Choice or Deprivation?
Primary School Drop outs in Malawi: The Case of Kasungu District

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Trondheim, May 2007

Dedication

To my dad, Patrick Elias Namphande for his perseverance and commitment to the course of my education, and the education of my brothers and sisters.

To my children Peter and Chikondi, for depriving them of my loving presence when they needed it most. And to my loving wife, Flora for covering up so well for me in my absence.

To the memory of my mum Susan Namphande and my brother Patrick (Jnr), who died while I was away from home.

Acknowledgements

Abstract.

For a country to develop, it needs an educated human resource. Besides the benefits of education to society, individuals have a better chance of escaping from poverty if they have the right kind and right levels of education. A Lack of functional education constitutes a deprivation of a basic capability. The purpose of this study was to find out the underlying causes of primary school drop out in Kasungu district, Malawi. It was undertaken to find out whether school drop out in this tobacco growing area was a result of deprivation or a matter of choice. The study followed a qualitative research design and the populations of interest were children who had dropped out of school, and their parents/ guardians. Several key informants also contributed to the study as well as a traditional leader. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and direct observation of phenomena. The Capability Approach by Amartya Sen was used in the analytical approach and framework. Data were analyzed by a coding system in which relevant and related passages to the research concerns were placed under themes which were presented in the writing as narratives using direct quotes from research participants.

The major finding of the study was that children drop out of school in the district as a result of deprivation of basic capabilities. It was observed that communities in the study area complimented the role played by Government in the provision of places for education since the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE). Although communities were endowed with schools, there were a number of factors which prevented people from taking advantage of such endowments. The Ministry of Education had not played its role of supplying learning materials satisfactorily. The lack of supply of learning materials to schools had the effect of limiting the access of pupils from poor households from attaining education. Similarly, communities in the study area expressed their dismay at the effectiveness and relevance of the education their children were getting. It was observed that people did not appreciate the role primary education played in their children since school graduates lacked marketable, and survival skills which could give them a meaningful occupation. As a result, parents/ guardians in some cases withdrew their contributions from activities meant to improve pupils' learning environments. Furthermore, most households placed more value on cultural practices at the expense of children's chances of schooling. It was noted that deprivations at the household level such as lack of command over adequate amounts of food, ill health, and death resulted in permanent damage done to the education prospects of children from vulnerable households. This was the case because the only entitlements at the command of most households were their labor and land. As such where unfreedoms existed, vulnerable households involved all the children available in the household to cope with such threats. As a result the schooling chances of children suffered. The study further observed that some parents directly discouraged their wards/ children from schooling due to their lack of support. Girls were noted to be the most deprived of educational opportunities due to the cultural roles played by females as caregivers, mothers, and wives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS.

AIDS : Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CDSS : Community Day Secondary School

CRECCOM : Creative Centre for Community Mobilization

FPE : Free Primary Education

GDP : Gross Domestic Product

HDI : Human Development Index

HIV : Human Immunodeficiency Virus

MK : Malawi Kwacha

MoEST : Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

MPRSP : Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

NORAD : Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

NSO : National Statistical Office

PEA : Primary Education Advisor

PSLCE : Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations.

TAMA : Tobacco Association of Malawi

TDC : Teachers' Development Centre

TIP : Targeted Input Programme

UNDP : United Nations Development Programme.

UPE : Universal Primary Education

USAID : United States Agency for International Development

US$: United States Dollar

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study was undertaken to find out the underlying causes of children dropping out of school before completing the primary school cycle in Kasungu district, Malawi. It was meant to get and present views, opinions and life experiences of the members of the affected households. This chapter will describe the state of education in Malawi and present the challenges that were being faced. It will also present the state and conditions of poverty prevailing in the country and how it was related to children dropping out of school.

