

CASE STUDY 1

MALAWI (RM)

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1 Introduction: Description of the school and its context

The District

The district where the school is located is one of the districts in northern Malawi. Chitumbuka is the predominant language spoken in the district as well as at the school visited. The local tribes have some cultural practices which could be regarded as having a negative impact on the education of girls, for example, a tradition that encourages parents to force their children into early marriages. The main source of livelihood in the district is subsistence farming although some people are involved in small scale businesses. This is a lower income community. The district has several zones, with each one under a Primary Education Advisor. According to the National Census, the district has a fast growing population.

Socio-Economic Profile of the district

According to the District Education Plan, the main source of livelihood is subsistence farming with some estates for tobacco farming. However, tobacco farming negatively affects learners' attendance during peak period and causes children to drop out of school during peak seasons. In the service industry, the district has branches of banks and retail charges. There is only a small scale manufacturing industry with only one large-scale wood industry installation. The district has earth roads that are poor, making travel very difficult.

The district has got various minerals and also natural and artificial plantation forests which contribute to the potential for the economic development of the district. Most of the communities around these plantations may use them for example through mushroom collection which can be dried and exported.

Sixty percent of the district population is involved in small scale businesses such as sales of used and new clothes, hardware, and restaurants. Most women are involved in micro businesses and sell such things as flour and 'mandazi'. Paid employment in the district is associated with labour demands in different occupations such as clerical, managerial and skilled and unskilled labour in public, commercial and parastatals. The income realised supports learners in terms of food, school fees and clothes.

The district has largely arable land. Some areas in the district have general water problems. For instance out of 249 public primary schools only 189 have safe water sources. This has a negative impact on school sanitation. Access to safe water supply is at 73 per cent which is below the national status by 1 per cent.

Primary school enrolment fluctuates due to migratory farm labourers. The lowest school enrolment is in July and September, the tobacco off growing season.

The school

The school visited is located near a big trading centre. It is also where the Teacher Development Centre (TDC) for the zone is located.

Enrolment

The school has an enrolment of 1357 learners out of which 719 (53 per cent) are boys while 638 (47 per cent) are girls. It has 30 learners identified with special needs and of them: 2 boys and 1 girl have speech problem; 2 boys and 2 girls have an intellectual disability; 1 boy and 3 girls are deaf and dumb;

one boy and one girl are deaf; 6 girls and 8 boys have hearing impairments; 1 boy and 1 girl have a physical disability; 1 girl is epileptic and 3 boys and 1 girl have learning difficulties. There are 17 teachers at the school out of which 16 are qualified and 1 is an ODL student teacher. Of the 17 teachers, 8 are males and 9 are females and 7 males and 6 female teachers have Malawi School Certificates of Education while 1 male and 3 female have Junior Certificates of Education. There is a specialist teacher for hearing impairment based at the school. The school had 22 boys and 14 girls registered as dropouts during the time data for this case study was collected.

Physical setting of the school

The school established a resource centre in 2013. Although there is not yet a structure befitting to be a resource centre plans are underway to construct one with the assistance of the church and government. The school boasts of electricity although only two blocks are electrified including the block that houses the head teacher's office. There is no staff room for teachers at the school. The head teacher's office is small and looks like a store room with so many things heaped in it, e.g. books, flour, bags of maize etc. Most of the school blocks are in poor condition. For example some of them have breezeblocks; others have windows without window panes, which expose learners to cold air during cold weather. The classrooms are not enough for all the learners and there are inadequate desks and chairs for learners. The classrooms are not accessible for learners with physical challenges. There are separate toilets for boys and girls although the girls' toilets are not safe because they do not have doors that can shut. The toilets are also not friendly for learners with physical challenges. The school has no borehole and learners have to walk a distance to drink water and this affects the punctuality of learners in attending classes especially after break time. The school grounds are not very clean and the playground for sports activities is some distance from the school premises. It was reported that the school used to have a bigger space and they placed the playground a bit far from the school buildings and then people encroached and settled on the land between the school and the playground separating the two.

Leadership, Management and Governance

The head teacher's office has a lot of information on its walls reflecting the organisational structures in the school such as School Management Committee, Parent Teachers Committee, Mother Group Committee, Discipline Committee and a Welfare Committee amongst others. There is also information on the organisations assisting the schools including support from religious organisations, the government through the DEM's office, and other non-governmental organisations such as PLAN Malawi etc.

2 Micro-level

2.1 The concept of inclusive education

Parents

i. The Parents Teacher Association and School Management Committee

Parents' Teacher Association members understand the concept of inclusive education as giving access to every child by providing them with a chance to go to school regardless of their situation, possible impairment and poverty. There were several perceptions of inclusive education. Some SMC/PTA members views are for example that:

For education to be for all, there is need for more teachers and teacher's houses here at [name of place]. There is need for more materials. There is need for a very understanding between the School Committee and the teaching staff at the school. Chiefs should also take part in school activities and be very participative. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 19)

The last view on inclusive education by the PTA/SMC largely focused on giving opportunities to children with disabilities as well as to the poor to have access to education:

So all, parents and chiefs set up an agreement that every child should be going to school regardless of their situation. Whether the child is disabled or poor should come to school. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 105)

The PTA emphasized that education should be available for every child to achieve. The PTA said:

What we want is that we need education for every child and we want to ask government as well as [name of place] primary school community to send all children regardless of their status to school. We also want children who are disabled should have a chance. All we want is that education should go a great height. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 136)

ii. Parents of Special Needs Learners Association

Parents of Special Needs learners regard the concept of Inclusive education as having specialist teachers to help learners with disabilities as well as acceptance by teachers and their fellow learners as well as learning together with regular learners. The parents of special needs learners explained in these words:

We are happy as parents because children learning here are not harsh to say, 'you go and learn separately from us', that is what we like because they are not segregated (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 48).

In addition to that, some organizations teach us and send us teachers here (specialist teacher), we found that it was good that our children are learning well with the others. As parents we are happy that the children are not bad mouthed by fellow learners. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 50)

iii. Mother Groups

Mother group members mentioned that both regular learners and learners with disabilities learn together in their respective classes and participating in extra-curricular affairs like sports together with what they call 'normal learners'. One of the mother groups members expressed the view that:

Children with special needs, some do not speak while some are deaf but they are allowed to participate in playing balls at the ground, here we have balls that we were given children pal together. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 110)

One of the mother group members said that learners with disabilities learn together with normal learners at the school.

They learn together there (meaning in class), here we don't have special block for special needs learners, so they enter in their respective classes they are in. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 112)

Professionals

i. The Head teacher

The head teacher stressed the need to have a specialist teacher for learners with particular impairments. He said:

There are some children who are physically challenged or impaired, any sort of impairment, hearing impairment, visual, deaf and so on, so, in most schools such children are not taught well because they need to have specialist teacher for them. For example, here we are having one but he is for hearing impairment only. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 36)

ii. Teachers

Teachers view inclusive education as the learning together of learners with impairments and non-impaired learners in the regular school. This helps to build the learners together and have oneness as they grow so that they do not become strangers in their society. One of the teachers said:

The policy of inclusive education is very important. It is very important that learners with learning impairment, disabilities learn with other learners in the normal schools. If the learners with special needs are isolated, they develop their own culture which makes them strangers to those in normal schools. Not only that the special needs learner become a stranger even in their own homes. This is a very good policy even though it has some challenges. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 99)

One of the teachers added that inclusive education means that all learners should have access to education despite all the challenges they are facing. She said:

To make sure that all have access to school regardless of the challenges that they have. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014)

In conclusion, under the concept of inclusive education the key issue raised by all the respondents at all levels is that inclusive education is concerned with providing an opportunity especially for learners with disabilities to learn together with other learners in one school. PTA/SMC added that the concept of Inclusive education also includes giving girls equal opportunities to education. Parents with children with special needs emphasized that inclusive education requires Specialist teachers in the schools to support the learners with disabilities. The mother group's perception is that inclusive education can be achieved if learners with disabilities participate in sporting activities with their peers whilst the PTA/SMC and teachers also view inclusive education as also including all groups of learners including learners from poverty stricken households. Parents with special needs learners and mother group referred a great deal to acceptance and participation of all learners.

2.2 Access

2.2.1 Drop out

Parents

- i. The Parents Teacher Association and School Management Committee view (PTA/SMC)

The PTA/SMC raised several issues leading to dropout of learners. One of the issues pointed out was that parents accept the custom of girls to be married at a young age. When the community has made efforts to withdraw the girl from the marriage, she is not accepted at her parents' house. One of the members of the group said:

There are some parents who accept bad behavior. Some encourage young girls to be married. When we manage to withdraw girls from early marriage, they do not accept the girls at their homes neither supporting her education. The parents even do not accept the child to be raised at their homes. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 70)

The second issue that was raised that contribute to the dropout of learners also points at parents who would let children drop out of school so that they can help parents in managing the family affairs. They share the role of bread winner with their parents especially within single parent families. One of the participants in the focus group discussion said:

The main problem is that parents want to be assisted by the children on household welfare. Some parents do not have husbands at the house, so they want children to help them fetch for food for the house. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 82)

Some children are left at home to look after their siblings during school time. A member of the PTA/SMC in the discussion elaborated:

Some children are asked not to go to school to look after his siblings by their parents. So they miss school. So the child will not continue with school. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 130)

Among the children who do not come to school, the disabled were also mentioned. One of the participants in the discussion emphasized:

There are some disabled children who do not come to school. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 92)

The group said that nowadays, children are not sent to herd cattle as it was in the past. It is now the responsibility of the parents to look after the livestock. A male member of the group in his own words said:

In the past, children used to be sent to herd cattle. Now it is the parents who are herding the livestock. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 129)

After realizing that there was a problem in the communities surrounding the area regarding the education of girls, they sat down and made a commitment that every girl child should access education:

Also we sat down that every girl child should access education and not drop out. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 133)

Regarding girls' education emphasis was also placed on having adequate toilet facilities and re-admitting girls who once dropped out of school due to pregnancy. A female SMC/PTA member said:

For everyone to access education, there is need to have enough toilets. Also the school should accept girls who were once pregnant. Teachers and parents they need to work together for the success of the children. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 21)

ii. Parents of Special Needs Learners

Parents of special needs learners emphasized that some of the children drop out of school due to illness. One member said:

Yes, he dropped out of school because as he was attending school, he became sick, he had problems of swollen legs from the knees below. He could be at times but during examinations his legs could become swollen again that is how he stopped. From that time when we tried to take him to different hospitals but to no avail. For some time the legs seemed okay but they have started again so he does not go to school. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 95)

No, all of them go to school except for one boy but he is old so that even if we tell him to go to school, he can't because he suffers from epilepsy, he left school a long time ago. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 117)

Early marriage is another factor that has made girls drop out of school. In her own words, one of the SNE parent said:

Not my biological daughter, all my children have gone to school except this one, the daughter to my younger sister. She once got married but the marriage failed and she is back. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 108)

The study also found that some learners drop out of school due to peer pressure and poverty particularly girls who admire their friends who have good clothes. So marriage is an alternative to get support and meet their needs. One of the members explained:

Girls are indeed facing problems because boys and girls are different because even when they either have both parents or they are orphans, they face similar problems in that sometimes they do not go further with education. Some will get married and when you ask them, they say it was because of peer pressure while sometimes it is because of poverty in their families. When they see their friends in good clothes, they also want to be like them and they end up not progressing with their education. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 149)

Some children in the communities drop out of school due to lack of school fees especially when they have to enter to secondary school. One of the members said:

We have one at home, a child to my younger sister, she is at the community day secondary school, she is not going because she does not have school fees. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 114)

Being older also causes some learners to drop out of school. One of the members said:

The one present stopped because he was older than the class he was in. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 131)

iii. Mother Groups

Mother group members noted that some of the school policies have contributed to learners dropping out of school. This includes the rule that every child should have a school uniform as well as financial contributions to for example the maintenance of electricity at the school. The mother group noted:

Some because here at school we use electricity and we need to maintain it so sometimes the school committee together with teachers sit down and agree on what to do. So the committee sometimes say,

'let us ask every child to pay maybe one hundred and fifty kwacha per year for the bills', so because of lack of that money some children stay home for good, others because of financial problems they lack school uniform as every child is mandated to be in uniform since this school is along the road. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 54)

Students

i. Special Needs Learners¹

The SNE learners pointed out that some of them drop out themselves at school because their parents tell them to stop coming to school while other friends are herding cattle and some stay in distant villages places that make access to the nearest school difficult. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 167-178)

Girls

Girls mentioned that illness is another reason that leads to some of their friends not come to school. One of the learners in the discussion said:

For example, [name of child] stopped coming to school and when I asked her why she was not coming to school, she could tell me she was sick and I told her to come back to school after getting better but up to now she is not yet back. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

Some of the girls strongly emphasized that lack of material/financial resources is a major contributing factor for the girls to get married at a younger age, some girls have dropped out of school because their parents have influenced them to do so, while for boys it is because they are given a responsibility to look after cattle and other boys just drop out. She said:

It happens that if they are girls, some just end up getting married though very young so as to be assisted by the man. Others leave school to take care of cattle. Most of the girls drop from school because their parents tell them to help with household chores but the boys just leave school on their own. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

Sometimes parents tell their girls to get married due to financial problems especially when they have debts to honour they decide to marry off their daughter although she may be still young. So its parents. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

Some parents are poor and they encourage their children to get married so that when they receive lobola [bride price] they should use the money to buy soap. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

Some parents would also ask the girls to go into prostitution so that they assist in looking for money to feed the family. One learner said:

Some are told by their parents to go to bars. They go to bottle store to fetch money. They are encouraged in prostitution by their parents in order to find money for feeding at home. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

¹ This is the main term used by the participants. Available information on how this term is understood is presented in the case study considering each of the perspectives. The study's underlying concept of inclusion includes all groups that has to be considered as disadvantaged in terms of inclusive education.

