

# MALAWI

## CRC based school leadership: the case of njewa education zone

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### 1. Introduction

Batch 20 of the Malawi Team is implementing a project “*CRC based school leadership: The case of Njewa Education Zone’ in Lilongwe*”. The project is targeting the school leadership (head teachers, deputy head teachers and section heads) from 11 primary schools and 2 secondary schools in Njewa Education Zone in Lilongwe. The school leadership

comprises 1 head teacher, 1 deputy head teacher and 3 section heads per school. This brings a total of 5 people per school and 65 people in this project.

The zone was chosen after a thorough assessment of projects which are being implemented in the area. Batch 16 and 19 are already working in the area targeting learners, teachers and communities with the purpose of promoting increased participation of children in decision making in schools. An assessment of these projects showed that there was a gap between the learners and teachers on the one hand and school leadership on the other which is the final authority in the school community. As such, Batch 20 chose to fill this gap and ensure that there is cohesion at all levels and between the levels.

## 2. Frame of Reference

Primary school education continues to face a lot of challenges in Malawi, some of which are indicated to have been contributed by lack of child friendly school leadership. The Government of Malawi has included provision of relevant and quality education as one of the priority areas in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (2011-2016), the overarching operational medium-term strategy for Malawi to attain the nation's vision 2020. Government has also enacted various laws and developed policy documents to promote and protect the rights of a child including providing relevant and quality education. Such instruments include the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi<sup>1</sup>, the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010<sup>2</sup>; the Education Act, 2013, the Disability Act, 2013<sup>3</sup>; the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, 2006<sup>4</sup> and the National Registration Act of 2009. The enactment of Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010 is a mile stone for Malawi because it consolidates various child friendly pieces of legislation into one law. The legislation entrenches the basic general principles for the promotion and protection of the rights of children such as survival, best interest of the child, development and participation in matters that affect them. Therefore, the enactment of this law presents the opportunity for consolidating efforts in the promotion and protection of the rights of children in Malawi. The enactment of the Education Act, 2013 represents a transformation of the education system in the country with regard to free and compulsory relevant and quality education. The Government also launched a National Action Plan for Children.

Apart from the national legal framework, Malawi also ratified all core international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 without any reservations and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in September, 1999. The Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010 is a domestication of the above international instruments. The Act foresees a spe-

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1 Enacted as Act No. 11 of 2010

2 Enacted as Act 22 of 2010

3 Enacted as Act 8 of 2012

4 Enacted as Act 5 of 2006

cific provision on the general duty to report any episode of violence, abuse, exploitation and maltreatment against children.

At the school level, other policies such as the 50-50 selection policy between boys and girls, re-admission policy for school drop outs, teachers' Code of Conduct, child friendly school initiative as well as free and compulsory primary education also make significant contributions to a strong legal and policy framework for the promotion and protection of children's rights to education. The teachers' Code of Conduct intends to enhance the provision of CRC based education in schools. A totality of all these laws, policies and international human rights instruments create an enabling environment for the enjoyment of the rights of children in the context of schools.

Likewise, an education system that is truly "child friendly" must effectively incorporate child protection into its policies, processes, curriculum, staff recruitment and training. A system approach to child protection requires responsibilities and duties to protection from all stakeholders dealing with children. Specifically, the Malawi Ministry of Education Science and Technology recognises that it has 'A Duty of Care' to protect children from maltreatment, to identify cases of maltreatment and to respond accordingly. The new Child Care Protection and Justices Act (2010) establishes provisions for mandatory reporting, which provides opportunities for schools to identify and respond to cases of child violations, realizing in this way its "Duty to Care".

Cognizant of the prevalence of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children and the Duty of Care of the education sector to keep children safe and to report violations against them, UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education Science and Technology in the implementation of a child friendly schools project. This concept responds to UNICEF's profound commitment to securing safe, rights-based, quality education for each and every child, irrespective of his or her circumstances. The main focus is on making educational environments safe, healthy and protective, endowed with trained teachers, adequate resources and appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for learning where children's rights are protected and their voices are heard.

Lack of child friendly school leadership in the schools has contributed to the challenges that schools are facing. Research has shown that these schools face problems such as teacher and pupil absenteeism, bullying, and an overall lack of CRC based leadership. The Government of Malawi has taken concrete strides to make primary school accessible to all children in Malawi. Government has made efforts to ensure that schools are physically accessible in terms of distance and improving infrastructure, removing school fees, the need for wearing uniform, and other school related costs. As alluded to above, the Government of Malawi and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have come up with interventions that aim at promoting the respect for the rights of children. The project in Njewa Zone was thus aimed at supplementing some of the efforts on the ground but also build on already existing programmes in the area to ensure that schools adopt a CRC based leadership that champions the promotion and protection of children's rights.

