

MALAWI

Child participation in decision making at school

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1. Introduction

Malawi ratified the Convention on the rights of the Child in 1991. Since then, Malawi has shown a strong commitment in protecting and promoting the rights of children. These commitments have subsequently been enshrined in national legislation through the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi and other child related laws. Although CRC implementation is considered as a priority programme of the government of Malawi when it comes to children issue at all levels, there are still a number of CRC related issues, dilemmas and challenges that can be highlighted in many ways particularly in the field of child participation especially in schools.

For this reason, Batch 16 Malawi team planned to implement a change programme focusing on involving children in decision making at school in order to strengthen children's level of participation. Participation, herein, is where children take part in and influence processes, decisions and activities that affect them in order to achieve greater respect, promotion and protection of their rights. Batch 16 believes that this will in turn reduce cases of child abuse and violation since it will give children the opportunity to be heard on all matters affecting their lives. In this case, concentration is in a school setting.

This Project further draws lessons from Batch 13 which focused on strengthening the level of participation on the part of the child learner. The change work was implemented in a school setting at Chimutu Primary school and it revolved around the learners

of the school as target group. However, the project faced some challenges because there has been some resistance to change from the teachers who feel a child need not to have more and in-depth knowledge on their rights because it misleads children, promotes rudeness on the part of the children and they do not become responsible citizens of the country. Therefore, for purposes of sustainability of the project, Batch 16 also focused on child participation with the main aim of changing teacher's attitude and perception towards involvement of children in decision making. This time around, the Batch 16 moved from the urban to rural setting at Njewa area to two Primary schools and one Community Day Secondary School. The team took advantage of the training on Child Rights which the Head teacher of Njewa Primary school underwent. The head teacher has basic knowledge on child rights and it was easier for him to influence others in changing their attitude and perception towards children's involvement in decision making.

2. Frame of reference

Protection and promotion of child rights in Malawi still remains a big challenge despite the various efforts made by the Government, civil society and various stakeholders. Children in Malawi continue to experience violence, exploitation and abuse across all areas of their lives. The violations include physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The violations occur in the homes, schools, streets, places of work and entertainment and in the care and detention centres. Cases of child abuse hit the headlines on a regular basis in the country. We read and hear horrendous stories and media reports about neglect and cruelty, about the system letting children down. This indicates that cases of child abuse are still on the increase despite several interventions and emphasis on child protection to protect children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect by government and its partners.

The Government of Malawi and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have tried to come up with interventions that are aiming at protecting children from various forms of abuses, and promote respect of the rights of children and thereafter reduce cases of child abuse, but violations of the rights of the child are still taking place.

2.1 The legal framework

The legal framework governing children's affairs in Malawi responds to this situation, particularly in the family environment and alternative care, safety of children, violence against children, the rights to life, right to participation, survival and development, health and welfare, and education. The legal framework is very relevant in the imple-

mentation of activities towards providing support, care and protection to children in Malawi.

2.1.1 The international framework

The pertinent international human rights instruments are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which Malawi is a party and the African Charter on the Rights and welfare of the Child, (ACRWC).

2.1.2 The national framework

The Malawi legal framework on children's rights is primarily composed of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi as the supreme law of the land and various statutes, such as: the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010; the orphans and Vulnerable Children's Policy; the Early Childhood Development Policy; the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act 2006; the Employment Act, 2000, the Penal Code, The Deceased Estates (Wills, Inheritance and Protection) Act and the National Registration Act as well as relevant international human rights instruments to which Malawi is a party.

The adoption of the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010 can be described as a mile stone for Malawi. Beyond the consolidation of most child-related laws into one law, the Act entrenches the basic general principles for the protection of children's rights namely: survival; protection and best interest of the child; development and participation of children in matters affecting them. In addition, the Act has put in place safeguards for: the promotion and protection of children's civil rights and freedoms; provisions for family environment and alternative care; violence prevention and redress, rights to basic health and welfare, education, leisure and cultural activities; and special protection measures. The enactment of the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act therefore, presents an opportunity for optimizing the protection and promotion of children's rights in Malawi provided the appropriate measures for enforcement of these Act are put in place.

At school level, other laws such as the 50-50 Selection rate Policy, Re- admission Policy, child friendly schools initiative, Free primary education (1994), also make significant contributions to a strong legal framework for the promotion and protection of children's right to education.