The fact that parents expect their children to work in the gardens in early in the morning causes lateness in coming to schools and in the long run results in drop out. One of the members in the discussion said:

Other parents take their children to and cultivate their garden in the morning before the child goes to school and the child ends up going to school every day late and is given punishments daily. This discourages the child to go to school and eventually drops out. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

Another participant mentioned in the discussion that another reason for orphans to drop out of school is in order to look for food and take care of themselves:

Some are orphans taking care of their siblings and they drop out of school to look for household amenities like food

Boys that migrate to South Africa for greener economic pastures also contribute to girls drop out. One of the girls said:

Sometimes boys go to South Africa to work and they send their pictures to the girls through their relatives and the girls are easily carried away by them and end up getting married to them. (MW_RM_F_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014)

Professionals

i. Head Teacher

When asked on the reasons for learners to drop out of school, the head teacher said:

In general we say that learners should come to school with clean clothes, clean uniform, so those from poor families when their uniform is dirty, they can sometimes not come to school because they do not have soap. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 129)

ii. Teachers

Teachers mentioned that early marriages sometimes are a result of poor performance in class by the learners especially girls. One of the teachers explained:

Mostly its girls who do that especially when they are not performing as expected like failing frequently they just decide to drop. Then maybe after two to three months we just hear they have gone for marriages. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 165)

Drop out has affected a large number of girls in the area. Some interventions were initiated by international and local non-governmental organizations in the area and include for example the establishment of clubs. One of the teachers in the focus group discussion said:

On part of girls' absenteeism and dropouts we have clubs with support from Plan, FAWEMA, YOUNECO, MAGA, RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, so when they come they teach chiefs, parents, teachers and then learners themselves. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 188)

Some by-laws have been put in place in the community to address the challenge of early marriages for example a penalty for a family found that encourage their daughters to marry early has been instituted. One of the teachers revealed:

We have also agreed together with the chiefs and YOUNECO that for the children who drop out of school with the reason that they have impregnated one another the parents should pay cattle and the children too. These are acting as by-laws. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 217)

In the discussion, the other reason that contributes to learners leaving school is due to family breakups. This affects learners' education future. In the discussion, one teacher who participated said:

Just to add family breakups also contribute to the dropouts because children are disturbed and they fail to understand who to follow in such cases. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 166)

In summary, PTA/SMC members, SNE learners, girls and teachers refer to parents as the main contributors to the dropout of learners in the school. Girls have mentioned several additional reasons why most of their fellow girls drop out of school in addition to being forced into marriage including being forced to go into prostitution in order to supplement household earnings. Girls also reported that some parents take children to the garden in the morning and they are late for classes, eventually this leads to the children dropping out of school. Parents of special needs learners and girls mentioned that some children drop out of school due to illness. Both girls and special needs learners mentioned that the other reason children do not come to school is they are asked by their parents to herd cattle while the PTA/SMC contradicts this because they said this used to happen in the past and now it is the duty of the parents to herd cattle. Orphans have been mentioned by the Girls as another group that drop out of school while special needs learners and PTA/SMC mentioned that there are some disabled children who do not come to school. SNE learners explained that the other reasons include challenging physical access due to the long distances to school and parents who do not want them to go to school.

2.2.2 Specific Measures to improve Access

In order to improve access to education for all groups especially girls, teachers advised them to be moving in groups as they are coming to and from school. One of the teachers said:

They are advised to be moving in groups for security purposes. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 154)

The head teacher said that in order to improve access especially to the marginalized groups who lack financial materials, the school deliberately reserve some supplies for them. He emphasized:

As a school, when we distribute resources received from the government and others, we leave some behind to distribute later to orphans and vulnerable children. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 216)

The school head teacher expressed satisfaction with the introduction of the re-admission policy. As a measure to give an opportunity to all learners, the school implements the policy which gives a second chance to girls who once dropped out and have come back. He said:

Re-admission policy especially for girls when they drop out of school to get married and when they come back, we re-admit them at school. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 245)

2.2.3 Recommendations on Access

a. Parents

i. Parents of Special Needs Learners

A call was made by the parents of special needs learners group for material support in order to improve access for their children. A member said:

They lack assistance to learn well in school so it could be better if they could be given assistance especially for the things they lack. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 165)

ii. Mother Groups

It was highlighted by the mother group that good teachers' houses would improve their presence at the school and reduce the distance they need to travel to school. So mother group members suggested that there is need to add more teachers' houses at the school:

If they could increase the number of houses for teachers because some are renting houses elsewhere. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 48)

Better sanitary facilities for the school was strongly emphasized by the mother group. These facilities include construction of adequate and accessible toilets and bathrooms:

Other things we are intending to do are that we want to construct bathrooms for the girls. For our girls we need nice bathrooms and adequate basins and other resources so that they should be helping themselves when in need and should fully participate in class. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 128)

[...] toilets, for a school to be good, we need adequate toilets, if they are not enough it even delays children from attending classes because they will have to queue up for toilet. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 129)

Mother group members also stated that the school needs enough classroom blocks as well as a borehole to improve on the water and sanitation at the school, e.g.:

Here we need to have adequate classroom blocks, adequate teachers, and adequate teachers' houses for our teachers not to complain. We also need a borehole, we had it before but it is no longer functional, we have a lot of children who cannot go to someone's house to ask for drinking water. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 128)

Key issues recommended in order to improve on access therefore are learning materials to support learners with special needs learners as raised by the parents of special needs learners, adequate and safe toilets, bathrooms, and the construction of new classrooms blocks, teachers houses at the school and a borehole.

2.3 Acceptance

2.3.1 Attitudes and Beliefs

a. Parents

i. SMC/PTA

Parents emphasized that inclusive education is concerned with adequate learning materials and the promotion of girl's education:

We as parents would want to see girls be educated and that each school should have equipment and enough materials. We as PTA would encourage girls to go to school because when a girl child is educated, then the whole nation of Malawi has been educated. Parents should see the behaviour of children. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 29)

ii. Parents of Special Needs Learners

Parents of special needs learners complained that children with disabilities at the school are being ridiculed by the other learners. In the words of one parent:

Another thing is for that learners with hearing and speech problems, we are asking teachers to talk to regular learners that learners with disabilities are just like anybody else and should not be ridiculed. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 167)

b. Students

i. SNE Learners

During the discussion we had with special needs learners, they said that teachers treat them well: One of the learner said:

The teachers treat us well and learn better. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 121)

However, one learner said that sometimes they get beaten up by the teachers. The learner revealed:

They do not beat us very often. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 125)

c. Professionals

ii. Head Teacher

The head teacher bemoaned the attitude around the community regarding children's education. He revealed this work is just left to the mother group and school committees and since the catchment area is so vast, they fail to reach out to everyone. He complained:

They do not care about sensitizing children of the things that could disturb their education, they do not take part. They just leave it for only those in committees such as SMC, PTA and mother group but because the area is too big, they do not manage to do so. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 121)

Association between regular learners and learners with disabilities seems to be a great challenge as it was observed for example that a normal learner was reluctant to partner with a hearing impaired learner when the teacher instructed them. Researchers observed:

Learners do not associate with a hearing impaired learners, the teacher tries to facilitate that he should be with a partner and one learner refuses to be with him but eventually gets a partner. (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_2_02.06.2014, 21)

Interaction between the learners who do not have a disability and disabled learners is still a challenge although they were paired together:

There is no interaction between the hearing impaired learner and his partner. (observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_2_02.06.2014, 33)

The attitude of teachers was also noted for example a teacher did not nominate a disabled learner although the child kept on raising a hand:

The hearing impaired raised his hand but is not nominated to go and demonstrate to the front. (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_2_02.06.2014, 31)

The teacher also exhibited some bias regarding particular learners. The researchers observed that

The teacher nominated the two learners to respond from the same desk, & the other one was asked to respond twice while the rest of learners were ignored. (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_3_03.06.2014, 26)

2.3.2 Prejudice

a. SNE Learners

Learners with disabilities complained that their parents beat them. They said:

We are beaten. Our mother. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, s. 139-143)

The learners with disabilities complained teachers only nominate their peers and when asked why they thought like that, one of them responded:

[...] because they are the ones they pass with good grades. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 160)

b. Professionals

iii. Head Teacher

The head teacher said that some learners discriminate against learners with special needs. He said:

They have, sometimes they are discriminated against by some learners (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 100)

He continued to explain that there is tension between different groups of learners in the school. He stated that:

Sometimes it is not visible, for example when one comes to school without proper bathing, with unwashed clothes and he sits with someone who is well bathed and with clean clothes, at least there is some tension where the clean one does not want to be with that one. Sometimes when they bring some food to school and they share the food with those who do not have for one or two days and later they stop sharing and tend to discriminate those who do not bring the food. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 123)

iv. Teacher

One of the teachers' revealed that girls are taken as inferior to boys at the school. The teacher emphasized:

Just to answer as regular now, most cases girls are taken as inferiors. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 209)

c. Observations

During the observations in classrooms in standard two, researchers noticed that there was a problem with interpersonal interaction between learners with disabilities and other learners:

Learners do not associate with a hearing impaired learner, the teacher tries to facilitate that he should be with a partner and one learner refuses to be with him but eventually gets a partner. (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_2_02.06.2014, 21)

Also when a learner with a disability was paired with a learner without a disability, there was some resistance by the learner without a disability. The researchers noted that:

There is no interaction between the hearing impaired learner and his partner. (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_2_02.06.2014, 33)

During the classroom observation in standard two, researchers discovered that not all learners when they got it correctly were being praised. Some were not being acknowledged. The researcher reasoned:

Asks learners to show her number 55 and one learner does it correctly -not praising each and every learner, why? (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_1_02.06.2014, 35)

In one class, researchers found that girls seemed to be more favored by the teacher in comparison to boys. This was in a Standard 4 classroom where researchers noted:

Girls seem to be favored and more girls are participating in class activities. (Observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_4_03.06.2014, 31)

2.3.3 Specific Measures to improve acceptance

a. Professionals

i. Teachers

Girls are still perceived as inferior by male learners. So the school rewards girls when they do well academically. Of these efforts to improve acceptance of girls, teachers said the following:

Just to answer as regular now, most cases girls are taken as inferiors and when it happens that the girl has done well we reward her so that other girl learners can emulate. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 209)

Such cases are not common because we advise them to accommodate all no matter the experiences the other girl had and they understand of course in other situations they do happen more especially when they quarrel. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 228)

The introduction of the grading system of results has improved acceptance of the learners who do not pass. One of the teachers said:

The use of grades in passing learners has also helped in motivating learners because those who score ninety do not really laugh at friends who have scored sixty as they turn to back up themselves that we have got the same grade. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 246)

On the actions they take in order to improve acceptance of learners with disabilities, the teachers emphasized the following:

Very true we do have that for example children with learning difficulties we do encourage other learners to engage them that they can do even better than them. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 200)

Parents were also involved to intervene in the situation of special needs learners through the establishment of a parent of special needs learners group.

Teachers supported the role of parents and also emphasized their own role in improving the acceptance of all. One teacher in the discussion said:

We have had such cases way back where other learners could not stay well with their friend with such problems but when we started engaging parents in advising their children on accepting others as we do here we no longer experience them. Even when giving responsibility we don't look at the face of the learner girl or boy, rich or poor. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 248)

Teachers intervened by advocating for acceptance of special needs learners by their peers and now things have improved. One of the teachers said:

At first it wasn't easy for other learners to accommodate such learners but tried to tell them that it's not their own making and now it's okay. This child is very intelligent and if it were that she is normal she could be taking position one. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 208)

ii. Head Teacher

The school supports marginalized children by giving them uniforms with the help of the school improvement plan. The head teacher said:

On the orphans and vulnerable children, we used some little money from school improvement plan and bought school uniform for about thirteen or fourteen learners from standard one to seven. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 137)

On rewards in achievement, the school gives them equally to the performers. Also on giving responsibility, they consider age. He said:

We try not to differentiate when distributing things, we do not differentiate in rewarding learners when they perform better, and we also share the responsibilities among learners equally. For example we do not give captainship to a younger learners to be in-charge of an older one instead we give responsibilities according to their ages so that they should also feel that they are being considered. For example when the teacher is busy with something outside, he can ask the older one to be writing something on the board for fellow learners and they feel that when the teacher is not around, he leaves him in charge of the class and the learner is not usually absent. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 183)

Some activities at the school have helped to improve the acceptance of over age learners. The head teacher emphasized that they include older learners in clubs like TUSEME ('speak out' Clubs). He said the following:

Yes, the activities which they do in the clubs when they meet because sometimes they talk about things like education has no age so if it happens that there are some old learners in the clubs, they feel encouraged that they can still be in school despite their age. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 189)

We chose that method to encourage the child not to feel that he is of different age from the others and also that he should like coming to school and class. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 191)

b. Observations

During observation in a standard two classroom it was observed that, the teacher praised the learners and helped them in correcting mistakes. The researchers observed the following

One learner says 'tayamika is a born in [name] village' – teacher corrects it in a friendly manner. Learner 2 – makes a sentence with wrong grammar but teacher corrects in a friendly manner. (observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_3_03.06.2014, 25)

