



Link Community Development

Extract from Supporting School Improvement in Malawi external evaluation report 2015

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Impact and results

There was evidence of different impacts at school level. The most important is the ***involvement of all stakeholders in the SPR process***; this led to improved relationships, transparency and accountability. The accountability was not just towards taking responsibility, but also having to provide evidence (e.g. receipts, lesson plans). Stakeholders are therefore not only involved in assessment and planning, but the full cycle of each School Improvement Plan (SIP) and its activities.

SPR and SPAM have strengthened awareness and roles of communities and other stakeholders because this has given a chance for the different stakeholders to participate. Before this was done informally mainly using the SMC but now it's a formal arrangement where everyone is involved especially learners and now they can air their views which can now be included in school improvement plans. (PEA)

The ***ownership*** that the stakeholders felt was the main contributing factor for the success of the SSIM project.

Learners were included in school decision making such that now they understand that the school belongs to them and the community are the custodians, teachers are just employees but the community own the school and not MoEST. The school belongs to the community. (LCDM staff member)

Learners

The learners of 236 schools were the ultimate beneficiaries of the project. The SSIM project through the SRP and SPAM empowered the learners to contribute to the school development. The community involvement that was stimulated by the SPR resulted in improved relationships between learners and their parents and their teachers. These improved relationships led to improved communication and motivated the learners to come to school (increased enrolment and decreased drop-out), attend more regularly, participate in learning, and therefore improve their performance. The availability of teaching and learning materials and the improved performance of teachers also contributed to the learners' performance. There are more learners selected to secondary school, which improves the school reputation (again leading to increased enrolment).

Previously no learners were involved in the SIP. Now they can speak and be involved in SIP development. (PEA)

Learners are more open and able to ask teachers if they have any problems. (Head Teacher)

Previously learners reached standard 8 without being able to write their names or surnames. Now standard 1 can do it. (Parents)

Learner performance has improved because the school is child friendly. (Teacher)

The learners also reported that the school environment significantly improved especially classrooms, toilets, improved school grounds, water supplies and sanitation. This improved their health (which decreased absenteeism) and made the school more conducive for learning. They were also implementing aspects learned at school at home and therefore improved the home conditions too.

Classrooms enable continuation of learning, even in rainy season. (Girls)

The renovations of the toilets and the introduction of the hand washing basins to be used after visiting the toilet has improved the sanitation of the school. (Parents)

Learners like going to school since it caters for all their needs. (Boys)

More children are attracted to attend school. (Girls)

Learners like to go to school and thus do well in class. (Girls)

There is a first aid room for learners in case they get sick at school. (Parents)

Vulnerable groups

The evaluation found that the project made a significant difference in enabling the schools and district to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable groups such as girls and orphans. The SPR served as an eye opener for the needs of vulnerable groups and these can therefore be included in the SIP. Harmful cultural practices were discussed during the SPR e.g. early marriages for those who are still in school. Through awareness the situation could be addressed to ensure that vulnerable groups are given attention.

Girls

Programmes targeting the girl child e.g. MG and Female Teacher Network were instrumental in different issues regarding the girl child. LCD has helped to strengthen these committees, helped provide solutions like making of reusable pads, helped to identify girls' challenges and then find other resources for them. The MGs ensured that girl drop-outs returned to school, they also advised girls. In doing so they also felt that they were needed at the school. Additionally the girls reported that they experienced less discrimination at school. This enables them to participate more and improve their performance. They also put more emphasis on the school environment and the improved sanitation and girls toilets. The FTN reported that class allocation is now more gender sensitive.

The majority of the head teachers (75%) felt that the needs of girls are being met. The student teachers seemed to have a special effect on the girls.

Previously we had few girls in school. Now more girls want to come to school due to the increased number of student teachers who act as role models. (Parents)

School management structures and community

The project aimed to build the capacity of the following school management structures in utilising School Performance Review processes and data for developing School Improvement Plans and monitoring implementation. School Governing Bodies are now more willing to meet and answer questions from visitors who come to inspect the schools. Coordination between learners, teachers

and the community improved because now everybody knows their responsibility (for example parents able to ask teachers why their children are not doing well). Ultimately this led to improved learning and performance.