A totality of all these laws, policies and international human rights instruments put in place safeguards for the promotion and protection of children's civil rights and freedoms; violence prevention and redress, rights to participation; right to education, basic health and welfare, leisure and cultural activities; and special protection measures.

Despite all these Laws, the prevailing normative framework continues to be daunted with a number of challenges that stand in the way of the effective realization of chil-

dren's rights. The implication of this is that the children's rights remain far from being effectively realized. Some of the challenges are lack of effective enforcement on child related laws, lack of advocacy on the existing laws, International conventions and policies, no proper and effective follow up mechanism on child abuse cases.

2.2 Child participation in schools

In Malawi, child participation in schools exists but at a lower level of carrying out decisions by adults. Despite all the efforts being made by the Malawi Government to ensure that children are involved in all levels of decision making, child participation is still not implemented in schools and homes. Right to participation by children is viewed with mixed feelings by teachers, parents and leaders. Children rarely take part in decision making as a result they don't benefit from matters affecting them. The main reason for this is because adults do not appreciate that children can be active participants and contribute meaningfully in matters affecting society. Secondly due to cultural beliefs, participation of children in development is not accepted. This is also perceived by the children themselves. They are not given chance to participate in developmental and other activities and are perceived to be rude if they try to contribute. Further to this, when children try to take part, their views are rarely taken on board.

Another challenge is high school enrolment and work load on teachers which leaves teachers with a lot of work to do as a result; they have no concentration on children. The other challenge is limited resources on child rights /protection programs especially in schools.

It is for all these reasons that the change work for Batch 16 focused on involving children in decision making thereby strengthening children's level of participation. Participation, herein, is where children take part in and influence processes, decisions and activities that affect them in order to achieve greater respect, promotion and protection of their rights.

In this case, the change team focused on articles 1 which defines a child as any person below the age of 18 and Article 3 which gives guidelines that all activities should be in the best interest of the Child. The change will further focus on articles 12, 13, 14 and 15; and articles 28 and 29 of the CRC. Article 12 of the CRC entitles children to play an active role on issues and decisions that affect their lives. This therefore, enforces the right to challenge abuses and take action to promote and protect their rights. Article 13 gives the children the right to freely express their views on issues that affect them. Article 14 gives the children an opportunity to think for themselves on issues that are in their best interest. Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC entitle children to relevant and qualitative education and stipulate state parties to recognize children's rights to relevant and qualitative education.

2.3 Target area

The project was implemented in Njewa zone which is the rural setting of the Western side of Lilongwe district. The area has eleven schools but our focus was on three schools namely Njewa Primary School, Chitipi Primary School and Njewa Community Day Secondary School. The project is therefore being implemented in these schools. Njewa has been chosen because the schools have a head teacher who has basic knowledge in child rights. The head teacher underwent training in child rights and will work together with the change team in implementing the project.

2.4 Target group

The main target groups for the project were primary School teachers from Njewa and Chitipi Primary schools, teachers from Njewa Community Day Secondary School, and the head teachers from the 3 schools. The project further targeted 70 children from standard 5 to 8 from the two primary schools and 30 students from forms 1-4 at the day secondary school. The change work also revolved around parents, traditional and Community leaders around the area, school management Committees, Parents and Teachers Association (Executive Committee), and the community surrounding the schools. All these need to realise that children have rights and these rights have to be enjoyed and respected.

Stakeholders were also involved in the project. In this project, involvement of stakeholders was in two parts:-

Primary Stakeholders (those directly involved) namely: - Head Teachers from the three schools; Primary Education Advisor; School Management Committee and Human Rights Club Patrons. The second part is Secondary Stakeholders, those indirectly involved namely: - District Education Manager for Lilongwe Rural West; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; Malawi Human Rights Commission; Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development; Organisations dealing with children issues in Lilongwe and the surrounding districts namely; Plan International, World Vision, UNICEF, Eye of the child, are the target stakeholders for the project. Community Based Organisations and Community Child Protection Workers were also involved as secondary stakeholders.

The Ministry Education was involved as our major stakeholder. The Ministry and all stakeholders were involved at all levels.

