

Financing Free Primary Education in Malawi: Can the EFA Goals Be Achieved?

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Introduction

One of the main turning points in the history of Malawi has been the transition from an authoritarian to a multi-party and democratic state in 1994. The then newly elected United Democratic Front (UDF) government embarked on an ambitious programme of Free Primary Education (FPE) policy. As noted by Chimombo (1999), FPE was not only a response by the newly elected leaders to popular demands for education from the electorate but was also perceived as the main instrument for a more egalitarian society, for expanding and modernizing the economy as an essential element of the development process (p.117). There is considerable literature that education is important for improvements in economic and agricultural activity, health as well as reductions in fertility, and infant mortality. In addition, increased access to good quality education is seen as an important means of achieving many of the other development goals. Education is therefore considered to be economically and socially desirable (Colclough, 1982, World Bank 1995).

The FPE policy can also be seen to be the new government's response to international declarations. The world community has been setting international targets now known as Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE). Starting from the great conferences of the early 1960s through to Jomtien and Dakar declarations, the goal has been primary schooling for everyone. However, over forty years since the agenda was put on the table, the goal of UPE is still elusive. The question then becomes: What has gone wrong?

This paper explores the complexities in the financing for EFA. In particular,

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the paper examines how the Government of Malawi has been financing this important policy. In particular, the paper focuses on how developing countries can indeed provide for the provision of education for all. It also examines the extent to which international assistance has encouraged or discouraged ownership and the sustainability of projects in Malawi. While making the declarations (in Jomtien and Dakar), world leaders also pledge increased levels of assistance for the attainment of their goals. Are international governments and institutions living to their acclamation? This paper also examines this and highlights the difficulties that are encountered by developing countries such as Malawi as they try to respond to these internationally determined targets.

The Free Primary Education Policy

The new democratic government of Malawi took a solid and courageous step when introducing FPE in 1994 after the first ever multiparty elections. In the past, the previous government had, in accordance with the Jomtien Declaration which made explicit the commitment of each country to provide education for all, introduced a school fee waiver scheme during the second half of the Education Development Plan period. However, after winning the elections in 1994, the UDF-led government followed through on its political promise to provide Education for All (EFA) Malawians. At the start of the 1994/95 academic year, primary education was made free. In this major policy intervention, the fees abolished included tuition, school fund/extra fees and textbook contribution. In some cases, it also meant the abolition of telephone and water fees. A uniform no longer became a requirement for attending school (MoE, 1996). The FPE policy also merged into one category assisted (those under the responsibility of local education authorities at the district level) and unassisted schools (those established by local communities). The central government with the support of other sectors, assumed the responsibility of financing these schools (MoE, 1995).

In addition to a symposium that was organized to brainstorm on the way forward for the policy, the Ministry of Education also organised a pre-school registration exercise throughout the country in early August 1994 in order to establish the number of pupils who were to start school in September. Several issues were

raised by this exercise:

- enrolment was to increase from 1.9 million to 3.1 million;
- at a teacher/pupil ratio of 1:60, 22,797 additional teachers, 38,742 additional classrooms and 30,444 teacher houses were required. This was in addition to the scarcity of teaching and learning resources already being experienced in many schools.

The main message from these issues is that the demand for resources that was created by the introduction of the FPE policy was very high and the need for external support for the attainment of EFA was so obvious. But what was the response from the donor community? This is where the paper turns to now.

Initial Donor Community Response

Following the announcement of FPE policy, several donors came forward to provide assistance¹:

- UNICEF was the first to come forward with a pledge of 1.3 million exercise books in early September, 1994 which were immediately distributed before schools opened in October. Other major contributions included the construction of 108 classrooms and provision of safe water to 40 schools (MoE and UNICEF 1998, p.20).
- GTZ donated about 248,000 notebooks which were distributed in the Zomba district. GTZ had put some US\$4.5 million to support teacher development in a parallel financing arrangement with World Bank and ODA.
- USAID through the Girls Attainment in Basic and Literacy Education project procured 8.3 million exercise books, which were distributed to schools.
- Other local institutions also responded to the government appeal. The Press Trust donated 1.6 million exercise books and pencils.

While such efforts by the development partners were commendable, the ad-hoc nature of the response to a major policy change by the donor community should be noted. Clearly, support from the international donors' community failed to effectively follow the lead here. The donors were left to act individually without any coordination. What seems to have been lacking in international declarations made at Jonteim for example, is the need to agree on concrete strategies for

raising additional resources at the international level. Obviously, there are no clear guidelines regarding what happens next when a country commits herself to these targets. There is need for a global action plan that brings together governments, donors and other actors around a framework capable of achieving EFA. What became obvious from Malawi was that although government and donor's resources increased in response to the policy, the financial implications of implementing FPE were however considerable and the resourcing levels have in general been low to ensure primary schooling for all of acceptable quality.

An analysis of the donor involvement in education in Malawi shows that external funding for the sector has been variable as can be seen from Figure 1 below.

