

[Speaker Presentation]

Decentralization of education and Governance for Quality Education and Roles of International Cooperation in Malawi

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Introduction

Governance in Malawi can best be considered in terms of the recent decentralization efforts. The issue of decentralisation has featured prominently in all contemporary discourse on educational planning and management more particularly so for the developing countries. In fact, the issue of central control versus regional autonomy is not new to the field of public administration. In governance systems, different functions can be allocated in different ways to different levels for different reasons. This is equally true with the ways in which education systems are governed and managed. In the recent pressure to reduce public spending and increase efficiency in the use of resources, decentralisation has become a reality in many countries, even in those that are considered highly centralized. When Cabinet approved the National Decentralisation Policy in 1998, one of the main objectives was to create a democratic environment and institutions in Malawi for governance and development, at the local level which facilitate the participation of the grassroots in decision making. Currently, it is not known as to whether there is genuine decentralization in Malawi. Several questions however still remain unanswered, some of which are the following:

- Which decisions should be decentralized who are making the decisions at the various levels?
- To whom should schools be accountable?
- What has been the impact of such reforms?

One of the main turning points in the history of Malawi has been the transition from an authoritarian state to a multi-party and democratic state in 1994. On coming to power, the United Democratic Front (UDF) government embarked on an ambitious programme of Free Primary Education (FPE) policy. As noted by Chimombo (1999), FPE was not only a response by the newly elected leaders to popular demands for education from the electorate but was also perceived as the main instrument for a more egalitarian society, for expanding and modernizing the economy as an essential element of the development process (p:117). There is considerable literature that education is important for improvements in economic an agricultural activity, health as well as reductions in fertility, infant mortality and morbidity. In addition, increased access to good quality education is seen as an important means of achieving many of the other development goals, including halving of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Education is therefore considered to be economically and socially desirable (Colclough, 1982; World Bank, 1995).

The FPE policy can also be seen to be the new government's response to international declarations. The world community has been setting international targets now known as Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for the achievement of University Primary Education (UPE). Starting from the great conferences of the early 1960s through to Jomtien and Dakar declarations, the goal has been primary schooling for everyone. However, over thirty years now since the agenda was put on the table, the goal of UPE is still elusive. The question is then what has gone wrong? Has the international community succeeded in shaping the future of education in Malawi in a constructive way? To what extent has the international community promoted a narrow vision of education in development that has undervalued quality and focused only part of the problem? This paper looks at some of the governance issues around the Free primary education Policy in Malawi.

Initial Donor Community Response

It can not be denied that the donor community has been in the driver's seat in shaping the economies and indeed the education systems of the developing countries. It may be appropriate to assess what roles the international community plays in the governance issues around the decisions that they drive countries into. When the Malawi Government took a board decision and made primary schooling free of fee paying in 1994, the numbers of children in school increased by almost one million. The implications of this policy change in terms of resource needs were obvious. The Government of Malawi made a frantic appeal for support for the policy, and as a result, the donor community provided its support for the FPE policy in various forms as presented in the table below.

Initial Donor response to FPE in Malawi

❖ UNICEF was the first to come forward with a pledge of 1.3 million exercise books in early September, 1994 which were immediately distributed before schools opened in October. Other major contributions included the construction of 108 classrooms and provision of safe water to 40 schools (MoE and UNICEF 1998:20).
❖ GTZ donated about 248,000 notebooks which were distributed in the Zomba district. GTZ had put some US\$4.5 million to support the PTDP in a parallel financing arrangement with World Bank and ODA.
❖ USAID through the GABLE project procured 8.3 million exercise books which were distributed to schools.
❖ Other local institutions also responded to the government appeal. The Press Trust donated 1.6 million exercise books and pencils. Universal Biscuits Company, Candlex Ltd, Lever Brothers and others have in one way or another supported the policy.

