

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are happy to present our third newsletter and hope you will enjoy reading through it. For up-to-date project information, please visit www.refie.org regularly.

Team Insights

As part of the data collection process the Malawian research team visited four schools and their surrounding communities which form case studies in the research analysis. In teams of two the Malawian researchers stayed for a whole week in the community in order to hold interviews and group discussions and to conduct participatory observations.

Some reflection of the Malawi national team after their field visits

Community Participation



While visiting the schools the team noted a high level of community-based support and advocacy for education of marginalized children across the schools through diverse mechanisms. At one school, an individual family volunteers to care of learners with disabilities from distant places in its home. Community members take turns in provision of basic resources for the learners such as food, soap and body lotion to support this family and the learner. In another school, a Father Group and a Young Female

Support Group participate actively to counsel learners especially girls on the benefits of education and encourage them to stay in school and delay marriage. The community also managed to introduce a school meals programme to ensure that children receive full balanced meal during school hours. Listening to lived experiences of groups of learners of various needs, the team learned of the diverse perspectives on acceptance and participation in the schooling process. Generally, the team heard inspiring stories of learners with various disabilities and circumstances that demonstrated a great deal of resilience, determination and adopted positive behaviours to overcome their obstacles and make it through to the education system.

The Resource Centre

Resource classrooms are established in Primary and Secondary schools across Malawi. In previous years there were 67 resource centres in primary schools and 4 in secondary schools in Malawi, but numbers have reduced to 43 in total by 2012. The aim of the resource centres is to prepare learners for inclusion in mainstream classes. However the national *refie* team found out that different stakeholders understand the issue of resource centres differently. Many resource centres do not have resources and – as a serious misunderstanding - some learners with severe disabilities are kept in the resource room for extended periods of time instead of them joining their fellow learners in the regular classroom. The member checking workshop that brought together national, district and school level participants was an eye opener in bringing to light the double edged sword that the resource centre played. On one hand, at national level the establishment of the centres was envisaged to support teachers in handling learners with various educational needs. On the other, school administrators and teachers alike found the acute shortage of appropriate specialist teachers and resources complicating the integration of learners with special needs in the regular classroom.

Sanitation

At one school, the team learned about the efforts of a world leading beverage company to increase attendance: The company is embarking on a project to improve sanitation in 42 schools in Blantyre Urban benefiting over 120,000 learners. The company is going to construct toilets for both boys and girls and install water supplies to schools that do not have clean water.

Sanitation has been one of the areas of concern by respondents during the *refie* data collection exercise. The poor condition of toilets and lack of clean water in some schools in Blantyre Urban has been a cause for concern to education stakeholders in the district. The sanitation problem is hindering girls' attendance in the district. Teachers, learners, head teacher, School Management Committee (SMC), Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) and Mother Group members mentioned sanitation as a major cause of high rate of absenteeism among girls and the physically challenged learners. The Desk Officer for Primary Education (DOPE) in Blantyre Urban concurred with the group's views. He narrated a story of one physically challenged learner who was refusing to take porridge at the school, because there was no toilet suitable for him. The SMC, PTA and The District Education Office worked together to construct a toilet specifically for him.

News & Events

International *refie* team visiting Guatemala and Malawi

In July the Malawi and the Guatemala national teams hosted the international *refie* experts in succession. Prof. Rolf Werning, Prof. Petra Engelbrecht, Prof. Alfredo Ariles, and Myriam Hummel visited Guatemala and Malawi and held several meetings with the national teams. GIZ was represented through Stephanie Petrasch in Malawi and Milena Rottok in Guatemala. A great benefit of the international team visits was amongst many others that the expert could share the experience from one country with the other. The main result achieved of the joint work, is the definition of further steps in data analysis and for the preparation of the final reports to be presented on January, 2015.



During the visits, both national teams organized a one-day workshop with the objective to discuss emerging views from the field with some of the interviewees of the study. The participants of the workshops represented the main levels of the education system, as teachers,

head teachers, ministry officials from district and national level and civil society representatives were present. This composition of participants proved to allow a multi-perspective member check.