Some learners respond with correct answers and are praised those who are wrong are treated in a friendly manner. (observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_4_03.06.2014, 19)

Some learners doing it correctly while others are doing it wrongly-correct ones are praised and wrong ones not shamed-asks others to assist. (observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_4_03.06.2014, 38)

Teacher praises them for doing them right e.g. thank you; very good. (observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_5_03.06.2014, 21)

During the classroom observations in a standard four classroom, the teacher praised the learners that performed better. The researchers observed the following in the classes:

[...] one learner does it and is praised - teacher always asking learners if one is wrong or right. (observations\MW_RM_Ob_Les_LC_AM_GH_1_02.06.2014, 34)

2.3.4 Recommendation to improve acceptance

Parents of Special Needs Learners

Parents of special needs learners emphasized that there is need for teachers to talk to their children's peers so that they should not ridicule the learners with disabilities. The parents said:

Another thing is for that learners with hearing and speech problems, we are asking teachers to talk to regular learners that learners with disabilities are just like anybody else and should not be ridiculed. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 167)

Key issues raised on acceptance reveal that learners with disabilities are less accepted by their fellow learners and mistreated by their parents. Also girls face a challenge in acceptance as they seem to be regarded as inferior in the local community. Efforts have been done to address these challenges by encouraging learners to be friendly to the learners with disabilities. Learners with disabilities and their parents suggested that teachers should talk to all the learners to have positive attitudes. However teachers revealed that they already encourage all learners to engage with one another and develop positive attitudes towards learners with disabilities. Teachers also emphasized that the school rewards girls when they perform well and classroom observations confirmed that girls are allowed to play a

dominant role in the classrooms. The head teacher also revealed that participation of the community in school issues is minimal as they tend to leave the whole responsibility to the mother group and PTA/SMC. The head teacher also stated that the school deliberately supports marginalized learners by buying uniforms for those who come from families who cannot afford to buy uniforms as a form of showing of acceptance. Furthermore over aged learners are made to feel welcome at the school.

2.4 Participation

2.4.1 Pedagogics

a. Professionals

i. Teachers

One professional during the focus group discussion mentioned that he involves the learners with disabilities in class by nominating them to write at the board:

I do have those in my class and do try to help them fully, for example those who can't speak try to go direct to them in an engaging manner to explain to them then do tell that learner to go and write what we were discussing on board from there we check his/her understand. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 208)

The other teacher concurred with this teacher by commenting how a hearing impaired girl in his class participates:

And we do help even when organizing groups by giving them responsibility in such groups. For example there is a certain girl very active in class but has hearing problems. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 200)

ii. Head Teacher

According to the head teacher, teachers support learners with disabilities especially the hearing impaired learners. He explained:

And also in terms of seating plan, we put those with hearing problems in front near the teacher and black board so that they can hear properly. Similarly, those with visual impairment, we put them in places where they can see properly. Some need to be closer to the blackboard while others need to be far away, and also some who are like the one who was carried, we try hard when we have outdoor activities, he is carried to where the activities are done. When the activities are done, he is carried back to the classroom. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 151)

He continued to justify these methods to promote the active engagement of learners with disabilities as well as overaged learners in classrooms:

We chose that method to encourage the child not to feel that he is of different age from the others and also that he should like coming to school and class. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 191)

He emphasized the use of group work and its benefits that it increases participation of all learners and resultant effective learning:

Here we still have it but sometimes we try to put the learners in groups using group leaders to assist others while the teachers are helping other groups. In so doing at least many learners are involved. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 198)

2.4.2 Specific Measures to improve participation

a. Parents of Special Needs Learners

Parents of special needs learners acknowledged that the learners with impairments are now placed in the front of the classroom:

So since that time, he is put in front and learners are always reminded to write faster. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 203)

b. Professionals

i. Head teacher

The head teacher mentioned that they do have In-Service Training opportunities at zonal/district level to improve teachers' skills in handling hearing impaired learners:

There are some children e.g. those with hearing impairment, we as teachers we have workshops at zonal level to share ways on how to teach such children. For example in addition to the normal teaching methods, we also use signs for hearing impairment. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 151)

Also the school tries to put learners in diverse ability groups to increase participation. The head teacher explained:

Here we still have it but sometimes we try to put the learners in groups using group leaders to assist others while the teachers are helping other groups. In so doing at least many learners are involved. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 198)

ii. Teachers

The teachers during the interviews explained that they try to encourage interpersonal interactions by providing opportunities for learners to help one another in finding solutions and reading together in the school library:

To avoid setbacks we try to bring in leadership by directing them to check with their friends and to go in the library to at least add from the little knowledge they have rather than just saying he or she has failed let him or her go. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 238)

2.4.3 Recommendations on Participation

a. Parents of Special Needs Learners

Parents with special needs learners suggested that there is need to have more qualified special needs teachers. They expressed their wish in the following way:

If there could be two or three specialist teachers to assist each other in handling learners with disabilities, things would be well. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 163)

b. SNE Learners

The special needs learners expressed their desire to be given an opportunity to improve their reading skills as well as their writing skills in the classroom:

To read in class as like how our friends do. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 208)

We want to be reading English. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 220)

Reading and writing. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 224)

c. Professionals

i. Head Teacher

The head teacher expressed concern regarding the teaching and learning system at the school. He is therefore planning to do an In-service training workshop on participatory teaching methods in order to improve the active participation of all learners. This workshop/training opportunity could also address the teachers discipline and work ethics. In his words:

What we need to do is to tell teachers to use new ways of teaching such as the one currently advocated called pupil participatory method so that when they are holding lessons, they should ensure that every learner is involved and should prepare their work well when coming to school e.g. lesson plans, schemes of work, some charts and all teaching and learning materials and they should be punctual in the morning, at break time and even when knocking off. They should also be well dressed. They should also love their children. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 242)

In conclusion, children with disabilities especially visually impaired and hearing impaired are supported in classrooms by seating them in the front of the class. Also to develop the participation and interpersonal interaction of all learners, teachers have emphasized that the learners work in groups and are encouraged to help one another in classroom activities like reading in class. Recommendations to improve participation of all learners include an In-service training workshop for all teachers at the school on teaching and learning strategies that will also address teacher behaviour as planned by the head teacher. This could improve the pedagogic skills of teachers. However, parents of special needs learners point out that there must be more specialist teachers at the school to assist not only the specialist teacher but also other mainstream classroom teachers.

2.5 Transition to Secondary Level

a. Professionals/Teachers

One of the girls who was withdrawn from early marriage was selected to a community secondary school. The teachers said:

We had one who left as we were nearing examination period but we tried to look for her until we found her now is at the community day secondary school but she was supposed to be selected to a national secondary school. That disturbance contributed to that but she is intelligent. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 265)

2.6 Policy Level

Respondents commended the various policies that the school is implementing. These included the re-admission policy where girls who dropped out of school due to marriages or pregnancies are allowed to come back to school. Teachers and the headmaster acknowledged this as a policy especially for girls that has helped:

The readmission policy is a beauty. This policy is really very good. For instance before I came here I was at [name of village], there was a girl who got pregnant, dropped out of school. We talked to the parents encouraged her to come back to school and she did and the same year she wrote her primary leaving certificate and passed with flying colors and got selected to [name] secondary school. And am sure where ever she goes she will excel in her studies. You see without the readmission policy she would have remained at home. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 106)

Re-admission policy especially for girls when they drop out of school to get married and when they come back, we re-admit them at school. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 245)

Another comment about policy referred to school fees that are still demanded despite national free primary education, teachers said that learners still pay a small fee when they write examinations. Another policy was on enforced compulsory education which they thought could be important in bringing back to school all those who have dropped out. They also commended the removal of the compulsory wearing of school uniform. The head teacher mentioned the school improving grant which all schools nowadays receive upon the production of school improvement plan. However, the head teacher bemoaned the practice of introducing the curriculum without consulting especially the Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform. They want to be contributing to the curriculum development:

Sometimes the curriculum that we are given, as teachers on the ground, we do not feel good that they should be from top to bottom here. For example, the introduction of PCAR [Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform], it started from the top then came to us as implementers. As a result we found it difficult to implement, so the government should try to start here or we should do it together. We should contribute and they should also contribute so that we have to make one thing not that they should do it for us. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014)

2.7 Barriers/Challenges

1. Material/Technical Resources

One of the main challenges the school face is lack of teaching and learning resources. Different groups mentioned the fact that the lack of technical resources hinder access to education for all children to be achieved.

a. Parents

i. SMC/PTA

The SMC/PTA feels: Each school should have equipment and enough materials. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 27)

ii. Parents of Special Needs Learners

The parents of special needs learners mentioned the lack of some materials for learners with disabilities and orphans. Emphasis was put on the lack of financial resources to buy for example soap, body lotions and uniforms especially for orphans. They stated:

We lack finances, soap, body lotions for them to look good to their friends and some of the children are orphans being kept by grandparents who find it difficult to get clothes, soap for them. Of course the DEM assisted us sometime back by buying school uniforms for both orphans and non-orphans and we are grateful for this assistance and we want this to continue to encourage the children to go further with education. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 228)

The parents with disabilities felt that for orphans, it is very difficult for them to continue with their education due to their financial situation with the result that they might not continue with their education up to secondary school.

For orphans, what they lack is assistance, even if they are hardworking but when they lack assistance, it discourages them. They will need fees when they get selected to secondary school, they need clothes, they need soap and when they do not have these they might feel like dropping out of school. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 171)

b. Professionals

i. Head Teacher

The head teacher mentioned that orphans lack material/financial support since the government does not provide enough teaching and learning materials. He explained:

Orphans, just because the government does not manage to provide enough teaching and learning materials, they (meaning the orphans) lack the materials such as notebooks and pens on top of what the government provides. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 109)

Teachers

Teachers complained that they do not have access to teaching materials such as textbooks, workbooks, handouts and reference books and learning materials and the support they get from government is inadequate:

I mean teaching and learning materials like note books and pencils. Which come once a year and in some cases inadequate to meet the number of students. We have cases of a learner getting one 40 paged notebook to use in the year when they have seven subjects requiring separate notebooks. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 57)

Some subjects like Mathematics require specific resources to support effective learning. This becomes a challenge to learners from poverty stricken households. The teachers explained in the focus group discussion:

To add on teaching and learning materials in the subject of mathematics especially, there is protractors, set squares etc these aren't available for teachers to use when teaching just like most students lack mathematical instruments boxes. In the absence of government providing these mathematical boxes parents are made to provide which is difficult as most are poor. It is very important that learners be shown how to use these instruments but with inadequate resources it is difficult for the teachers. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 61)

Mainstream teachers lack necessary materials to support them when teaching special needs learners. One of the teachers explained:

Secondly there are inadequate resources to teach special needs learners. It is important that regular teachers should have materials necessary to teach special needs learners. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 93)

The specialist teacher mentioned some materials at the resource center when interacting with the learners in the pull out process:

At the resource center, we pull out special needs students from their classes and have them at the center. We don't classify them we teach them together. We have the hearing impaired, low vision, learning difficulty and physically disabled but still we have a challenge with learning materials like hearing aids and books. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 93)

The teachers furthermore mentioned that orphans and poor children lack basic resources like clothes and other basic necessities including food. One of the teachers said:

The disadvantaged children include orphans who are living with their old grandparents and they fail to get basic necessities. Not only orphans some children have their parents but are so poor. Their parents fail to provide even the basic necessities like clothes. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 116)

One of the teacher added that the biggest challenge, orphans face is lack of food:

They meet a lot of problems. The biggest challenge is food. They are constantly trying to find means to find food for the younger ones. They leave school to get piece work to support their siblings. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 135)

c. Professionals

i. Teachers

Teachers emphatically said given the situation of children from poverty stricken households they even fail to write mock examinations at Primary School Leaving Certificate examinations preparations because they fail to raise money to contribute towards that course. One of the teachers expressed it these words:

They find it hard to do so thus on their own even when they ask their parents who are very poor they are just told not to write the mock exam. This is not good because for example mock is there to test the preparedness of the learner for the MANEB exams. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 161)

3. Human Resources/Professional

a. Parents

i. SMC/PTA

There is need for more teachers. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 19)

b. Professionals

ii. Head Teacher

The head teacher complained that new teachers who recently qualified and the ones on Open Distance Learning programmes are not as committed in comparison to the older teachers trained in previous teacher training programmes. He expressed his dissatisfaction:

There are some teachers because from different colleges, like us who qualified in the 80's, 70's and some who went through MIITEP [Malawi Integrated Initial Teacher Education Program] are behaving well unlike those who are doing ODL [Open and Distance Learning] and IPTE [Initial Primary Teacher Education]. They are not dedicated to their work ... The introduction of ODL is not that good because a person after writing the Malawi Certificate of Education Exams and attend the interviews, he goes for orientation just for two weeks and come to work and during the holiday they also go for two weeks just like that so the training of such teachers is not enough but that two year programme is good. There are very few who teach well like the one you observed his lesson yesterday in standard four ... They are sometimes absent but also instead of being in class teaching, they like chatting. They can prepare five to seven lesson plans well but when it comes to teaching, they sometimes they can only teach one, two or three subjects a day, sure. So, that's where the problem is, there is less dedication. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 46- 50)

The need to have a specialist teacher for every disability was emphasized by the head teacher. He stated:

There are some learners who are deaf and there is no teacher who is specialized on that impairment of deafness. There are some who are a bit mentally disturbed like the ones making noise outside, they are about three, we also do not have specialist teacher for them. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 96)

There are some children who are physically challenged or impaired, any sort of impairment, hearing impairment, visual, deaf and so on, so, in most schools such children are not taught well because they need to have specialist teacher for them. For example, here we are having one but he is for hearing impairment only. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 36)

Since special needs learners are of various types, there is need to have teachers for hearing impairment, deaf learners and also mentally retarded learners so that learners with mental problems should have their own teacher, deaf learners should have their own teacher, and learners with hearing impairment should have their own teacher. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 153)

iii. Teachers

Regular teachers acknowledged that it is difficult to teach special needs learners. They said:

Also it becomes difficult for the teacher to give attention to those needing special attention. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 71)

The teachers recommended that every school should have a resource center with teachers who have knowledge of how to teach the special needs learners and orientate other teachers in this regard:

I feel that it is very important that all the teachers at a school where there is a resource center should be oriented on special needs education to promote easy and efficient teaching of the special needs learners. Failure to orient these regular teachers on special needs education I feel contribute greatly to the challenge education for all is facing. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 94)

The special needs teachers complained that they are not recognized in departmental promotion policies despite the fact that they have a diploma in special needs:

We were trained at college, but our system has a problem, we did the normal certificate, and then went back for training in special needs but on the ground nothing has changed. The pay is the same the grade the same. There is no motivation our friends laugh at us that we spend a lot of time at school with nothing to show for it is a great discouragement for special needs teachers. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 97)

The regular teachers revealed that they do consult the specialist teacher whenever they face a problem and they try to accommodate the special needs learners:

I can say that where we find problems we do consult the specialist teachers and we try to accommodate such learners at the same time he or she should not feel isolated. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 206)

The teacher said that change can only happen if there is change in their system:

The teacher is not happy there can be no change so the need to consider the standards of the teachers. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 296)

The teacher complained that there are more learners at the school as compared to the number of teachers. The teacher learner ratio is very high. One teacher said:

The number of teachers is not meeting the number of learners. When we talk of seven-teen they think is a good number but seriously thus not good for the learners to understand easily because we talk of 100 learners against one teaching standing in front. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014, 301)

The specialist teacher also added that he has a large workload. He complained:

Will talk on a specialist point of view [name] being a proposed resource center it could be better that all the teachers are trained so that we can be helping one another as on my own cannot manage as I depend on them too. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7._06.2014)

4. Teacher Incentives

a. Parents

i. Mother Group

The mother group strongly recommended that for quality education to be achieved, one of the aspects is to consider teachers welfare particularly teacher's housing and overcrowded classrooms;

The problems we meet here are that there are a lot of pupils, we have few teachers and few blocks that lead to some pupils learning outside the classrooms and because we don't have houses for teachers there are few teachers and others are renting houses elsewhere and they fail to report for duties in time. This is what we see as a problem at [name] that is making education quality to go down. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 46)

b. Professionals

i. Head Teacher

The head teacher pointed out that the lack of incentives in the teaching profession is the greatest challenge they face. Also teachers work more hours as well and there is a clear lack of teaching and learning materials to support them;

Secondly, as I said, we do not have incentives, having low salaries like here in local schools, we have hardship allowance, and others have double shift allowance. The meaning of double is that the person is doing two things, so a person receives ten thousand kwacha as a salary and is doing the same work and is given two thousand and is told that he will be given an extra two thousand kwacha because he is doing two things, it's not working. If they say double then it should be, if its' ten then it should be at least fifteen or almost that much comparing with other companies like David Whitehead and others in the past. When they say one is working from six in the morning to two in the afternoon and continues from two to ten in the evening it means it is the same amount because it's similar work. In the morning you will be given full class, in the afternoon, full class, to be given five thousand to your salary it's nothing done. Here, the government should scrutinize well and also materials such as notebooks, pens are not enough, furniture is also limited, school blocks most of the times especially here instead of a and b, some classes need a, b, c according to the teacher pupil ratio recommended. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 253)

ii. Teachers

The teachers expressed their frustration by asking for a change in the standards and conditions of service of teachers. The teachers complained on how the system is treating them because the conditions are poor:

The teacher is not happy there can be no change so the need to consider the standards of the teachers. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 296)

5. Language as a barrier

a. Professionals

i. Head Teacher

Language of instruction was mentioned as a challenge as some learners face difficulties in fully understanding instructions in Chichewa because their mother tongue is Chitumbuka. The head teacher, explained:

Other challenges, some are that language that is being used in classes since national language is Chichewa, while sort of communication with children in Chichewa from standard one to four, from standard five to six we are told to communicate with learners in English but the children here, their mother tongue is chitumbuka, so for them to capture Chichewa things, it's like their second language. As a result they are less advantaged unlike their colleagues whose mother tongue is Chichewa. For example, a picture of a dog can be found in a book, you ask a learner, 'what is this?', he will answer it's ntchewe (a tumbuka word for a dog) because that's his mother tongue, so you tell her that, 'yes it's a

dog but in Chichewa we call it galu', so it's like he is facing two steps to capture the thing while our friends it is direct. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 38)

He emphasized even for those learners whose home language is Tumbuka, they find it difficult to understand the context in the books. He illustrated this point in the following way:

That's it because Chichewa becomes a second language and most of the learners in standard one, when you greet them in Chichewa like, 'mulibwanji?' [Meaning: how are you?], they will answer by saying 'tilibwanji kaya inu choncho?' [Literally translated: How are we and you?, instead of fine and you]. So, they have difficulties even in greetings, so what more to grasp the contents in books. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 40)

On the other hand, teachers also ignore some learners who are in class and cannot understand the Tumbuka language. The head teacher commented:

Sometimes, we teachers because most of us are from here, we usually use Chitumbuka to communicate, so sometimes we teach in Chitumbuka forgetting that there are some learners who do not understand the language so they are disadvantaged. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 117)

The head teacher added that some instructions of some subjects like Expressive Arts are all in Chichewa. So learners find it difficult to understand as well as teachers find it difficult to teach as well:

Chichewa as a subject and also as a language of instruction because there are subjects like expressive arts, life skills, which are in Chichewa. We are supposed to teach them in Chichewa so the learners are finding difficulties, even the teachers themselves. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 42)

ii. Teachers

Teachers emphasized that the syllabus was designed to disadvantage some children who do not understand the language of instruction hence their poor performance in examinations. They gave an example of names and also mentioned that some materials are not locally found.

On the same note the way they designed the syllabus creates a challenge. The learning materials that are required may not be found in this locality. In the same vein the actual items' names may be names that people in the north do not use hence do not know. Not only that but this thing will come in the exams giving an unequal advantage based on language. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 66)

6. Learner Behaviour

a. Parents

i. PTA/SMC

The PTA/SMC discovered that some standard eight learners were drinking beer but that the teachers who are at the school do not drink. They said:

In the past standard eight learners used to be reading at the class during odd hours. We discovered that some were taking beer. We sat with them and they stopped this kind of behaviour. The other good side is that all teachers do not drink, they are Christians. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_04.06.2014)

ii. Parents of Special Needs Learners

Peer pressure is another challenge that parents encounter:

Girls are indeed facing problems because boys and girls are different because even when they either have both parents or they are orphans, they face similar problems in that sometimes they do not go further with education. Some will get married and when you ask them, they say it was because of peer pressure while sometimes it is because of poverty in their families. When they see their friends in good clothes, they also want to be like them and they end up not progressing with their education. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 149)

b. Students

Special needs learners revealed that sometimes members of their peer group bully them by beating them and also smoking Indian hemp;

The learn beat their friends, also they smoke Indian hemp. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 185)

c. Professionals

i. Head teacher

The head teacher emphasized the issue of discipline within classroom management and that children have misinterpreted their rights and are disrespectful to teachers at times. Also he feels, corporal punishment is important because without corporal punishment they cannot learn He said:

With this democracy and the rights of children, behaviour of learners towards teachers, towards learning is not good. They misinterpret the meaning of democracy. For example, learners should not be given corporal punishment, should not be given that, so learners without such things they cannot learn well. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 44)

ii. Teachers

Because beer drinking is part of the culture of the Ngoni's (a local ethnic group), learners copy from their parents: One teacher in the focus group discussion revealed:

As the Ngonis we do love beer too much so that as the children see this they copy such kind of behavior. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 173)

Learners who come from well to do families, tend to be insubordinate to teachers. They undermine the orders of their teachers. In the focus group discussion with teachers, it was revealed:

There are some who feel they come from well to do families or they are old that they see themselves not fit to be commanded by someone inferior to them. They turn to undermine even orders from teachers and it becomes painful to see your learner answering back in the presence of fellow learners. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 274)

Learners with intellectual disorders at the school sometimes are very difficult to handle, they even do not cooperate with teachers. One of the teachers expressed this:

Those with mental disorders are very difficult to the extent that they even refuse to work with the teacher. But we try to make them work with others when they are now stable. More of self-denial. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014)

Learners deliberately come without uniform to test the teachers. Teachers explained:

Disadvantage is there but on the part of learners leaving the uniform home just to test the mind of the teacher so we do send them home as a lesson to the other learners. (MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014, 179)

The study noted that there are many challenges and obstacles faced in the implementation of education for all at this case study school. Respondents mentioned lack of resources for teaching and learning; lack of proper housing for teachers and adequate classrooms, toilets and bathrooms for girls. Learners' behaviour has emerged as another problem due to the lack of adequate strategies to manage discipline in the school. The head teacher also mentioned that learners have misunderstood the meaning of the word democracy. Learning through a second language is challenging within this school community as it is not addressed within the implementation of the syllabus or the development of competence and confidence of children who do not understand the local vernacular language. Teachers also revealed that in part the misbehaviour of the learners is due to their cultural background where beer drinking is a Ngoni custom.

2.8 Opportunities/Positive Developments

a. Students

i. SNE Learners

Some special needs learners feel they are treated well by the teachers. They explained:

The teachers treat us well and learn better. (MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC_4.7_4.06.2014, 121)

b. Parents

i. PTA/SMC

The PTA/SMC acknowledged that the training they got from CRECCOM (Creative Centre for Community Mobilization) helped them with necessary skills to fight the unnecessary drop out of children and it has been reduced. The members said:

CRECCOM, PLAN Malawi and FAWEMA trained us. So as PTA/SMC and chiefs, we have fought against this behaviour and now it is low. CRECCOM and PLAN Malawi also gave us the skills to fight that. When such a child is found, we were giving a charge to their parents. So parents fear about that. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 133)

PLAN Malawi, AIDS Toto Club and a CBO raised awareness against stigma and discrimination at the school. The PTA/SMC mentioned:

So at the School, with the AIDS Toto club, CBO and PLAN Malawi intervened by raising an awareness on stigma and discrimination. PLAN took her to the hospital for treatment and now she is looking well. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 115)

A village savings loan group within the community donated some funds to the school which were used to buy an umbrella for an albino. The PTA/SMC members said:

We had support from village savings and loans. So we bought an umbrella for the albino and a cap because he was having problem with sunlight. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 57)

Although additional bathrooms are needed, the school already constructed two bathrooms for girls. The committee members present in the discussion said:

In addition to that, school constructed two bathrooms for girls to use for girls during menstruation. This was done together with school management committee. (MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_05.2014, 62)

ii. Parents with Special Needs Learners

Parents of special needs learners acknowledged that the arrival of a specialist teacher at the school helped because now their children are receiving support:

Another thing is that since they sent us a specialist teacher, [name], they have helped us very much at our school, [name of school] because we did not know that there could be such things because we were just keeping the children at home. So when the organizations came and invited us together with the children that there is a teacher teaching such children, we were happy. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 53)

The parents also acknowledged the support they received from a religious organization of food, cooking utensils like pots, cups basins. The parents said:

So when we informed organizations, they have assisted us at least twice from Ekwendeni, the Synod people. They gave us food, cooking utensils like pots, cups, basins for bathing and buckets for drawing water and last month they also brought food. Recently, the Member of Parliament also donated food that we are still feeding the children. (MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014, 77)

iii. Mother Group

The support from the mother group encourage both girls and boys so that they should be in school. They counsel girls who get married before 18. The mother group revealed that:

As mother group, when it comes to this, we encourage both girls and boys, because girls cannot marry themselves but it is the boys who marry them. So we help them all, when we have heard that a girl is married before age of 18, we go there and get her back and counsel both of them to go back to school. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 35)

The mother group also advise girls on dressing and in time of menstruation they are supported with cotton wool. They said:

We also encourage learners on mode of dressing especially when they are in their monthly periods, yah, so that they should take care of themselves and are not laughed at and we have bathrooms and cotton wool so they take care of themselves and are able to concentrate in class. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 38)

The mother group also encourages children to come forward when they face problems. The members explained:

we encourage these children on their education that if they face any challenges, sometimes these children are deceived by fellow children, but sometimes by adults, so we encourage them to come

forward to us as mother group if they meet any problems, so that we should help them and they should continue with education. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 44)

The mother group feels that when a child can get further education e.g. to go to university, like Chancellor College the community will benefit:

The other good thing, the other good thing is that when our child makes it to Chancellor College, and get employed it means that child has developed the whole [name of area] and even the nation will benefit from this child from [name of area]. (MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014, 170)

c. Professionals

i. Head teacher

The school supports orphans and vulnerable children through the School Improvement Grant and for example bought them uniform for thirteen learners. The head teacher said:

On the orphans and vulnerable children, we used some little money from school improvement plan and bought school uniform for about thirteen or fourteen learners from standard one to seven. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 137)

The committee which looks after the resource center received money and multiplied it and the proceeds were used to buy notebooks, ball point pens for orphans and special needs learners.