The ad-hoc nature of response to a major policy change by the donor community is noted. Clearly, support from the international donors' community failed to effectively follow the lead here. This is obviously centrally to the commitment that is made by the donor community at the time the various declarations are made. What seems to have been lacking in these international declarations is the need to agree on concrete strategies for raising additional resources at the international level. Obviously, there are no clear guidelines regarding what happens next when a country commits herself to these targets. There is need for a global action plan that brings together governments, donors and other actors around a framework capable of achieving EFA. What became obvious from Malawi was that although government and donor's resources increased in response to the policy, the financial implications of implementing FPE were however considerable and the resourcing levels have in general been low to ensure primary schooling for all of acceptable quality. Consequently the quality of education has significantly declined as demonstrated by the SACMEQ studies (Milner et al, 1998; Chimombo et al, 2005)

As donors provided assistance for FPE in Malawi, two issues emerged. The first was the extent to which the government could support the process of education reform without becoming too dependent on foreign funding. The second touched on the overall challenge of co-ordinating the many donor activities. While some donors claimed that there was a high degree of co-ordination in donor activities, others thought that each donor was pursuing its own projects and goals independently. Indeed, despite the so-called SWAP approach to funding projects, donor coordination in Malawi is very weak. Although monthly meetings are held, donors largely act independently of each other; a situation mainly encouraged by weak government control. If I may draw from my own experience with the implementation of JICA projects, it has been observed that while JICA had put in place a steering committee for monitoring implementation, some of the big donors in the country have never attended these meetings. There is some

confession from DFID in this respect: *closer and more regular consultations has built greater cohesion with like-minded donors, ... While we are moving towards integration with some donors in key areas, ... others are more constrained and lack flexibility* (DFID, 2003, p: 12). But the question here may be what does flexibility mean and flexibility to whose interests?

This DFID country assistance paper also observed that *'a number of active donors meet to discuss general and sector specific issues. However, there is need for better consultations and dialogue especially with the international financial institutions on important policy issues* (p:11). A related concern for many donor activities regards the taxing effect they could have on a ministry already spread thin both in terms of human resources and management capabilities. It must indeed be emphasized that funding is fungible and that an overabundance of uncoordinated donors can crash local ownership and boost transaction costs. In fact DFID agrees that this is what is happening in Malawi and that *efforts devoted to negotiation and procedure harmonization are highly time consuming* (p:12). One can also expect that this state of the art is weakening institutions of the state and eroding the capacity through the administrative burden of multiple projects.

The National Decentralisation Policy in Malawi

In a study on decentralization of education delivery in three African countries SACMEQ (2004) observed that the spirit of decentralization was so strong that no SADC country could have escaped the band wagon. Consequently, under the Ministry of Local Government, the National Decentralization Policy (NDP) was passed by the Malawi Parliament in December 1998 (Local Government Act, 1998). The National Decentralization Policy was instituted among other with the view of promoting accountability and good governance at the local level in order to help Government reduce poverty; and mobilizing the masses for socio-economic development at local level.

The Policy provided that elected local governments in districts and major urban centres (District Assemblies: DAs) are to be established, and part of Central Government functions is to be decentralized to them. It identifies functions and services to be assigned to DAs which includes education services of the following:

- (a) Nursery and kindergarten;
- (b) Primary schools, and
- (c) Distance Education Centres

The NDP envisaged devolving administrative and political authority to the district level which includes spreading implementation responsibilities to the various level of governance. In achieving decentralization, the policy also envisaged integrating parallel functions in one administrative process. But is decentralisation the penance to the governance of education system in developing countries? An assessment of the decentralization policy by Williams et al. (2008) noted that one of the problems of the implementation of the decentralization policy was that decentralization in Malawi is being implemented in the absence of elected bodies. This is the context in which decentralization in Malawi is being implemented and this is the context that was not properly conceived by those behind the policy.

The NDP provides a strong basis to institutionalize decentralization in Malawi. As part of the institutional development, a comprehensive capacity development programme was launched during 2002-2006 covering all components of the National Decentralization Programme. Through this effort, a total of 209 new member staff of Assemblies (District Commissioners, Directors of Finance, Administration, Public Works, Planning and Development and Management Information Officers) were recruited and trained. During the same period, seven sectors were devolved, namely: the public works, health, education, agriculture, housing, finance and social welfare. In these sectors, District Assemblies were entrusted with implementation and administration function. But observers of decentralization in Malawi (Chimombo, 2006; Williams et al, 2008) have noted that the capacity for the implementation of the policy

has not fully developed.

