



Link Community Development

Case Study: School Management Simulation Training

Link Malawi – April 2015

As part of the Supporting School Improvement in Malawi (SSIM) project funded by Scottish Government, Link Community Development Malawi has trained 456 school stakeholders in 19 schools in Dedza District using the School Management Simulation Game.

Link's School Management Simulation Game trains school stakeholders on how to make effective decisions about the use of funds, staff and resources to bring about school improvement. It enables school management teams and school governing bodies to 'simulate' school management decision making, helping participants to reflect on the standard of education which schools should be delivering, and how their school is performing against this standard. This equips decision-makers with the knowledge and skills to develop School Improvement Plans which are focused on school priorities and achievable within the school's resources.

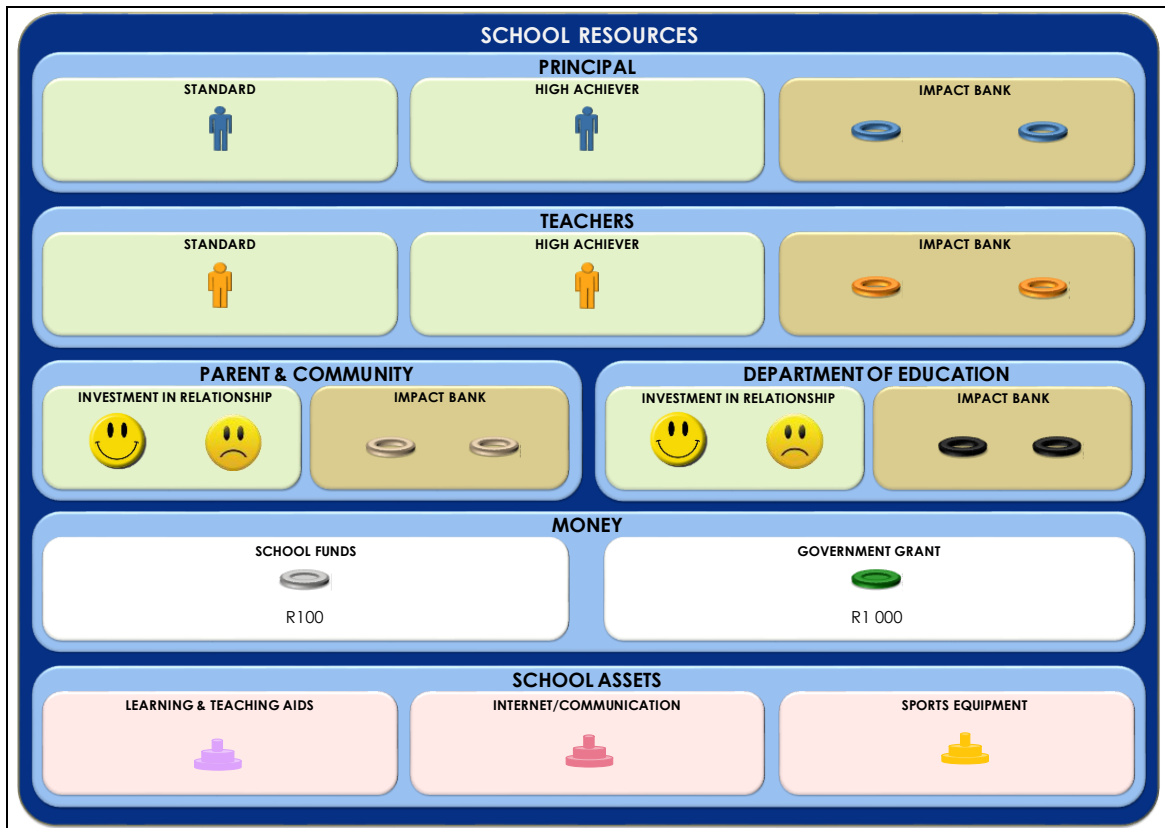
On 28th April 2015 a group of 25 teachers, learners, SMC, PTA and Mother Group members from Liphuphwe Primary School came together for the training. They were selected to participate by the Headteacher, Mr Mabvuto K. Mwandira, as representatives of the different stakeholder groups who are involved in decision-making at the school. The group was split into five teams, each of which received their own board and counters.

