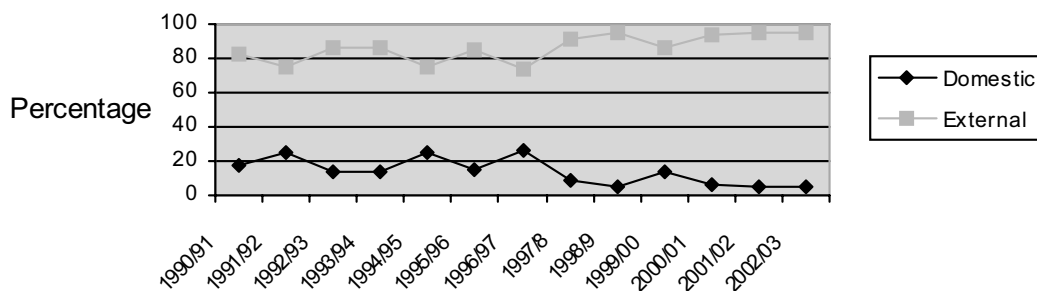


Figure 1: Education Development Expenditure by Source

A closer look at the figure indicates that in addition to the variations, the gap between the external and internal sources of funding has been widening. This is an indication of the ever-increasing dependency on foreign aid for the financing of education in Malawi. In fact, an analysis of levels of foreign aid by Brantigan and Knack (2004) showed that overseas development assistance as a percentage of government expenditure in Malawi was 89 percent in 1999 and this was second highest from the war torn Rwanda at 99 percent. And an examination of the 2003/04 budget showed that the financing of government business remains heavily reliant on external resources. MoE (2005) observed that bilateral donors funded an average of 70 percent of the education development budget while multilateral lending averaged 25 percent with government funding 5 percent.

As donors provided assistance for FPE in Malawi, two issues emerged. The first was the extent to which the government could support the process of education

reform without becoming too dependent on foreign funding. The second touched on the overall challenge of co-ordinating the many donor activities. While some donors claimed that there was a high degree of co-ordination in donor activities, others thought that each donor was pursuing its own projects and goals independently. Indeed, despite the so-called Sector Wide Approach Program to funding projects, donor coordination in Malawi is very weak. Although monthly meetings are held, donors largely act independently of each other; a situation mainly encouraged by weak government control. If I may draw from my own experience with the implementation of JICA projects, it has been observed that while JICA had put in place a steering committee for monitoring the implementation of their projects, some of the big donors in the country never attended these meetings. There is some confession from DFID in this respect who observed that: *closer and more regular consultations has built greater cohesion with like-minded donors, ... While we are moving towards integration with some donors in key areas, ... others are more constrained and lack flexibility* (DFID 2003, p.12). But the question here may be what do the like minds hold and what does flexibility mean and flexibility to whose interests?

The DFID country assistance paper also observed that *'a number of active donors meet to discuss general and sector specific issues. However, there is need for better consultations and dialogue especially with the international financial institutions on important policy issues* (p.11). A related concern for many donor activities regards the taxing effect they could have on a Ministry of Education already spread thin both in terms of human resources and management capabilities. It must indeed be emphasized that funding is fungible and that an overabundance of uncoordinated donors can crash local ownership and boost transaction costs. In fact DFID agrees that this is what is happening in Malawi and that *efforts devoted to negotiation and procedure harmonization are highly time consuming* (p.12). One can expect that this state of affairs is also weakening institutions of the state and eroding the capacity through the administrative burden of multiple projects.

Public Spending on Education in Malawi

According to Kishindo (1998), the Malawi government has never had a social development policy and social sector expenditure in Malawi has been justified in economic terms. 'Health and education were treated not as basic needs but as aids to the productivity of labour. Government's failure to treat health and education as basic needs has led to under-funding of these areas with the consequent failure to provide adequate services to most of the population' (p.19). Thus, the major problem regarding the historic under-funding of education in Malawi has been that government development policy has given the production sector priority over the social sectors. The first Development Policy clearly emphasized on the production sector:

The choice of the strategy, which gives top priority to raising agricultural productivity, is dictated by the present pattern of economic activity among the population, but also by the nature and distribution of Malawi economic resources. (GOM 1971, p.1).

In Malawi, debt servicing now eats up to 38 percent of government recurrent budget. These transfers on top of an erratic domestic product, virtually place a lid on any potential growth in the Gross National Product (Owens 1997, p.12). The amount spent on servicing the country's huge external debt of close to US\$2 billion, has fluctuated on a yearly basis between 8 and 25 percent of the government revenue. This has been at the expense of public investment in much needed social services such as health, education and housing (Owens, 1997).

Moyo (1992) observed that this under funding of the social sector is reflected in the average public expenditure on the social sector as a share of GDP of 5.9 percent between 1964 and 1969, 5.3 percent between 1970 and 1980 and 6.7 percent between 1980 and 1985. Moyo noted that as a result, government expenditure on education, standing at less than 3 percent of national income, was low both in absolute and relative terms to most of Sub-Saharan African countries (over 5 percent in Kenya, and Zambia, nearly 7 percent in Zimbabwe and more than 8 percent in Botswana) (p.292). This under-funding of education over many years has had a

devastating consequence for the development of education in the country. In Figure 2 below, the recurrent expenditure in education as a percentage of GDP since the early 1990s has been presented.