Implementation and MANAGEMENT OF DECENTRALIZED POLICY

What is key in understanding decentralisation policies are: the nature of the decentralised levels, the forms, powers, functions, accountability and processes that we have gone through. There is a big difference between decentralisation to local elected government, local administrative units, school management or school governance/ committees; between decentralised budget, personnel management versus textbook provisioning and financial management functions; between tight or loose forms of accountability to the upper level, etc.

The District Assembly is expected to perform all administrative and political functions at the district and to which there are structural arrangements, such as:

- *District Assembly (DA)* is mandated to pass by laws to govern its operations in local government and development, as well as to raise funds for carrying out its functions under the Local Government Act of 1998. A chairperson selected from the councilors representing a ward in the district heads it.
- *District Executive Committee (DEC)* - is headed by commissioner and includes all sector heads and NGOs and is supposed to meet once a month. It acts as a technical advisory body to the DA.
- *Area Development Committee (ADC)* - in some districts, ADCs are headed by chiefs but in some districts an elected member chair's the committee.
- *Area Executive Committee (AEC)* - technical body composed of civil servants NGO workers operating in a traditional Authority. It is a technical arm at the area level responsible for advising the ADC on all aspects of local development. It is headed by an elected member.
- *Village Development Committee (VDC)* is a representative body from a village or a group of villages responsible for identifying and facilitating planning and development in the local community. It is headed by an elected member but reports to the Group Village Head.

These provisions with village and ward level representation signify a system structured for devolution to the district level and below.

In the education sector, planning and budgeting have adopted a participatory and incremental process. This process has resulted in the preparation of the School Improvement/Investment Plan (SIP) and the District Education Plan (DEP) which feeds into the development of an overall District Development Plan (DDP) engaging three major stakeholders in the process: *the beneficiaries* - parents and students; *implementers* - teachers, head-teachers, and PEAs; and *decision makers* - DC and DEM's office.

The roles of the School Management Committee, PTA and the head-teacher are instrumental in the preparation and implementation of SIP. However, SIPs¹ and DEPs prepared locally are perceived as being too ambitious and too expensive to fund. The demand for funding support from central government is almost always on the high side. Moreover, the high pupil: teacher ratios leave many school communities focusing only on the supply of teachers. In attempting to assess the contribution of decentralisation towards the improvement of educational management, it is important to examine how the tasks and responsibilities have been distributed, and the strategies deployed to implementing decentralisation. The following table summarizes the distribution of functions at the various levels:

¹ Under the new modified Direct Support to Schools program, distribution of funds to primary schools will be dependent on the formulation of school improvement plans (SIPs).

Distribution of decentralized functions

National	DA	Divisional	District	Zone	School/community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Policy formulation (e.g. NESP) •Policy reinforcement •Inspectorate •Establishment of service and performance standards •Training -development and provision of textbooks and supplies (this includes control of development funds) -payment of salaries •Curriculum development -standardization of exams, -accreditation -setting of norms and standards -EMIS and evaluation of school system. •International representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishment of school -request for teachers -Deployment of teachers -Management of DSS -Financial control -Development (including formulation of DDP) -Construction of classrooms -Staff Welfare -Consolidation of district budget -coordination -General administration of the district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -provision of books and supplies -EMIS and evaluation of school system -administration of secondary schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -prepare education development plans -Monitor the day to day operations of education institutions in the District -Administer posting of teachers -Appoint PEAs -Appoint Primary School Heads and their Deputy in liaison with the LEA -Implement policy guidelines issued by the Ministry from time to time -Co-ordinate education activities with NGOs and all stakeholders -Plan and monitor the organisation and implementation of school and zone based in-service teacher education programme -Initiate changes to educational policies Account for all education expenditures. -EMIS and evaluation of school system -representation on DEC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Advise primary school head teachers and teachers in the zone on curriculum issues, methodologies and management of schools -Conduct in-service training for primary school teachers in Teacher -Supervise primary school teachers in their teaching Inspect primary school teachers -Compile report and data on activities carried out in schools -Assist the DEM in accounting for expenditures incurred in their Zones -Determine the budgetary requirements for schools and TDCs within their Zones -EMIS and evaluation of school system -Representation on Area Executive Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Operating grants budget, -building maintenance -promotion of pupils, -assessment -in-service training of teachers -Decisions on class size, admission of students, -day-to day management and administration of schools and in matters related to pedagogy, curriculum, training and finance. -implementation of DSS -monitor pupil and teacher attendance -EMIS and evaluation of school system -provision of labour by communities