3. Purpose

The main purpose of this project was to increase child participation in decision making. Specifically the project aims at achieving the following objectives:

- Changing the teachers' and members of the community's attitude and perception towards involving children in decision making that are crucial to school governance
- Ensuring that the children themselves and teachers know and understand the values of children's participation in decision making
- Establishing human rights clubs to which will be our medium of bringing children participation where the learners take an active role and with a view of strengthening child participation at the schools.
- Establishing class and school councils as direct structures that will offer maximum participation to children.

The focus of the programme therefore, was to strengthen child participation in decision making on matters affecting them at school

4. Methodology

In order to achieve the desired objectives, the team applied a number of pedagogical strategies in the implementation of the project. The follow up seminar in South Africa availed the team other well intentioned child friendly practices which further influenced the methodological approaches.

The following methods were used:-

4.1 Meetings

Preliminary meetings were held with various stakeholders like:

- The Executive Secretary for Malawi Human Rights Commission
- The Director of Children Rights at the Human Rights Commission (the department where Jeremiah and Priscilla are affiliated to)
- The District Education Manager for Lilongwe Rural West
- The Head Teacher for Njewa Primary School
- The Head Teacher for Njewa Community Day Secondary School
- The Head Teacher for Chitipi Primary School
- Primary Education Adviser (PEA) for Njewa zone

The team also had a series of meetings with learners through focus group discussions, class representatives and school council.

The purpose of all these meetings was to introduce the concept of the project, share views and experiences, obtain permission and in case of teachers, agree on the planned activities.

4.2 Focus Group Discussions

These were held with the head teachers, teachers of the three primary schools class representatives of the three schools, Committee representatives and the PTA. The purpose of the discussions was to introduce the concept and do some consultations for the successful implementation of the project.

4.3 Sensitization meetings/workshop

The workshops aimed at sensitising the teachers, learners, parents and members of the community on child rights and responsibilities.

The following workshops were carried out

- The training of teachers
- Training of the learners
- Training of members of the community

4.4 Dialogues

Dialogues were also carried out with the teachers, learners and parents from the three schools. These were centred on children's involvement in decision making

Development of IEC materials was also used to disseminate information to the target groups.

Monitoring and follow ups were done every month.

5. Activities

The team has implemented various activities since the commencement of the project. Going by the planned activities it is observed that some activities were not implemented in the planned way. This has been due to other factors considered necessary for the success of the programme. Some of the changes include;

5.1 Establishment of child rights clubs

Visits to the school indicated presence of child rights clubs therefore; the activity of establishing child rights clubs was foregone. However, there remains an issue of strengthening the child rights clubs and giving children a voice in such groupings as an area that needs improvement.

5.2 Training of teachers

Initially the plan was to train 15 teachers from three schools with each school having 5 representatives. However, during the consultative period with other various stakeholders it was recommended that more teachers be trained in Child rights and child participation. Therefore, the team had a big task of getting enough resources for the trainings. It was revealed that teachers attitude on all issues of empowering children to claim and promote respect of their rights has always been negative as they have thought such promotion activities are aimed at fighting against the authority of a teacher. As such they have always been resistant to all issues of promoting child rights. In this regard 50 teachers were trained in child rights and child participation. The major activities that were accomplished as planned include:-

Courtesy visits to relevant key authorities in the implementation of the project

After completing phase II of the programme in Sweden, the team thought it wise to pay courtesy visits to relevant authorities to introduce ourselves and the nature and scope of the programme. Such people visited included:

- The executive Secretary for Malawi Human Rights Commission
- The Director of Children Rights at the Human Rights Commission (the department where Jeremiah and Priscilla are affiliated to)
- The District Education Manager for Lilongwe Rural West
- The Head Teacher for Njewa Primary School
- The Head Teacher for Njewa Community Day Secondary School
- The Head Teacher for Chitipi Primary School
- Primary Education Adviser (PEA) for Njewa zone

At the meeting of all these authorities information disseminated regarded the composition of our team that it composes three members from two different institutions. The team works as volunteers without any funding and is working as Change agents with an aim of initiating change to give children greater opportunities to participate in issues that affect them at school. It was also emphasized that this is a programme rather than a project to distance it from what people expect of a project more especially its financial benefit. The programme is aimed at streamlining child participation into daily business of the school.

