

An Investigation into the School Improvements in Primary Schools as a Result of Direct Support to Schools (DSS) Grant in Malawi

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Malawi introduced Free Primary Education in 1994 soon after democratic elections. Enrollment dramatically increased from 1.9 million in 1994 to almost 3 million in 1995. However, the resource implications were enormous. For instance, with a total of 5106 schools in the country the infrastructure shortage is serious with a gap of 24510 classrooms, 39696 teachers houses, 3057 head teachers offices, 3932 staffrooms, and 4700 libraries. The average Classroom pupil ratio is 1:116 while the average Teacher-pupil ratio is 1:81. Teaching and learning materials are also said to be inadequate, (Government of Malawi, 2009).

MoEST/UNICEF (2008) report rates of absenteeism averaging 30% in the third term of the 2008 school year and repetition rates of 20% are the highest in the SADC region. High dropout rates result in completion rates of 32% per cohort which means that 68% do not finish primary schooling. This low completion rate means that even with a high enrolment rate of 140% GER, Malawi can never reach universal primary education which entails completing the eight year primary cycle. According to SACMEQ studies, Malawi's mean reading score of 429 and a mean mathematics score of 433 were the lowest in the region where the regional mean was 500 for reading (Chimombo, Kunje, Chimuzu, & Mchikoma, 2005). These statistics indicate a low quality of education.

The Government of Malawi embarked on a series of efforts to deal with the challenges brought by the introduction of free primary education. For instance, they recruited 22,000 extra teachers, provided teaching and learning materials, introduced a distance mode of training teachers to reduce pupil teacher ratios and are still constructing schools and classrooms. As one way of helping address the teaching and learning resource challenges facing the education system in Malawi, with support from the World Bank initiated a programme to directly support schools financially in 2006. The programme was referred to as the Direct Support to Schools (DSS). Initially a limited number of schools benefitted for the purpose of purchasing teaching and learning materials (Government of Malawi, 2006).

As the Malawi government was engaged in a series of efforts to deal with the challenges emanating from the increased enrolment, a national decentralization policy was approved in 1998, the core of which was to facilitate grassroots participation in decision making processes.

Specifically, the national decentralization policy, was approved with a view to :

- Create a democratic environment and institutions in the country for governance and development at the local level which facilitate participation of the grassroots in decision making
- Eliminate multiplicity in administration,
- Mobilize the masses for socio-economic development at the local level.

In the decentralized setting there are six levels of administration – the Central level (Ministry Headquarters), District Assembly (DA), District Education Manager (DEM), Zonal Primary Education Advisor (PEA), School Management Committee (SMC) and Parents Teacher Association (PTA) (Government of Malawi, 2008b). The central level is responsible for policy training, curriculum development and international representation. DAs are responsible for, among other things, actual delivery of education services by primary schools in accordance with policies, standards and criteria set by the central level Ministry headquarters to ensure quality of education. The DEM has to, among other responsibilities, prepare district education plans, prepare budget estimates for local education authorities monitor day to day operations of education institutions, post teachers, appoint head and deputy head teachers of schools and prepare budgets and account for all expenditures in the district. The PEAs advise heads of schools and teachers on professional matters, inspect schools, assist DEM in accounting for expenditure and determine budget requirements in the zone. The SMC oversees the development and execution of school action plans while the PTA holds the SMC accountable for all activities in the school.

With decentralization, DSS was meant to serve two purposes: support the purchase of teaching and learning materials and small scale school maintenance, and strengthen community participation in school management and the procurement of the teaching and learning resources.

1.2 Direct Support to Schools (DSS)

The DSS funding involved giving financial support to schools through the District Assemblies in compliance with the decentralization policies. According to DSS policy guidelines (Government of Malawi, 2006) DSS started in 2006, under the Education Sector Support Project (ESSUP 1) of the World Bank and was funded through the IDA grant. Whilst the initial purpose of DSS was to help schools purchase basic teaching and learning materials in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, this was reviewed after the implementation of two cycles of the grant to include maintenance and rehabilitation as well. The review of purposes was implemented when the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) joined the World Bank in school financing resulting in the enhancement of the grant (MoEST, 2008). The purpose of DfID additional funding was to help schools perform small scale maintenance and rehabilitation works. Thus while the teaching-and-learning-

materials-only grant was given by the World Bank between 2006 and 2008, in 2009, schools in addition, received maintenance and rehabilitation grants from DfID.