### 3. Purpose

The main purpose of the project was to improve school leadership through CRC lens in Njewa Education zone. The specific objectives of the project included:

- Enhancing CRC based decision making in schools.
- Ensuring that school leadership involve children in decision making in the schools
- Improving school leadership on inclusiveness, safety and protection of children

### 4. Methodology (Activities)

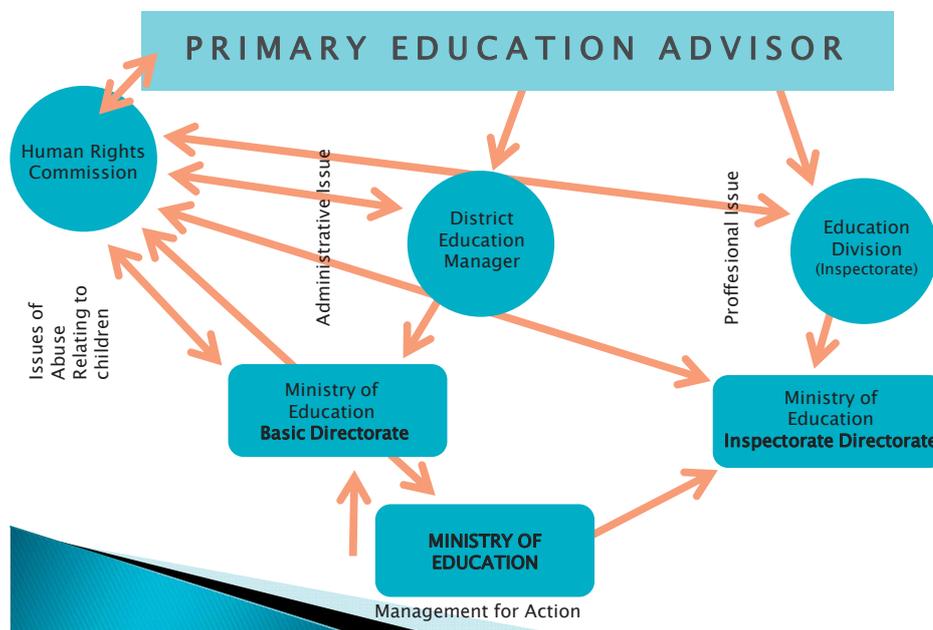
This section highlights the activities that the team has managed to implement in pursuit of the project goals and objectives between June 2014 and August 2015.

#### 4.1 Meeting of batches 16, 19 and 20 to synchronize activities

The very first activity of Batch 20 was to organise a meeting with the Primary Education Advisor for Njewa Education Zone and the District Education Manager for Lilongwe South West Education District and members of Batches 16 and 19. The meeting took place at Dr. Chimombo offices within the Ministry of Education in Lilongwe. The meeting discussed Batch 20's project as well as projects of batches 16 and 19 with the aim of synchronizing the various projects into one main project. During the meeting, all the Batches presented their plans and the members agreed to come up with one plan and how the officers can complement each other. The meeting also had a chance to meet Batch 21 Malawi team and offer advice in the implementation of its activities.



The activities are being synchronized as follows:



Thus all the Batches continue to implement their activities in Njewa Zone with a focus on CRC and child participation. While Batch 16 and 19 continue to target teachers, learners and the communities, Batch 20 continues to target the school management of all the 13 schools in the zone.

#### 4.2 Introduction of the project to Malawi Institute of Education (MIE)

The Malawi team introduced the concept of child participation through the Students' Councils to a training program that the Malawi Human Rights Commission is implementing in partnership with the Malawi Institute of Education. MIE is an institution that is mandated to build capacity of teachers, to train primary school teachers on human rights under a programme "Education for human rights and democracy." The programme aims at promoting the teaching and learning of human rights and democracy concepts, issues and values as part of the school curriculum. The training program covers topics such as human rights, rights of vulnerable groups such as children and women.

The change agents have been using this one week training to train all the head teachers who are being targeted in the CRC based school leadership: the case of Njewa Education Zone project. The institute welcomed the idea of schools establishing child participation structures and the aspect has been included in the training curriculum and forms part of the work plan that each head teacher draws at the end of the training. The head-teachers who successfully implement their activities receive a certificate of at-



tendance. The initiative continues to consolidate the concept of child participation in decision making in schools.