Further the briefing highlighted that three schools of Chitipi Primary, Njewa Primary and Njewa Secondary are targeted as a pilot but with an intention to roll it out to all schools in Njewa Zone

Briefing session with all head teachers from schools in Njewa Zone

After the courtesy visits there was a request from all head teachers in the zone to have a brief meeting with them on the detailed nature of the project. They requested to have an insight on child rights and child responsibilities and how schools can implement child participation in decision making at the school. Though our plan is to implement in three schools as a learning point other school heads thought there might be some lessons they can implement on their own. This was viewed as an opportunity and such a meeting was arranged on 2nd October, 2012 (see attachment of the programme in appendix I). Detailed content covered at this meeting is attached in appendix II which has been the same content covered during the trainings with teachers. Schools represented are: Lingadzi Primary School, Mbavi Primary School, Chitedze Primary School, Mphanje Primary School, Muzu Primary School, Lilongwe Airbase Primary School, Phereni Primary School, Sankhani Primary School, Chitipi Primary School, Njewa Primary School and Njewa Community day secondary School.

Following the discussion with head teachers it was clearly revealed that teachers for a long time have been reluctant to accept the concepts of child rights and child involvement in decision making because various organizations have handled the promotion of child rights in a confrontation manner. This implies that they have always empowered children and the community to rise up against teachers whenever they have violated the rights of children. Little have been done by various organizations that promote child rights to instill the sense of responsibility in pupils.

An example was cited of the Learning without fear a programme implemented by Plan International (Malawi Office) whereby children were sensitized to write what they see as hindrances to their education and through their concerns in a box. This box was only managed by Plan Malawi officers who visited the schools at times to open the boxes and read what children have written. To their disbelief children resorted to writing obscene words against teachers to an extent that the programme was just abandoned. Teachers

had no effective role in the programme as there was no forum where they could come together and discuss pupils' concerns.

Therefore, after presentation of our programme, these head teachers welcomed the programme with its focus and one other impressive thing they promised to revive the Learning without Fear programme on their own in order to create a favorable learning environment to the pupils

Training of teachers from the three schools in the programme

In order to achieve one of the goals of the project which is changing the teachers' attitude and perception towards involving children in decision making, trainings of teachers in child rights were arranged. The first training involved 25 teachers from Chitipi primary school. This was a one day training covering various topics relevant in equipping teachers with skills and knowledge in child rights and child participation. The session also tackled on establishment of students' councils and how they are expected to function. This training was conducted on 2nd October, 2012 at Chitipi Primary school. This training drew all teachers at the school to the training. Another training of teachers was conducted at Njewa Teacher Development Centre (TDC) on 15th October, 2012. This training drew a total of 30 teachers to training. Among the 30 teachers 12 teachers were from the secondary school meaning that all teachers except one who failed to attend the training due to other commitments attended the training and 18 teachers from Njewa Primary school attended the training. Therefore, a total number of 55 teachers were trained in Child Rights and Child Participation.

In echoing the importance of child participation in decision making one teacher gave said "one day I heard children discussing the plan they employ to make their parents buy for them new clothes. One child explained to his friends that when he wants new pair of short after his mother has showed no interest he just go away tear the clothes and go back to his parents saying that he was climbing a tree at his short got hooked in a tree and the short was torn apart".

During both training sessions teachers clearly expressed their resentments towards promotion of child rights and with specific right to participation. For example one teacher asked this way; what will you do (Change Agents) after noticing that upon entering my class pupils whom you encourage to participate by forming a council have staged strike and up in arms against the teacher?

In responding to this fear it was stated that pupils needs to be taught what they are supposed to do and further to this constant interaction between teachers and children help to provide forum to raise their concerns amicably. This in turn helps to iron out possibilities of pupils uprisings.

Briefing session with school management committees and parents and teachers Associations from all three schools on the nature and scope of the programme



in advancing the child participation in decision making principle, representatives from the community that have roles to play at school were gathered on 16th October, 2012 for a briefing on the nature of the programme. Further to this the meeting aimed at highlight on how this programme might involve them. On this it was highlighted that taking the understanding of child participation which means “Involving boys and girls in the decision making process that affect their lives, the lives of their families and the community and larger society in which they live” it was then deemed necessary for members of the school management to have a glimpse of the programme bearing in mind that at one point in time their involvement will be required. For example when children in their councils establishes that some problems affecting their education emanate from family situations or parents and other community members behavior, then definably the Parents and Teachers’ Association will be a responsible duty bearers to assist. Furthermore, the school managements are responsible for development projects at the school implying that children participation should also be embraced in this aspect.