The DSS guidelines show that in the first year, 2006, all target schools received the same amount of US\$200 through their respective District Assemblies. In the second year of implementation, 2007, the disbursement of funds changed based on the enrolment of schools. Thus schools were categorized into enrolment bands that determined how much money they should receive as shown in table 1. In both the first and second year, the fund was meant for the procurement of teaching and learning materials.

Table 1: DSS grant and enrolment bands

Year	Band 1 Enrolment from-to 10-500	Band 2 Enrolment from-to 501-1,500	Band 3 Enrolment from-to 1,501-3,000	Band 4 Enrolment from-to 3,001-4,500	Band 5 Enrolment from-to Above 4,501
2006	K27,000 (\$200)	K27,000 (\$200)	K27,000 (\$200)	K27,000 (\$200)	K27,000 (\$200)
2007	K24,000 (\$170)	K27,000 (\$192)	K30,000 (\$214)	K33,000 (\$220)	K36,000 (\$257)

Source: Government of Malawi, 2008a

In the third year of implementation, 2008, the Department for International Development (DfID) extended the programme to all schools and increased both the scope and size of payments, linking them to school improvement plans. Thus, while the World Bank continued to fund the procurement of teaching and learning materials DfID funding allowed schools to allocate money for maintenance and rehabilitation needs identified through a simplified process of school improvement planning. In addition to the teaching and learning materials and the maintenance and rehabilitation grants, the DSS guidelines show that schools also received discretionary grants for which the school would have some autonomy to use either for teaching and learning materials or maintenance and rehabilitation. Table 2 summarises these grants for the various enrolment bands.

Table 2: DSS grant and enrolment bands from 2008 onwards

Grant purpose	Band 1 Enrolment from-to 10-500	Band 2 Enrolment from-to 501-1,500	Band 3 Enrolment from-to 1,501-3,000	Band 4 Enrolment from-to 3,001-4,500	Band 5 Enrolment from-to Above 4,501
Teaching and learning materials	K24,000	K27,000	K30,000	K33,000	K36,000
Maintenance and Rehabilitation	K40,000	K48,000	K56,000	K64,000	K72,000
Discretionary	K8,000	K9,600	K11,200	K12,800	K14,400
Total	K72,000 (\$514)	K84,000 (\$600)	K97,200 (\$693)	K109,800 (\$784)	K122,400 (\$874)

Source: Government of Malawi, 2008a

After some years of DSS programme implementation, CERT felt it was necessary to investigate the impact of the fund inschools. This was partly because schools had never received any money from the Government before the introduction of DSS and most head teachers might have had limited exposure to large sums of cash at the school level and formal school budgeting and accounting was not yet widely spread among the primary schools. The interest was on how the money was used at school level in order to understand some of the benefits and challenges experienced at that level. The benefits are necessarily linked to improved quality of education as this was the target of DSS. In addition however, it was of interest to explore how DSS implementation works in a decentralized structure.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Most schools in Malawi are characterized by inadequate teaching and learning materials. This leads to poor learning as learner centered teaching methodologies are difficult. Additionally, the lack of and/or poor conditions of classrooms result in overcrowded classes and many classes being conducted outdoors.

Inadequate numbers of desks per school entail that pupils should sit on cold cement floors and together with inadequate sanitary facilities children especially girls tend to absent themselves frequently at the smallest excuse and even drop out of school. Schools cannot address these seemingly petty issues because they are virtually not funded and have to wait for outside support which is in most cases not forthcoming. SMC can only manage minor repairs due to the small financial base derived from parent contributions which are very small. This study investigated the initial impact of the newly introduced Direct Support to Schools in a decentralized environment, which was meant to address the inadequacies of scholastic materials and schools' facilities, on the quality of education in primary schools.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the processes in the use of DSS funding once received at the school level?
2. What monitoring and control processes were in the schools receiving DSS funds?
3. In what ways has the DSS funding affected education quality?
4. What challenges did schools experience as a result of DSS funding?
5. How might DSS funding be improved for better impact on education quality and equity in the schools?