#### **4.3 Orientation of Njewa Zone school leadership on CRC**

The Change Agents held a half day meeting with the school leadership of all the 11 Primary Schools and 2 Secondary schools namely Njewa, Chitipi, Chitedze, Mphanje, Sankhani, Lingadzi, Mbabzi, Tsapa, Lilongwe Airbase, Phereni and Muzu Primary Schools as well as Njewa and Chitedze Community Day Secondary Schools.

The meeting aimed at sensitizing the school leadership (head teachers, deputy head teachers and section heads) on the project and the role of the school leadership in the promotion and protection of child rights. The meeting also clarified the role of the head teachers and how they would work with the change agents in order for the project objectives to be achieved. The Agents also informed the school leadership how this project and the other projects from Batches 16 and 19 are complimenting each other. The project was introduced as an initiative to create child friendly schools in line with the Malawi Government policy that all schools should be child friendly as part of the implementation of the Malawi Free Primary School Education Guidelines. The project was also linked to other school programs such as child friendly schools, learning without fear and child protection. The school leadership welcomed the initiative and pledged to support the change agents in all the processes. The meeting took place at Njewa Teachers Development Centre in Lilongwe.



#### 4.4 Monitoring the work of Batch 16 and 19

The Change Agents took up the responsibility of monitoring the work of Batch 16 and 19 in the implementation of the plans. Between June 2014 and August 2015, the Change Agents followed up on the following activities.

- Review meetings with Head teachers and School Management Committees (three meetings organised in 3 clusters-a cluster has three to four schools in the zone).
- One review meeting with Student Councils
- One training with patrons of Student Councils
- One review meeting with patrons of Student Councils



The review meetings revealed the following challenges in the implementation of the project:

- Lack of full support from some teachers on the initiative (establishment of Students' Councils and its role). This is probably because the Change Agents have not reached out to all the teachers in the targeted schools although the head teachers have made several briefings to the teachers.
- Inadequate support by some head teachers to the patrons of Students' Councils such that the concepts of Students' Councils seem to be left to the patrons only. It was noted that the support of school management was missing. However, these challenges were noted in few schools.
- Weak linkage between patrons of Students' Councils and their fellow teachers. It was noted that there is narrow space of action for patrons to champion the concept among their fellow teachers.
- There is need for strong coordination between prefectial bodies and Students' Councils

#### 4.5 Training of school leadership on CRC

The school leadership of all 13 schools attended a training session that was organised by the Change Agents in Lilongwe. The training was facilitated by change agents from Batch 20 and 16. The aim of the training was to provide knowledge and skills on CRC and enhance child participation in schools and ensure a free, safe and secure environment for children. The discussions also focused on the challenges that were identified by Batch 16 and 19 in reviewing their projects.

The trainings covered the fundamental principles of the CRC and how such principles can be used to promote and protect children's rights in schools. The participants were taken through the child rights provisions in the CRC. The participants were also



taken through the relevant provisions in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children as well as children's rights as provided in the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, especially Section 19 which prohibits corporal punishment and section 23 on child rights. Further, the participants were taken through the Penal Code of Malawi especially Section 138 on defilement and Chapter XVA on offences against morality relating to children; the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010; the Education Act and the teachers Code of Conduct. All these documents enforce the principle of child care, protection and participation in the schools. The participants were also taken through child rights and school management and how the school structures can be established and supported.

The participants were also trained on their role in ensuring that children in schools participate in decision making, especially on issues that affect them. The expectation is that school managers (head teachers, deputies and heads of sections) as well as ordinary teachers will ultimately cultivate a culture of harmony with learners and facilitate the latter's participation in decision making on matters that affect them. During the meeting, the participants received the following IEC materials to assist them with their work:

- Copies of Sections 19 to 24 of the Constitution of Malawi
- The Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (both English and Chichewa versions)
- Copies of section 138 and Chapter XVA of the Penal Code (Amendment)

The training also included group work as follows:

- The participants were asked to take a temperature of their school by assessing the safety and protection of children from abuse, violence in the school environment, availability of fair and transparent complaints handling mechanisms, child participation structures and efficiency of the school leadership in respecting views of children and handling their cases.
- The participants were also divided into groups to discuss how the challenges identified during the review meetings with teachers, Students' Councils and communities can be addressed.
- The outcomes of both exercises were used as basis for discussion in the subsequent meeting with school leadership.

