EDUCATIONAL POLICY CHOICE AND POLICY PRACTICE IN MALAWI: DILEMMAS AND DISJUNCTURES[1]

IDS WORKING PAPER 124

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SUMMARY

Following democratic elections in 1994, the Government of Malawi embarked on an ambitious programme of free primary education (FPE). This was partly a response of the newly elected government to the popular demand for education, as well as recognition of the important role that primary education can play in alleviating poverty in the long term. As a result, access to education increased dramatically. However, free primary education was enacted before a comprehensive policy framework had been developed which examined the resource and other implications of FPE. Furthermore, the policy framework that was subsequently developed did not include key stakeholders in formulation and was, to a large extent, donor-driven. As a result, questions arise about the extent to which the education policy is responding to citizen's needs. The paper argues that the policy did not sufficiently consider the ways in which direct and indirect costs of schooling continue to be prohibitive for the poorest groups. In addition, the expansion of primary education has been at the expense of quality. The relevance of the type of education currently received by children who are unable to continue beyond the primary level is also questioned. Finally, the potential conflict between schooling and the agricultural calendar is also found to constrain the participation of children in school. Thus, the paper suggests that the policy developed for FPE may not necessarily contribute to the achievement of poverty alleviation goals. It is argued, however, that many of the dilemmas and disjunctures between policy intention and policy practice that are identified could be overcome through a more inclusive and participatory educational policy process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
DEC	Distance Education Centre
FPE	Free Primary Education
GABLE	Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education programme
GAPS	Gender and Primary Schooling in Africa programme
GER	Gross enrolment ratio
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MOE	Ministry of Education
NER	Net enrolment ratio
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PAP	Poverty Alleviation Programme
PIF	Policy and Investment Framework
SMC-EQ	Social Mobilization Campaign for Educational Quality

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, primary education has been a priority amongst governments and international agencies, mainly due to its perceived role in reducing poverty. Research has shown, for example, that primary education is important for the improvement of economic and agricultural productivity. In addition, education, particularly of girls, has been found to be highly correlated with improvements in health, as well as reductions in fertility, infant mortality and morbidity rates. Education is, therefore, considered to be economically and socially desirable.

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, highlighted major problems facing primary education in developing countries. Progress towards increased access to school, improved quality and narrowing the gender disparity in enrolment at all levels was found to be hindered by several factors. These included the rising costs of education, high population growth rates, poor survival rates in school, inadequate planning and monitoring and decreasing allocation of national budgets towards education. Since the Conference considerable attention has been focussed on the improvement of primary education in general, and female education in particular. Progress towards the achievement of primary schooling for all[3] was reviewed at the 2000 World Education Conference held in Senegal. Evidence indicated that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have fallen short of achieving the goal, in terms of both quantity and quality of education, and the target for attaining universal primary education was shifted from the year 2000 to 2015.

Low levels of education are a cause and outcome of poverty, both at the level of the household and the state. While educating children is not an immediate survival strategy, sacrifices made for education by households in the short-term can be considered as an investment in future well-being. Given that households might be unable to make these sacrifices, or cannot anticipate the longer term benefits either to themselves or to society more generally, a case is often made for public provision of education, particularly at lower levels. However, households still incur substantial direct and indirect costs of sending children to school, which often means that the poorest are unable to receive the full benefits. In addition, although education is expected to lead to economic growth in the longer term, governments often lack sufficient resources to provide sufficient school places of acceptable quality to be able to achieve this goal.

In Malawi, the policy framework for the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) identified low enrolment due to lack of school fees and limited facilities, and poor quality due to inadequate resources and inappropriate curricula amongst the causes of poverty. For this reason, education, particularly at the primary level, has been an important focus of government policy and resources following the 1994 elections. The rationale for this emphasis was based on the perception that basic education could contribute to achieving the government's primary objective of poverty alleviation, in particular in relation to 'improved agricultural productivity and better prospects of employment, reduced infant and maternal mortality, lower incidence of diseases and fertility rate' (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development 1995: 24). The PAP recognised

[3] Schooling for all is defined as 'the circumstance of having a school system in which all eligible children are enrolled in schools of at least minimally acceptable quality'. This would require gross enrolment ratios of at least 100 per cent, unless repetition and over-age enrolment were significantly reduced (Colclough with Lewin 1993: 41).

that improvements in the quantity and quality of education would be necessary for the eradication of poverty in the long term and that there was, therefore, a need 'to increase access to quality, relevant and efficient education.'

This paper begins by reviewing education policies in Malawi, examining the process of policy choice, and assesses the extent to which it is responding to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. This is followed by an investigation of the impact of the current education policy on different sub-groups of the population, in respect to access, quality, relevance and fit (using the framework developed by Devereux and Cook 2000).

EDUCATIONAL POLICY CHOICE AND PROCESS

During the last two decades, government policy on education in Malawi has shifted from an emphasis on secondary and tertiary education to primary education, in line with changes in international priorities.[4] The rationale for the shift has been an apparent move to address the needs of the poor, particularly since the 1990s. The new government that came to power following democratic elections in 1994 made primary education its top priority, since it was seen as central to the new government's overall policy of poverty alleviation. As a consequence of this shift, education is now the largest recipient of government recurrent expenditure (24 per cent of government recurrent expenditure was spent on education in 1997), and within education, primary education receives the largest share of recurrent expenditure (65 per cent in 1997) (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). Thus, public spending on education, which had hitherto favoured the richer sections of society, became more pro-poor as a result of new policy initiatives (Castro-Leal 1996).

The first education development plan (1973-80), produced after independence, prioritised secondary and tertiary education at the expense of primary education. The main objective of education at that time was seen to provide middle level manpower to fill posts left by colonial government. In the second education development plan, covering the period 1985-1995, the priority shifted from tertiary and secondary levels to primary education. The main objective of this plan was to increase access, equity and relevance of primary education (Swainson *et al.* 1998). Although the plan had noble objectives, it failed to meet the needs of the people to a large extent. At the end of the plan period primary enrolments remained relatively low: the net enrolment ratio (NER)[5] of 71 per cent in 1993 fell far short of the intended target of 85 per cent. Thus, progress was slow in spite of measures adopted during the plan period aimed at improving access at the primary level, which were introduced largely as a result of the 1990 Jomtien conference and the consequent shift of donor priorities towards primary education. These measures included the partial abolition of school fees (tuition waivers) from 1991/92,[6] beginning with standard 1 and phased in for standards 2-3 over the following two years. In addition, school fee waivers for non-repeating girls were introduced in 1992/93 in standards 2-8, funded by the USAID 'Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education' (GABLE)

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4 Jones (1992) provides a comprehensive review of shifts in international priorities towards education. See also Fine and Rose (2001).