1.5 Significance of the Study

In the context of DSS and decentralization schools are learning to plan and manage finances in order to improve the quality of education. This provides an avenue to explore better ways of financing schools in dire straits and to identify priority needs of schools in different demographic settings. This study is an effort to link various funding regimes to quality improvements in the provision of education service which could result in improved quality of education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Models of School Financing

Models of financing schools from three Sub Saharan African countries are referred to in this paper. One model is that practiced in Ghana where schools are funded via a Capitation grant, school fees and community participation fees. Some schools also benefit from the Member of Parliament Common fund and donor support. However at the school level there are usually delays in receiving funds and in other cases not all the budgeted funds are released for use at the school. At the district level there are reports of mismanagement of funds meant for schools and the existence of ghost teachers who deplete the already meager funds. There have also been cases where Head teachers have been alleged to have mismanaged school funds (Ampiah & Yamada, 2008). In Kenya schools receive funds in the form of a Free Primary Education Grant, a School Facility Grant from the central Government and a Constituency Development Fund. In some cases, NGOs, Community Based Organisations, Harambees, well wishers and parents also fund schools. As in the case of Ghana, there are also reports of delays in funding and fluctuations in the amount of funding from time to time A more interesting case is that of Uganda where schools have budgets which include teachers salaries, scholastic materials, construction, rehabilitation and maintenance, extra curricular activities, school lunch and contingency funds. There are few cases of donations from NGOs, Old boys, parents and PTAs. Therefore schools depend entirely on government for the provision of facilities (Byagamusha and Nishimura, 2008). These models give insights into the possibilities of funding schools for optimum quality education.

Asian models also throw light on other modalities of funding schools. The Thai system provides a very interesting example. According to the Chiang Mai Educational Service Area 4, 98% of the funds are used for government schools while 2% is used for the private schools support. Of the 98%, 79.5% is used for salaries, 20.05% is allocated for study materials and 0.45% is for office upkeep. Each child from pre primary to higher secondary is allocated a certain amount of money per year, the amount increase the higher the level of education. Stationery and uniforms are provided free to all the school going children from year one to year 15. The service area looks after a designated number of schools and is responsible for academic matters, budgeting, personnel welfare and general affairs. A number of Service Area Committees ensure the smooth running of the various functions. At the school level the school board participate in school policy and proposing the vision and also approve the school plans and the curriculum. All these structures render the decentralized system efficient and focused and provide avenues for educational quality control

It was of interest in this study to explore the processes of DSS funding in primary schools in Malawi particularly what happens when the money reaches the school. Of equal interest was the impact of the grant on education quality whose framework is discussed next.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Investigating initiatives and their effects are categorised either as quantitative or qualitative. The focus of this study was largely qualitative. Although difficult to measure, qualitative indicators are important because they explain how and why certain choices are made. This study uses a systems model to look at the school improvements in primary schools as a result of the DSS funding to schools. There will be four categories of indicators: inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes, which are described as follows:

Inputs: These are the key resources that are being used/required/available to carry out an initiative, intervention or a programme. The inputs include: finances, materials (teaching and learning), facilities/environment (classrooms/desks), human resources (teachers/qualified) etc. In this study the key resources are the DSS funds given to schools.

Processes- These are the qualitative interactions that explain how inputs (DSS funds) are used at the school level, the mechanisms used for the administration of the funds and the monitoring and control processes. The same inputs can be used in many different ways in different school settings depending on the needs of the school, and processes can explain why some schools are of better quality than others. Here, we unravel the issues in the process of using the DSS funds.

Outputs- These are components that need to be put in place to ensure that there is quality and equity in education. In this study, the outputs could be the availability of teaching and learning materials, and improved infrastructure.

Outcomes- These indicators show the effects of the mix of inputs and processes. They relate to the change in practices at individual schools. It is here where the improvements and challenges in schools will be examined. Figure 1 portrays the model.