There is also a committee for the resource center which received a certain amount of money and they multiplied it and the profits were used to buy notebooks, ball point pens for such children, not only special needs learners but also orphans and others who are poor. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014, 139)

The head teacher mentioned that sometimes they hold in-service training workshops for teachers through the Primary Education Advisor on teaching skills:

We have been holding school based insets sharing ways of teaching normal and special needs learners. We use resource persons like this special needs teacher is the key teacher and sometimes we invite the PEA when we feel that we cannot do better, we invite them to teach us with enough information to teach them. (MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014)

A number of positive developments were noted at this primary school. The school has established a resource centre which is managed by a committee comprising of local people. The school has a specialist teacher based at the school and this is encouraging parents who were just keeping children with special needs at home to send them to school. With support from the government, they received money which they multiplied. The money was invested in a village loan savings group where it accumulated shares. Later, they bought books, ball point pens which they distributed to special needs learners, orphans as well as children from poverty stricken households. The government has also contributed cooking utensils, buckets, food such as maize flour, 'gramil' (flour made by a company called 'Grain and Milling'), cooking oil, soap and salt to the resource center. This is assisting the disabled children who are boarding close to the school. During the tripartite election campaign, some politicians donated maize and this partly relieved their problems.

The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in collaboration with the special needs section of the District Education Manager's office gave the school footballs, netballs, nets for volleyballs and others which have helped in improved attendance of the learners. As mentioned earlier, a small amount from

the School Improvement Grant (SIG) has been used to buy school uniforms for about thirteen to fourteen learners who are orphans and vulnerable children. The mother group has also helped the school by buying basins for girls.

The school also organized some activities to show the importance of education. This included; drama and songs which were performed and they highlighted the problems girls face when they get married early.

Regarding positive developments on access: the school has open access for special needs children in line with the government who has been very much supportive in making sure that all children access education. Some Non-Governmental Organizations also assist the school in some areas. Below are some of the sentiments from respondents on the positive developments. Organizations like PLAN Malawi, YONECO, MAGGA, Rights of the Child, FAWEMA. Involvement of chiefs has been as a positive development.

2.9 Discussion

1. Key emerging patterns that can be seen from the findings are:

a. A focus on inclusive education makes visible the overwhelming complexity of inequalities in low-income countries

The implementation of Inclusive education faces challenges that include the following:

- The system is facing lack of adequate teaching and learning materials including the lack of assistive devices for learners with disabilities, poor infrastructure that is not disability friendly, poor toilet facilities including bathrooms for girls and lack teachers houses as well as
- frustrated teachers with low remuneration, lack of opportunities for promotion and facing overcrowded classrooms.
- Resource Centre that has no structure and one specialist teacher specialized in one particular area handling all learners at the school with different impairments and handling learners from Standard 1 alone without proper technology and materials to handle those learners. Regular teachers are lacking the knowledge and the skills to handle and assist learners with disabilities.
- Furthermore the Government is failing to supply the school with adequate teaching and learning resources for teaching to be inclusive and inadequate social protection measures for orphans, learners with disabilities and girls.

b. The difference between global goals of Inclusive Education and local implementation challenges frustrate stakeholders and produce negative pressures

Attaining the goals of quality education for all and ensuring that every child should go to school have been challenging. Factors that are negatively affecting these goals range from parental involvement, values and cultural perceptions of education in the community, early marriages among girls, lack of support of other groups of children with diverse educational needs including those with disabilities and orphans. The socio-economic situation in the district negatively influences education in the

following ways: parents do not want to send children to school but give them responsibilities at home like looking after their siblings and doing household chores, herding cattle whilst other parents marry off their children in order to use the bride price for settling debt. So when the Mother Group intervenes and withdraws the children from their marriages, the parents do not accept them back at their homes. This defeats the whole concept of the policy of re-enrolment or back to school. Secondly, guardians of orphans do not provide the necessary support and sometimes stigmatize and discriminate against them. This leads to orphans withdrawing from school as they have to balance going to school and being bread winners. Some orphans live with grandparents that lack support to care for themselves, so they drop out of school for piecework in order to find money for immediate survival. School policies emphasized that every learner should be in uniform and clean with the result that learners from poverty stricken households do not come to school. The high turnover numbers of learners enrolled at the school at the school puts pressure on mainstream teachers effectively. Teachers also experience pressure to teach and support special needs learners due to inadequate resources and support strategies that result in limited opportunities to provide support for all learners in regular classrooms. Lack of training causes most teachers to have limited skills to handle learners with different disabilities and impairments that range between visual, intellectual, hearing and learning difficulties. Lack of monitoring of the already mentioned support activities is another challenge the community still faces.

c. The lack of inter-sectorial communication and coordination leads to misunderstandings and fragmented approaches inclusive education

The Ministry of education especially the curriculum development section lacks proper coordination of how an inclusive classroom should be. Teachers are not provided with sufficient in-service training opportunities on how they should support learners with disabilities and other educational needs e.g. how to address language challenges where learners are learning in their second language. They also all need to be oriented on the skills of how they can handle standard one lessons. There is lack of consultation of teachers when coming up with the syllabus.

d. Leadership and ownership at all levels matter for the implementation of inclusive education

Inclusive education will only be successful if all stakeholders are involved and participate. Chiefs, mother group and PTA/SMC, teachers, regular learners, community, guardians of orphans, parents of special needs learners have to take an active role. However in this area it was noted that parents and community members are not in general committed to this goal. However on the other hand, the Mother group has managed to build bricks, construct temporary bathrooms, bought basins and cotton wool for the girls to use when they menstruate and have encouraged girls to return to school. The school has a committee for parents with special needs and they came up with an initiative to develop a resource center at the school. The mother group has managed to raise awareness amongst both boys and girls on the importance of education. The community set up a By-Law for parents that if they encourage girls to be get married early before the age of 18 years that they will be paying a fine of MK 75,000.00 or five goats or one cow. This indicates community ownership on the need to keep children in school.

e. The value, meaning and expectations of education vary across actors and/or levels and affect the realization of inclusive education

The value and meaning of education vary between different actors/stakeholders. Findings from the study have shown that the respondents do understand the important role education plays in life. For instance, learners involved in FGDs mentioned what they wanted to be after finishing school which means they do realize that it is through education that they can become what they want in future. While three quarters of the learners want to be nurses after school, some want to be teachers while very few just want to have the knowledge of things and reading and writing skills. Some learners like reading and asking questions in class when they do not understand because they know why they are in school. Some parents seemed to understand the important role of education by encouraging each other to send all children whether disabled or poor to school. Other parents appreciated the role of education by testifying that their children could read and write and even do some household chores which they never did before. In some cases some parents are ridiculed by fellow parents for sending children with disabilities to school but they insist that they want a better future for their children. Some parents revealed that if a child gets educated, it is not the family that will benefit, but the whole area and Malawi that will benefit.

f. Occurring general themes mentioned by different perspectives

Key themes identified in the data are that there is need for adequate teaching and learning materials, proper infrastructure that is disability friendly, providing necessary teaching skills for teachers in supporting learners with disabilities and other learners with diverse educational needs, lack of involvement by some parents and commitment to the education of their children. Learners with disabilities, learners from poverty stricken households as well as girls and orphans need social protection because they are the most vulnerable. Teacher incentives for both regular and specialist teacher are regarded as challenging and therefore influences motivation and dedication of teachers. There is also a need for sensitizing the wider school community to the advantages of education.

2. Common views among respondents related to themes and dimensions

Respondents emphasize the need for advocacy and raising awareness on the importance of education to all key stakeholders in the community and the need for necessary social protection measures for children with disabilities, girls, orphans and vulnerable children from the necessary authorities. These measures would be financial/material, include child protection strategies and measures and actions that would combat stigma and discrimination. The need to bring in initiatives to learners on rights and responsibilities. Professional development of teachers was emphasized as another way to achieve Inclusive education.

3. Contrasts/differences regarding perspectives

Although parents especially members of the PTA/SMC said that parents do not send children to herd cattle during school time anymore students, including girls and special needs learners complained that parents do send children to herd cattle. An issue that was mentioned frequently is that according to government policy all children should have access to school regardless of uniform but this school's own policy differs in which wearing school uniform is compulsory. It was revealed that due to this policy school some children drop out of school because they cannot afford to buy school uniforms

while teachers mentioned that some children deliberately do not wear school uniform to test the teachers. Also teachers feel that the ban on corporal punishment has brought in moral decay among learners. They are disrespectful to teachers and do not take orders from teachers. Secondly parents of special needs learners and special needs learners suggested that they do not feel accepted but the teachers said they already use specific strategies to improve the acceptance of learners with special needs and their peer groups

4. Conclusion

The consultation process undertaken at micro level in the district included a variety of data collection strategies with a focus on gathering the voices of the Malawians: women, parents with special needs children, school governance structures, men, girls and boys as well as teachers, through face to face key informant interviews and focus group discussions. In order to ensure that a diversity of voices was heard, attention was given to ensuring that amongst others, individuals such as women particularly mother group members, children, adolescents particularly girls, teachers, school management committee, Parents Teachers Association, people with different impairments, epileptic children and learners living with and affected by HIV/AIDS were targeted. Others consulted included the Head teacher of the case study school. In terms of the emerging issues, the following main recommendations emerged from the voices gathered at the micro level in the district:

- There is need for specialist teachers who have specialized in diverse learning need areas at the school to provide support to both teachers and learners.
- There is a need to address absenteeism of teachers in general and standard one teacher in particular. As only specific teachers are trained to teach Standard 1, all teachers should be trained on how to teach standard one due to the high absenteeism of teachers.
- All teachers should be trained on how to handle learners with diverse educational needs in their classrooms to promote efficient teaching of all learners and also to assist the specialist teacher when he or she is alone. Failure to orientate regular teachers regarding special needs education is a major challenge in meeting the goals of quality education for all.
- There should be enough well-structured classrooms which should be disability friendly. The classrooms should have window panes and enough desks and chairs. Both parents and the government should take part in constructing enough classrooms and enough teacher's houses
- There should be enough toilets with doors that close so that the girls are able to help themselves when the need arises.
- There is a need for the provision of sufficient and effective teaching and learning materials for both teachers and students and for both regular and special needs learners.
- Teachers should be advised to use new ways of teaching such as participatory group methods including cooperative learning and other group work strategies.
- Sensitization on the importance of sending learners with a disability to school as well as the importance of education for girls.
- There is a need for teachers to further develop the syllabus in which second language challenges are addressed and there should be more books for the pupils.

During the consultations it became clear that the most disadvantaged groups with regard to inclusive education who need closer attention to their needs are as follow:

- Learners with disabilities with specific reference to learners who are physically challenged, have a hearing impairment, speech problems, visual impairment or who are intellectually challenged.
- Other disadvantaged groups include girls, orphans, children from poor families, HIV/AIDS infected children, children from migrant farm workers who are disadvantaged because they cannot understand Tumbuka the local vernacular language which is the language of instruction and used in the classes by teachers.

These groups of children are disadvantaged in different ways. The children with disabilities are disadvantaged by lack of acceptance both at school as well as in the community, lack of well-trained specialist teachers to support them, regular classroom teachers who do not have the necessary skills to teach them and the lack of learning materials like assistive devices and other materials that include books and pencils. Orphans also lack parental care and home support and learners from poverty stricken households including orphans do not have the money to buy school uniforms.

The majority of respondents displayed not only the knowledge of what the problems are, but were also very clear in terms of the possible solutions to them. They also acknowledged the causes of the problems as well as what needs to be done to have achieve participation and acceptance of all children.

3 Meso Level

The District Education Manager the respective district, the Special Needs Coordinator for the district, School Health and Nutrition Coordinator, Coordinating Primary Education Advisor and the District Social Welfare Advisor were interviewed.

3.1 Concept of inclusive education

Concerning the concept of inclusive education at the school the District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator emphasized the connection between including all groups of learners and a productive school environment:

In SHN I talked of productive school environment, we cannot talk of productive school environment looking at only a particular group of people but rather its education for each and every one, so that what so ever is taking place in productive school environment we have to involve each and every one in whatever status one is, whatever condition one is in we have to involve each and every one. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 34)

This statement also reflects that community members including officials on district level try to implement the idea of access, acceptance and participation for all groups of learners.

3.2 Access

Key aspects that influence access are duration of time in school/drop out, infrastructure including distances to school and specific measures to increase access.