5 Net enrolment ratio is the number of children of primary school-going age enrolled as a proportion of the school-going age population (6-13 years).

6 Parents were still required to pay a book fee and make contributions to the school fund.

programme. Educational planning entered a new phase in 1994 following the election of a new government as a result of the first democratic elections since independence. Reforms that were introduced mainly focussed on primary education, with the aim of achieving universal primary enrolment.

The main thrust of the educational reforms introduced since 1994 have been to expand access to primary education by reducing household direct costs of education, and to make it more relevant. The main objective of the secondary school reforms was to increase access and improve equity. The major reforms that have been introduced since 1994 include:

- the introduction of fee-free primary education in 1994
- elimination of the requirements for school uniform
- change to use vernacular language as medium of instruction in standards 1-4
- the introduction of school fee waivers for girls in secondary schools in 1995
- the unification of the secondary school system through the merging of conventional government secondary schools and Distance Education Centres (DECs) into one system

On coming to power in 1994, the new government embarked on an ambitious programme of free primary education (FPE). FPE was both a response by the newly elected government to the popular demand for education, and was also perceived as one of the major instruments for a more egalitarian society, for expanding and modernising the economy, and an essential element in the development process (Chimombo 1999). The main objectives of FPE were to increase access, eliminate inequalities in participation between groups and sensitise the community to the importance of education. Under the FPE initiative the government promised to undertake the following:

- assume the financing of unassisted primary schools[7] by merging them with government-assisted schools
- provide sufficient learning materials and teachers
- be responsible for the provision of classrooms, furniture, teacher houses, sanitation facilities and boreholes
- abolish all forms of fees
- introduce community schools
- encourage the participation of girls in primary education (Ministry of Education/UNICEF 1998)

Since FPE arose from a political agenda and was implemented to fulfil an electoral pledge, a systematic analysis of the education sector was not undertaken beforehand to assess the impact of the policy and develop strategies that would be financially sustainable. As Chimombo (1999) notes, FPE was not based on a

[7] Unassisted schools were usually junior schools established by the community, covering standards 1-4, which did not qualify for full government support previously. Unassisted schools were usually placed in very poor communities, mainly those under-served by the state system. The communities were supposed to pay the teachers and also supply all teaching and learning materials. The consequence of this policy was that many of these schools closed before the end of the academic year due to lack of money to pay teacher salaries.

proper understanding of the forces behind school participation, which are embedded in the socio-political and economic settings in which the school operates. The financial implications of implementing FPE were considerable and, although government and donor resources increased substantially in response to FPE, as will be shown, they have been inadequate to ensure primary schooling for all of acceptable quality. In theory, the government was supposed to be responsible for all costs of primary education under FPE, including instructional materials, school construction etc., implying an entirely free system on the part of the parents. In practice however, the government has been unable to meet its obligations and parents still have to meet a substantial portion of the costs of education. Donors have also provided much needed financial support to sustain FPE through construction of classrooms and schools, provision of teaching and learning materials and training of teachers. Already there are fears that if one or two current donors to education decided to pull out, the primary education system will collapse (Bernbaum *et al.* 1998). In addition, the impact of FPE on other levels of education has yet to be analysed. However, it is evident that the budgetary implications of implementing FPE, with an increased proportion of resources allocated to primary, mean that fewer resources are available for other sub-sectors, with implications for quality, as discussed below.

The Education Policy and Investment Framework (PIF), which was first developed in 1995 to accommodate FPE and other recent reforms, outlines government policy at all levels of the education system over a ten year period. The government regards the PIF as an on-going process and, as such, the PIF has already been updated several times since 1995. The initial PIF was largely a response to the introduction of FPE and mainly covered primary, secondary and teacher education and also outlined policies to cover issues such as school health and nutrition (Ministry of Education 1995b). The shortfall of the first PIF was that it did not cover the whole education sector, in particular tertiary education was completely ignored. In addition, it was criticised by donors for a lack of a critical analysis of the current situation in each sector which was required to justify the policy priorities proposed by the PIF (Kilby 1998). Furthermore, the investment framework, which was supposed to be at the heart of the PIF, was lacking. This led to a revision of the PIF in 1998. However, most of the issues raised in the first PIF remained unanswered, resulting in the development of the PIF that is currently under preparation.

Unlike the first two drafts of the PIF, the current PIF has been developed in close collaboration with major donors to education, in particular USAID, DFID, DANIDA and JICA. Most of the concerns of donors with the first two PIFs have been addressed, although the current PIF still lacks a critical analysis of the issues affecting the education sector to justify the policies proposed. The current PIF proposes a number of important educational reforms. Like the second education plan, priority is on primary education, with the aim of allocating 65 per cent of the recurrent education budget to primary education. The main educational challenges which the PIF tries to address are those of access, equity, quality and relevance. The main objectives of the policy reforms suggested have been identified as:

- improving access of children, particularly to secondary and tertiary education
- promoting greater social equity between various groups in society

- enhancing the quality of education offered at all levels and making the education provided relevant to the needs of individuals and society (Ministry of Education 2000)

Donors have exerted considerable influence on government policy through the various projects that that they implement. A good example is the USAID-funded GABLE programme initiated in 1991 with the aim of improving access, persistence and achievement of girls in primary schools. At the time when GABLE was implemented girls' education was not a priority of the government[8] and gender disparities were not targeted in education policies and plans. Through the influence of the GABLE project, which had the impact of putting girls' education on the national agenda (Wolf 1995; Bernbaum *et al.* 1998), the current PIF now attempts to incorporate gender policies. However, there is some concern that initiatives aimed at improving girls' schooling have not always been internalised within the Ministry of Education, partly due to weak organisational structures. In addition, attention to monitoring of the programme at the classroom level has been weak, and given the extensive resources allocated by USAID, questions of its sustainability remain (Swainson *et al.* 1998; Bernbaum *et al.* 1998).

The PIF is intended to use a sector wide approach, the current approach to planning advocated in development circles. As such, the PIF process is supposed to be a collaborative effort between the government and donors, ensuring coordination of donor activities. However, in practice this has not entirely been the case. Given that the financing of education in Malawi has always relied heavily on donor funding, donors continue to play an important role in the policy process. Currently, donors provide about 40 per cent of the primary education budget (Bernbaum *et al.* 1998). Because of dependence on donor funding, education policies have tended to reflect donor priorities and interests, sometimes to the detriment of the needs of the country. A classic example is the advice of the World Bank in 1983 to increase primary school user charges, which resulted in a decline in enrolments (Thobani 1983; Ministry of Education 1984). Donor influence in policy making in education is still evident, as shown by the development of the current PIF which, to some extent, reflects donor interests and priorities. An important reason for donor influence on educational policy and planning is due to the lack of capacity within the Ministry of Education, which is partly related to low salaries making it difficult to retain qualified and experienced staff. As a result, the Ministry of Education sometimes uncritically accepts and adopts donor recommendations without a full analysis of the implications.