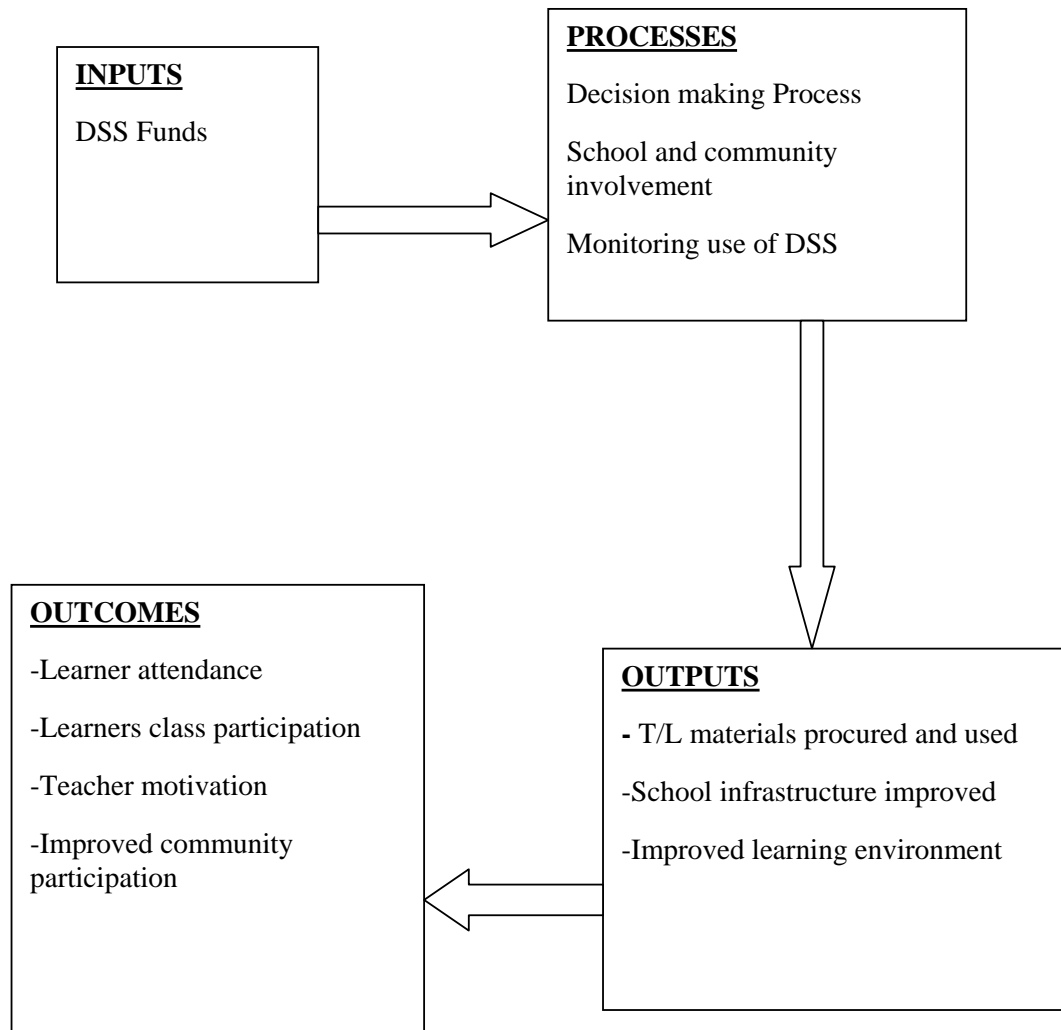


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

The methodology was largely qualitative due to the nature of the research questions. It made use of Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and document analysis.

3.1 Sample

The sample for the study included a total of six schools from Zomba, Blantyre and Mangochi districts in which two schools were selected from each district. The schools reflected both the urban and rural settings. The districts were selected based on education indicators and location; thus Blantyre district was selected for the typical urban school characteristics, while Mangochi was selected for the rural school characteristics and due to the low education indicators in the district and Zomba was selected to give a combination of both rural and urban. In total, there were three rural schools and three urban schools. From the six schools, two urban

schools were selected from Blantyre, two rural schools from Mangochi and one urban and one rural were selected from Zomba district purposively. At each school, the sample included the head teacher, teachers, and SMC/PTA members.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods for the study included Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and document analysis. At the district level key informant interviews were conducted with District Education Managers (DEMs) who are responsible for education in the whole district. At the school level, Individual interviews were conducted with head teachers while one FGD each was conducted with a group of teachers, and SMC/PTA members.