Head Teachers

The SPR tool had questions that contributed to CPD for head teachers. The questions raised issues such as what records are kept, assistance required, etc. Since most of the head teachers have not yet received headship training it guided them to what is required. This is important considering the lack of head teacher leadership skills. According to the DEM one of the biggest challenges is the lack of good leadership at the schools. Most head teachers are not trained in management, leadership and all that is required in the role of the head teacher. Due to the high cost of training (e.g. at Malawi Institute of Education two weeks training costs MK196000) the districts can only send four head teachers at a time. Even steps to alternatives (including linking with the British Council) will be enhanced through the SPR process. Lack of leadership in itself poses a challenge to successful implementation of interventions.

As the head teacher I learned from being part of the SPR process. I learned what the PEAs are looking for at the school. Teachers also gained insight and are responding better now. (Head Teacher)

All the head teachers reported in the interviews that the SPR improved their work as head teacher either “very much” or “a lot” and 75% agreed that their needs are met. The head teachers indicated that the teachers, MGs and SMC were also influenced “a lot”.

Teachers

Teachers were influenced through the increased participation of the community in various ways. Firstly they benefitted from the building of teacher houses, secondly by the inclusion of student, auxiliary and volunteer teachers (who alleviated some of the workload) and by monitoring of the teaching activities. Teachers were encouraged to practice teaching and learning using locally available resources (TALULAR). Teachers are able to focus on their core purpose that is to teach. Relationships between teachers improved.

Teachers’ houses are now on the school grounds; teachers are on time and teach better. (Boys)

Teachers are proud to teach. (Girls)

We now have a good school and good qualified teachers who are able to teach. (Parents)

Teachers are better able to teach as they are better able to prepare. (Head Teacher)

They are now dedicated to work because they have teaching materials which makes their work much easier. (PTA)

Teachers want to be here. Lots of other teachers admire the school, they want to be here. (SMC)

Teachers have good relationship with the community, they community even gave them gardens. (SMC)

Female Teacher Networks

Female teacher networks are for all female teachers. They meet and share challenges; discuss issues on girls' education, professional upgrading, self-economic empowerment, etc. The FTN empowers woman leadership and provides very important role models for girls as they show that girls can be educated and become teachers and have a profession.

The FTN are able to counsel girls without any fear as compared to previous years. (FTN)

The FTN has helped to develop confidence in accepting and dealing with positions of responsibility and decision making. (FTN)

Mother Groups

LCDM seemed to be instrumental in the reactivation of the Mother Groups (MG). This is one of the strongest initiatives that link community engagement with schools. Mothers realised that they have a role to play in children's education. Before they thought their role was to stay home and only men were responsible for education. The MG were trained in counselling and contributed to the schools in various ways:

- The MG identifies the children who dropped out of school or those prone to absenteeism (through good relationships with learners). They trace the children and assess the situation.
- Children who need assistance are given provisions such as soap or uniforms to assist the needy and vulnerable children to attend school.
- Orphans are encouraged to attend school and follow-up visits made to ensure that they are taken care of.
- Drop-outs are identified and visited and encouraged to return to school. This has been very successful in having girls involved in early marriages returned to school.
- There was also an increase in dropouts (especially girls who had been pregnant) returning to school because the mother groups encouraged them.
- In some of the sampled schools that were visited, fathers also became part of the MGs (at one school including the Village Head). The men have discussions with boys on dress code, behaviour, respecting adults (including parents, teachers and others) and appropriateness of having relationships while at primary school.

Children who drop out from school had to return because of MG. (Teachers)

The Mother Groups played an important role to decrease sexual harassment at school. Sexual relationships with teachers and relationships between boys and girls have decreased. Early marriages have been discouraged and early pregnancies decreased. (Mother Group)

Mother Groups act as a bridge between parents and teachers. (Mother Group)

School Management Committees

The capacity and knowledge of the SMC was improved by the SSIM through training. The teacher parent communication improved and the SMC are more able to supervise teachers while teaching. Transparency and accountability improved and they are able to follow how the School Improvement

Grant (SIG) is used. In general the SMCs are now able to form the important link between school and community and the critical coordinator of the different school management structures.

The SMC are more active now, they know their roles and responsibilities. (Parents)

After the introduction of the SPR the SMC are able to mobilise the Group Village Head, PTA and community to solve issues at the school. (SMC)

The SMC now shows improved leadership skills in school development activities. (Teachers)

Parent-Teacher Associations

Similar to the SMC the PTA was empowered to understand their roles and responsibilities. Relationships have improved and the PTA members are now seen as role models. One aspect that was prominent was the increased attendance of meetings and relationships.