Previously, education policies were designed in such a way that the needs of disadvantaged groups were not addressed. However, there has been a move in recent times to design educational policies to meet the needs of various sub-groups. As mentioned, girls in particular have received attention in the formulation of policy, although this has, to a large extent, been a donor-driven agenda. The needs of children with special needs, street children, out of school youth, orphans, and children from poorest households have, however, rarely been directly addressed by past and present policies. Although FPE was supposed to address access

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[8] For example the second education plan had equity as one of its major objectives, however, gender equity was not mentioned as one of the areas which required intervention. Instead the plans saw regional and district disparities as areas of major concern.

problems of different sub-groups, and allow those who previously could not enter school because of costs to do so, some sub-groups continue to be unable to benefit from FPE. Furthermore, while the current PIF, which has equity as one of its major objectives and includes policies to attempt to improve access to education for children with special needs and orphans, the needs of the other sub-groups (for example, street children, out of school youth, illiterate adults and the poorest households) have not been adequately addressed. Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail, primary education is still not 'free', either in terms of the direct costs that households have to pay (stationery, clothes for school and 'contributions' levied at the school level), or the indirect costs in terms of the time children spend in school instead of on household activities. These costs impact differently on households (for example, female-headed households, poorest households, households with orphans etc.), as well as different children within the households, particularly girls. These groups, therefore, require special attention in the policy if their needs are to be adequately addressed. NGOs working in the education sector have mainly concentrated their efforts on the poor sections of society. In most cases, NGOs have been involved in making schools accessible to rural communities through the construction of schools or assistance with building materials. With the advent of democracy, more NGOs came on the scene. Most of these new NGOs are concentrating on disadvantaged groups, including street children and orphans (CONGOMA 1999). Since these groups have received limited government attention there is a danger that exclusive NGO intervention will further marginalise these children from the mainstream education system.

The education policy formulation process in Malawi does not have the tradition of consulting with stakeholders, including teachers, parents, communities, local leaders and NGOs involved in education. Since FPE was a political agenda, there was little consultation with stakeholders on what form it should take. The users of the policy (district education officers, schools, teachers, parents and pupils) have, therefore, been suggested to be passive recipients of pre-packaged solutions proposed to them by a distant agency (Chimombo 1999). This is likely to hinder the effective formulation and implementation of policy, as a recent study highlights: 'People are receptive to dialogue and involvement. They are not receptive to being told' (GABLE SMC-EQ 1999). Although the PIF is supposedly being drawn up by the government with support from donors, in reality it has mainly been a donor-driven process and so far there has been limited consultation with relevant stakeholders. Where plans for such consultations are being made, these appear to be relatively ad hoc. Furthermore, the stakeholders will only be consulted *after* the document has already been drafted. This could have implications for the appropriateness of the strategies that are being drawn up. For example, during the development of the PIF, there have been discussions about whether some form of cost sharing should be introduced at primary level to reduce the pressure on government resources. There have been proposals to shift the costs of learning materials such as exercise books and pens to parents, and formalisation of contributions to schools.[9] Given the potential impact that such a policy could have on

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[9] The debates concerning shifting costs of schooling back to parents in the context of free primary education is not new. For example, it has been suggested that, although fees are not advisable given the low levels of literacy in the country, that education costs, such as textbooks and writing materials, could be transferred to households, and the savings made could be used to improve the quality of 'free' primary education by providing more furniture, classrooms and qualified teachers (Kutengule 1997).

household ability to pay for education and enrolments (as evident from previous experience)[10] it would have been appropriate to consult with different stakeholders before developing the plan and undertake an analysis of their ability to pay, in order to assess its feasibility in relation to achieving access and equity targets.

Furthermore, the current emphasis on 'community participation' in the PIF is intended to empower communities to take an active role in school governance. Communities have, in fact, always been involved in school matters in relation to providing assistance and contributions (in cash or kind, in terms of labour and materials) to school construction and maintenance. Although in theory households are still expected to contribute labour and materials (with an increased emphasis recently, for example, through the Malawi Social Action Fund - MASAF),[11] the interpretation of 'free' primary education has resulted in some reluctance because of the belief that the government is now responsible for providing everything.

Moreover, evidence indicates that the structures created to facilitate the process of community involvement in decision-making, such as school committees, are often ineffective and weak. School committees are supposed to be involved in issues dealing with teachers, pedagogy and financing. However, in practice, most school committees have been reduced to agencies for mobilising communities to provide labour or other resources for school construction or maintenance and monitoring construction work at the schools. Lack of education was cited by parents in one study as the major reason for the lack of involvement in the running of the schools (Kadzamira and Ndalama 1997). In addition, studies in Malawi have consistently revealed that community participation in most instances is really an alternative means of raising resources, rather than a means of empowerment (Msiska and Kadzamira 1995; Hyde *et al.* 1996; Kadzamira and Ndalama 1997).

The question remains whether education policies have actually been responding to citizens' needs. It is not apparent whether, given the choice, households would actually have prioritised education above their other needs to the extent that has occurred. Many households face chronic food shortages and coping with food insecurity is the main priority for these households. In this situation, education is likely to rank low on the list of their immediate needs and priorities. For example, in the recent study on 'Consultations with the Poor', the two major problems cited by most communities were lack of food and lack of health facilities (Khaila *et al.* 1999), whereas education barely featured. While this might be partly because education is no longer considered a problem thanks to FPE which means that schooling is accessible to the majority of the population, FPE was mentioned as a factor contributing to improved well-being in only one district visited.

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[10] For example, the relatively modest reduction in costs as a result of abolishing fees in 1994 had a massive impact on enrolment. Even at their highest level (for standards 5-8 in urban areas), by the time fees were abolished they were hardly sufficient to buy four exercise books and two pens, which would be grossly insufficient for a standard 8 pupil (Rose 2000).

[11] MASAF aims to encourage community participation in the selection, preparation and implementation of development projects. In order to receive MASAF funding for community projects, community groups should select a project according to a prioritisation of their needs following a process of community consultation. Their proposal must demonstrate that they will be able to contribute 20 per cent of funding to the project (in cash or kind) (World Bank 1996). Primary school construction has benefited disproportionately from the community sub-projects component of MASAF (Parker and Serrano 2000). While this might partly indicate communities' prioritisation of education, it is also often due to the fact that school committees are already established in most communities, providing a structure from which MASAF funding can be applied.