3.3 Analysis

The data, most of which was qualitative was analyzed by firstly reading through all the collected information to obtain a sense of the overall data. Then the data was reduced by clustering common themes as well as writing stories and tallying and ranking key informant responses to uncover the main issues that were arising.

4. Findings

4.1 The Processes in Decision Making for Use of DSS Funds

The DSS grant administration process in the six schools followed a similar process perhaps reflecting the guidelines set for the grant in the first place. The process started with the transfer of funds from the District Assembly to the District Education Office (DEMO) The DEMO informed schools through the Primary Education Advisors about how much each school had been allocated. When the head teacher was informed about the school's allocation for the year, a meeting of teachers and School Management Committee (SMC) members was called in order to identify priority needs for the school based on the school improvement Plan. Based on the fund allocation for teaching / learning materials as well as that for maintenance (as spelt out in the guidelines for the grant), the school head and SMC representatives collected quotations from prequalified suppliers for the priority needs. The quotations were scrutinized at the school level and three quotations were selected and submitted to the PEA who then forwarded them to the District Education Manager's Office (DEMO). The school management team thus plays a big role in deciding the materials to purchase and the infrastructure to maintain according to the needs of the school (thereby enhancing relevance in the use of the grant).

At the DEMO, the three quotations supplied by a school were further scrutinized after which one quotation (for each category of teaching and learning materials and maintenance) was approved and schools were informed of the approved quotation. The DEMO then wrote a cheque to the selected supplier and the school management took the cheque to the suppliers to collect the purchased goods. This practice is an improvement on the one used at the inception of

DSS when the DEMO would send the cheques directly to the supplier. The school management would then collect the materials from the suppliers after presenting the cheque to the suppliers. Although the reasons for the change in the latter procedure are not known, it makes sense for the supplier to interact directly with the client at both the payment and collection of materials and services levels. What is clear from this procedure is that DEMOs have more power in selecting the supplier of the materials and/or maintenance work after the school has submitted the three quotations, a practice that might enhance the accountability of the procurement of services. The disadvantage with the practice is that there are delays in the procurement process since schools have to wait for people at the DEMO to meet, select the supplier and write the cheque, which may be contrary to the intentions of the grant.

It was noted during the visits to the schools that mostly, head teachers were conversant with the processes involved to access the funds and procure the materials while some members of SMC/PTA could not remember the process probably because some were newly elected at the time of the visit or the process might not have been participatory.

4.2 Monitoring and Control Processes of DSS Funds

Generally, in all the six schools visited, it was reported that, all the stakeholders at the school level were invited to a meeting to be sensitized on the DSS fund received and the materials procured. Receipts were tendered as evidence of payment at such meetings. Head teachers in the three schools explained the participatory nature of the budgeting and procurement process i.e. where SMC and head teachers discuss the needs of the school and allocate funds, which acted as a control in itself to ensure the funds were put to good use. Additionally, SMCs monitor any maintenance or renovation works taking place so that they may check on the appropriate use of the materials procured. However, for all schools, the DEMO and PEA's were found to rarely visit them to monitor the progress or use of the procured materials. The DEMO's interest is in the submission of balanced receipts by the school, an area which creates accountability flaws especially in schools where only the head teacher collects materials without involving other members of the larger school management team. Besides limited monitoring on the use of materials at the school level, the study also found that there was no evidence of auditing for DSS funds in the visited schools. It is possible that this happens at the DEMO level using the balanced receipts sent by schools.

One DEM in one district explained that at the school level monitoring and control for DSS was done by the head teacher and the SMC chairperson although no further explanation was given on how this was done. However, he admitted that there was not much monitoring by the PEAs although they were supposed to do the monitoring.

Besides limited monitoring of the use of materials at the school level, the study also found that there was no evidence of auditing for DSS funds in the visited schools. It is possible that this happens at the DEMO level using the balanced receipts sent by schools. More evidence

about this will need to be explored in the main study.

4.3 Use of DSS

The availability of the funds to the schools followed by the interactions that went on in the schools to make decisions on the priority needs and indeed the transparency involved in the monitoring process allowed schools to make use of the funds according to their needs.