The objectives of the workshops were to:

1. Conduct a member check with participants to get their feedback on the study in order to enhance credibility and authenticity of the data and interpretations made. This consultation also provided an opportunity for any additional information pertaining to the study;
2. Provide a platform for sharing with participants what the research team found so far– many times participants do not get to read or hear about the data they helped generate;
3. To validate the emerging themes based on the partial review of the field information by representatives of the different levels who are part of the National Education System.
4. To discuss possible future actions to achieve inclusive education systems

As the participants mentioned, the workshops developed in a very productive and participative atmosphere. For some, being invited to contribute in the validation of emerging results was a new and positive experience. Especially the exchange across levels, e.g. between teachers and the ministry proved to be a new experience for some participants and was evaluated as very productive. Moreover, the national teams of the refie project described the workshop as an important and valuable strategy to validate the initial results.

In general terms the objectives set out for the workshops were achieved. All participants stressed that the workshops enriched their views about the current situation of education and that such an exchange across different levels is necessary for the development of inclusive education.

Education and Access: Opening spaces for the marginalized

The Malawi team will participate in the upcoming national education conference on 'Education and Access: Opening spaces for the marginalized' (20-22 August) organized by the Faculty of Education of the University of Malawi with support from the British [Canon Collins Education and Legal Assistance Trust](#) (CCELAT) and the also British [Department for International Development](#) (DFID).

Inclusive Education is in Malawi's news

Malawi's media and social media have demonstrated the heightened recognition of the importance of inclusive education (IE). Major newspapers and websites

presented publications on various aspects of the topic. Over the last weeks alone, the two major newspapers carried articles on the plight of children in various circumstances leading to vulnerability. An article on child labour in Malawi's tobacco farms lists various stakeholders that have taken action to eliminate this kind of child abuse. Initiatives include listing and distribution of education materials on hazardous work and materials for children; improving opportunities for families to allow them send their children to school; improved access to loans and farm input for families; social responsibility avenues for tobacco firms and best practices on eliminating child labour. A related article particularly discouraged the abuse of children with disabilities by using them as "*money generating instruments*" on the streets consequently exposing them to the risks of intimation, drug and alcohol abuse. The Ministry of Education's commitment to ensure equal opportunities for all children regardless of their circumstances was demonstrated in the announcement that it will construct a special needs education institute during the launch of the 2014 Education Global week. In addition, the ministry has also directed that newly constructed schools should include facilities to make them disability friendly institutions. Additional articles focused on improving communication for students with hearing impairment and also the important role of Mother Groups in the context of helping teenage mothers to return to school after giving birth was elaborated.

The Guatemala *refie* team at the Second National Seminar on Autism

On July 18 and 19, the *refie* team was invited to participate in the Second National Seminar on Autism organized by "Fundación Autismo Guatemala". The name of the Seminar was "Toward and Inclusive Society". During this event, Prof. Alfredo Ariles, Marta Caballeros and Héctor Canto presented the theme "Inclusive Education and Guatemalan reality" based on the research project and its contribution toward the discussion of inclusive education in the country.

The *refie* project in Guatemala was invited to conform an emerging group integrated by Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (Escuela de Psicología), Universidad Galileo, FLACSO, and Fundal. The initiative began because it was noticed that there are several efforts taking place in the country that are oriented to improve inclusive education mainly at the university level. The first meeting took place at the *refie* office and participants presented their projects and its objectives. The second meeting proposed to strengthen the group as an opportunity to discuss and support the theme of inclusive education in different institutional agendas.

The *refie* team has been invited by the "Comisión Nacional para la Atención de las Personas con Discapacidad" CONADI and UNESCO in two different occasions to participate in the presentation and follow up actions of a program oriented to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, mainly indigenous women from rural areas, in public policies. The main purpose is to build a "critical route" for the inclusion of disable people in the current policies and improve the fulfilment of their human rights.

London International Conference on Education (LICE-2014)

November 10-12, 2014, London, UK, www.liceducation.org

The London International Conference on Education (LICE) is an international refereed conference dedicated to the advancement of the theory and practices in education. The LICE promotes collaborative excellence between academicians and professionals from Education. The aim of the LICE is to provide an opportunity for academicians and professionals from various educational fields with cross-

disciplinary interests to bridge the knowledge gap, promote research esteem and the evolution of pedagogy. The LICE-2014 invites research papers that encompass conceptual analysis, design implementation and performance evaluation.