During this discussion members of the committees echoed their sentiments on the importance of the programme as they welcomed it hoping that it will encourage children to become responsible and contribute towards their learning. For example one member requested that there should be discussions between the school management committee members, teachers and pupils on various contentious issues. The cited examples of freedom of dressing as to say how should a teacher dress in class. This was made in reference to what her child told her one morning when going to school when she thought the child has not dressed properly. The child responded to say a teacher cannot send her back home because teachers “dress worse” than her.

Creation of Student Councils

The discussion started with reviewing of structures already available in the schools. On several occasions school stressed that they have student councils. Therefore, the session wanted to align the school councils to what is already available in the schools

Structures for learners participation available at individual schools		
Chitipi Primary	Njewa Primary	Njewa CDSS
Sports club, Wild life club, Sanitation club, AIDS ToTO club Girl Guide, Bible club change , climate club, child Rights club, student council	Students Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM), Girl guide, Climate change, Wild life, CCAPSO, Adventist , Youth, Quiz and Debate, Student council	Child Rights club, Girl guide, Bible club, Wild life club, Climate change club, Road safety club, Discipline club, Sports club, Student council
Student councils available at the schools		
Head boy, Head girl, Discipline, Sports, Members from other classes	Head Boy, Head girl, One member from each committee	Head Boy, Head girl, Sanitation prefect, Sports prefect, Discipline prefect Entertainment prefect
Frequency of meetings		
3 times per term	No specific time	Once per term
Agreed structure		
Pupils from std 3-standard 8 (2 class monitors per class) Head boy and head girl Representatives of school clubs	Pupils from std 3-standard 8 (2 class monitors per class) Head boy and head girl Representatives of school clubs	The prefects body and class monitors

Meeting with Plan International (Malawi)

The team arranged for an audience with the Programme Manager for child protection to sell the idea for possible financial support. In response Plan Malawi has adopted the concept of Child Participation in decision making which was not one of their major focus areas. As such they have released funding but through Malawi Human Rights youth Network which they are already funding in a different areas. Further to this, Plan Malawi has recruited a Child Protection and Participation programme officer who previously was titled as Child Protection officer.

After the follow up meeting in South Africa, the activities at appendix 1 were planned to take place. The team managed to undertake the following activities:

Meeting with the Director of Basic Education

During the implementation of the project, the Ministry of Education had a new Director of Basic Education. For this reason, the Malawi team arranged a meeting with the new Director with the main aim of briefing her about the project. The meeting was held on 28th December and Director welcomed the project and promised to give her support where necessary.

Meeting with Network members

The meeting was held on 18th April 2013 with the aim to strengthen the network and sharing challenges and experiences.

Development of guidelines on student councils and other materials to use during training

After the school councils were formed, the team developed guidelines (appendix 2) on student councils and other materials which were used during the trainings. These guidelines were submitted to Malawi Institute of Education to form part of the training in Human Rights and Democracy in Schools which the (Malawi) Human Rights Commission has been running from 2007 targeting Primary school head teachers and heads of sections. This was done between December 2013 and January 2013.

Training of members of student council and patrons, child Rights clubs patrons

From 21st to 25th January 2013, the team conducted training on child rights and responsibilities with the student council and patrons and child rights clubs. The purpose of this training was to sensitize participants on child rights and responsibilities. The training was done in four categories. The first three trainings targeted student councils from the three schools and their patrons from each of the three schools, and the fourth one targeted the child rights clubs and the patrons.

Class level meetings

This was the initiative of the teachers and was done from 4th to 8th February, 2013. The purpose of these meetings was to brief other class members about the formation of the student councils and also sensitize the learners about their rights and responsibilities.

Student Council meeting

The student council meetings were organized by the students themselves with the aim of identifying the problems they face and present them to their patrons for possible solutions. The meetings were held from 11th to 15th February 2013.

Follow up and Evaluation meeting with Patrons

On 1st March 2013, the team visited the school for a follow up on the project. During the visit, the team held briefings with the student councils from the three schools, patrons and the head teachers.

Meeting with members community (taking advantage of already scheduled PTA meetings by the schools)

In April 2013, the team held a meeting with members of the community where they were sensitised about child rights and responsibilities.