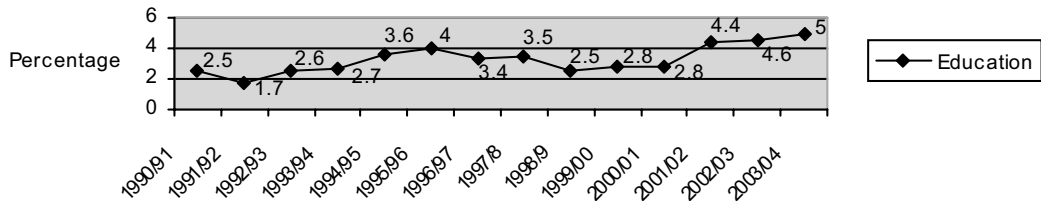


Figure 2: Education Recurrent Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP

It can be seen from the figure above that although recurrent expenditure in education as a percentage of GDP increased in the early years of the FPE policy, it reverted back to its normal levels of less than 3 percent after only four years of implementing the policy. This demonstrates the difficulty faced by developing countries in sustaining high levels of support to education. Thus, if the emphasis of self-help at the recipient level suggest not only being in the drivers' seat but also that the country should make a substantial contribution towards the financing of the reform agenda and long-term sustainability, the evidence rendered above shows that this national obligation is clearly at odds with any regime with a substantial degree of aid dependency (King, 2004).

Trends in Recurrent Expenditure in Education

Overall government revenue and expenditure performance determines the size of education expenditure. Government expenditure is divided into recurrent and development. While development account is mainly for capital investments, construction and other development related activities, recurrent expenditure defines the amount of money available for the day-to day running of the Ministry of Education. In Figure 3 below, recurrent expenditure levels in education as a percentage of national total have been presented.

The trend shown by the figure below indicates that there was a steady increase in the percentage of money allocated and spent for educational purposes from 1992 to 1994/95 (the year in which free primary education was introduced). This

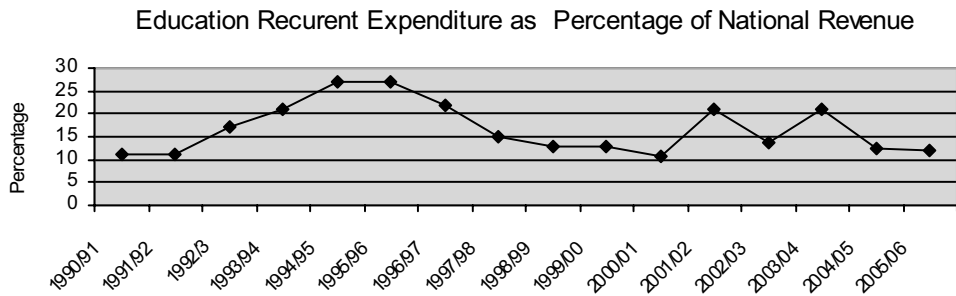


Figure 3: Education Recurrent Expenditure as a Percentage of National Revenue

high level of recurrent allocation continued until 1997 when there was a drastic decrease in the allocation to education. Two issues arise from the figure above. The first issue is that there are a lot of fluctuations in the allocation of resources to the education sector which means that planners and managers are never sure about the amount of resources available for the sector. The second issue is that the high commitment to education after the FPE dwindled as the years passed by. Again all these demonstrate the difficulty embedded in attempting to provide for genuine EFA.

Within Sector Allocations

Because of the pro-secondary education attitude of the post-independence era, the Second Education Plan 1985- 95, began to shift emphasis away from secondary and post-secondary education. Specifically, the plan aimed at providing as soon as possible places and resources in schools for the number of children represented by 85 percent of the primary school age population. Calculations of unit expenditure on the revenue account from the 1991/92 financial year showed that indeed government started to make more resources available to the primary level rising from 56 percent in 1991/92 to 77 percent in the year of FPE policy.

However, although primary education receives the lion's share of the education budget, per pupil expenditures are still very low compared to the secondary and tertiary level education. For example, in 2002/03, a secondary student and a student teacher were 4 and 64 times as expensive respectively as a primary pupil, while the university ratio was 129:1. It must be pointed out that apportioning expenditure in Malawi is a problem. Currently, administrative costs involved in

the various levels are not included in the unit costs calculations. Some CDSS teachers are paid under primary school teachers and MIITEP trainees were still receiving full primary salaries thereby understating the unit costs for secondary and teacher training.

The calculations also showed that while giving due attention to the primary education sector, the government also progressively increased funding for the higher education sectors. While absolute increases for primary education have been greater since the UDF government took office in 1994, relative funding increases for secondary, teacher education, technical and university education have surpassed primary education (Lewin 1999). The truth of the matter however is that, if government does not take steps to seek cost recovery at the secondary and indeed tertiary levels, the burden of a government budget that already has too many demands on it to cover increased educational expenditure will eventually become unbearable.