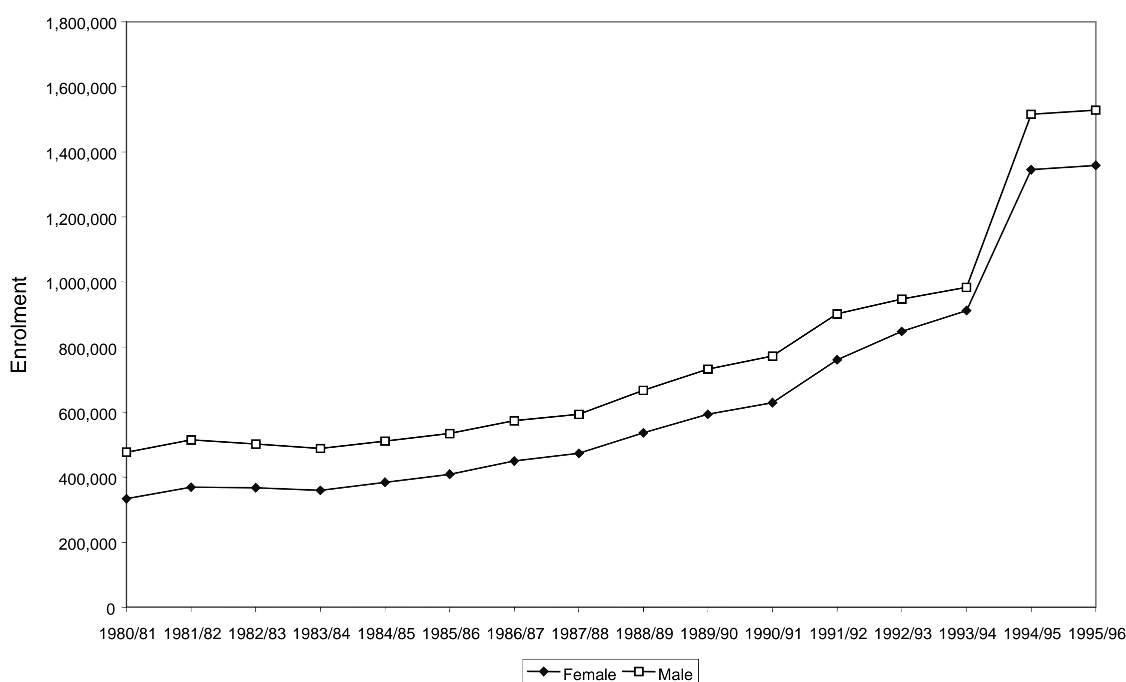
POLICY AND PRACTICE

Access

The promise of free primary education as a means of increasing access to education was high on the agenda of most of the political parties during the 1994 general elections. Once in power the party that won the elections immediately fulfilled its pledge. This could be considered a response to citizen needs since previous research had shown that school fees were a constraining factor on school attendance (for example, Kadzombe 1988; Davison and Kanyuka 1990; Hyde and Kadzamira 1994; Burchfield and Kadzamira 1996). Moreover, the proposed abolition of fees certainly appeared to play an important role in winning votes.

The amazing response to FPE indicated that the new government had correctly identified an important desire of the population. Although enrolment had increased steadily over the 1980s, a massive expansion was evident following the implementation of FPE: enrolment increased by over 50 per cent between 1993/94 to 1994/95 (from approximately 1.9 million to nearly three million) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Primary enrolment by gender, 1980/81-1997



Sources: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletins, various years

This increase was, to a large extent, due to children (particularly boys) above the school going age re-entering, as evident by gross enrolment ratios (GERs) of over 100 per cent (Table 1).

Table 1: Gross and net enrolment rates (per cent), 1980/81-1997

	GER	NER	% female enrolment
1980/81	65	47	41.2
1981/82	70	50	41.8
1982/83	67	47	42.3
1983/84	63	44	42.4
1984/85	65	47	42.9
1985/86	67	48	43.4
1986/87	71	52	43.9
1987/88	72	53	44.4
1988/89	79	60	44.6
1989/90	84	64	44.8
1990/91	79	60	44.9
1991/92	88	56	45.8
1992/93	88	56	47.2
1993/94	93	71	48.1
1994/95	134	83	47.0
1995/96	123		47.1
1997	139		47.7

Sources: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletins, various years; Ministry of Education and UNICEF (1998). Data for 1994/95 NER from Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (1996)

Interestingly, more targeted attempts at abolishing primary fees before the elections had a more limited impact (including a phased abolition of tuition fees in Standard 1 in 1991/92 with the aim of gradually abolishing fees for the first four years of primary schooling, and the introduction of a school fee waiver programme for non-repeating girls in standards 2-8 from 1992/93). This might suggest that it was not the abolition of fees alone which encouraged parents to send their children to school, but also optimism around the changing political and economic environment, and possibly also the impact of other reforms taking place in the education sector simultaneously (such as non-enforcement of uniforms which also had the potential of substantially reducing household direct costs on education).

Potentially, the abolition of school fees could also free household resources for other household needs. However, given that poor households responded by sending more children to school, it is likely that the proportion of their expenditure allocated to education actually increased, since children from poorer households in particular started school as a result of FPE and, although they do not have to pay fees, they still incur other direct costs of education such as buying exercise books, pens and clothes for school. Furthermore, these costs are substantially higher than the amount required for fees. Recent estimates indicate that, regardless of their wealth ranking, households spend as much as 20 per cent of their total expenditure to

education, on average (Rose 2000).[12]

In conjunction with the positive response of households to the fee abolition, the government also responded positively by increasing resources to education, particularly at the primary level. The proportion of government recurrent expenditure allocated to education increased from 11 per cent in 1990/91 to 24 per cent in 1997, and the per cent of education expenditure allocated to primary education increased from 45 per cent to 65 per cent. This increase was partly the response of the government to fulfil its pledge of FPE, but also a result of donor conditionality.[13] The increase was, however, only just sufficient to cater for the increase in primary enrolment (recurrent expenditure per pupil increased only slightly from K39 to K41 in 1990 prices, over the same period). Furthermore, government provision for instructional inputs, which research has shown to have a significant impact on achievement, remains very low – in 1997, 83 per cent of primary recurrent expenditure was spent on teachers' wages, while only six per cent was spent on learning materials (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000).

Given that primary education was also a priority of donors, it was possible to implement the promises made during the elections, as donor support was forthcoming. However, the priority of the government and donors implies that other sectors must have suffered from a diminishing share of resources allocated to them. In addition, it raises questions of sustainability once government and donor priorities shift. Such a shift is already evident in the international agenda, which is now giving increased attention to technical and higher education once more. For example, the 1998/99 World Development Report on **Knowledge for Development** proposes that basic education 'should not monopolise a nation's attention as it becomes a player in global markets' (World Bank 1999: 42). Rather, it is proposed that higher levels of education deserve increased attention because of the need to adapt to and apply new information-based technologies.