Mentor's visit 22nd to 26th April 2013

From 22nd to 26th April, 2013, our mentor, Ulf Leo visited our country as part of support and follow up visit. During the visit, the mentor visited the project site at Njewa where he had the opportunity to meet head teachers and other teachers, the student councils. During the meetings, the mentor had discussions with the student councils on various topics as it relates to the project at the schools. The mentor also made a tour to various classes from the three schools to see the extent to which the schools have moved in terms of child rights and child participation.

The mentor further held meetings with the Executive Secretary for the Malawi Human Rights Commission and the Director for Child Rights for the Commission on 23rd April, the District Education Manager for Lilongwe Rural and the District Education Manager for Lilongwe Urban on 24th April and the Director for Basic Education from the Ministry of Education Headquarters on 25th April 2013. The purpose of all these meeting was to check and hear from the two offices how the programme is being implemented and how the institutions are benefiting and supporting the team.

On 25th April 2013, the mentor had a meeting with the Malawi network for change agents. The purpose of the meeting was to give progress report on the projects that the change agents are implementing and exchange ideas.

Monitoring visits

Much of the work after the mentor's visits has been monitoring the implementation of the project. In these visits teachers have echoed of the improvement in school sanitation, learners' punctuality, higher levels of class attendance, improvement in student behaviour as evidenced by a downward turn of school disciplinary sessions, and a relief to teachers work as students were becoming responsible for most of the issues that were previously handled by teachers

Open-day on 12th July, 2012

To mark the final phase of the project as learners were going for the school recession, an open-day was organized which was highly attended by parents and traditional leaders. At this meeting, learners were able to display their understanding of child rights and the

positive impact of learner's council which parents and traditional leaders appreciated for a swift change they have experienced in their children

6. Results

All activities performed during this time were aimed at raising awareness on the importance of according pupils opportunity to take an active role in decision making process on matters that affect their lives. As such it can be concluded that all those activities achieved its goal of changing teachers and community attitudes towards child participation to a more positive and accommodating view. This can be seen through;

- The formation of the student councils in the three schools. The councils are very active and addressing the problems that the students from the schools are facing.
- Expression of willingness to involve children in various aspects. Teachers are committed in meeting children frequently through the councils and they are giving the children opportunities to make decisions on what should be done in making their groups effective.
- The expression by head teachers during their briefing to revive the closed Learning without fear programme by Plan Malawi is another indication of the change of attitude towards child participation
- Teachers expressed acceptance of the programme by testifying that previously they have been unwilling to accept all programmes that promote child rights on conception that promotion of child rights instils indiscipline among learners
- Expressions from the School management committee and Parents and Teachers association to welcome the programme as a positive move towards achieving child participation can be viewed as an indicator of changing attitude towards child participation. At the beginning of the meeting these community representatives were reluctant to accept children taking part in decision making over developmental projects at school. This was regarded as a no go zone for children. At first one parent echoed that "Do you think children are mature enough to make a decision on school projects? "
- The students are now being represented and involved through the student councils in issues affecting the schools and their welfare and are allowed coming up with suggestions.

Short term achievements

During the period we have been implementing the programme, it can be concluded that the team has managed to equip teachers and members of the community with skills and knowledge on how child participation can be effectively implemented

Medium term achievement

The expectation in the medium term is the formation of student councils that will be operational Revamping child rights clubs that stopped functioning where children's voice will be heard

From the activities performed and indications of the results achieved it can be concluded that the programme has taken the right direction that is aimed at achieving child participation in decision making. For example, revamping child rights clubs where children will be given opportunities to have their voice heard is a catalyst towards achieving child participation in decision making. Secondly, establishing student councils is creating direct structures that will enhance effective child participation on matters directly or indirectly affecting their education.

7. Discussions and reflections

As a team we have learnt that registering success in such programmes requires division of labour, dedication, team work, endurance, sacrifice, reliance of one another's skills and experiences, involvement of other stakeholders in the field and patience.