#### 4.6 Commemoration of the 2015 Day of the African Child

Batch 16, 19 and 20 in collaboration with the Malawi Human Rights Commission and Plan Malawi supported the children from Njewa Educational Zone to commemorate the 2015 Day of the African Child under the theme "*Accelerating our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage in Malawi*".

The aim of the commemoration was to raise awareness on the extent of the problem of child marriage in Malawi; to advocate for a collective effort to end child marriages



as a responsibility for all stakeholders; to encourage children especially the girl child to continue with education to avert the negative impact of poverty on their development and welfare and to provide children with an open forum to actively participate and present their concerns to various duty bearers.

As part of the commemoration, representatives of all the Learners Councils in the zone held a meeting to discuss the problem of child marriage in the schools, the causes and impact on the children and identify duty bearers who can help to deal with the problem. The children put their concerns in form of a statement that was made on the actual day of commemoration on 30 June, 2015.

The advocacy based commemoration which was facilitated by the children themselves involved various activities like role modeling by various professionals, testimonies by girls rescued from child marriages and readmitted in the schools, drama, role-plays, panel discussion, songs, poems, and traditional dances. Children communicated against various factors that infringe on the girl child's right to education through child marriage. The statement from the children was presented to various key stakeholders including the Ministry of Education and the Malawi Police Service.

Against this background, Batch 16, 19, and 20 followed up with the parents and the communities on the proposed resolutions made by the children during the commemoration. With support from the Malawi Human Rights Commission, the change agents held 10 meetings in the communities surrounding Njewa Education Zone to



discuss violence against children including child marriages and child rights governance in the schools.

#### **4.7 Follow up with Njewa Zone school leadership on the workplan developed at MIE**

The team in collaboration with MIE followed up with all the 13 head teachers in the zone who had received training at MIE. The head teachers had drawn up work plans on promoting and protecting child rights to implement in their schools after receiving training from MIE. The exercise indicated that although there was some progress on most work plans, there is need for more support and guidance for the complete and effective implementation of the planned activities. The Change agents continue to work with the head teachers for effective implementation.

#### **4.8 Meetings with school management from other educational zones**

The team and other change agents held meetings with school management from other 400 schools in Lilongwe and other districts to enhance child protection in all the schools and implore on the importance of good governance. The meetings involved

presentations and largely discussions of practical cases and scenarios in the schools such as corporal punishment, sexual harassment and abuses, transparency and accountability to the children and the entire school environment as well as child participation through the establishment of Students' Councils. Njewa Education Zone was used as a success story for the establishment and effectiveness of student councils.

#### **4.9 Setting up a complaints handling system**

All the schools have complaints handling systems that children are supposed to follow. However, the project highlighted that many children and teachers are not aware of the procedures. The problem also extends to the school leadership which does not keep thorough records of the cases and the issues handled at ad hoc level. This problem continues to be being handled through various child friendly schools project that are being implemented. For the team, this is an on-going activity with the schools so that one standard clear procedure is put in place for reporting all violence to the relevant authorities.

#### **4.10 Strengthening the relationship between the schools and other structures in the community**

The team involved other duty bearers in the project so as to strengthen the relationship between the schools and other structures. The team worked with the office of the DEM, PEA, Malawi Police Service and Community Child Protection workers (CCPW) to strengthen the relationship of the school and the other parties. The team also wants to ease the flow of information and response to issues including cases of abuse at the school and in the communities. The CCPW has the mandate to handle and refer cases



of child violence, abuse and neglect in the community and works closely with the District Social Welfare office and the Police.

#### **4.11 Follow up meeting with the head teachers**

The team held a follow-up meeting with the head teachers to address the issues raised in the first training and also on the progress of the project as a whole. The outcomes of the meeting were as follows:

- The project is on course but the need was noted for more engagement with the rest of the teachers to support the efforts that are being taken by the school leadership.
- The school leadership, mother groups, school committees and school councils should strengthen their linkages to improve child protection and child rights governance in the schools. The linkages are strong in some schools and not in others.
- Student councils should continue to receive more training and support from the school leadership and the change agents until the ideology is well mainstreamed in the school systems.

#### **4.12 Linking members of Batch 20 with the Malawi Change Agents Network**

Members of Batch 20 were introduced to other change agents who have attended the training in Sweden and are members of the Malawi CRC Change agents network. The network meeting was very successful as the members discussed the challenges faced in implementing child rights activities and shared the best practices.