In attempting to assess the contribution of decentralisation towards the improvement of educational management, it is important to examine how the tasks and responsibilities have been distributed, and the strategies deployed to implementing decentralisation. It can be seen from the above table that the primary mode of decentralisation is administrative and the devolution of power is largely rhetoric. Here the center continues to play a significant role both in setting policies and in carrying out routine functions. Regulation of education remains the duty of the center. Our observation was that the crucial responsibilities of management, finance, and curriculum at regional, community, and school levels continue to be defined by the central office. Commenting on, the NESP draft observed that:

The decentralised management system for basic education at district level, if supported, can help local level administrations to address these issues more efficiently and effectively. Yet decentralisation, although established in Malawi, has not yet fully devolved full decision-making powers and authority at district level. There has yet to be clear definition of the changed roles of Ministry officials, across the system, and a re-definition of responsibilities. Similarly, decentralisation has the potential to make community participation more possible The National Community Participation Strategy in the Management of Primary Schools (NCPSMPS) plan of action, together with a finalised sector devolution plan, will be instrumental in improving governance and management at local levels (NESP, 2007:30).

Thus, despite considerable emphasis on decentralization, central governments continue to play a major role in the allocation of resources in Malawi and national guidelines continue to be an important mechanism in translating state

policy into local reality. changed the landscape in terms of peoples’ thinking. However, the major challenge has been that “we have moved too fast in enhancing capacity of people but we have moved too slow in responding to people’s needs. In an interview with one of the key informants in Williams et al (2008) it was observed that “there is need for change in the budgeting system to give DAs their proportion of the cake so that they can decide what to do at the district level and be able to do it. Finance is the major obstacle to effective decentralisation in Malawi. In the current state of affairs, Malawi has not decentralised. Decentralisation cannot work in the absence of adequate financial resources. A study by Chimombo et al (2008) on the administrative and financial issues of the implementation of the FPE policy observed that Malawi was the only country out of the four (the others being Ghana, Kenya and Uganda) which had not instituted capitation fund system to schools after the implementation of the FPE policy consequently, the report raised the following issues.

1. Administrative issues in implementing UPE policy

Table Roles and responsibilities in education

	Roles	Person/institution in charge	Observed Challenges
(a)	The overall education planning	DEM	There are no planners at the District level and plans are limited to ORT
(b)	Budgeting	DEM,PEA, HR, Accounts	Do not receive enough funding. Given a ceiling
(c)	Monitoring of schools	CPEA and PEA	Not difficult but no fuel for transport
(d)	Evaluation of schools	CPEA and PEA	Very difficult. PEAs have little training and so lack skills
(e)	Deployment of teachers	DEM, Desk officer and HR	There are no teachers. There is no compelling policy and no accommodation and facilities in rural areas for women especially.
(f)	Administration of in-service teacher training	CPEA and PEA	Budget does not allow and so depend on donors like UNICEF
(g)	Construction and rehabilitation of schools	District Assembly helped by SMC	School committees get frustrated because of there is little assistance. Proposals take a long time to be considered.
(h)	Provision of textbooks	Supplies Unit and MIE	This happens occasionally, with UNICEF and MIE bringing special books at times
(i)	Provision of other scholastic materials	Supplies Unit only from this year after four years of no supplies	Not done often enough. The last consignment of teaching materials was delivered four years ago
(j)	Others	Bilateral institutions eg UNICEF and WFP.	Not very often

The District Education Office has at least four departments and these are management, human resource, accounts and the advisory services. The functions of each department are coordinated by the DEM who is the leader. Therefore the DEM is available in most of the activities such as planning, budgeting, deployment of teachers and overall evaluation and monitoring of schools. Issues such as construction and rehabilitation of schools, provision of text books and provision of other scholastic materials are not under the DEMs’ mandate. This makes it difficult for the office to make provisions for schools and therefore hard to make recommendations to schools regarding improvements in teaching and learning materials. Furthermore the DEM can only work with the teachers in the district and has little influence on recruitment of new teachers into the district. It should be emphasized here that Malawi primary schools (and indeed secondary schools) operate under very pathetic conditions with no or minimal amount of resources.