Individually, we have learnt that every change agent needs to be well conversant with the concept. Meaning it requires individual effort to master the content delivered, experience challenges and find possible solutions

7.1 Challenges

- Commitment to official work made it at times difficult to fulfil planned activities. This was reflected where it was difficult for all members to be available for an activity. This led to several postponements of some activities that in turn led to loss of interest by other stakeholders
- Secondly, financial constraints derailed implementation of some activities as some activities especially the sensitisations required provision of refreshments and fuel to the schools. For example most our activities were done from September, 2012 instead of June.
- Further to this the programme implementation was delayed due to closure of school session. This made the team wait until schools opened on 3rd September, 2012
- Implementation of activities did not go as planned. One of the contributing factors was the way some related previous activities were implemented by other stakeholders. For example, the team was advised that the way our activities were initially planned was similar to implementation of other projects that have not been very successful as expected. Therefore, with advice from the Primary Education Coordinator for the zone we decided to make some changes so as to register successes in the programme. For example, the number of teachers trained increased, and briefing sessions with all head teachers from the zone was not a planned activity. As such this increased the demand for more resources.
- There was low turn up of members from School management committee from Njewa CDSS as only one member out of 5 turned up for the meeting and members of the community.

7.2 Successes

- The training of 50 teachers itself is one of the major success that the team has registered. This included a 100% turn out of teachers from Chitipi Primary School as all 22 teachers attended the training. An 88.9% of teachers from Njewa CDSS attended the training as 8 out of 9 teachers turned up for the training and 66.7% of teachers at Njewa primary school were trained as 20 teachers out of 30 turned up for the training
- Acceptance of teachers to formulate student councils is viewed as a success in the sense that it indicates an element of changing teachers' attitude.
- Head Teachers' commended the Student Councils for positive Change in School Administration through number of areas:
 - Curbing absenteeism
 - Experience change of early coming to school.
 - Cleanliness surrounding the school. Previously there were litter everywhere.
 - Students have capacity , more talking about Child rights issues

- Prefects are now being respected
- Teachers accommodating student's decisions.
- Overwhelming attendance of parents and chiefs on the open day, where students showcased various activities depicting issues on child rights gives hope of community support for the project

8. Way Forward

For the purposes of sustainability of the project, Batch 16 team of Change Agents (Malawi) will continue implementing the remaining activities in the area and working with the teachers and students council to make the councils function accordingly. This will be done in collaboration with Batch 19 which will also focused on child participation with the main aim of changing teachers attitude and perception towards involvement of children in decision making.

The Change Agents Batch 16 (Malawi) will also consider taking the programme to other schools within the zone.

The following activities are expected to be implemented:- Meeting with Traditional leaders, Inter school visit between zomba-songani primary and the targeted schools, Meeting with members of community (taking advantage of already scheduled PTA meetings by the schools), Establish teachers human rights network (after exploring already existing structures), Production of IEC materials on Child participation, Open day + student conference

9. List of References

The content covered was taken from:
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which Malawi Ratified in 1991

The Child Care, Protection and Justice Act No. 22 of 2010

National Child Protection Training Manual developed by Malawi Human Rights Commission and Plan International with support from various stakeholders in the protection and promotion of child rights, 2012

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Way forward after South Africa

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AFTER FOLLOW UP MEETING IN SOUTHAFRICA

No.	ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	LEAD PERSON
	Meeting with the Director of Basic Education	26th – 30th November 2012	Masache
	Meeting with Network members	13th December 2012	Thawe
	Development of guidelines on student councils and other materials to use during training	December 2012-January, 2013	Mpaso
	Training of members of student council and patrons, child Rights clubs patrons	21-25 January, 2013	All
	Class level meetings	4-8 February, 2013	Patrons
	Student Council meeting	11-15 February, 2013	Patrons
	Follow up and Evaluation meeting with Patrons	1st March, 2013	All
	Meeting with traditional leaders	Mid-March	Thawe
	Inter school visit between zomba-songani primary and the target school	End March, 2013	Mpaso
	Meeting with members community (taking advantage of already scheduled PTA meetings by the schools)	According to school programmes	Thawe
	Establish teachers human rights network (after exploring already existing structures)	January-June 2013	Masache
	Production of IEC materials on Child participation	January-June, 2013	Mpaso
	Open day + student conference	April, 2013	All
	Meeting with Mentor Ulf Leo	22nd -26th April, 2013	All
	Teachers Evaluation seminar	May +on going	Mpaso
	Discussion forum between student council and community	June + on going	Masache

Appendix 2: Guidelines on Scholl Councils

Guidelines on student councils

MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

A BRIEF GUIDE TO ESTABLISHMENT OF STUDENT/LEARNER'S
COUNCIL IN SCHOOLS

JANUARY, 2013

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*USER GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT
COUNCILS*

WHAT IS A STUDENT/LEARNERS' COUNCIL?