The teams are ready to begin


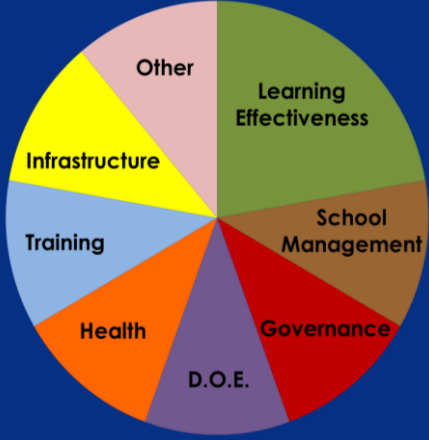




Link facilitators explained that each team should imagine they are the school management committee for a fictional school. The features of the school – number of teachers, learners, school assets, relationship with the community and District Education Office, and school funds – are represented by counters on the board.

The game




ACTIVITIES			
Continuous Professional Development 1	General Maintenance 2	School Management 3	Fundraising 4
School Health 5	Non-School Meetings 6	Travelling 7	School Functions 8
Vandalism & Fines 9	General 10	School Infrastructure 11	Lesson Planning Administration 12
Monitoring & Support 13	Initiative 14	School Meetings 15	
16 LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS			
LEARNERS – JUNIOR YEARS = 20 Learners 	LEARNERS – MIDDLE YEARS = 20 Learners 	LEARNERS – SENIOR YEARS = 20 Learners 	
TEACHING TIME  	TEACHING TIME  	TEACHING TIME  	
PARENT/OTHER SUPPORT  	PARENT/OTHER SUPPORT  	PARENT/OTHER SUPPORT  	

PERFORMANCE






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The teams familiarized themselves with their fictional school and then the facilitators posed a number of scenarios which required the teams to make decisions about how to use the people and funds available to address the issue. Some of the scenarios included: investing in professional development of teachers; building the relationship between the school and community; and purchasing school assets.

Then the teams had to address challenges which schools commonly face: teachers are absent at the end of the month to collect their salaries; the Headteacher had to travel 40km to the District Education Office to deliver a monthly report; vandals have destroyed some classroom teaching aids.

As with a real school, there were also unanticipated issues which teams selected by drawing "Challenge Cards". Some were lucky: "a wealthy former pupil decides to donate to the school fund". Others were unlucky: "a storm has blown off the roof".

Team members watch closely as school funds are counted



The decisions the teams made about how to invest their time and money at the beginning of the game had implications for how they were able to deal with the positive and negative challenges later on.

At the end of Term 1 the teams added up their scores and drew graphs to see how much of the teachers' time had been spent in the classroom. The results ranged from 72% to 83%. Teachers at the lowest-scoring school spent 28% of their time – that's more than one day a week - on activities other than teaching. The game encourages participants to think about how they can make better use of the parents and community, Headteacher and District Education Office to help with school activities so that teachers can spend more time on their primary responsibilities in the classroom – teaching learners.

The teams then calculated how much of all the time and money in their school was used to benefit the school and its learners. The best team used 90% of its resources effectively, while the lowest score was 84%. For this school 16% of its time and money was used on activities like travelling, dealing with vandalism, paying fines or holding non-school meetings, which do not help the school to improve or children to learn.

A team debates how much to invest in community relations



At the end of the game, the teams reflected on what they had learnt and below are the lessons learnt:

- Cooperation amongst teachers, learners, School Management Committee (SMC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the surrounding community can help to improve schools.
- School management teams need to deploy teachers according to the number of learners in each class.
- Schools can be developed even without the use of funds from the Government of Malawi.
- All stakeholders have a role to play at a school to ensure that schools are developed.
- Teachers need to effectively use their teaching time as this helps the schools to improve the learner pass rate and increased the number of passes with good grades in all classes as well as the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination.
- Acquisition of literacy skills in the infant sections boost the understanding of content in the junior and senior sections.
- It is important to share responsibilities and delegate duties effectively if a school is to develop.
- There is need to deploy more and effective teachers in the infant and junior classes to reduce anxiety in the senior classes.