1. Duration/Drop out

The interviews revealed discrimination as one factor contributing to the drop out of learners. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator illustrated this challenge by indicating the disadvantages learners affected by HIV/AIDS are facing at school:

There was a lot of that one then this one even if she comes to school, he comes to school, within him or herself he could feel that, 'I think am out of place' because some of the girls, boys would boo him eeh! you are positive so automatically, it was affecting performance in class and maybe some even decided to drop out to say I think school is not our area where we should be, we better be at home because they don't laugh at us. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 66)

2. Infrastructure

a. Way to school

According to the coordinating Primary Education Advisor (CPEA) girls are disadvantaged on their way to school due to incidents like harassment or the possibility of being raped. These dangers can keep parents from sending their daughters to school:

When going to school and coming back when they are not in groups, girls are at a disadvantaged. If one girl is walking around through thick forest, they are more disadvantaged than a boy, they can be raped and things like that. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 65)

b. Accessibility of school buildings

Concerning children with disabilities the CPEA mentions the necessity of accessible school buildings and sanitary facilities:

From there, it's improving the infrastructure because some of them might be using wheel chairs so they need to have classrooms which are accessible. They need to have toilets which are accessible or may be enough toilets so that other toilets are less used by others so that neatness or cleanliness is maintained, that in terms of access. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 47)

3. Specific measures/positive developments

The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator named feeding programmes as one specific measure to increase access for children. The distribution of food at school encourages children to go to school:

Now that the children are getting some food at school, even those that were not willing to go to school are now saying, 'let us go to school because there is feeding programme'. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 42)

3.3 Acceptance

1. Attitudes, Beliefs

With regards to children with disabilities the coordinating Primary Education Advisor points out that a welcoming and accepting atmosphere as well as an accessible school environment prevents these children from drop out:

And then welcoming attitude, mood at the school by teacher and learners, automatically that one will feel part and parcel of the school unlike where by the environment or mood is not welcoming to that person, they say, 'tomorrow I think I should not come back'. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 47)

2. Prejudices

Speaking about children affected by HIV/AIDS, community prejudices and discrimination influence their willingness to attend school as well as their learning achievements. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator explained:

There was a lot of that one [refers to discrimination] then this one even if she comes to school, he comes to school, within him or herself he could feel that, 'I think am out of place' because some of the girls, boys would boo him eeh! you are positive so automatically, it was affecting performance in class and maybe some even decided to drop out to say I think school is not our area where we should be, we better be at home because they don't laugh at us. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 66)

3. Specific Measures to increase access

The coordinating Primary Education Advisor emphasized the necessity of sensitizing the parents of children with disabilities as well as the communities regarding their children's potential and the importance of sending them to school:

Trainings are also important, sensitizations are very, very important because some of them who have special needs children, they feel that is the end. They do not know that this time a special needs learner, a special needs child will become somebody who will help even those who feel they are okay, so even the communities also need sensitization trainings, when they have been trained, they understand it is also better off and they are able to help their child. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 31)

3.4 Participation

Key aspects are professional qualification and specific measures.

1. Professional qualification/Lack of specialist teachers

The lack of specialist teachers was named as one of the most challenging problems when it comes to participation, since regular teachers often do not know how to include and provide effective learning support for children with disabilities according to their needs. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator on including children with disabilities:

Talk of learners who have some impairments, we don't have enough specialist teachers so much so that those teachers who might be handling those learners may not teach in the proper way which will benefit the learners so that education for all at some time may be at a disadvantaged because the learners are not getting what they are expected to attain in class maybe because the teacher is lacking expertise. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 60)

2. Learning materials

Additionally adequate learning materials for learners with disabilities have to be provided:

(...) and then teaching and learning materials for those in special schools at least they need special materials, so at least they need adequate resources. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 39)

3. Specific measures to increase participation

a. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

To address these challenges some specific measures have already been implemented to provide teachers with in-service or continuing professional development opportunities. The Coordinating Primary Education Advisor (CPEA) pointed out the importance of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) programmes:

These CPDs are important in meeting education for all because we have specialist teachers who are very few and are maybe in schools where we have concentration of learners with critical conditions but we have also other learners with mild conditions in our regular schools. So, for those teachers to handle the learners properly and even to say this learner is not mild is critical and have to be referred to those special schools, they have to have some knowledge so that is why there is need for CPDs for those teachers so that at least they can be able to handle those learners in at least a fair manner. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 31)

In addition Primary Education Advisors (PEA) provide supervision and assistance to teachers concerning the inclusion of learners with disabilities. The CPEA noted:

I talked of training and then on supervision, when I have to encourage my colleagues the PEAs that when we supervise our teachers, we should be able to assist them on how to handle special needs learners. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 33)

b. NGO's intervention

The activities to increase participation are supported by the work of NGOs that are also training teachers on how to include children with disabilities in their lessons and on how to cooperate with their parents:

Let me add now, we also have another NGO belonging to [name of religious organization], it's also concentrating in some zones where by they call all the teachers, they train them how to handle those learners, how to identify them, then they call the parents of those learners. They also give them some basics and sometimes they give them basics like the trainings on how they can handle those learners and

how they can work with teachers, how as parents of those learners can come together. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 37)

c. Policy

On the policy level a new curriculum is supporting teachers in implementing the participation of children with disabilities:

And number two on the part of the government, it's good that when this new curriculum was being introduced it had components of special needs. Yah! So, that's the advantage like the previous curriculum, it did not have any components of special needs, and this time students in college are sure they also handle that area. And then the textbooks especially the teachers' guides, they have reminders nearly at each and every topic, at least they have components on how you can modify to fit the special needs learners, so there is that reminder that when a teacher is preparing, at least somewhere he is reminded of special needs learners, how you can modify the activities, so that's why I said it's okay. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 37)

d. Club activities

Considering an equal participation of both genders to be included in its activities, clubs, as for example the theatre for change or the wildlife club, are meant to encourage the inclusion of male and female learners. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator explained:

Talk of theatre for a change and this one we are talking of behaviour change at different levels, so I feel having these clubs in schools, we are also encouraging ... participation by both gender, yah! Male-female, then in the formulation of the groups even those who are discriminated at some time, when they are involved in the groups they also feel we are part and parcel of the school, yah! (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 78)

In the same, we could also have wildlife club where we are also looking at how we can conserve the environment, talking of the wildlife and then living things in the environment, so such clubs are incorporating both gender. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 80)

3.5 Transition to Secondary School

1. District Social Welfare

The district mentioned that due to limited funding, they fail to support all vulnerable learners who are in secondary schools

Some of the challenges are these: financial support. In secondary schools we have a list of needy students who are already vulnerable but due to inadequate funding, we don't support some of them because we are given limited in terms of money so we don't support each and every student in secondary schools, that's our major challenge. And in terms of assessment, if you want to go for assessment, sometimes we are having a problem of fuel so to make some follow-ups and do assessments, another challenge because the money from NAC is not enough. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.5_13.05.2014, 73)

Transition to Primary School

The office of the Social Welfare Department/Ministry makes transition to primary school possible by encouraging parents to send their children to Early Childhood Development Centre especially Community Based Childhood Centers (CBCCs). They also encourage parents to send their children to primary school because as emphasized in the following quotation children who are in standard one and two should be targeted:

When we are talking about our programs, in terms of inclusive education, let me tell you about the ECD, Early Childhood Development. Early Childhood Development is targeting a child from conception to eight years. Okay. Zero to five years they are attending CBCC Centers. Six to eight and above, they are school going children but six years is a standard one child or standard two child even seven, eight, standard two or standard three more especially standard two, one and two. Still they are in the category of ECD [Early Childhood Development]. Okay. Now as an office we do encourage people in the community to send children from zero to eight years more specially zero to five years to attend CBCC Centres and six to eight, they are supposed to attend standard one or two classes so we encourage parents to send those children to primary schools so that they can be cared for properly and the beginning of their future. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.5_13.05.2014, 98)

Concerning transition, there is the need for early childhood development from an early age to eight years of age and also to standard two in the primary school. It also seems as though the District Social Welfare Office is failing to support vulnerable children at secondary school due to lack of finances whilst some of the girls fail to proceed to secondary school due to pregnancies.

3.6 (Most) disadvantaged groups

1. Most disadvantaged groups

Learners with special needs, learners with HIV/AIDS, those who are taught in their second language as well as girls could be identified as the most disadvantaged groups of learners for various reasons.

Regarding children with disabilities and learning difficulties, inaccessible infrastructure, the lack of specialist teachers, inadequate teaching materials, a negative attitude towards their educational potential as a consequence of prevailing perceptions amongst their parents and in the communities and the insufficient cooperation between their parents and their teachers can be named as important factors that form barriers to their education:

And again, we have many I think parents who are still keeping children with disabilities in their homes. They still feel, they have not yet come to appreciate I think the importance of sending such children to school. (MW_RM_DEM_EI_A_A_1_24.05.2014, 77)

A lack of sensitization also plays a role when girls' education is considered. Important aspects that contribute to girls' disadvantage are the danger of harassment or rape on their way to school (see access), inadequate sanitary facilities and their household responsibilities that can keep them from working for or attending school. In addition early marriage or pregnancy can discourage them from going to school.

The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator explained:

I think on that one I will say, though things are improving this time around after sensitization and re-sensitization, sensitizing in those days we could hear most of the girls complaining that they are being given lots of work to do at home, girls doing a lot of work as compared to boys so when they come to school concentration might not be there because they have worked hard at home, they have been working, when they come to school, they are tired, because of gender then this girl is disadvantaged in the sense that she cannot concentrate when she gets back home. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 62)

We need to have improved toilets in the schools and for the girls I think we can also have those, we can also construct some bathrooms for the girls. We have a period whereby some of them will decide to say,

'I will stay out of school because I am in my menses, so I won't go to school', so we can have those bathrooms in the schools where children can be assisted, the girls especially and so we can have improved toilets, some bathrooms and then maybe we can also think of sharing with our colleagues from ministry of health. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.201, 112)

The Assistant Social Welfare officer on early marriage:

Some of the parents do not want children to go to school, they discourage them to go to school, some of them they even force, more especially a girl child, not to go ahead with their education, they encourage them to get married as early as possible, so we just go there to talk to the parents. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.5._13.05.2014, 38)

Some of the guardians are encouraging a girl child to get married as early as possible. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.5._13.05.2014, 148)

2. Other disadvantaged groups

Furthermore orphans, children from poor families, children affected by HIV/AIDS, children from migrant families who only speaking minority languages are disadvantaged as well.

The CPEA on orphans:

One when he has only the mother, the father passed away, automatically income generating activities in some cases might not be okay. So, support will automatically go down in terms of resources as well as in terms of psychological or maybe information at least to guide that learners, you need to have two people, that's why orphans are disadvantaged. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 69)

The CPEA on children from poverty stricken families:

For example those from low income generating activities. Generally, it happens because you are not at that level so, you isolate yourself, you feel less comfortable but it's not serious but at least that's why it's tough that uniform is a problem with those marginalized also have problems to buy uniform. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 91)

The CPEA on children affected by HIV/AIDS (also see acceptance):

One, attitude from others because maybe they are on treatment so others might not have positive attitude. Teachers might not have positive attitude, then automatically in some cases their health might be not all that perfect, automatically, they are disadvantaged because they cannot attend lessons full time so they are disadvantaged in some of these areas. Still on the positive attitude, at least sensitization is there that at least this time understanding is becoming better for other learners and for teachers as well but they are disadvantaged in those areas. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 73)

The CPEA on tenants (farm workers and migrant workers):

It's training them or making the communities aware that at least despite that the father or parents are there on the estate, the children must go to school so that at least they attend classes, they attend lessons. That one is known, the only challenge they have is tobacco is harvested before the term ends, when they have received their dues in June, they will not wait up to July, they will leave so learners are disadvantaged on that one. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 113)

The District School Health and Nutrition Advisor on languages:

There are several languages, it's not Tumbuka throughout because when you get to RMimba, Rumphu, Tumbuka is very common but when you go to Karonga, it's Ngonde, there are other languages there. Then we go to Chitipa, 24 different languages, so there it becomes ... Chitipa boma it's easy, they can

Speak some Tumbuka but when you get into the rural places, you find that they have other languages which we cannot understand one another. So, in that scenario then being disadvantaged in terms of language comes in. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 74)

3.7 Discussion

Against the background of the analysed data the connections and dynamic interaction between the individual learners, their physical environment that includes their educational context become apparent. The implementation of inclusive education as reflected in the areas of access, acceptance and participation can only be successful if the needs and challenges of all different groups of learners with diverse educational needs (for example learners with a disability or girls) are taken into consideration. Furthermore the dynamic interaction between various aspects of access, acceptance and participation can be identified as well. If issues regarding discrimination are taken as an example it becomes evident that the low acceptance of one specific group of people also influences their access to and acceptance and participation at school. As explained above discrimination towards children who for example are affected by HIV/AIDS can decrease their motivation to attend school and can negatively affect their performance in class.

Besides these dynamic interactions and connections between different individuals, their family, the school they attend and their local community, the dominant economical, social, cultural and political situations and structures in the district as well as in the country constantly influence one another. These continuous dynamic interactions between multiple contextual and social influences have particular relevance for education and as such education cannot be regarded as one separate problem, but must always be viewed in the context of the whole country as well as in the specific areas of the country. That means that not only the situation in Malawi but also the specific circumstances in the RMimba district as well as in this specific school community should be taken into consideration. Providing examples from the data, nutrition and health care on national and district levels were for example revealed as one significant factor that is closely connected to the successful implementation of inclusive education. In addition the children from tenant families can be named as one group of learners in this district whose particular traditions and attitudes have to be taken into consideration when all groups of children are supposed to be included into the educational system.

It becomes evident that schools and learners in these schools always need to be considered in their social context that includes the micro, meso, macro and global (e.g. the international movement towards inclusive education) contexts. If one aspect of these complex contexts and the dynamics involved is neglected the other aspects will be affected by that as well. Consequently networking, cooperation and collaboration between all system levels become key aspects in the implementation of inclusive education.