Modelling the Costs²

In this section, attempt is made to examine the requirements for Malawi if a genuine provision for EFA was to be made. Using a simulation model (UNESCO, 1991), estimates are made of the number of teachers, classrooms and other resources needed if Malawi were to provide schooling for all, as defined by Colclough and Lewin (1993). These were projected over a 15 year period to give an indication of the cost implications of such attempts. The base year for the simulation was 1997. Two models were projected. The first maintained the status quo, and none of the indicators was assumed to have changed. The projected school age population of 6-13 years was based on growth rate hypothesized to be at 2.5 percent throughout the 15-year period. New admissions were also assumed to remain at the 1997 rate of 190 percent throughout the fifteen years.

In the second model, several policy options were simulated. Population growth rate was assumed, as in the first model, to be constant at 2.5 percent throughout the period. But new admissions were assumed to be constant for the first five years and to decline to 120 percent in the next five years, reaching 100 percent by the end of the fifteen year period. In addition, policy changes were included

in respect of T/P ratios and the provision of teaching-learning materials, in order to raise the quality of schooling and increase the efficiency of the system by reducing repetition and dropout rates. It was projected that in ten years time, the T/P ratio would be reduced to 1:50, with the intention of reducing it further to 1:45 by the end of the fifteen year-period. It may be noted that the 1:50 teacher pupil ratio was previously used (see 1994 statistics) but it appears it was changed because of the flood of pupils resulting from the introduction of FPE, and increased to 1:60 in order to lessen the demand for teachers. My argument is that planning at 60 pupils to a teacher is still too high for the provision of genuine EFA.

It was assumed further that both repetition and dropout should be reduced to 10 percent in the first grade and to 5 percent in all other grades. Using these ratios and total pupil enrolments, the total teacher requirement for the future was projected. It was also argued that in addition to improving the T/P ratio, effort should be made to improve teaching conditions through increases in salaries, in-service training and better accommodation. These initiatives should start early at the end of the five-year period and were estimated at K1,000 per teacher per year. The effect of these should be a reduction in the teacher attrition rate from 7 to 5 percent by the end of ten years. If schooling of a minimum quality is to be provided, it is assumed that every pupil must have the required basic textbooks³, and should be taught in a classroom. This was estimated at K80 per pupil. With all these policy reforms, the total cost to the primary education sector was then calculated. The results of the projections have been summarized in Figure 4.

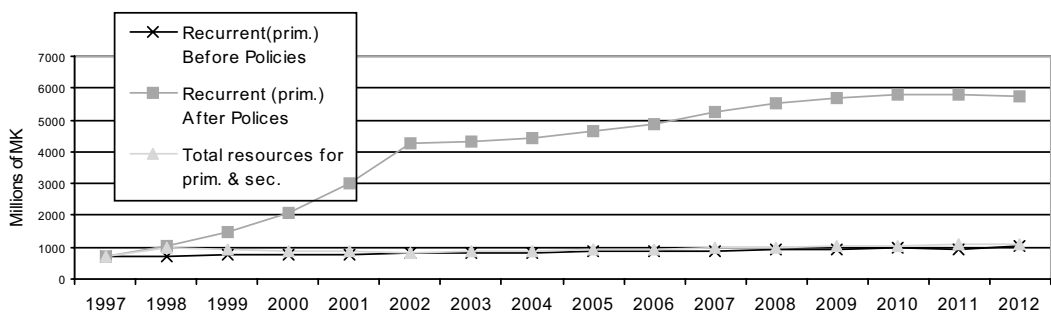


Figure 4: A Simulation of Recurrent Costs for Primary Education (1997 prices).

The main effect of reducing repetition is a slowing down of the total costs, as children move more quickly through the system and hence there is a reduction in the total costs of primary education. A reduction of repetitions is also expected to increase the number of graduates (through its effect on dropouts) and decrease the required inputs per graduate. When the effects of a reduction of repetitions are combined with the effects of a reduced dropout rate, the mixture of these two strategies reinforce both the increase in the number of graduates and the decrease in the number of pupil years per graduate. The overall result should be an improvement in the efficiency of the system. Figure 5 shows the number of new entrants into Standard 8 (from a cohort excluding repeaters already in Standard 8) in the two simulations.

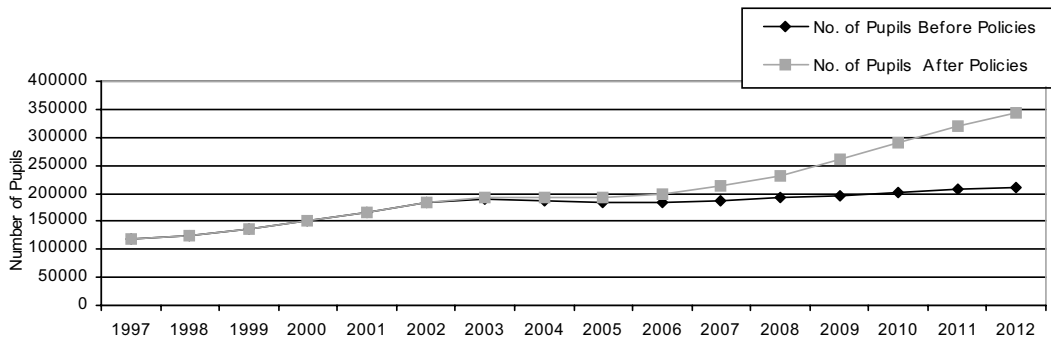


Figure 5: Number of Pupils Reaching Standard Eight.