Given that the poor in particular benefited from increased access to primary schooling as a result of the fee abolition, the cumulative impact of the enrolment and resource increase is that the poor now receive a larger proportion of public spending than their population share at the primary level, although they continue to be disadvantaged at the secondary and tertiary levels. However, since the poorest have a substantially younger population profile, even after the abolition of fees children in the poorest groups continue to receive a smaller share of public resources than higher socio-economic groups (24 per cent of children aged 6-13 years are within the poorest income quintile which receives 19 per cent of public spending on primary education) (Castro-Leal 1996).

Previous to FPE, only the Northern Region had achieved universal primary education in both rural and urban areas. After 1994/95 GERs in both rural and urban areas in the Central and Southern Region were also estimated to have reached 100 per cent. However, although significant improvements for all sub-groups

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[12] Despite the non-enforcement of uniforms, the vast majority of households continue to indicate that clothes are bought especially for school. Thus, approximately two-thirds of household education expenditure is spent on clothes for school. Including only school contributions and stationery, the proportion of household expenditure allocated to education is approximately 5-6 per cent for all wealth groups. This suggests that poorer households spend less on learning materials for their children, which is likely to affect their performance in school.

[13] An important reason for the increased allocation of resources to education is due to conditionality of the USAID GABLE programme which committed the government to increase the budgetary allocation to education to 27 per cent by 1997.

following the introduction of FPE are evident, disparities remain between different income groups and, within these groups, by gender, indicating that girls from the poorest households are the least likely to have access to schooling opportunities (Table 2). Thus, this suggests that, despite some relaxation of financial constraints on primary schooling, there are factors that continue to constrain poorest households from sending all their children (particularly girls) to school, as discussed below.

Table 2: Primary gross enrolment rates by income quintiles and gender[14]

	1990/91		1994/95	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
I – Poorest	65	51	100	69
II	83	69	117	88
III	88	83	118	98
IV	104	89	134	104
V – Richest	113	106	134	120
All	86	75	121	96

Source: Castro-Leal (1996)

Furthermore, although children are entering school in vast numbers, and almost all children now spend some time in school, many leave before they are likely to have obtained basic literacy and numeracy skills. Given existing flow rates through the primary cycle, only half of all children who start school will reach standard 3, and less than one-fifth will complete the primary cycle, with fewer girls than boys completing. It should be noted, however, that the poor internal efficiency of the system was evident even before the introduction of FPE and there are, at least, favourable signs that the gender gap has narrowed: in 1993/94 only 13 per cent of girls who entered school completed, compared with 18 per cent of boys whereas, by 1997, survival rates increased for both girls and boys to 18 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively (Table 3). In addition, given that a larger number of children are entering school, the absolute number of children expected to complete has also increased considerably.[15]

Table 3: Survival rates by gender

	Standard								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**graduate**
1993/94									
Girls	1000	686	543	418	332	250	189	135	130
Boys	1000	708	559	437	358	285	237	192	182
1997									
Girls	1000	651	527	405	332	264	213	188	175
Boys	1000	656	521	401	325	266	223	212	199

Source: Authors' calculations from Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletins, various years

14 Figures for 1994/95 are estimated based on enrolments by region and may, therefore, be subject to error. It should be possible to obtain a more accurate estimate using the results of the Integrated Household Survey once these data are available.

15 The implications of these survival rates for the number of graduates given enrolment in standard 1 in 1993 is 59,461 boys and 43,699 girls, compared with 82, 570 boys and 70,767 girls in 1997.

This suggests that, although the vast majority of the school-aged population has access to primary schooling, many households are not able to sustain their initial demand for education for a variety of reasons, often related to poverty. After children have been enrolled in school, households can find the costs associated with schooling prohibitive. These costs increase at higher levels, when more stationery and better quality clothing is required, increasing the likelihood of drop-out for poorer students – expenditure on a pupil in Standard 4-8 is approximately 50 per cent higher than a pupil in Standard 1-4 (K445 and K275 on average, respectively, in 1998) (Rose 2000). In this survey, approximately three-quarters of the households visited reported that they faced difficulties meeting school expenses.

Furthermore, even in the context of FPE, studies continue to show that inadequate clothing and lack of money to buy school supplies are an important reason for non-enrolment (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000; Burchfield and Kadzamira 1996). Although the government is supposed to provide exercise books and writing materials, these are often insufficient so that households have to supplement the supply from the government. In addition, despite the abolition of fees, schools continue to request contributions for sports, water bills etc as well as labour and materials for school construction and maintenance. These additional costs can be prohibitive for poorer households (Chimombo and Chonzi 1999; Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000; Rose 2000). For example, of the children interviewed in the Gender and Primary Schooling in Africa (GAPS) survey, one-third of girls and 50 per cent of boys who had dropped out in both rural and urban areas mentioned costs of schooling as the most important reason for them not being in school. This is reinforced by evidence that those out of school come from households of lower socio-economic status on average, compared with pupils. According to a group of children who had dropped out from school: *'FPE has not addressed the problem of poverty'* (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). This suggests that educational policies have failed to differentiate between different levels of poverty, so that the poorest continue to be under-served by the education system.

Moreover, although children might initially enrol in school, they might be withdrawn from school because their labour is needed by the household. Studies have shown, for example, that child labour can be an important aspect of a poor household's coping strategy, particularly in relation to *ganyu* in rural areas and street vending in urban areas (Devereux 1999). While these activities are not always compatible with schooling, in some cases boys in particular are able to combine schooling and work, by engaging in *ganyu* to raise money to pay for their school expenses (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). Furthermore, children, particularly girls, may be needed to substitute for the domestic work of adults in the household to allow them to undertake income-generating activities. This has become more severe in the context of HIV/AIDS which often means that girls are required to look after sick relatives, and take on roles of childcare and other domestic chores following the death of a parent (Kadzamira and Ndalama 1997). The GAPS survey found that, although children in school spend approximately two to three hours per day working for the household, on average, children out of school spend approximately four and a half more hours per day working either for the household or in income-generating activities in both rural and urban areas. This suggests that children out of school provide an important contribution to the household. Furthermore, girls, both in and out of school, spend approximately one hour per day more than boys working for the household.

As mentioned, children tend to enrol in school considerably later than the official starting age of six years. This raises particular problems for girls who reach puberty before completing the primary cycle. Early pregnancy is often cited as a reason for girls dropping out of school although little is known about the magnitude of the problem. In addition, in some cases girls may drop out of school before they are discovered to be pregnant. Furthermore, early marriage to avoid pregnancy outside of wedlock can also be a reason for girls to be withdrawn once they reach puberty. Pregnancy of school girls and early marriage are, however, often also related to poverty as girls seek material support from boyfriends or husbands which their parents are unable to provide (Davison and Kanyuka 1990; Burchfield and Kadzamira 1996; Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). As noted by a group of rural women in the 'Consultations with the Poor' study:

> Poverty adversely affects the chances of girls to persist in school. A good number of girls both in primary and secondary schools fall in love with either teachers or old people as a means to satisfy their needs. Many become pregnant and drop out of school altogether. It is sad that our girls are failing to fully take advantage of the free education initiative (Khaila *et al.* 1999: 109).