Featured Publications & Links

World Inequality Database on Education

The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) highlights the powerful influence of circumstances, such as wealth, gender, ethnicity and location, over which people have little control but which play an important role in shaping their opportunities for education and life. It draws attention to unacceptable levels of education inequality across countries and between groups within countries, with the aim of helping to inform policy design and public debate. <http://www.education-inequalities.org/>

The State of the World's Children 2014 In Numbers

Every Child Counts highlights the critical role data and monitoring play in realizing children's rights. Credible data, disseminated effectively and used correctly, make it possible to target interventions that help right the wrong of exclusion. Data do not, of themselves, change the world. They make change possible – by identifying needs, supporting advocacy, gauging progress and holding duty bearers to account. Making the possible real is up to decision makers.

<http://www.unicef.org/sowc2014/numbers/>

UNICEF Germany press release on the report (in German only)
<http://www.unicef.de/blob/52008/8cee222c5eb4fcd88473b0dffa88e85f/zusammenfassung-unicef-report-2014-pdf-data.pdf>

More research projects

- **Reach Forward: Making educational research count for children with disabilities in Malawi, Kenya and Uganda** (2013-2014), University of Birmingham
The Reach Forward Project aims to address the exclusion of children with disabilities in Africa from quality education. It will do so by establishing a wide network of partners from a variety of sectors including UK and African universities, non-governmental organisations, educational managers and coordinators, practitioners and government staff in Kenya, Malawi and Uganda. The project will draw on existing primary research to address a number of issues around the current educational support available for children with visual impairment and those with other disabilities, focusing on Malawi, Uganda and Kenya. The ultimate goal is to strengthen the capacity of partners in the South allowing them to set their own research agendas and inform the development of effective education systems.
<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/reach-forward/index.aspx>
- **The Center for Equity in Education**, University of Manchester
The Centre involves practitioners, policy makers and researchers in

collaborative development and research projects that seek to have a direct impact in the field. Specifically it aims to develop (1) better understanding of the nature of the challenges facing the education service particularly in respect to vulnerable groups, (2) analyses of best knowledge and practice in the field in relation to these challenges, (3) effective intervention models and strategies that have high leverage in terms of pupil outcomes and (4) forms of dissemination that will be accessible, meaningful and relevant to policy makers and practitioners.

<http://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/education/research/disadvantageandpoverty/cce/>

- **Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP)** (2005-2010), University of Cambridge

The core objective of RECOUP is to study the mechanisms that drive this cycle of deprivation, and to identify the policies needed to ensure that educational outcomes benefit the disadvantaged. Between 2005-2010 RECOUP conducted six collaborative projects:

(1) Disability and poverty study, (2) Youth, gender & citizenship study (3) Health & fertility study (4) Skills acquisition and its impact upon lives and livelihoods (5) Aid partnerships and educational outcomes, (6) Public-private partnerships in the provision of education

<http://ceid.educ.cam.ac.uk/researchprogrammes/recoup/projects/>

- **Strengthening open and flexible learning for increased education access in high HIV prevalence SADC countries (SOFIE)** (2007-2010), University of London

The SOFIE Project was a three year research study funded by the ESRC-DFID Scheme, which sought to play a proactive role in facilitating government action through developing and trialing alternative pathways to learning that complement and enrich conventional schooling and meet learners' needs more effectively. The study was led by researchers at the Institute of Education, University of London working in partnership with researchers at the Institute of Education, National University of Lesotho, the Centre for Educational Research and Training (CERT), University of Malawi and the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). The aim of the study was to increase understanding of how more open and flexible learning can address barriers to educational access and achievement and how to increase the knowledge skills and empowerment of HIV-affected young people. Further it contributed to an increased research capacity in the participating countries.

<http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk>

Contact

If you have any questions about the project and its research, please be invited to contact our research coordination office:

Myriam Hummel, Research Coordinator

Leibniz Universität Hannover
Schloßwender Str. 1
30159 Hannover
+49 511 762 17382
contact@refie.org

With best regards,

The *refie* Team

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