In general, the study found that the money is used for procurement of teaching and learning materials depending on the needs of the schools. While it was common to all visited schools to buy similar teaching and learning materials such as flip charts, pentel markers, scheme pads, pens and rulers, there was variation in the use of funds in terms of maintenance. In urban schools, the funds were mainly used for maintenance works such as burglar bars and locks for security purposes; white wash, paint, window panes and many other maintenance jobs. In rural areas it was common for the schools to use the money in building toilets, construction of the head teacher's office and rehabilitating classroom floors and windows. It is however, important that the schools procured materials and maintained equipment of their greatest need - and of specific relevance - to the school. This is a sign that the grant has in a way contributed to the improved functioning of the school.

4.4 The Impact of DSS Funding

The findings of the study have shown that DSS funding has positively affected the quality of education in the schools. The following are the impacts;

4.4.1 Improved Learning Environment

Results from the study have shown that the teaching and learning environment for both teachers and learners has improved in the selected schools as a result of the DSS funds. For instance, schools rehabilitated and maintained classroom floors, doors, and windows. Teachers and head teachers reported that the maintenance of windows in three of the schools where window panes were broken and learners were exposed to cold weather helped to create a conducive environment for learning. On the other hand, rehabilitation of classroom doors contributed to improved hygiene in the schools in the sense that no intruders or outsiders can access and mess up the secured classrooms after learners have finished their classes for the day as was previously the case in Zomba and Blantyre. This means that learners come to class not expecting to see disappointing sites in their classroom. The fund has also ensured safety and security in schools through fixing security items to classrooms such as burglar bars for windows and doors, buying of rim locks and many other Safety items. The improved security ensures the safety of teaching and learning materials displayed or stored in the classrooms so that teachers do not have to make them continuously and that learners use them for an extended period of time. Two schools used the DSS funds to paint some classrooms which led to a better teaching and learning environment for both teachers and learners.

4.4.2 Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials

The availability of teaching and learning materials plays a vital role in enhancing the teaching and learning process. The provision of DSS funds made some teaching and learning materials available in schools. Respondents in all the schools visited explained that the availability of teaching and learning materials as a result of DSS funds had improved the teaching and learning situation. It was reported that teachers used the flip charts procured to make teaching and learning aids to assist in their teaching. From the teachers' understanding, pupils learn better when they see real examples or their exemplifications on charts. Teachers observed that learners even scramble to be nominated to name something they see as a real object or on the chart. This also motivated the learners. It was also reported that procurement of scheme books and exercise books helped teachers to prepare lesson plans and schemes of work without difficulties.

4.4.3 Improved Teacher Motivation

Teachers mentioned that the availability of different teaching and learning materials enhanced their motivation as they could vary their teaching methods. There is however a need these findings with classroom observations which werenot captured in this study. Head teachers said that the availability of teaching and learning materials eased their management tasks as teachers were motivated. In addition, teacher motivation came in as a result of the fact they could leave their charts in the classroom without fear that someone would steal them. In two schools, one in Blantyre and another in Mangochi, teachers' houses were painted using DSS money. Such teachers were happy to stay in better houses. In both schools in Mangochi, DSS money was used to build head teachers offices which also served as staffrooms. Previously teachers could only prepare their work under the trees.

4.4.4 Improved Learner Motivation

The general picture from the respondents was that DSS had increased learner motivation towards schooling and therefore the implication was that in the long run, achievement could be improved. Part of the learner motivation as it relates to clean classrooms and access to a variety of teaching and learning approaches has already been alluded to in the foregoing discussion. Respondents from one school observed that pupil attendance had improved due to motivation although the study could not verify this. DSS money was also used to rehabilitate broken desks for learners. Teachers felt that the change from sitting on the floor to sitting on the rehabilitated desks motivated learners more especially the older ones.

The general impression from the study was that DSS has had some impact on enhancing learning. The improved learning environment, the availability of teaching and learning materials and improved teacher and learner motivation was said to have led to better teaching and learning which would eventually lead to improved quality of education. Interviews at the district level also revealed that the DSS funds helped in community empowerment. Thus the involvement of

SMC/PTA's in decision making gave them a sense of ownership and empowered them to look for solutions to problems affecting their schools.