These are forums composed of children where learners have opportunity to deliberate on issues affecting their education and suggest possible solutions. These might be issues from home, community or at the school.

GOAL

The major goal of establishing student/learner's councils is to make a reality of children as subjects of rights and as the center of all teaching and learning processes at the school

Specific objectives

Student/learners council enhances participation of children in all matters affecting their psychological, social, emotional, mental and physical development. Child participation is a right enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which Malawi is a party to and ratified (committed to implement) in 1991. Children participation counts only when children are involved in decision making process and express their concerns related to their lives, so that they could identify their own problems followed by solution. Some articles of UNCRC recognize children as subjects of rights are expressed, explicitly or implicitly:

Article 12 – Children's opinions must be listened seriously in all matters that affect their lives. This includes decisions made by courts and judges.

Article 13 – Children have the right to express themselves freely and access information, subject to prevailing laws.

Article 15 – Children have the right to freedom of association, subject to prevailing laws.

Article 17 – Children have the right to information that is beneficial for them, in their own languages and appropriate to their level of understanding (UNCRC, 1989).

Child participation has the following objectives:

Involve pupils more in the life of the school.

- Contribute to class and whole school decision making.
- Listen to what pupils have to say.
- Look at ideas for improvement.
- Decide what needs to be done to make the school a better place.
- Development Plan to playground facilities, litter and after school clubs.

Importance of involving children in decision making at school

1. Helps them to acquire more knowledge, skills, build competencies, acquire confidence, form aspirations and better personality
2. Helps to protect the right of children, assertion of their right to participate and helps to heal the past
3. Provides children with many opportunities that can bring important improvements,
4. Builds up self-confidence and self-esteem in their life
5. Helps the children to be a good citizen in future

6. Promotes the well-being and development of young people
7. Strengthens a commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy

Some of the areas where student/learners' council can be involved

- Engaged as full voting member of school governing body
- Involved in the evaluation of the teaching process and student's performance and give in suggestions on what they think are better ways of helping them learn.
- Involved in development of school improvement plan, annual calendar, school budgeting, extra-curricular activities,
- Identifying problems individual students/learners face that negatively affect their education
- Look into the general learning environment in terms of sanitation

Some strategies student/learners council may follow in operation

- a) Hold class evaluation meetings done per day, per week, per fortnight or per month. Areas evaluated may be;
 - i. Students/learners behavior
 - ii. Students/learners commitment
 - iii. Students'/learners punctuality
 - iv. Teacher's commitment
 - v. Teachers' behavior towards students/learners
 - vi. Special problems (family and community) that has negatively impacted on the education of the learners
 - vii. Devise possible solutions
- b) Hold school meetings weekly or bi-weekly or monthly or per term. Areas of discussions remain as in (a) including:
 - i. Holding disciplinary meetings
 - ii. Holding discussions with parents, teachers, school management committees or PTAs on issues affecting them

Composition of a student/learners council

- a) Class representatives: these can be;
 - I. Class monitors/prefects for each class (range of classes to be determined by the school)
 - II. Separate representatives from each class
- b) A body of prefects but with class representatives/monitors from classes where prefects are not available

Reporting lines

Through the patrons/matrons elected or appointed by the school to be coordinating teachers to the school administration.

It is strongly discouraged to have the head teacher as the patron to avoid growing discomfort from teachers as children have an opportunity to talk to head teachers thereby bypassing teachers. As such there is growth of resistance from teachers

Office bearers

The student/learners council has elected office bearers elected at its first general meeting by the majority of its members. Term of office is to be determined by the council assisted by the patron/matron

Posts available include

- Chairperson/president
- Vice chairperson/president
- Secretary
- Vice Secretary
- Other positions deemed relevant to the group

Working modalities between a student/learners council and the prefects body or other learners' committees

Where some learners' structures already exist, there is a need to critically differentiate the roles of the student council and other learners representing groups. It should be emphasized that the learners' council looks at general issues affecting all learners. For example a sanitation prefect who sits in the council will represent the student body on matters of sanitation at the school.

Important information

A student council should be very active and practical in deliberating matters affecting pupils at the school. They should have an opportunity to come up with solutions and check their implementation. They should be provided with relevant information on developments happening at the school. However, it should be emphasized that a student/learners' council will only be effective if their resolutions are taken into consideration