Thus, non-economic factors can also be a constraining factor for some, although they are often interlinked with poverty-related factors, and disproportionately affect girls (Colclough *et al.* 2000). Despite the recent pregnancy policy allowing girls back to school after giving birth, it appears that not many girls are taking advantage of this partly because parents fear that their daughters will be impregnated again, and also because they face intimidation by fellow pupils (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000).

In order to address problems of access at the primary level, the PIF proposes to seek closer links with the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services, Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of the Disabled in order to tackle basic education issues (including pre-school and adult education as well as primary schooling) in a more holistic manner. In addition, as mentioned, community participation is encouraged, while recognising the need to devise guidelines to take into account significant variations among different communities. These are likely to be important strategies but may not go far enough to address, for example, the multiple constraints faced by girls from poor families from attending school.[16]

Emphasis on primary education has implications for other sub-sectors of the education system. In particular, it is likely to increase pressure on the secondary school system as the cohort of children entering primary school as a result of FPE in 1994 reach the end of the cycle. Although the pressure of the FPE bulge cohort has not yet reached secondary school, by 1997 the secondary GER had increased to 18 per cent, from 10 per cent in 1990/91) (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000).[17] This increase might partly be related to the view that, since a larger proportion of children now have access to primary schooling, secondary education is now a necessary condition for obtaining employment. Even so, currently less than half of those who complete the primary cycle are able to continue to secondary school, despite the evident high demand for secondary

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16 See Kadzamira and Chibwana (2000) for a comprehensive review of policy options to address constraints to schooling, particularly for girls.

17 Note that these figures include enrolment in all types of secondary school (i.e. conventional government secondary schools, DECs and private secondary schools).

schooling. While only eight per cent of girls and boys who completed primary school were admitted to government secondary schools in 1997, approximately 20 per cent of primary school completers entered DECs (now Community Day Secondary Schools – CDSSs) (Ministry of Education 1997). This is an indicator of the high demand for secondary education since these schools not only charge higher fees than government schools, but also are of considerably lower quality with, for example, average pupil/class ratios of 84:1 in DECs compared with 48:1 in conventional government secondary schools in 1997. Furthermore, the vast majority of teachers in DECs are only trained to teach at the primary level and, therefore, do not have training in secondary school subjects. The recent and sudden transformation of DECs into CDSSs is likely to reduce the number of school places available further, since these now have to meet the same requirements as government schools, including a limit on the pupil/class ratio of 50:1. In addition, the merge is likely to put increased pressure on government resources, since the government has committed itself to fund CDSSs in the same way as conventional government secondary schools. There are already signs that the quality of the secondary school system, which was relatively high a decade ago, has deteriorated over recent years. One indication of this is the deterioration in pass rates in public examinations since 1994/95. In 1999, for example, about 87 per cent of the students who sat for the Malawi School Certificate Examination, failed.

In order to address government resource constraints at the secondary and tertiary levels, the PIF proposes various forms of cost sharing measures including: shifting full costs of boarding to parents at secondary and university, phasing out of boarding at secondary level, introduction of various forms of user fees, for example non-refundable book fees and the introduction of fee-paying students at the university. Currently, higher levels of the education system enjoy large subsidies. The cost of one university student in 1997, for example, was equivalent to financing 124 students at primary level (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). Comparing the cost of financing secondary and university education with student contributions at these levels, it is clear that education at these levels is almost free. However, given that the poorest sections of the society have the least chance of entering these levels, which have the highest private returns, this means that public spending in education in its current form is regressive. Thus, if the reforms proposed by the PIF are implemented they could contribute to ensuring that the financing of education across different levels is more equitable.

Furthermore, since the abolition of primary school fees made the primary fee waivers for girls obsolete, the fee waiver was shifted to the secondary level. Despite pressure from USAID, which was funding the fee waiver, to target needy girls, the government decided that all girls enrolled in secondary school should be eligible. Thus, the government provides school fee waivers for all non-repeating girls irrespective of need. The fee waivers are both controversial and unpopular amongst parents because girls from well-off families benefit while poor boys do not (Swainson *et al.* 1998). Available research evidence shows that the majority of girls in conventional government secondary schools come from wealthier families than boys (Hyde 1994) and the poorest rural households are virtually not represented at the secondary level (Castro-Leal 1996). As long as the secondary system remains selective based on merit, the poorest girls are unlikely to make it to secondary school and therefore be eligible for the fee waivers since research has shown that performance at the primary level is closely linked to socio-economic status (see, for example, Kadzamira and

Chibwana 2000).

Thus, the fee waiver for girls does not appear to have had a significant impact on the gender gap in enrolment at the secondary level: in 1997, only 39 per cent of those enrolled in the different types of secondary schools were female. In addition, an objective of the secondary school fee waiver was also to encourage girls to continue with their primary schooling as they would now have a better chance of attending secondary school. However, primary survival rates shown above suggest that this has not been entirely successful. Although, in theory, the secondary school fee waiver should enable those who cannot afford to pay for their education to have access to secondary schooling, the fact remains that very few children in Malawi ever attend secondary school, and the majority of those who do attend schools of very low quality. Thus, government policies on secondary schools so far have failed to respond to meet the demand for secondary education. While the draft PIF proposes increased cost-sharing at the secondary level, it also intends to target 'needy students', expanding the current bursary system to include all students from low socio-economic groups, with particular emphasis on students with special educational needs. Although it is not clear how such targeting will be achieved in practice, it does appear that the policy is attempting to respond to parental concerns.

Quality

FPE indicated a real commitment by the government to primary education, and was supported by a substantial increase in resources to the sub-sector, as noted above. However, the impact of the abrupt increase in enrolments meant that access to facilities could not expand concomitantly. Rather, it has led to an increased number of children using existing facilities more intensively, resulting in a substantial increase in class size, particularly in early standards, and more classes being taught in the open air. The government did respond to the increased demand by recruiting approximately 18,000 untrained teachers, but these were both insufficient to provide classes of an acceptable size and also meant that a large proportion of the teaching force were inexperienced and unqualified. By 1997, over half of teachers were not qualified compared with 16 per cent in 1993/94 (Ministry of Education 1994; Ministry of Education 1997).