We (teachers and PTA) discuss problems children face therefore building up the relationship. (Teachers)

Parents

The parents reported improved relationships with the school, especially the teachers. There was more open communication allowing for discussions of learner problems and early interventions. The SPR has helped less privileged parents to send their children back to school because the school committee provide learning materials. Parents' involvement was evident from them attending school functions (e.g. closing days, emergency meetings), observing lessons and participating in SIP meetings and development.

They encourage their children to work harder. (SMC)

Communities

The community at large has also been strengthened. Previously the community was represented by the different school management bodies, but during the SPR the community at large became involved. They have taken responsibility of the schools and shown ownership. There were teachers working as auxiliary teachers from local communities.

The community at first thought their role at the schools was mainly moulding bricks and now they know that all school issues are their responsibility. (PEA)

One question of the SPR as what part the community plays. The community became aware through this question and are now contributing more. (Head Teacher)

The community is involved in school improvement and they are advising the head teacher to improve education standards. (Parents)

Schools now have security guards supported by the community, which led to a decrease in vandalism.

Many changes occurred at the schools. This included structural changes such as new or renovated classrooms and toilets through the contribution of the community. Sports grounds were developed in some schools and in others income generating activities contributed to the school funds.

Woodlot helps generate school funds through selling of timber and building poles. The money is used for teaching and learning materials. (Girls)

Village Development Committees

The Village Heads and Village Development Committees were also included in the SPR. They in turn encouraged parents and other community members to participate in school activities. More parents were sending their children to school. At one school the Village Head (male) is part of the Mother Group and is actively working with boys.

Civil society and other stakeholders

Members of the Dedza District Education Network (D-DEN) also visited the schools during the SPR. Partners who have been involved included National Initiative for Civic Education, Rights Advocacy Centre, Centre for Children Aid. It had the following benefit that the DEN members after visiting could develop programmes to support the schools and bring it up also during meetings, thus holding others accountable and bring awareness to the needs on the ground. For example the Right Advocacy Training Centre developed new programmes after the visit that increases learners' rights. They returned with the programme to the same schools.

Systemic changes on Zone, District and National levels

LCD's model and work focuses on working with existing structures and capacitating the systems for long term results. The impact of the LCD work on the Education system in Dedza was visible on many levels. The results of LCDM's work were visible from National level and LCD influenced the national education system especially the DIAS.

Zone level

The project aimed to demonstrate and disseminate effective linking between national inspection and monitoring, and district and school improvement processes. Capacity of zone and district officials was also achieved. This included:

- PEAs have the skill on how to assess the school, because the tool it is self-explanatory and enable insight into strengths and weaknesses of schools
PEAs are more competent than in other districts. (DIAS)
- The zones also have data on how schools are performing and are now able to focus on specific gaps and thus support the schools in those areas (can compare schools to schools and zone to zone)
I am able to read about and compare the performance of schools in the district. (PEA)

The PEAs reported challenges with teacher CPD because they run out of topics. PEAs now have more ideas of which CPD topics to cover since the SPR tool gives them a chance to identify needs and gaps in the teachers and schools.

The PEAs were further assisted through the supply of ICT equipment and training in the use thereof. This in turn had a significant effect on the work of the PEAs especially as data entry are now done electronically and emailed to the DEMIS that saves travel time.

Previously the district was able to visit 53 to 56 schools per year, now all 236 schools are visited. The SPR improved the opportunity for assessment and reflection.

I now frequently interact with schools in my zone. (PEA)

The PEAs rated the value of different aspects. Figure 6 illustrates the perceived value of the SPR on data capturing and the DEP. Figure 7 presents how much the information from the district conference contributed to the PEAs training events. Figure 8 investigates the value of the SPAM on the SIP development.