From Figure 5, the effects of increased internal efficiency are shown by the rise in the number of pupils reaching standard 8. Here, it means that, more pupils are progressing through the system faster than is possible in the absence of policy reforms. Thus, the longer a pupil is enrolled beyond the minimum time required, the more teacher time, classroom space, textbooks and other teaching/learning materials and educational services will be needed, and indeed the more costs will be incurred by the family to keep the pupil in school.

The simulated model above might have underestimated the requirements for provision of genuine EFA but the impact to the system in terms of costs as a result of instituting quality improvements reforms is obvious from Figure 4, which also illustrates the challenge of providing minimum quality education. The recurrent costs for primary education increased by more than fivefold, meaning that

Malawi would have to allocate at least 30 percent of her GNP to education. This is obviously not possible and even allocating one and half times the current 6 percent is not sustainable. World Bank (1995:4) observed that in 1990/91, non-salary recurrent expenditure per primary school pupil was 11.5 percent of public spending on education. In 1995, this had declined to 3 percent due to the rise in enrolments and in corresponding requirement for teachers, which was not supported by a proportional increase in budgetary allocations for non-wage items. This is the dilemma in which those attempting to provide EFA find themselves.

One of the messages from Figure 4 is that, given the funding crisis that afflicts the education sectors in most low income countries, donors who are serious about policy based reform of basic education have little alternative but to accept that the recurrent costs associated with increased primary schooling will have to be met from their own external resources (Bennell et al. 1998). At the end of Dakar conference, delegates seriously declared:

The international community acknowledges that many countries currently lack the resources to achieve education for all within an acceptable time-frame. New financial resources, preferably in the form of grants and concessional assistance, must therefore be mobilised by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, including the World Bank and regional development banks, and the private sector. We affirm that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources (World Education Forum, 2000, p.9).

While there was some assistance from donors after the introduction of FPE, the evidence suggests that there wasn't the renewed commitment called for in the Jomtien declaration. When the quality enhancing reforms were introduced in the model in 2002, the cost for primary education alone rose to K4251 millions which took almost the whole of the MoE budget. But what more could be asked from a country like Malawi, which had increased the allocation to education of the government budget to 27 percent? It appears that if external agents meet and urge Third World governments to encourage their citizens to go to school, they

are placing them in a predicament if the efforts made by these governments are not accorded the necessary support. However, the problem to this is that if a larger share of the cost is from donors, then they are likely to wish to influence or dictate the patterns of expenditures. And how long can these donors support such an increases? This is another dimension which is silent in the donor support to the provision of EFA- the silence regarding what happens after EFA.

Recent Budgets Re-examined

A major motivation of the HIPC initiative has been to use the resources freed by debt relief to help the poor. The poverty focus as expressed by the OECD in 1996, the World Bank's comprehensive framework and the increasing adoption of poverty reduction strategies in Africa marks a major departure in educational planning. Indeed the implementation of international targets and the MDG has seen a proliferation of approaches to the whole development planning process such as SWAP, PRSP, budget support and many more. All these have been imposed as ways of building ownership, and the spirit of self-reliance in the recipient countries. Malawi's commitment to poverty reduction and indeed self-help and sustainability of projects, can best be assessed by examining the 2003/04 budget. This is particularly so because firstly, the 2003/04 budget coincided with presidential and parliamentary elections and secondly because there was every hope that donors were to come back after two years of abstinence.

In reviewing the 2003/04 budget statement delivered by the Minister of Finance on 4th July, 2003, it can be observed that the Minister noted that while poverty and unemployment had evidently been on the increase, economic growth had remained low or negative in recent years. Obviously, this was counter to the much acclaimed poverty reduction. First, poverty reduction takes place only when there is substantial and sustained economic growth. Second, and in the context of Malawi, poverty reduction can only be sustained if the poor and small-scale operators are directly and adequately involved in the targeted economic growth programmes. Was there adequate provision for "pro-poor and small-scale sources of growth" in the 2003/04 Budget?

The PRSP continues to be a guiding tool for budget formulation and execution

through the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and the recently re-introduced Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). The commitment to utilize MPRSP as a guiding tool for planning and budgeting was strengthened by the passing in Parliament of three legal instruments, namely; the Public Finance Management Act, the Public Audit Act, and the Public Procurement Act. The 2003/04 budget forecasted an overall deficit of K20,531.94 million to be wholly funded by grants from donors. It was not clear however where the sources of grant funding were, given the fact that foreign pledges have not been honoured in recent years⁴. The implication was that if these grants were not received, the government was to source them domestically with unfavourable consequences on the already high inflation and interest rates. This of course was likely to generate additional macroeconomic instability.

A scrutiny of some of the budget allocations in Table 1 shows that the recurrent allocations for non-growth ministries and public institutions of the National Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the Presidency increased substantially.