Brief Discussion

African countries trying to decentralise must face the challenges presented by both universal primary education

and the development of a new management strategy for the education systems. African countries have indeed grappled with the problems of providing education for all their citizens (now with emphasis on quality education for all), for the past three decades or more. The evidence to date (UNESCO, 2002) indicates that the majority of these countries may not achieve the EFA goals by the new date of 2015. This then calls for a paradigm shift. We need to identify key elements in the improvement of educational quality initiatives. These include the role of the headteacher², inspection and advisory services, improvements in relations with parents and communities, appropriate training and orientation and improved data collection and analysis. Education management in many countries still follows a pyramid model, in which national policy, programs and logistics are formulated by the central ministry. These are then communicated and implemented down in units that essentially duplicate the structure at the centre. Schools are managed by heads whose authority and responsibilities include a combination of school management, school-ministry communications, school-community relations and instructional supervision and indeed teaching. What is not known is whether by advocating decentralisation, we have the answer to the problems that have come into the way of providing education for all.

Improving education quality while maintaining the integrity of the national system of education and attaining equity goals creates a challenge much greater than administering expansion of enrolments. While attempts were being to establish institutional arrangements that allow for local participation in the education sector. What local participation means, and whether it relates to sub-national units of government or grass-root communities is often not clear. Another unclear area is the degree of genuine decentralization.

Today's concerns about development partnerships fall short of addressing the problems of coordination, ownership and dependence. There is no doubt that FPE in Malawi was in general; Malawi's own initiative to provide education to the majority of the population. There is also no doubt that the formulation of PRSP utilized the available means to ensure the full participation of the society's stakeholders. The big question that arises from these modalities is What next or so what? These big questions cannot be answered by such broad declarations as:

“ Substantial and long-term increases in resources for basic education will be needed. The world community, including intergovernmental agencies and institutions, has an urgent responsibility to alleviate the constraints that prevent some countries from achieving the goal of education for all. It will mean the adoption of measures that augment the national budgets of the poorest countries or serve to relieve heavy debt burdens (WCEFA, Declaration, 1990: 8-9).

And at the end of the Dakar conference, delegates seriously declared:

*The international community acknowledges that many countries currently lack the resources to achieve education for all within an acceptable time-frame. New financial resources, preferably in the form of grants and concessional assistance, must therefore be mobilised by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, including the World Bank and regional development banks, and the private sector. **We affirm that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources** (World Education Forum, 2000: 9 (emphasis added)).*

Declarations like this one and the many more from the Jomtien and Dakar conferences are too broad and lack a clear and detailed elaboration of the funding mechanisms if a genuine education for all is to be provided. They mean little to the program and strategy planners at the country level. Malawi was one of the first developing countries to respond to

² The headteacher is the level of management that will experience the greatest change in role and responsibility during decentralisation of education.

the Jomtien declaration by making a board decision to remove fees. But as seen above, because of lack of internationally instituted “*modus operandi*”, the local donors could not be coordinated in a manner that ensured that adequate levels of required resources were mobilized. If the requirement is that Malawi should spend 30% of its GDP (see Chimombo, 1999), then the message from Malawi is that the achievement of EFA is impossible without heavy donor support with its implications for increased aid dependency. The other message arising from the Malawi’s experience is that leaving it to local donor agencies to respond to a country seriously committed to the provision of EFA simply thwarts the achievement of the Dakar pledges. Thus, we need to be cognizant of the fact that the scale of external support required for implementation of policies for genuine EFA counters the ownership and sustainability initiatives of national plans and priorities.

There is also a very devastating dimension of the whole North-South relationship and the politics of aid. This relationship is shaped by the way the so-called MDGs are formulated which dictates that the donors are more central to the implementation of the new modalities (King, 2004). Commenting on this aspect, formulator of the PRSP in Malawi had this to say:

There is often an underlying assumption on the part of development partners that because they are benevolent donors, everything they do is in the best interests of Malawians and they are above criticism. However, the reality is that at best, donors do not effectively use their resources for poverty reduction, and at worst help to exacerbate poverty by undermining Government’s planning and priority setting. (93)

The people formulating the MPRS went further to say that the preparation of the PRSP basically involved three stages. *These were mobilisation, preparation and validation processes. The three stages were aimed at: building broad Malawian ownership of the MPRS; building consensus on MPRS in order to enhance likelihood to policy adoption, implementation and sustainability; to ensure donor “buy in” to MPRS and to meet donor requirements (143).* Thus, while recognizing the underlying assumption of the development partners, the technocrats in Malawi still had to take into considerations the donors’ interests for fear that they would not buy in to their strategies. Whose agenda is being fulfilled under these circumstances then?