3.8 Opportunities

1. Specific measures

a. Health and Nutrition

Referring to the District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator, nutrition education and feeding programmes at school support the creation of a productive school environment where all groups of

learners can be included. General sensitization concerning the importance of proper nutrition for child development and especially for learning is regarded as significant:

We are trying to coordinate activities in schools where we are trying to promote productive school environment where we are talking of schools having school gardens, schools having orchards, schools having some woodlots to maintain or at least to make sure that the environment is not replenishing, so that's what we are doing as district SHN coordinator. And then we are also talking of nutrition education, we go to the schools, meet the community members, talk of the importance of nutrition (inaudible) saying that if a learner is well nourished, the body is well nourished then this child will do well in class. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 32)

Furthermore the general idea of creating a productive school environment focuses on several aspects of health and the development of a healthy lifestyle:

And then we have productive school environment, we are talking of cooking food, then we need to have extended woodlots whereby firewood will be taken from within the woodlot for preparing the meals at the school. Then, the orchard, after taking the meals at school, the children should be able to eat the fruits from their own garden, the orchard, so we would use that money mainly for improving sanitation and hygiene in schools as well. [...] We need to have improved toilets in the schools and for the girls I think we can also have those, we can also construct some bathrooms for the girls. We have a period whereby some of them will decide to say, 'I will stay out of school because I am in my menses, so I won't go to school', so we can have those bathrooms in the schools where children can be assisted, the girls especially and so we can have improved toilets, some bathrooms and then maybe we can also think of sharing with our colleagues from ministry of health. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 112)

b. Club activities

The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator referred to the opportunity of implementing clubs at school to address challenging (health) issues like for example HIV/AIDS and to promote the inclusion of all groups of learners. Additionally matrons and patrons were trained to support these clubs:

In school health and nutrition, we are advocating to say there should be some set up of clubs. In these clubs, they are talking of different things. They are ... we can talk of AIDS TOTO (meaning we don't want AIDS) clubs, all those in AIDS TOTO club does not mean that they are infected but it's just AIDS TOTO club where they talk of the pandemic and then how they can prevent, protect themselves. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 78)

In school health and nutrition generally, we are intending to train matrons and patrons for the clubs. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 95)

c. Resource centres

When it comes to learners with disabilities and specific educational needs, the establishment of resource centres is regarded as an important opportunity to support their inclusion. The CPEA on resource centres:

For the resource centre, that is why [name of school] is getting to be an established resource center, at least when they have been funded, they can buy food and other items which are required at that resource centre. Then other learners how they are being supported may be its through conducting CPDs with the teachers and also going around assessing those learners to say they are at what level and they make recommendations. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 43)

The Special Needs Coordinator:

with these partners what is in program now is the establishment of another resource center in the district which is going to be inclusive not only specifying on the either visually impaired or hearing impaired it

will be a resource center where all learners with different impairments can be mobilized under specialist teachers to be under one resource center that is at [name of school] which I was saying that last week, 2 days ago we were meeting chiefs to see what they can do in the program so that when the donor funds then we will start construction of the resource center in that way we will be able to reach out to many who cannot walk to school, who cannot be assisted by parents to go to school to be in one place under the specialist teachers. (MW_RM_DDEM_A_A_5_24.05.2014, 89)

d. Mother groups

The Mother groups could be implemented to counteract gender discrimination and support female learners with their particular needs and problems like for instance sanitary needs at school, forced early marriages or pregnancies. They can also counteract traditional beliefs regarding formal education for girls and inequalities in this regard in their local communities and schools:

Interview partner on mother groups:

In fact we are very much working with the communities because in all schools we have established for example the mother groups which work very hard in fact in counselling the girl child to remain in school. (MW_RM_DEM_EI_A_A_1_24.05.2014, 41)

And I also mentioned about girls in general. Now because of this mother group, we see that in fact even in most of our schools, enrolment has gone up very much. Now I think from standard one to standard five, it's almost the same when you look at boys and girls. So I can see that in fact this initiative of mother groups its working, it's helping us to bring to school those learners those girls otherwise remain. (MW_RM_DEM_EI_A_A_1_24.05.2014, 73)

2. Emerging patterns

Besides these specific measures other success factors that contribute to the promotion of an inclusive school environment include the following:

a. Mobilization of resources

First of all the mobilization of resources and financial support was named as one important aspect that can contribute to inclusive school communities. This includes getting support from the government/the MoEST, the District Education Manager (DEM) and from NGOs. On the other hand it was pointed out that although these forms of support are great opportunities, there are still not enough resources to cover all schools in the district and resources and interventions are not always allocated equally in the different areas or schools (see also the next chapter on challenges).

The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator:

For the whole year, and we appreciate it because we never had a budget ever since but that we have been given a budget, no matter how small it can be, we will say aa! We are happy we have a budget, so will see how we can go about it. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 48)

The CPEA on governmental support:

And number two on the part of the government, it's good that when this new curriculum was being introduced it had components of special needs. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 37)

The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator on DEM support:

From the 2 per cent budget of the operations and whatsoever the DEM has, we only get a 2 per cent which we use to buy nutrition support like maybe we buy milk, buy some cooking oil, then we share it to the teachers.[...] And from the DEMs budget it's unfortunate that we are only getting very little money which for us to maybe support all the teachers at once does not happen. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 84)

The CPEA on NGO's intervention:

Positive developments are there although it varies because some areas or zones have advantage because NGOs are not flat out, at least some zones are advantaged, and some zones are disadvantaged so that's why am saying there is variation. Because of support from other NGOs, for example we have EGRA, RTI conducting Early Grade Reading activities. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 35)

One [referring to the work of specific NGO's] is training all the stakeholders maybe on gender issues ensuring that other learners/children especially the girls are not more disadvantaged although they can look at all the learners but also the girls who are more disadvantaged so trainings to various stakeholders even to the learners themselves. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 79)

b. Community and parent's involvement

Building strong school-community relationships is a crucial aspect in the development of inclusive schools. Incorporating the communities and traditional authorities in school development activities provides additional support, feelings of ownership from the community and contributes to the development of understanding and addressing challenges in the development of inclusive school communities where diverse learning needs are supported:

If you get into the schools today, in [name of district], I would say it's almost three quarters of the schools have tried to introduce feeding programme at community level, yah, after being sensitized and then talking of them on nutrition education importance we had discussed that one, then the communities had to have, has its own experience to say let us try to grow our own crops in the schools. So, they have grown maize, have grown soya, some have grown groundnuts and then they have introduced feeding programmes. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 42)

Yah, because we can see even Traditional Authorities (T/A) even coming in after we had visited them after they told them the importance. We talk of nutrition education and then importance of feeding the children at school. Then, one of the T/As, am happy to say this, he said, 'let ... I am also going contribute let's say five bags of fifty kilograms maize to the school so that the children should keep on eating'. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 44)

In general the idea of including community members and collaborating on addressing challenges at the grass root level is considered as one important aspect when it comes to implementing inclusive education. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator explained:

The district education manager always ensures that where resources are permitting, he supports so that we get to the ground, to the grass roots and when we are at the grass-root now, we try to interact with the communities, and we interact with the teachers as well as learners. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 40)

The CPEA on community participation and parent's involvement:

Community participation is a very serious component, without community participation we cannot achieve so on that one we have less challenges. [...] And the synod of [name of place], they gathered the parents or guardians of those special needs children encouraging them, giving them some resources so that they can do income generating activities towards supporting their learners so community participation is there seriously and advocated. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 49)

c. Networking and cooperation

Finally the importance of networking, cooperation and collaboration of all these stakeholders was emphasized as an important factor to achieve sustainable results. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator:

In fact it requires multi-sectorial approach, several ministries are working hand in hand, even NGOs, yah! We are working hand in hand. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 54)

Considering opportunities and success factors, key aspects in addressing challenges in the development of inclusive school communities and systematic problem-solving in this regard are networking and cooperation between different stakeholders, involving the communities and the parents of the learners, working on challenges from the grass root level as well as seeking support from the government/the MoEST, the District Education Manager (DEM) and different NGOs.

3.9 Barriers

Key aspects are especially resources (material, financial and human) and challenges referring to specific measures.

1. Resources (material/technical, financial and human)

A general lack of technical and human resources can be regarded as one of the most significant challenges when it comes to implementing inclusive education. A lack of technical (learning and teaching resources as well as assistive devices), financial and human resources was claimed by all interview partners in various areas of their work. As mentioned earlier the dynamic interaction between micro, meso and macro education systems on socio-economic levels has a direct impact on the availability of necessary resources, consequently this strong interrelationship should always be considered. The element of human resources relates specifically to, a lack of well trained teachers in general and a lack of specialist teachers concerning special needs education.

Like I will start with staffing in schools, we are talking of education for all, so you have a school which is standard one to eight, has four teachers, the quality of education that these learners are getting at that particular school is not the one which we are desiring, so I feel those children then are disadvantaged because they do not have enough teachers in those schools. Talk of learners who have some impairments, we don't have enough specialist teachers so much so that those teachers who might be handling those learners may not teach in the proper way which will benefit the learners so that education for all at some time may be at a disadvantaged because the learners are not getting what they are expected to attain in class maybe because the teacher is lacking expertise. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 60)

Additionally technical resources that include teaching and learning materials as well as effective learning support are not available. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator stated the following'

Maybe the materials which should be used for teaching, the teacher is just using general materials, then that child is again disadvantaged [referring to special needs learners]. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 60)

2. General Specific measures

Regarding challenges which are linked to specific measures, the strong connection between the availability of resources and the implementation of specific ideas on inclusive education becomes apparent.

a. Feeding programmes

Taking the implementation of feeding programmes as an example various challenges were named by the District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator:

On material resources:

Then another challenge is about the inputs, farm inputs, Yah! For them to have a bigger land, they need to have much fertilizer, they need to have adequate seeds. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 46)

On human resources:

So, the other challenge is like when women are supposed to prepare the meals for the children, at times the one who is on that duty to say to prepare may not turn up, so instead of having maybe having three, may have only two. So, having the two will mean delaying each and every process, so, even it also disturbs some lessons at some point then the education for all which we are talking about maybe somewhere somehow may be limited. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 46)

On financial resources:

Although the number of schools have also increased in 2014, only 19 schools out of a total of 259 schools have a feeding scheme.

b. NGO interventions

As mentioned above NGO interventions are regarded as an important success factor in the process of implementing inclusive education. Nevertheless, some challenges became apparent as well. For example not all areas in the district are receiving equal support and there are also critical views with regards to the focus of some of their contents. The CPEA on NGO interventions:

We have some zones that are advantaged like those that are under Plan, at least there are more projects towards supporting learners concentrating on girls. Then some zones, we had program of MALGA [Malawi Girl Guides Association] concentrating on supporting the girls so in addition to mother groups, various zones have these other projects but they are not in all zones. In Plan zones because there is YONECO [YouthNet and Counselling] working there towards the children, girls are already there, then we have FAWEMA [Forum For African women Educationalists in Malawi] concentrating in Plan zones. Then Girl Guide zones are around the tarmac, Ekwendeni Erukweni and Bwengu. So, that's why I say some zones are disadvantaged. In Plan zones we have FAWEMA, we have YONECO. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 77)

I think in the schools it's okay because a number of books, they talk of rights and responsibilities but the NGOs when they are going flat out, have you ever heard them talking of responsibilities? (Laughs), you are in Zomba, there is YONECO there full swing, have you seen it talk of responsibilities (laughs), they do not talk of responsibilities, they simply say you have these rights, you have these rights. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 87)

[...]so learners have responsibility to study hard, to go to school. They need not to be forced to go to school. Look, they have to go to school, they have to study hard, and they have to follow the rules because there are rules and regulations. We cannot have a school without rules and regulations, then that's awkward. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 89)

c. Sensitization

Another common view expressed during the interviews was the general lack of awareness and need for sensitization regarding the needs and problems of specific groups of learners and the importance of education in general as already explained in the chapters above. The CPEA takes children with disabilities as an example:

Challenges obviously, you know, culturally, people brought up in those remote areas may be they have had no chance of learning or being aware that special needs people they also achieve then it becomes difficult to have positive attitudes towards that situation, that's one challenge. That is why they need sensitization that this time people do achieve, they still have that mentality to say with this child then there is nothing that can happen. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 39)

Finally it was claimed that problems at the grass root levels are not taken seriously, and in order to create sustainable change, people have to work on these challenges on the grass root levels. The CPEA explained:

And then the type of support going to the grass-root level is not taken seriously, the problems at the grass-root level are not taken seriously. For example (Laughs) somebody at grass-root level, for example a teacher solely depends on salary while other people up there at least you have one or two allowances in a month, am sure am correct when a teacher's sole salary gets there late. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 121)

So becomes confused so that's why we need to be very serious with the best level where things are happening, that's whatever we are doing up there, to have quality things it's because of the ground where things are actually taking place, so we really need to think of that one. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014, 122)

3. Facilities

As already mentioned above inadequate or inaccessible sanitary facilities are problems, especially for girls or children with a physical disability. Furthermore a lack of water sources is closely connected to this challenge. The District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator explained:

But then you go to a school, you find that there is no water source, even if you can have that bathroom, it means that bathroom will not be used because there is no water, so we can construct some sanitary facilities in some schools not all schools but in some schools it can work but in others it would not work. (MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014, 120)

3.10 Recommendations

Based on the analysed data the following recommendations on how to support inclusive education in the district can be provided.

One important factor that was mentioned refers to the need of *sensitization* and the resultant development of advocacy programmes at all levels to facilitate attitude change in relation to inclusive education and values and practices regarding the importance of education for different groups of learners.

