where the model for instance, CFS encompasses a lot of activities, that can be stand alone interventions, focus by various players has been on one type of intervention with the hope that it will contribute to the provision of a Child Friendly School environment.

Overall, the one innovative model that seems to have a broad based coverage is the Child Friendly Schools approach. As such if the interventions by various members of CSEC are to make a lasting and significant impact, it would be good to adopt and adapt the CFS model to become a best practice. Such adaptation must include EGRA under the CFS pillar of Academically Effective School.

However, it should be born in mind that to ensure sustainability and feasibility in adopting new approaches or innovations such as CFS, various actors would look at the success it has registered. In comparison with the EGRA model, the most evident success has been registered by the EGRA where following its implementation; emerging evidence has shown that pupils can begin to read within the first 6 weeks of school. Although pupils' drop-out is high in the higher standards, it is unquestionable that conditions in earlier standards influence later learning and so EGRA could help provide the motivation to pupils to remain in school once they see that they are able to read and learning is taking place. Nonetheless, it remains a challenge that EGRA only targets lower grades of primary school and is primarily focused on strengthening early grade reading thus this could be a limitation to an extent. Although CFS seems to be more complex, it targets all areas including literacy, health, rights and other. On that basis then, the CFS model is more encompassing and if properly implemented it could be a success as it addresses all areas of schooling that will make a girl child remain in school if implemented.

5.2 Recommendations

In conclusion, the various interventions being implemented hold great potential to make a significant impact on girl child education if properly implemented. Of all these, the two innovative models can be easily adopted and adapted. Particularly, the Child Friendly Schools approach would be recommended for up-scaling because it can easily include and embrace EGRA when and where funds permits through curricula improvements. However for it to be effectively implemented several things need to be taken into consideration:

- Ensuring that both schools management and communities work together to ensure that it is well implemented. It is imperative that before implementing CFS both the schools and communities surrounding the schools should be adequately sensitized so that they have full knowledge of what this model entails and how they can get involved/mobilize to ensure its

success. Remember that effective innovations are those that are premised on sound school community linkages and integration. Such integration facilitates ownership and support of school innovations by the community.

- The variation in innovation implementation level among schools indicates that implementation of any innovation is a process, as such implementers must be committed to the process, not only doing a one-off assistance and abandoning the schools. Different schools perform at different stages and have different need levels as such there must be commitment on the part of all stakeholders to see the process through if it is to make a lasting impact.
- For some of the innovative models where there is a package of activities that need to be taken into consideration to achieve the goals (for example, Child Friendly Schools), it is important to have a clear understanding of what the interventions entail. There must be common knowledge and understanding about the different facets of the intervention so as to influence a positive response and behavioural change on the part of the community, throughout the implementation period.
- Proper and focused training needs to be given to SMCs and PTAs as a whole committee and not only chairpersons so that working together they can sensitize and mobilise the communities. Besides, involving all in training will help in ensuring capacity building.
- Take time to sensitize/mobilize the communities on the need for taking ownership of the projects as this not only helps government and NGOs to free other resources but it also helps them to extend education provision to other places that would not be possibly served with government resources alone.

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