Table 1: Recurrent Expenditure Allocations (K'000)

Ministry/Institution	2002/03 approved	2003/04	percent Change
State Residence	256,915.90	327,573.00	27.5
OPC	485,165.00	868,709.00	79.1
The 1st Vice President Office	64,708.70	75,082.00	16.0
The 2nd Vice President Office	0	54,000.00	-
The National Assembly	387,328.00	491,384.00	26.7
National Intelligence Bureau	60,313.00	158,000.00	162.0
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	821,201.00	1,228,554.90	49.6
Ministry of Education	5,051,920.70	6,412,180.40	26.9
Poverty Alleviation Trust Fund	0	1,995.70	-
Immigration Department	106,949.50	141,350.60	32.2
Administrator General	7,744.80	13,531.60	74.7
Human Rights Commission	30,627.50	41,662.80	36.0
Anti-Corruption Bureau	61,433.00	82,000.00	33.5

In trying to address the question as to whether the Malawi government is committed to poverty reduction, the worrying picture in this regard is the doubling of recurrent expenditure allocation to OPC from K485,165,000 in 2002/03 to K868,709,000 in 2003/04 and the trebling of the recurrent expenditure allocation to the National Intelligence Bureau. This does not demonstrate that Government is highly committed to the fundamental goal of poverty reduction and economic growth which was, in itself the theme running through the 2003/04 budget. One may also wonder whether there was any political will or that the much sang song of poverty reduction was nothing but rhetorical. These figures also beg the question as to whose poverty was it being alleviated anyway? The evidence from the increased allocations to the election active institutions suggests that fiscal policy management was not to be "elections neutral" and, by extension, that it was not to generate the conducive environment required for the economic ministries to promote economic growth (Magalasi, 2003).

The evidence also indicated that there had been a substantial reduction in allocations to over 50 percent over the Protected Pro-poor Expenditures (PPEs). Whereas there was a significant increase to K100,000,000 for teaching and learning materials for secondary schools, this was accompanied by a substantial decline in the provision for teaching and learning materials in primary schools from K436,311,000 in 2002/03 to K300,000,000 in 2003/04. And rather surprising for a pro-growth budget though, was that the PPE allocation for Technical and Vocational Training had declined from K168,085,000 in 2002/03 to K162,301,000 in 2003/04. In addition to the reduced allocation to Technical and Vocational Training, it was also observed that the total allocation to Pro-poor sources of growth, in the context of protected Pro-Poor Expenditures, had declined by a substantial 38.4 percent from K1,430,983,000 in 2002/03 to K911,889,150 in 2003/04.

An attempt was also made to examine the 2005/06 budget. In the 2005/6 fiscal year government projected total revenue and grants at MK116, 188 million and total expenditure of MK118, 801 million. Government planned to spend this money on several social services including on education, health and other sectors as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Education vs Other Selected Sectors 2005/6 Budget

SECTOR	REVISED 04/05	ESTIMATE 05/06	% Change
Overall Budget	91,887,000,000	118,801,000,000	29
Education	11,300,982,618	11,934,601,435	5
The Presidency	4,410,000	20,000,000	353
National Assembly	836,344,035	1,053,686,879	26
Office of the President and Cabinet	1,862,338,721	2,581,443,935	38
Nutrition, HIV/AIDS	0	5,314,977,000	-
Agriculture	6,050,467,243	12,559,309,041	107
Health	11,058,000,000	12,780,000,000	110
Subventions	3,582,000,000	4,411,000,000	23
Foreign Affairs	1,947,365,669	2,362,000,000	21
Home Affairs	73,420,553	1,293,130,179	1,661
National Roads Authority	4,123,500,000	10,082,376,000	144

The Ministry of Education total recurrent and development budget for 2005/6 was at MK11, 894 million, which was 10% of total budget from 2004/5 revised MK11, 300 million which was 12% of total budget. Out of this figure MK9, 265 million was for recurrent and MK2, 629 million was for development expenditure. The recurrent budget was broken down into MK7, 300 million for personal emoluments and MK1, 964 million for other recurrent transactions (ORT) from 2004/05 revised MK6, 631 million and MK2, 000 million respectively. The rest of the estimates appear in Table 3 below.

The greatest concern was the continuing decline in government expenditure on education at the time stakeholders expected government to increase it. As observed above, historically government commitment to fund education ministry has declined from allocating around 27% of total budget in the 1990s to 10% in 2005/6 financial year. In fact, the percentage increase from 2004/05 figures was only by 5% which was the lowest among key sectors relative to agriculture, health, national roads authority, the presidency and others. For instance, the overall budget increased