## 5. Key Results

Following the implementation of the activities as discussed in this report, the following are the results recorded so far.

5.1 Head teachers of the targeted schools in Njewa Education Zone have gained knowledge on issues of children's rights and how they can create a conducive environment for children to participate in decision making in school context.

5.2 The schools are making strides to create a safe, secure and inclusive environment for children based on the various legislation, code of conduct and setting up a child friendly complaints handling system.

5.3 The programme has been linked to the Malawi Institute of Education which is implementing a similar programme for head teachers on "Education for human rights and democracy." In view of this, issues of children's rights in schools are being mainstreamed in the school curriculum.

5.4 There is strong coordination between Batch 16, 19 and 20 in the sense that the projects are feeding each other. Since Batch 16 and 19 are mainly dealing with students, teachers and the communities, all the challenges that require the intervention of school leadership (head teachers) for children to properly participate in decision making in schools are dealt with by Batch 20 which focuses on school leadership. On the other hand, Batches 16 and 19 are also addressing all issues regarding Students Councils, teachers and the communities that are perceived to be problematic to head teachers. This linkage provides a strong united front to promote the rights of children in schools.

5.5 Batch 20 has been able to monitor the activities of Batches 16 and 19. The monitoring exercise has provided Batch 20 with a deeper insight on how best to build the capacity of school leadership. The monitoring has informed the design of the trainings on children's rights in schools so that head teachers get to the front line in giving space to children to participate in decision making in schools apart from protecting them (children) from violations in school context.

5.6 The linkages of the batches and their areas of focus have improved child rights governance in the educational zone. The various actors such as the school leadership, teachers, student councils, school committees, mother groups, Parents Teachers Associations, chiefs and others are striving to work as a unit for the promotion and protection of child rights and improve transparency and accountability in the schools while at the same time involving children in the decision making processes.

5.7 Using the project, the concept of Students' Council has been introduced to over 300 head teachers through MIE and school management in 4 districts (400 primary schools).

5.8 The project has been able to link the schools with child protection structures such as the Police, CCPW and the Human Rights Commission to promote protection and justice for children.

## 6. Discussion and Reflection

In all the 13 schools, the project has been welcomed by various stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology at the ministry level as well as the head teachers and ordinary teachers. The head teachers and the school management in the targeted schools have so far demonstrated cooperation and commitment to ensure that children's rights are promoted and protected in schools. It is worth noting that the strong linkage between Batch 16, 19 and 20 has provided a strong basis to tackle the issues of children in schools from different angles but with the same goal. Strengthening and linking the targets (head teachers and school management, teachers, children through student councils, school committees, mother groups, chiefs, etc) will create an even more strong, safe, secure and inclusive school environment. Taking cognizance that change is a gradual process, the project will continue to build the capacity of school leadership in order to create a vibrant school environment which is sensitive to children issues and concerns and also responsive to their needs and creates an open forum for children to participate in decision making.

Furthermore, the targets and schools which have been seen to be lagging behind continue to be purposefully targeted for more activities by the change agents. Such targets include teachers who have not fully embraced the principle of child participation, the Students' Councils who are not at par with other Councils, the head teachers who have not effectively implemented their work plans, the learners who have not fully inculcated child rights as part of them, the schools that are not at the same levels with others. Thus the change agents need to consolidate their success if the project is to be effectively sustained and replicated in other zones. The evidence based results is a tool that will be used to convince the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to replicate the project at a national level. In view of the foregoing, the team members expect to continue to use their strategic roles and positions in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Human Rights Commission to effect wider change in the primary school sector, especially in the area of child protection and child rights governance.

## 7. Way Forward

To consolidate the successes of the project, the following are the recommendations that informs the way forward.

1. To continue building capacity of the head teachers in the area of CRC leadership so that they can better manage their schools and the issues that arise therein;
2. To strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the project and identify gaps and challenges. This will inform the development of responsive activities of the needs of the project so that the project stays on course;
3. Due to the strategic positions that the team members hold, certain aspects of the project should be absorbed in the various projects being implemented by the team members for sustainability of the project;
4. Since the team wants the project replicated in other zones, the change agents should carry out continuous reviews to record progress and success stories which would form a basis to lobby for policy review with the Ministry of Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
5. To continue to strengthen the working relationship and the synergy of Batch 16, 19, 20 and 21 for better efficiency, success and sustainability of the project.

## 8. List of References

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi  
The Convention on the Rights of the Child  
The Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, 2010  
The Penal Code (Amendment) Act