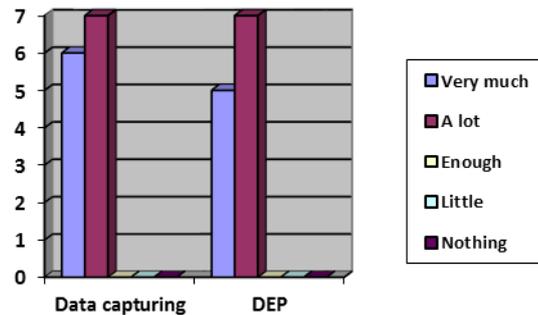


Figure 6: Value of SPR on data capturing and DEP



Figure 7: Value of District Conference

Figure 8: Value of SPAM

District level

The district collects all the SPR and SIP data from all the schools and analyses it. The SPR and SIP also helped the district to compare school to school, and even Zone to Zone. It helps the district compare according to the 17 indicators and they can then identify for each indicator the best and worst performers. It also helps to know why a zone or school is not performing. They are able to filter out the common trends and this goes into the District Education Plan (aligned to the National Education Sector Plan) which then forms part of the District Development Plan which then eventually is incorporated into the National Development Plan. For example in the new DEP there's an inclusion of capacity building for school management committees and leadership training for head teachers which shows that decisions can be made based on the results of the different indicators. The district also uses it as reference in other meetings.

District is better able to make decisions using the available information. (PEA)

The district was involved in the SPR and it had a significant effect on all the stakeholders at the school.

Dedza district is the only of 28 districts in Malawi where rural people are given a chance to speak directly to all six directors from the MoEST about the various issues facing education in Dedza. Directors respond directly and people trust that their challenges have been heard. (LCDM staff)

National level

The collective information gathered through the SPR and the insight that leads to prioritising challenges through the SPAM informed the education system up to national level.

The information from the SPR assist in presentation of real challenges faced by the schools at national forums since the DEO now has access to the information. (DEM)

The information collected is shared with other stakeholders within MoEST e.g. Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Services and Department of Basic Education. (DEMIS)

LCD through the SSIM project influenced and contributed to the following on national level:

- LCD's activation of the Mother Groups caused to MG to have a significant influence on school level. LCD contributed in that the MG were further strengthened through capacity development activities. The value of the MGs was recognised on national level.
- The SPR tools and process contributed significantly to the newly development National Education Standards.

The Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Services (DIAS) is currently developing the NES and a many parts of the SPR have been incorporated into the NES. (DEM)

From Dedza it was clear that there were no clear education standards. They are now producing the NES which are also a product of the SPR. (DIAS)

- The Primary School Improvement Plan was piloted in Dedza and the Dedza team are now the main trainers.
- The lessons learned through the LCD activities enabled successful funding applications for the BDE and DIAS. This will fund not only roll-out in primary school, but also secondary school level.
- The solar connect project was also recognised as having wider impact. It seems that this solution will also be implemented wider by the DIAS.

The link with the TDC and central office was seen as a problem. We were given the idea to connect them through the solar system. This will ease communication. (DIAS)

- The lessons learned about the school evaluation further informed the inspection process.

The ministry representatives concluded in their report after the SPR training, piloting and debriefing:

The Ministry's stand was made clear that the School Performance Review (SPR) is a very useful tool in helping schools and their communities to successfully achieve quality education. The School Performance Review process will provide community members an opportunity to be involved in needs assessment of their schools, prioritization of needs,

drawing of school improvement plans (SIP), implementation of agreed school improvement plans besides sharing lessons learnt during implementation. In so doing they will develop a sense of ownership. (DIAS MoEST representatives report)

There is evidence to conclude that the SSIM:

- Enhance the capacity of school management structures (Head Teachers, Teachers, School Management Committees, Female Teacher Networks, Mother Groups, Parent-Teacher Associations, Village Development Committees) in utilising School Performance Review processes and data for developing School Improvement Plans and monitoring implementation; and
- Facilitated effective use by the districts of School Performance Review data to identify district improvement priorities to meet school and district needs including the needs of vulnerable groups such as girls and orphans.

Acronyms

CPD: Continuous Professional Development

DEM: District Education Manager

DEMIS: District Education Management Information System

DEP: District Education Plan

DIAS: Directorate of Inspection and Advisory Services

FTN: Female Teacher Network

LCD: Link Community Development

LCDM: Link Community Development Malawi

MG: Mother Group

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SMC: School Management Committee

SPAM: School Performance Appraisal Meeting

SPR: School Performance Review

PEA: Primary Education Advisor

PTA: Parent-Teacher Association

TDC: Teacher Development Centre

VDC: Village Development Committee