Two key observations indicate the potential impact of the game on school improvement. The first is that the game led players to think of the longer-term consequences of their decision-making. Those who spent all their money early on were unable to cope with unexpected costs like flood damage later in the term. Those who decided not to invest in community relations were unable to draw on their support, for example to run reading clubs, and as a result their learning outcomes were lower. At every school this was a revelation which led to animated discussions about a change of strategy for the next round. This change in thinking will translate into stakeholders' approaches to the annual school improvement planning process.

The second observation is the extent to which all stakeholders were actively participating throughout the game. We had anticipated that non-literate community members (e.g. many members of the Mother Group) might be reluctant to share their views in front of senior members of the school, and that senior staff might dominate the decision-making and not take account of others' views. We often hear community members of school governing bodies complain that Headteachers are not inclusive when they develop school improvement plans. In reality we saw the opposite during the game. The Headteacher listened to other team members and did not overrule their decisions, while all team members contributed to the discussions, and in some cases there were very lively debates. This may be due to the way the game is designed. It is also helped by actions of the facilitators to keep people engaged e.g. giving responsibility for counting markers to a team member who seemed distracted.



Liphuphwe School took part in School Performance Review (SPR) in 2013 and **Headteacher Mr Mwandira** was involved as a data collector in 2014. This means he is very familiar with best practice in School Improvement Planning and endeavours to involve all stakeholders in the process. Before SPR both he and the community members were unclear about how they should engage with the school improvement plan, but now they are active participants in developing the plan and helping to

implement it. However, Mr Mwandira finds it challenging to involve fathers in the school because many of them travel frequently to South Africa to work. He thinks that what he and others have learnt through the simulation game will encourage them to redouble their efforts to build a relationship with the men in the community so they are active participants in school improvement as well.

Susanne Pukusani, Chair of the School Management Committee (SMC) didn't know what to expect from a 'simulation game', but she has learnt "it is not just a game". It has trained her to look at the development of the school and particularly to reflect on how Liphuphwe School manages its school fund. "I have seen there are issues in the game which



have direct relevance to our school because sometimes we make decisions which are not useful for the SIP”.

Leo Luka from Standard 7 was one of the learners who participated in the game. He learnt a lot about the effect of buying assets for the school. “Buying sports equipment for the school helps learners to be fit.” He also learnt that when there is a good relationship between the school and the community, there are a lot of good effects for the school. “If there is a school meeting that brings the community and the school together that means whatever they discuss they will not just agree, but will debate and make a decision which is effective.



There is ownership when people agree to something and therefore the chance of making it a success are very high.” Leo has enjoyed being part of the discussions on decision-making at Liphuphwe school, particularly around school health and sanitation where learners have been extensively consulted.

Chiwaga Major, the PTA Chair, found the simulation game useful and thinks if everyone takes this learning seriously, their school is going to improve. He thinks it will be important to share the learning with more stakeholders. “The School governing bodies depend on the community leaders to work with them. Since there were no community leaders at this training, we will meet them to share what we have learnt.”



Lydia Nzemgo, the Mother Group Secretary, said “I feel I am not the same as before I came to this training.” She was particularly struck by the importance of the relationship between the school and District Education Office: “If we work together, I think there is going to be development.” She also noted the need for more training around the management of school funds. “If people see you are transparent and accountable, they want to help and to see what development is taking place in the school.”

Link will return to Liphuphwe School to play the next round of the game in a few months. While the conditions and decisions in Term 1 were based on a generic school facing common challenges, in Term 2 the teams will use information from Liphuphwe’s School Performance Review report to simulate real decisions their school will have to make. They will then work together to develop the School Improvement Plan for 2015-16. Through the SSIM project (MAL 17) Link has monitored the effect of SPR on School Improvement Planning in Dedza between 2012 and 2014. Although it falls outside the lifetime of the SSIM project, Link will measure the impact of the Simulation Game on School Improvement Plans which will be developed in August 2015.