There are also the hidden agendas of the countries of the North. The nature of this relationship is such that the South always agrees with what the North has already laid out. Any recipient country that stands firm on what she believes is right for herself invites drastic measures from the donor side. The action by DANIDA to withdraw all aid to Malawi in 2002 amidst massive innovations orchestrated by DANIDA herself can be described as one such devastating actions of the North. Indeed, the many times IMF has frozen aid to Malawi directs us to the realization that in the North-South relationship, the aid politics of the North is what matters. It would seem that in this relationship, where one party has funds to allocate and the other seeks these funds, equality is not possible. *If so, then dialogue, partnership and similar terms become a façade to obscure the entrenchment of dependence (Samoff, 1999).* This means that the people of the South must lose their conscious, must lose their integrity and indeed must lose “their-self” if they are not to lose the precious “aid” from the North. Where is the *partnership which is supposed to be based on mutual trust and respect between Africa and the rest of the international community?*

The obvious question is then what is the problem? Has the international community succeeded in shaping the future of education in Malawi in a constructive way? To what extent has the international community promoted a narrow vision of education in development that has undervalued quality and focused only part of the problem? The analyses in this paper and many others have showed that Malawi faces an insurmountable task to deliver an education of minimum quality. Levels of resource provision are very low and their distribution uneven with the rural areas getting little of the resources. What is obvious is that more than four decades of declaring international targets for greater access to education have passed but the achievement of these targets remains elusive. It would seem that missing in

these target setting, is a holistic approach to planning which goes beyond the quantitative targets to explore how to go about financing these policies and indeed what happens after achieving their targets (Lewin 2005). There is need for the generation of home-grown knowledge that takes into account the context in which schooling takes place.

Emerging evidence from the Malawi SACMEQ studies (Milner, Chimombo, Banda and Mchikoma, 2001; Chimombo, 2005 and Chimombo, Kunje, Chimuzu and Mchikoma, 2005) and many other studies have demonstrated that it is easier to achieve reforms which secure increased access to schooling than it is to enhance robust improvements in schooling quality. These studies have pointed to the fact that the poor learning conditions and the consequent deterioration in quality should be of major concern to planners and policy makers in Malawi. The danger is that it is those households with lower socio-economic status which have a lower propensity to send their children to school and keep them there and it is the girls who are more sensitive to this household status (Chimombo, 1999). This is counter to the objectives of Malawi's UPE policy and indeed of the Millennium Development Goals. There are no minimum standards for the operation of schools in and it is imperative for the Ministry of Education that minimum standards in the operation of schools be set.

Critical to improving primary education in Malawi is the weak capacity of the system to retain pupils in the primary schools. The most disturbing feature throughout schools is the tendency for enrolment to decrease as pupils progress to higher classes. It would seem that unless the quality of teaching and learning improves at the lower levels, Malawi is unlikely to reverse the pattern of repetition and dropouts that have characterized the education system for a long time now and it is difficult to see how UPE can be achieved. Further, despite many efforts to tackle cultural obstacles to education, the education system in Malawi continues to be beset by cultural barriers. The Ministry of Education needs to seriously think about what constitutes a school and indeed what constitutes education otherwise the UPE and EFA goals will not be achieved and will remain at the level of rhetoric. Another policy implications here is that the one size for all approach to development is inappropriate.

Thus, we want to emphasize that as long as the international community is in the driver's seat in determining the targets, the set declarations will not be realized. There is need for the generation of home-grown knowledge that takes into account the context in which schooling takes place. There is a need to enable local researchers and policy makers to generate more relevant information and policy alternatives. This also means that teachers, researchers, policy analysts and indeed policy makers in education should be in the process of fundamentally re-conceptualizing what it is that they do and how they have to do it in future. Our minds should focus on answering the questions how can we make our children literate and numerate? How can our teachers be prepared to deal with the large numbers of pupils in the classroom? Thus, the core challenge is for us to come up with a coherent strategy that links our actions to what is happening in the system and therefore focus on where the problems in the system are! There is need for a situation analysis of how the key actors in the system can be supported so that our complex reforms can be rendered more effective. These cannot be achieved by the one size fits them all school of thought propagated by the big bang approach. There is need for a mind-set change that begins to use and apply research findings. It is this further research, aimed at identifying policy investment strategies and local action, that will be cost effective in raising the quality of primary schools and hence the learning curves of young children.