Table 4: Indicators of educational quality at the primary level, 1992-1997

Pupils per:	1992/93	1994/95	1997
Teacher	68	77	61
Qualified teacher	88	131	119
Textbook (basic subjects)	2.9	7.1	3
Permanent classroom	102	422	119
Chair	32	56	
Desk	18	31	

Source: Castro-Leal (1996); Ministry of Education (1998)

Although the pupil/teacher ratio has, on average, remained reasonably stable following the introduction of FPE, this is mainly because of the appointment of a large number of unqualified teachers. The number of

pupils per qualified teacher has, therefore, risen dramatically from 88:1 to 119:1 (Table 4). These averages mask disparities between and within schools. The pupil/teacher ratio in urban schools was 48:1 on average, compared with 63:1 in rural schools, and 75 per cent of teachers in urban schools were qualified compared with 51 per cent in rural schools. Moreover, lower standards within schools suffer from fewer resources. They are more likely to be held outdoors, to lack chairs and desks and to be taught by inexperienced and untrained teachers. Furthermore, due to unequal distribution of teachers within schools, the class size is considerably larger in earlier standards – ranging from 113 pupils per class in standard one, on average, to 27 pupils per class in standard eight. An important reason for lower standards being most affected by low level of resources is due to the examination orientation of the education system, which places emphasis on upper standards (Chimombo 1999). This is suggested to have contributed to high repetition and drop-out in the early years of schooling (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000; Kadzamira and Kunje 1996). The unequal distribution is particularly detrimental for students from poorer households in rural areas who are often more likely to drop out early, for reasons discussed above. These students, therefore, only experience schooling of extremely poor quality, which would often prevent them from even attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills. Previous to FPE, while two to three pupils had to share a textbook in lower standards, in the upper standards there were sufficient textbooks for each student. The situation is similar in lower grades after the introduction of FPE, but it has worsened in later standards with three students sharing a textbook in the core subjects at a time when they are preparing for their primary school examination (Ministry of Education 1994; Ministry of Education 1996). Furthermore, teacher guides are also insufficient, while other teaching aids required for the curriculum, such as globes, maps, clocks, mathematical sets and charts, are absent from classrooms (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000).

The poor achievement attained as a result of poor quality is evident from the results of the tests administered to children in Standard 3 in the GAPS survey – ten per cent of the children interviewed were unable to write their name, while approximately half could not identify letters of the alphabet. Furthermore, fewer than half of the children interviewed could read common words which appear frequently in textbooks, such as cat, pot or book. While this could partly be attributed to language problems, similar results were found in the Chichewa test, for words such as *galimoto*, *amayi* and *mphaka*. It is not possible to compare what would have happened in the absence of the rapid expansion of enrolments nor with test results in previous years, but the lack of basic literacy skills amongst some of the children suggests that, despite the achievements made in increasing access, there are serious problems of quality in the primary education sector preventing children from achieving their potential. Furthermore, low quality of education is likely to reduce perceived returns by increasing the number of years necessary to acquire the minimum skills (Castro-Leal 1996). This, in turn, increases the direct and indirect costs of obtaining basic literacy and numeracy, which is particularly detrimental for the poorest households.

As indicated above, girls are less likely to complete the primary cycle, compared with boys. While this is partly attributed to constraints they face particularly on reaching puberty, it is also related to school factors. Teacher attitudes are particularly important in this respect. Evidence from the GAPS survey indicates that over half of both male and female teachers interviewed thought that boys are more intelligent than girls, and

two-thirds believe that boys are able to perform better in science subjects. Moreover, one-fifth of female teachers and one-quarter of male teachers continue to believe that the types of tasks that girls perform in school should reflect those that women traditionally do, and an even higher proportion consider that emphasis on gender equity is biased against boys. These attitudes are borne out by the practice of girls being chosen more frequently to undertake work within the school which reinforces the gender division of labour within the home, such as cleaning offices and classrooms, fetching firewood, as well as carrying out tasks for teachers including cleaning their houses, cooking and washing clothes (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000).

While teachers often perceived problems of girls' schooling to be related to factors outside the classroom and, by implication, beyond their control, such attitudes and practices indicate that the school environment replicates and reinforces some of the attitudes that prevail within society more generally which are likely to be particularly detrimental to girls' schooling. Although these attitudes and practices are apparent for both male and female teachers, they are more prevalent amongst male teachers. The distribution of male and female teachers within schools is, therefore, also a cause for concern. Female teachers are concentrated in earlier standards (approximately two-thirds of female teachers were allocated to standards 1-3 in the schools visited, whereas approximately half of male teachers were teaching in standards 6-8), supposedly because these classes are considered to be easier to handle. Given the large class size in early standards, this is evidently not true and, in any case, reinforces societal attitudes towards women (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000).

Studies have suggested that teacher performance has deteriorated following FPE due to low morale, which also has implications for the quality of education delivered. In addition, parents blame problems of discipline in school on teachers as they no longer feel accountable since parents are no longer paying for schooling and cannot, therefore, make demands on teachers. However, teachers blame parents for disciplinary problems due to their misinterpretation of 'free' education which means that they no longer take an interest in their children's schooling. In some cases, parents and pupils have misinterpreted the meaning of FPE to be 'free to attend school or not'. Democracy is also misinterpreted to mean freedom to do anything, contributing to disciplinary problems (Mthindi *et al.* 1998; Ministry of Education/UNICEF 1998; GABLE SMC-EQ 1999).

Relevance

In theory, the curriculum is supposed to be child-centred, including active participation of pupils through group work, debates and problem solving activities. However, teachers do not appear to be well trained in the methodology, and it does not always appear to be appropriate for, or adapted to use with the large class sizes. Furthermore, teachers often lack teaching and learning materials to enable them to deliver the curriculum effectively (Ministry of Education/UNICEF 1998; Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). This is partly a problem of inappropriate policy choice in the context of the current resources available and the present school environment. Given that the choice of using a child-centred approach has been made, the constraints faced have not been addressed for its effective implementation.

The appropriateness of the content of the curriculum has also been questioned in relation to its

applicability to poverty alleviation (Ministry of Education/UNICEF 1998). The study reports that parents, teachers and school heads mention that teaching technical and agricultural skills is more important than the present academic curriculum, which is aimed at preparing students for secondary education to which very few actually have access.

Language of instruction is a particularly contentious issue. The current policy states that children should be taught in the vernacular from standards 1-4 and in English from standards 5-8. In practice, it has been difficult to implement the change in policy in the early standards because textbooks are still only available in Chichewa, the previous language of instruction for standards 1-4. In addition, some teachers do not speak the language of the local area, and in some areas there is a mix of ethnic groups making it problematic to select a common language for instruction (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). Thus, although the language policy might be pedagogically sound, it has so far proved to be impractical (Chimombo 1999). Furthermore, it has been found that the policy is not popular with parents who want children to learn in English from an early age because they consider that it is more useful for getting better jobs in the future (Kaunda 1999). However, since fewer than half of pupils survive in school beyond standard four, the usefulness of learning in English for these children is questionable, and might not be appropriate for the achievement of poverty alleviation objectives.