4.5 Challenges

Despite the benefits related to quality as described, a number of challenges were experienced by the schools. One challenge emanated from the bureaucracy of getting the cheque from the DEMO to the supplier. It often took a long time before the DEMO issued the cheque so that by the time the cheque was ready, commodity prices would have gone up. At the same time, some materials could be out of stock by the time the cheque is written. For instance, four head teachers complained that sometimes the shop owners could replace the materials ordered by the school with different materials saying; "*these materials were finished so you can get these others instead*". In some cases, schools were forced to collect few materials on the understanding that they would collect others later. On the other hand, the delays by the DEMO meant that the immediate needs were not properly met as a long time elapsed and the immediate needs were no longer urgent.

Another related challenge cited by school management for each of the schools is the price fluctuations by suppliers themselves. The observation was that at the time when quotations were being sought, suppliers quoted lower prices in order to win the tender. Once the cheque was written, the suppliers changed the prices resulting in fewer items being bought. In one of the six schools, SMC/PTA's were not fully involved and this created a lot of mistrust with the SMC having an opinion that the head teacher was misusing the DSS money.

Respondents in all the six schools were of the view that the DSS grant was too little for the teaching and learning materials and maintenance needs of the schools and hence posed a challenge in prioritizing the school needs.

Interviews at the district level revealed that most of *the School Management Committee members are illiterate* and this led to poor participation.

It was also observed from respondents that schools were given a prescribed list of materials to choose from when deciding what to buy and a prescribed list of suppliers to get quotations from. This created challenges in that some of their school needs were not on the list and could not be met. They also had to travel long distances to source quotations from prescribed suppliers when they had some local shops within their areas.

One major challenge that was not mentioned by respondents but noted by the researchers was that of poor record keeping of the items bought through DSS. Only two of the six schools had data for the teaching and learning materials purchased using DSS funds and none of the schools was sure of the specific amounts of money allocated for teaching and learning materials or maintenance purposes.

4.6 Suggestions for Improvement

The discussions with the different groups of respondents led to a number of suggestions for improving the processing of DSS funds in order for these funds to achieve the intended

improved quality of education.

The first was that the money should come directly to the school account so that the school could decide where to buy the items and do it quickly. The challenge with this proposal would be mistrust among those responsible for allocating funds to different needs of the school, but where the SMC and head teachers are working well, this could be one good way forward. Other respondents suggested that there should be a proper monitoring and auditing component. Other suggestions were not in terms of the process of DSS. Rather, perhaps due to frustrations resulting from the DSS process, the suggestion was that the Government should consider bringing the needs of the schools directly to the schools instead of the money. However, this would lead to the same failures that were noted before DSS funding was put in place. The other suggestion was to perhaps increase DSS funding since it was observed that DSS funds were not enough to cater for the numerous needs of the schools such as renovation / construction of teacher houses and classroom blocks; repair / buying of desks etc. This could perhaps be one plausible way forward due to the increasing costs of materials. The other suggestion was to have flexibility in the use of DSS funds since the current process is limited to only earmarked types of expenditures.

5. Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that all the six schools followed a similar process in the use of the DSS funds. This is perhaps due to the guidelines set for the grant utilization in the first place. Both the school (heads and teachers) and the community (SMC/PTA) were represented in deciding the needs of the schools. The study also concludes that there was poor or limited monitoring of the DSS funds from the district officials although it was largely monitored at the school level by head teachers and SMC/PTA when the materials bought were shown to the teachers, learners, SMC/PTAs.

In terms of the use and impact of the funds, the general impression from the study was that DSS has had some impact on enhancing learning. Though the amount of the funds is small schools were able to use them to procure teaching and learning materials and to carry out minor maintenance and rehabilitation works. This led to improved environments for teaching and learning, made teaching and learning materials available, and improved teacher and learner motivation. The improved schooling conditions were said to have led to better teaching and learning which would eventually lead to improved quality of education. Interviews at the district level also revealed that the DSS funds helped in community empowerment. The involvement of SMC/PTAs in decision making gave them a sense of ownership and empowered them to look for solutions to problems affecting their schools.

When programmes and/ or initiatives are being implemented, challenges are always there and DSS funding was no exception. The study concludes that although DSS was affected by such challenges, it could be a better model of assisting schools financially if: the amount is increased, the money goes straight to schools' accounts, there is timely disbursement of funds,

schools are given autonomy to choose what they want to buy and where to buy to minimize transaction costs, and there is a strong monitoring mechanism.

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