Table 3: Overview of Education Budget Estimates 2005/6

Item	REVISED 2004/5	ESTIMATE 2005/6	DIFFERENCE	%AGE+-
National	K91.89bn	118.8	26.91	+29.2
Education	K11.3bn	11.89	0.593	+5%; 10% of total
<i>Recurrent</i>	K8.631bn	9.265	0.633	+7.3%
<i>Development</i>	K2.669bn	2.629	(0.394)	-1.5%
<i>Emoluments</i>	K6.631bn	7.300	0.669	+10%
ORT	K2.000bn	1.964	(0.360)	-1.8%
Administration	K402.628mn	397.880	(4.748)	-1.1%
Primary	K605.791mn	388.010	(217.9)	-35.9%
Secondary	K702.501mn	796.340	93.839	+13.35%
Tertiary	K289.580mn	382.222	92.642	+31.9%

by 29%, agriculture by 107%, health by 110% and national roads authority by 144%, while the presidency had increased by 353%. Civil society, members of parliament, Ministry of Education officials and stakeholders who have been monitoring Education for All (EFA) Goals and Millennium Development Goals have been calling for an allocation closer to the 26% advocated for by the United Nations at the international level required to achieve EFA Goals by 2015. The decline in education budgetary allocation showed that government was less committed to sort out the many challenges in education, and was in disrespect of international obligations to achieve EFA Goals and deal with the dwindling standards of education. Moreover over MK7 billion of the MK11.9 billion for education was allocated to personal emolument alone. This means that less than 30% of the budget was going to development and ORT activities, signaling that funding for education sector was less than desired. This was perhaps one of the biggest dilemmas for the Ministry of Education. While the need on the ground was for increased number of teachers coupled with increased or improved conditions of service for teachers, any attempt to address these two issues, simply takes away the money for resources for the actual teaching and learning.

In the analysis of the budgets, it can be conclude that the economic growth process funded through the 2003/04 budget exhibited eliticism and large-scale

enterprise bias. It was in the interest of the goal of poverty reduction that pro-poor sources of growth be adequately provided for in the budget. While the growth orientation of the budget was a welcome one, the worrying thing was that the expenditure allocation to "pro-poor and small-scale sources of growth" had been reduced. *Many deserving activities suffered the blunt of the budget's elitist orientation* (Magalasi, 2003). The evidence above demonstrated that while funding was low due to the exiguity of fiscal resources (including aid), long advocated reforms needed to embrace the poverty reducing impact of public expenditure are sometimes impeded by vested producer and consumer interests. In the Malawian context, there was need to demonstrate beyond the rhetoric, the type of strong political will necessary to undertake major policy changes. Lack of real political will has seen a dwindling support for education which results in gross inadequacy in provision for the education sector.

Discussions

More than four decades of international targets setting have passed but the achievement of these targets remains elusive. It would seem that missing in these target setting, is a holistic approach to planning which goes beyond the quantitative targets to explore how to go about financing these policies and indeed what happens after achieving their targets. It is also necessary to think about the ethical nature of the targets, and indeed how they can be realistic for all the countries with different conditions and contexts. As Little (2004) asked, what kind of education is needed to put the vision of EFA a reality? The evidence from Malawi suggest that unless attention is paid to the quality, relevance and fit of primary schooling, the possibility that it can contribute to a pro-poor strategy is unlikely to be realized (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003, Chimombo 2005).

Today's concerns about development partnerships fall short of addressing the problems of coordination, ownership and dependence. There is no doubt that FPE in Malawi was in general; Malawi's own initiative to provide education to the majority of the population. There is also no doubt that the formulation of PRSP utilized the available means to ensure the full participation of the society's stakeholders. The big question that arises from these modalities is what next or

so what? These big questions cannot be answered by such broad declarations as:

The world community, including intergovernmental agencies and institutions, has an urgent responsibility to alleviate the constraints that prevent some countries from achieving the goal of education for all. It will mean the adoption of measures that augment the national budgets of the poorest countries or serve to relieve heavy debt burdens (WCEFA, Declaration, 1990, p.8-9).

Declarations like this one and the many more from the Jomtien and Dakar conferences are too broad and lack a clear and detailed elaboration of the funding mechanisms if a genuine education for all is to be provided. They mean little to the program and strategy planners at the country level. Malawi was one of the first developing countries to respond to the Jomtien declaration by making a board decision to remove fees. But as seen above, because of lack of internationally instituted "modus operandi", the local donors could not be coordinated in a manner that ensured that adequate levels of required resources were mobilized. If the requirement is that Malawi should spend 30 percent of her GDP, then the message from Malawi is that the achievement of EFA is impossible without heavy donor support with its implications for increased aid dependency. The other message arising from the Malawi's experience is that leaving it to local donor agencies to respond to a country seriously committed to the provision of EFA simply thwarts the achievement of the Dakar pledges. Thus, in increasing the role of the state, we need to be cognizant of the fact that the scale of external support required for implementation of policies for genuine EFA counters the ownership and sustainability initiatives of national plans and priorities.