As mentioned, an important impact of FPE was to encourage older children to enrol or re-enrol in school. As a result, there is a wide age range of children in school. In the GAPS survey, the age in standard one ranged from four to 18 years, with students as old as 30 years enrolled in primary school. The age range was wider in rural schools, and males tended to be older than females (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). The demand for the labour of older girls at the household level and the fact that some of the girls might be mothers or married is likely to have prevented them from going back to school. Not only does this mean that primary school classes are likely to be disrupted by older students but these students are unlikely to receive the type of education suitable for their needs. A non-formal system of education would probably cater better for the needs of the older students, rather than formal primary education. An adult literacy programme could, for example, reduce the pressure on primary schooling as well as assist in moving towards the achievement of poverty alleviation goals in the short term since, by providing older students with appropriate orientation in technical and agricultural skills. In addition, improved literacy of adults has generally been found to have important inter-generational advantages. Yet, with the implementation of FPE, non-formal education has become a forgotten priority. The current adult literacy programmes continue to be plagued by low attendance, and poor quality and coverage.

With regard to the primary school curriculum, the PIF proposes to revise it to make the primary cycle terminal, and de-emphasise selection to post-primary. On the one hand, this might be important in terms of addressing immediate poverty alleviation goals by focusing resources on ensuring that all children obtain minimum levels of basic literacy and numeracy. However, most households do not see the benefit of only primary education and, in reality, secondary education is needed for economic and social benefits to be realised. Parents often perceive education as a way out of poverty through enabling their children to obtain a job, but the opportunities available for primary school leavers are extremely limited. Secondary education has

now become the minimum qualification for entry into the formal job market. In the 'Consultations with the Poor', most communities in both urban and rural areas realise this, and identified lack of secondary schools and/or poor selection to secondary as one of the priority problems in their areas (Khaila *et al.* 1999). Over 90 per cent of households interviewed in the GAPS survey did not think that primary education would help their children obtain waged employment, and half of these believed that employment prospects had deteriorated over the past five years (i.e. since the implementation of FPE). Furthermore, three-quarters of the households did not consider that the education that their children were receiving at the primary level had any influence over their skills and knowledge to improve agricultural production, and one-fifth thought that this had worsened over the past five years. Moreover, over 70 per cent of households did not think that boys would benefit from primary education unless they were able to continue to the secondary level, while 55 per cent did not think that girls would benefit from primary schooling alone (Rose 2000). In reality, very few children from these households are likely to get the chance of receiving secondary education. Thus, in practice the policy choice of providing primary schooling for all leads to qualification inflation, so that only those who have access to the limited secondary schooling available receive the economic benefits of education, with the implication that FPE could actually become anti-poor.

Fit

The fit between the school calendar and the livelihood systems of the poor is problematic. On the one hand, some believe that the school calendar should fit around the agricultural calendar (which also influences the timing of initiation ceremonies) so that it does not conflict with peak times when children's labour will be required to assist with household activities. On the other hand, there might also be a desire for the school calendar to mirror the agricultural calendar so that agriculture can be properly taught in school. However, the current calendar does not appear to fit either of these. The school year, which previously ran from October to July, now begins in January with long holidays in November and December (the beginning of the hunger months). The reason for this adaptation, rather than based on an assessment of needs at the primary level, was due to water shortages in boarding secondary schools and tertiary institutions which meant that they had to be closed from October to December. The calendar does not, therefore, either mirror the agricultural calendar, nor avoid peak agricultural times.

Before the change in calendar, research showed that, since the school calendar coincided with the 'hunger' months (December–February), children would often go to school without food (Kadzamira and Ndalama 1997). The problems intensify during periods of famine which have been shown in the past to be closely related to periods of stagnation, and even decline, in enrolments (Fuller 1989). Following the change in the school calendar in 1997, studies continue to show problems. The Ministry of Education/UNICEF study (1998) noted that there is a high correlation between the agricultural cycle/initiation ceremonies and absenteeism, with high absenteeism during the harvest and immediately after the harvest when initiation ceremonies are held. The GAPS survey also found that, of the boys who had been involved in an initiation ceremony, over half were initiated during August-October which now conflicts with the school calendar (Kadzamira and Chibwana 2000). Furthermore, since the long school holidays now fall within the 'hunger'

months, parents have little food and money to spare and are, therefore, reluctant to adjust the initiation calendar to fit with school holidays (Kaunda 1999).

Thus, the dilemmas around an appropriate school calendar are not easy to solve but suggest that a flexible approach to the curriculum might be desirable, so that children who are absent for a period of time can continue with their studies at their own pace (as, for example, with the Esceula Nueva programme in Colombia). However, the feasibility of implementing a flexible curriculum of this kind would not be easy given large class sizes, particularly in the earlier standards.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted some of the dilemmas and disjunctures between policy choice and policy practice. The disjuncture between policy and practice is evident from different interpretations of 'free' primary education. Furthermore, the dilemma of increasing the quantity of primary schooling at the expense of quality is that more years of schooling are needed to attain the minimum skills required to achieve the poverty alleviation goals. In addition, the expansion of the primary system increases the demand for the limited supply of secondary education.

As recent studies have indicated, in reality schooling is still not free even in the post-FPE era and the cost of schooling continues to be the main reason for children not being in school. Furthermore, primary schooling for all cannot be attained if other important needs are not addressed, which may be beyond the scope of educational policy. Poverty at the household level which leads to lack of food (hunger), poor health, lack of clothes and lack of money to buy school essentials continue to be important causes of high dropout in the primary school system, even in the FPE era. Thus, the success of educational initiatives such as FPE is dependent on other needs being satisfied, suggesting a need for an integrated approach to social policy. Moreover, even though the government has committed a significant proportion of its resources to education, particularly at the primary level, these continue to be insufficient to provide primary schooling of acceptable quality.

While it is evident that FPE has increased enrolment in primary schools, poor quality, particularly at the lower level to which the poor have most access, means that the achievement of poverty alleviation goals through education is uncertain. Furthermore, many of the economic and social benefits of education are not realised until late primary or even the secondary level (particularly when quality is so low) which very few children reach. Thus, despite considerable achievements in terms of meeting quantitative targets, consequent deterioration in quality raises questions about the extent to which the needs of the poor are being met. This is of particular concern given that these households spend a considerable proportion of their own resources on education in the hope of bringing themselves out of the poverty trap in the longer term. However, not all of the problems of education are a result of resource constraints, or would necessarily be resolved merely by an increase government expenditure. Rather, many of the dilemmas and disjunctures identified could be overcome through improved formulation, design, implementation and monitoring of educational policy. This could be facilitated by encouraging and supporting the involvement of different stakeholders in education throughout the policy process.

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