It is noted that national planning and the setting of priorities within the field of education should be a question of finding a balance between different objectives, levels of education and target groups. A systemic approach is required and the challenge is strong and sustained commitment and leadership manifested in strategic sectoral policy, adequate allocation of resources to the sector, and a willingness to implement contentious policies. The lesson from the FTI shows that external support for primary education in low-income countries, will need to increase from just over \$1 billion to about \$3.7 billion. *While some FTI partners have been quick to respond to, others will need to make fundamental*

changes in the way they do business, in particular to increase financial levels, to make financing more flexible and predictable, and to finance an increased level of recurrent costs. The FTI demonstrates for the education sector the broad reality that even under the most optimistic growth scenarios and best fiscal management, the dependency of many low-income countries on external aid will remain stable or increase over the short and medium term. But given the manner in which developed countries are behaving towards implementation UPE, EFA or call it UPC, it is very doubtful that the set targets of 2015 will be met and the majority of our children will continue to be denied the power to reflect, make choices and enjoy a better life.

This evidence also points to the fact that implementation problems are imbedded in the cultural setting in which the implementation takes place. In order to use the Ministries of Education as organizations to their best effect, there is need to understand this cultural context. It is only by examining the context that we can understand why things have or have not happened as planned. In Zambia, BESSIP is becoming another income generating activity for staff at headquarters. This is a growing trend across the continent. In Malawi, civil servants (bureaucrats and teachers) are unwilling to attend a training session or a seminar or workshop without being paid allowances (see Chimombo 1999). And in Tanzania, teachers simply refused to be under the local government. These experiences with policy change throw light on theories of implementation. While the main frameworks of implementation developed in the West (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973, Chase 1979 and Berman and McLaughlin 1981) may not have emphasized much on such contextual issues, the study has shown that this is the context in which policies are implemented in Africa and that this is the context in which problems of implementation must best be understood. Delens (1999) commented that donor-funded development projects tend to be planned in accordance with donor cultural values and the need is for project managers especially expatriates to bridge the culture gap between donor values and the values of the “target community”. Contributing to this argument, Leach (1999) says that bilateral and multilateral interventions have failed because they were themselves culture-bound and inappropriate to the contexts of introduction.

Recommendations and conclusions

Further, the evidence presented above demonstrates that although the enormous challenge for the need for massive resources to the education sector has been energetically taken up, the results have not always lived up to expectations. The big question that arises is then, will donors meet again and declare another set of goals if the current goals are not met by 2015? The answer to this big question for me is NO. It would seem to me that it is high time we woke up to the reality of the inachievability of the goals and devise strategies that recognize the diversity in the context of policy change for the different countries. We have come from far in defining the goals that have not been achieved. In my opinion, we need to forget the setting of goals and recognise that the different countries have different contexts and will therefore require different strategies as well as time frames.

The following recommendations are therefore made based on the evidence above.

- Avoid the big band approach and go the incremental approach to UPE - one that builds on a strong foundation to enable the pupils to stay in the system. So far the evidence demonstrates that it is easier to achieve reforms which secure increased access to schooling than it is to enhance robust improvements in schooling quality
- The need to focus on the rural- to tackle exclusion and deprivation
- There is need for increased number of studies that should shape policies aimed at making education inclusive, responding to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and giving appropriate weight to the abilities, skills, and knowledge they bring to the teaching learning process.
- The need for a holistic approach to planning which goes beyond the quantitative targets to explore how to go about financing these policies and indeed what happens after achieving their targets.

- The post Dakar challenge is to develop more effective strategies and policies at national level and through international action, to provide the financial resources necessary to ensure that such policies succeed. There need for a holistic approach to planning which goes beyond the quantitative targets to explore how to go about financing these policies and indeed what happens after achieving their targets

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