Further recommendations refer to the opportunities explained above:

- *networking, collaboration and cooperation* among stakeholders
- *mobilization of all available resources including human resources*

- *bottom-up-approach* (working from the grass root level)
- involving *communities* and *parents*

3.11 Discussion (and summary)

Based on the data different emerging patterns could be formulated that summarize the opportunities and challenges concerning inclusive education in this district in Malawi.

First of all there is a gap between education goals and the resources that are available for the implementation of inclusive education. Almost all interview participants claimed that they are lacking the necessary financial, technical and human resources which impact on the specific measures and programmes that aim to improve the educational situation in the district. Taking NGO interventions as an example, it was noted that not all areas of the district receive equal support due to a lack of available resources. Another important aspect is the importance of inter-sectorial communication to improve cooperation between the different stakeholders working in the educational sector although several examples of well-functioning collaboration strategies could be provided, such as the active involvement of some members of local communities. Nevertheless it is recommended that these cooperative relationships need to be expanded and should focus more actively on expanding networking and inter-sectorial communication to promote inclusive education. An analysis of the transcribed interviews indicated that a variety of initiatives and strategies focus on effective leadership and ownership strategies such as the introduction of education regarding effective nutrition, feeding programmes, club activities or specific continued professional training for teachers or initiatives to increase awareness of the importance of education for all learners. Different stakeholders for instance community members, NGOs, the government or the parents participate in these initiatives. Another significant aspect that has to be considered is the particular understanding of the role of formal education by the population in the district. It became evident that this aspect is closely related to access to education for different groups of learners in the area (for more details see the next chapter on the role of education). Finally providing general access to education dominates the development of inclusive school communities while challenges regarding acceptance and participation are still not receiving the attention it needs. This can be illustrated for example by the classroom situation of children with disabilities who although they have access to the school are not accepted in general by their peers and whose learning needs cannot be addressed due to a lack of effective and sufficient learning materials.

Role of education: Although an awareness of the importance of education was identified our data revealed that sensitization regarding the importance of education is still one of the most important steps to be taken towards the implementation of inclusive education, for example it became apparent that teachers, communities and parents have to be sensitized regarding the potential of learners with disabilities to be educated and how to include them in the educational system while considering their specific learning needs. Taking this aspect into account suitable and more flexible forms of learning that include all groups of children have to be provided. Alternative options that can be considered include for example open and distance professional learning opportunities for teachers to develop skills in teaching.

Re-occurring general themes mentioned by different perspectives: Themes that re-occurred (mentioned by almost all interview partners) include the importance of sensitization regarding discrimination, the important role of education, a general lack of resources on all levels, the significance of high quality professional qualifications of teachers and the important role of communities and parents. Particular traditional values and accepted practices that influence the education learners with disabilities, girls and related gender related problems and the situation of orphans were also emphasised.

3.11.1 Common views among participants related to the themes in the dimension that is being analysed

Generally speaking all the participants seemed to think of inclusive education as a concept that includes all groups of children and not only children with disabilities. Even though they may focus on a specific group in their area of work, they were aware of the needs and problems of other groups of learners as well. This can be regarded as an important foundation for the further development of cooperation and implementation of a common understanding of an inclusive education system. Another important aspect identified by the interviewees was the current lack of resources (like financial resources in general, teachers and specialist teachers, adequate learning material) and how it is negatively impacting their own work and the work of other initiatives as for example NGOs. Besides their own awareness, the respondents claimed that more sensitization especially of local communities and the parents is necessary. As discussed earlier sensitization and resultant advocacy campaigns were described as a key element in the implementation of inclusive education due to the important role of the general but also the specific involvement of communities and parents. Finally it was emphasized that working on the challenges from the grass root level is a very significant starting point in order to create sustainable change and ownership in this regard, since that it is in local school communities where the final results, improvements as well as challenges, are becoming apparent.

3.11.2 Contrasts/differences regarding perspectives

Although the interview partners generally agreed on the topics as discussed above, it became evident that they regarded similar themes and challenges from different perspectives based on the focus of their own work, as for instance nutrition and health or special needs education. Consequently they rather complemented each other's views than creating contrasting opinions. This can be considered as an interesting opportunity to see different priorities in one common issue.

4 Final discussion (referring to micro and meso level)

4.1 Emerging patterns

Based on the results of all interviews emerging patterns that reflect the situation in the district could be extracted. It also needs to be emphasised at the outset that these emerging patterns are closely related to the relatively disadvantaged socio-economic context in the district that influences education in this district.

The first pattern considers the relation between traditional special education systems and inclusive education and the lingering effect of the traditional views of separate placements for children with disabilities. The role of resource centres serves as an example, since participants on the one hand explained that they provide support for learners with disabilities, but on the other hand an exclusive space for these children is created that influences their participation in regular classrooms. Secondly a gap between the idealistic goals for the development of inclusive school communities and available technical and human resources in overcrowded classrooms was identified. This can be regarded as a general problem due to a lack of financial, material and human resources as named above, and attainable goals. It became apparent on the micro level that people seem to be frustrated and overwhelmed by the global as well as national goals on inclusive education they are expected to achieve. Therefore it might be worth thinking about breaking down these goals into smaller and more realistic steps that are aligned with available resources and considered against the background of specific challenges and resources. Furthermore inter-sectorial communication between the different levels as well as the different sectors was discussed as another fundamental aspect that influences the development of inclusive schools. As mentioned earlier networking, communication and cooperation/collaboration seem to be essential aspects when creating change and therefore the stakeholders in these different areas and levels need to work together to implement sustainable change. In the interviews respondents provided various examples of specific initiatives and strategies that reveal leadership and ownership, as for instance the work of NGOs, mother groups or projects working on building awareness around education. Closely connected to this last aspect values and practices regarding the role of education could be illustrated from various perspectives. On the one hand there is awareness around the importance of education for all groups of learners. Parents of Special Needs learners as well as the girls interviewed mentioned that pressure from parents due to financial reasons as well as peer pressure to have better clothing has led some girls to make the decision to get married. Mother group members mentioned that financial contributions and the enforced uniform policy in the school have contributed to some dropouts at the school.

It is therefore clear that the main reason why learners of all different groups including girls, orphans and children with disabilities drop out of school are lack of parental and material/financial support. This includes the impact of living under conditions of poverty where children need to help to earn money or specific values and cultural practices regarding education for girls and gender relationships and prejudices regarding disabilities or people with HIV/AIDS. Finally it could be concluded that there the dynamic interaction access, acceptance and participation must be acknowledged and that the dominance of attention paid to access compared to acceptance and participation has a negative influence on the development of acceptance and full participation in regular classrooms for learners with diverse education needs including those with disabilities.

4.2 Occurring general themes mentioned by different perspectives

In summarizing the results on both meso and micro levels several significant general themes were identified.

First of all the lack of resources (financial, technical or human resources) is one of the most challenging aspects considering the implementation of inclusive education. Especially on the micro level people are directly affected by this, consequently many initiatives fail due to under-resourced classrooms and schools. It becomes apparent that almost all areas of the educational system are negatively affected by the lack of resources including for instance infrastructure, professional qualifications of teachers or the general learning conditions and the infrastructure of the schools. Secondly sensitization and awareness are important factors and can be the foundation for creating an inclusive school environment. Interview partners speak about a lack of sensitization when referring to some of the parents or the communities and society in general. This aspect is closely related to the role of the communities and the parents which was considered on the micro as well as on the meso level as another significant factor. In addition teachers and especially the aspect of professional qualification was named as another important factor that can influence the implementation of inclusive education in either a positive or a negative way. Speaking about inclusive education all participants referred to different groups of children that are most disadvantaged at school. At the meso level the interview partners shared the view that predominantly children with disabilities and girls are most disadvantaged in the educational system, at the micro level additional groups were mentioned including orphans, those affected and infected with HIV/AIDS as well as children from tenant families.

4.3 Common views among participants related to the themes in the dimension that is being analysed

In the interviews participants shared a variety of common views on the implementation of inclusive education. It became apparent that people on the micro as well as on the meso level consider sensitization as one of the key elements. They believe that creating awareness in people's minds is the foundation for developing sustainable change, but if the identified negative cultural values, beliefs and practices in this district are considered it can be concluded that this process needs time and constant effort to be successful.

Another important aspect that influences almost all other areas is the lack of financial and human resources (including resource access and control, financial management, effective administration and teaching and learning support). The interview partners provided several examples of how this is influencing their own life and work as well as the implementation of inclusive education in general. Common examples are the lack of specialist teachers and learning materials or the inadequate infrastructures and general learning conditions at school. The lack of financial resources in families is also an important factor when considering reasons for drop out, as for example girls might be encouraged to work or to marry early in order to support their families. At this point it just becomes apparent again how contextual disadvantages are related to poverty and how all these factors are connected and influencing each other, therefore it is essential to consider these interrelations instead of only focussing on individual aspects.

Furthermore another common view that was expressed concerns the important role of communities and parents. This aspect is closely connected to awareness and sensitization since their attitude and

willingness to cooperate is a foundational factor in the development of inclusive school communities. Contributions on the micro level specifically illustrated that some parents still do not prioritize the education of their children, predominantly due to their own attitude towards education but also because they need the immediate support of their children to care for the family.

These aspects can be regarded as the most important common key factors that need to be considered in the implementation of inclusive education

4.4 Contrasts/differences regarding perspectives

Comparing the micro and the meso level some contradicting aspects regarding the perspectives of different participants could be revealed. First of all the common idea of inclusive education that all groups of children should be included at school is not shared by some of the parents who refuse to send their children to school (as for example some parents of learners with disabilities who do not believe in the educational potential of their children). It became apparent that this attitude is representative of parts of local communities and partly by society in general whereas among professionals a similar understanding of inclusive education seems not to be dominant. This aspect is closely connected to the importance of further sensitization as described in the chapters above. Additionally it becomes obvious that inclusive education cannot be regarded as something separate but rather as a concern of the society as a whole. If the idea of inclusion is not implemented in society in general and particularly in people's minds, the development of ownership of transforming education to accommodate a wider range of learners with diverse needs in regular schools amongst parents/caregivers, community members and all teachers and learners cannot be developed.

Another re-occurring aspect refers to the different perception of the situation on both levels. On the micro level people are strongly and directly confronted with the challenges that emerge in connection with the implementation of inclusive education as they have to deal with them immediately on a daily basis. On the meso level people are rather indirectly affected by these problems, although they work on implementing the same idea. That might be an explanation for the high frustration and discontent that was expressed by a large number of the interview partners at the micro level. People seem to be overwhelmed by the problems they have to face and referred a great deal to concrete challenges they experience on a daily basis. On the other hand people on the meso level seem to be more optimistic and predominantly speaking about opportunities and past achievements. They also mentioned specific challenges but due to their position they rather considered the broad picture and alluded to the connections and dependences between different factors.

Finally the role of NGO interventions should be emphasised. On the one hand NGO interventions are regarded as important opportunities by the different interview partners, as they provide resources and implement specific projects as for example the improvement of infrastructure at schools by the building of new sanitary facilities. On the other hand critical views concerning the way these projects are sometimes implemented were expressed as well. It was explained that in some cases NGO interventions do not include the people on the micro level and in this way acknowledge their specific knowledge and experiences. This approach reminds of a rather colonial way of implementation and should be reflected on critically as it could create new power relationships, influence ownership and a dependency on external support instead of respecting already available resources and expertise and the resultant assets present in every community.

Micro-level

Kind of Data Collection	Name of Interviewee / Participants of FGD and Position	Name of Transcript / Audio File
FGD	Girls	MW_RM_FG_G_LC_LC_4.4_02.06.2014
FGD	Mother Group	MW_RM_FG_MG_LC_AM_4.2_03.06.2014
FGD	Female Parents of SNE Learners	MW_RM_FG_P_LC_LC_4.3_03.06.2014
Interview	Head teacher	MW_RM_I_HT_LC_LC_4.1_04.06.2014
FGD	Teachers	MW_RM_TEACHERS_FGD_AM_LC_4.7_06.2014
FGD	PTA/SMC	MW_RM_SMC_PTA_AM_LC_4.5_04.06.2014
FGD	SNE Learners	MW_RM_SNELEARNERS_AM_LC4.7_4.06.2014
Lesson Observation	Standard 2A Mathematics	MW_RM_Ob_les_LC_AM_GH_1_02.06.2014
Lesson Observation	Standard 2B English	MW_RM_Ob_les_LC_AM_GH_2_02.06.2014
Lesson Observation	Standard 4A English	MW_RM_Ob_les_LC_AM_GH_3_03.06.2014
Lesson Observation	Standard 4B Mathematics	MW_RM_Ob_les_LC_AM_GH_4_03.06.2014
Lesson Observation	Standard 7A Mathematics	MW_RM_Ob_les_LC_AM_GH_5_03.06.2014
Lesson Observation	Standard 7B Chichewa	MW_RM_Ob_les_LC_AM_GH_6_03.06.2014

Meso Level

Kind of Data Collection	Name of Interviewee / Participants of FGD and Position	Name of Transcript / Audio File
Interview	Coordinating Primary Education Advisor	MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.2_12.05.2014
Interview	Desk Officer for Primary & District School Health & Nutrition Coordinator	MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.3_12.05.2014
Interview	Social Worker, Social Welfare Office	MW_RM_EI_EX_LC_LC_4.5_13.05.2014

Kind of Data Collection	Name of Interviewee / Participants of FGD and Position	Name of Transcript / Audio File
Interview	DEM	MW_RM_DEM_A_A_4_2 4.05.2014
Interview	Deputy DEM	MW_RM_DDEM_A_A_5_ 24.05.2014