There is also a very devastating dimension of the whole North-South relationship and the politics of aid. This relationship is shaped by the way the so-called MDGs are formulated which dictates that the donors are more central to the implementation of the new modalities (King 2004). Commenting on this aspect, formulators of the PRSP in Malawi had this to say:

(formulators)

There is often an underlying assumption on the part of development partners that because they are benevolent donors, everything they do is in the best interests of Malawians and they are above criticism. However, the reality is that at best, donors do not effectively use their resources for poverty reduction, and at worst help to exacerbate poverty by undermining Government's planning and priority setting. (GOM 2001, p.93)

The people who formulated the PRSP went further to say that the preparation of the PRSP basically involved three stages. *These were **mobilisation, preparation and validation** processes. The three stages were aimed at: building broad Malawian ownership of the PRSP; building consensus on PRSP in order to enhance likelihood to policy adoption, implementation and sustainability; to ensure donor "buy in" to PRSP and to meet donor requirements (p.143).* Thus, while recognizing the underlying assumption of the development partners, the technocrats in Malawi still had to take into considerations the donors' interests for fear that they would not buy in to their strategies. Whose agenda is being fulfilled under these circumstances then?

There are also the hidden agendas of the countries of the North. The nature of the North-South relationship is such that the South should always agree with what the North has already laid out. Any recipient country that stands firm on what she believes is right for herself invites drastic measures from the donor side. The action by DANIDA to withdraw all aid to Malawi in 2002 amidst massive innovations orchestrated by DANIDA herself can be described as one such devastating actions of the North. Indeed, the many times IMF has frozen aid to Malawi directs us to the realization that in the North-South relationship, the aid politics of the North is what matters. It would seem that in this relationship, where one party has funds to allocate and the other seeks these funds, equality is not possible. *If so, then dialogue, partnership and similar terms become a facade to obscure the entrenchment of dependence (Samoff, 1999).* This means that the people of the South must lose their conscious, must lose their integrity and indeed must lose "their-self" if they are not to lose the precious "aid" from the North.

Where is the *partnership which is supposed to be based on mutual trust and respect between Africa and the rest of the international community?*

As developed countries consider supporting developing countries towards realizing the targets for developments in the millennium, (halving the number of people in extreme poverty by 2015, and universal primary education by 2015) through exploitation of their potentials, respect for self help and the boosting of their ability to form and implement their own development visions, it is important to realize that the African continent has a diversity of traditions and cultural values which are also driven by motives of self-gratification. The commitment of the people to their country's economic development is seriously inadequate and the "Gambare" spirit and the maximization of the development process are completely missing in the Malawian context and instead, a spirit of self-gratification is prevalent⁵. You only have to talk to a few civil servants to appreciate the extent of the problem of exploitation of government resources by ministers and senior officers at the various levels of the bureaucracy. It is also possible that this self-gratification spirit is reinforced by both the traditional ways of upbringing children in Malawian society, as well as by the rote learning and the examination oriented nature of the education system. Pupils' progression from one level of education to another is highly competitive in the Malawi education system.

Conclusion

The global education agenda dates back to the early 1960s with the great conferences in Addis Ababa, Santiago, and Karachi. When the agenda was resurrected in 1990 with the Jomtien conference which advocated an expanded vision for EFA agenda, it was realized that many countries had failed to provide basic education for all their citizens. And an assessment of the provision of genuine EFA in Malawi has proved the task to be insurmountable. At the moment, the provision of EFA through FPE as envisaged by the Jomtien conference is yet to become a reality in Malawi's schools. The evidence points to the fact that countries like Malawi, which try to provide EFA, may put themselves in a state of predicament in the absence of genuine outside support. And it would also be safe to say that the goal of gender parity by 2005 for primary and secondary has clearly not be

met and attention needs to be focused not only on access but on retention and quality. It is important to understand better what works for girls and share the experiences. Despite numerous attempts on improving girls' education in Malawi, girls still lag behind in terms of completion.

National Planning and the setting of priorities within the field of education should be a question of finding a balance between different objectives, levels of education and target groups. A systemic approach is required and the challenge is strong and sustained commitment and leadership manifested in strategic sectoral policy, adequate allocation of resources to the sector, and a willingness to implement contentious policies. The lesson from the FTI shows that external support for primary education in low-income countries, will need to increase from just over \$1 billion to about \$3.7 billion. *While some FTI partners have been quick to respond to, others will need to make fundamental changes in the way they do business, in particular to increase financial levels, to make financing more flexible and predictable, and to finance an increased level of recurrent costs (World Bank 2004, p.12).* The FTI demonstrates, for the education sector, the broad reality that even under the most optimistic growth scenarios and best fiscal management, the dependency of many low-income countries on external aid will remain stable or increase over the short and medium terms. But given the manner in which developed countries are behaving towards the implementation of UPE, EFA or call it schooling for all or Universal Primary Completion, it is very doubtful that the set targets of 2015 will be met and the majority of our children will continue to be denied the power to reflect, make choices and enjoy a better life. Under these circumstances, it will definitely not make sense for the international community to meet and yet again, make similar sets of declarations.

Notes

1. In the year of FPE policy, purchase of textbooks accounted for 13.8 percent of total development budget for primary education.
2. This is based on my earlier work in Chimombo 1999.
3. Only 4 textbooks per pupil were included in the simulation and the cost was spread over the total period.
4. The IMF had frozen aid to Malawi for the past two years on human rights grounds.

5. The donor community in Malawi is worried with a culture of allowances and vowed to crackdown this problem by outlawing all seminars at the lake, and devising their own rates for allowances.

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