Malawi is a land locked country located in Southern Africa. It is ranked number 165 on the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) which is a means of measuring standard well being. It indicates the measure of poverty, literacy, education, life expectancy, child birth, and other factors worldwide. Malawi has a gross domestic product (GDP) of US$ 605, an adult literacy rate of 64.1% and a combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools of 72%. The life expectancy at birth is 39.5 years (UNDP, 2005). According to the World Development Report 1999/2000, the major contribution to the GDP comes from agriculture which generates close to 40% of the gross domestic product; accounts for 90% of all export earnings; and supports about 90% of the entire population (Eldring, et al, 2001). Most of the foreign exchange is obtained from tobacco. Up to 1994, tobacco accounted for over 70% of domestic commodity exports (Mwasikakata, 2003).

This study focused on poverty as capability deprivation, whose consequences cover income poverty, and social exclusion among others (Sen, 1999). Capability as defined by Sen (*ibid*) refers to the substantial freedoms a person enjoys to lead the kind of life she/ he has reason to value. It focused on factors that were responsible for children dropping out of school before completing the primary cycle. Attention was paid on deprivation;

conscious choice by parents and children; educational related factors; and attitudes and cultural factors.

1.1.1 The Education System in Malawi

A lot of research has proved that education plays a major role in the development of both individuals and societies. The Malawi Government states that "education is associated with increased agricultural productivity, higher incomes, and lower fertility rates and with improved nutrition and health. The education of parents, especially mothers, has been shown to affect the cognitive, affective and physical development of the child." (MoEST, 1999:1). From an ethical perspective, UNESCO-APPEAL, (1998:4) views education as an "intrinsic good to be cherished for its own sake and as a basic human right" and as a "transforming experience that leads to enlargement of one's self and full realization of one's potentials" (quoted from Carm, et al, 2003:25).

In Malawi, the education system comprises 8 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary education and 4 years of university education. The primary section enrolls children within the age range of 6 to 16 years. According to The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, children refer to all persons less than sixteen years of age. After completing eight years of primary schooling, pupils sit for The Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations (PSLCE). Due to limited secondary school places, there is a selection process based on the results of the PSLCE, for pupils to proceed to secondary schools. A lot of pupils are therefore forced to stop their schooling after primary education due to lack of space in secondary schools.

The education system, however, faces a number of challenges such as: access, quality, relevance, equity, management, and financing. Some of these challenges, with emphasis on primary education, are discussed below:

Access

Malawi introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994. This led to an overwhelming increase in enrolment in primary schools (Livingstone, 2001). According to Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) 1999 statistics, just over 4000 primary schools enroll nearly 3 million pupils. Not all children aged 6-16 years have access to education. **There is shortage of physical facilities and qualified teachers. Long distances to school also act as a barrier to children's education.** This results in internal inefficiencies in the system. For example, MoEST statistics indicate that only 20% of children complete the cycle of primary education. There is a 17% drop out rate in all standards, i.e. from standard 1 to standard 8. Due to problems of access, primary education is not compulsory. The problem of access is increasingly felt as one moves up the ladder from primary to tertiary level. For example, less than 0.5% of Malawians aged 18 to 26 years are enrolled in tertiary institutions

Quality

The introduction of Free Primary Education resulted in a chronic shortage of relevant teaching and learning resources such as qualified teachers, school buildings, and teaching and learning aids. This led to high teacher/pupil ratios. Poor terms and conditions of employment for teachers have also resulted in a poorly motivated teaching force. This has come at a high cost to the quality offered. The following are examples of some qualitative inputs for primary education:

Percentage of qualified primary school teachers	=	51%
Teacher: Pupil ratio	=	1:62
Pupils per textbook (English, Chichewa, Maths)	=	24
Pupils per desk	=	38
Pupils per permanent classroom	=	119

(Source: MoEST, 1999)

Relevance

Although a small fraction of primary school graduates make it to secondary and tertiary levels, the education system prepares children for white collar jobs, and for selection for post-primary education. There is little emphasis in the curriculum on survival skills such as entrepreneurial skills, analytical skills, etc. As a result education is not highly valued by communities. The following statement from MoEST bears testimony to the low value of education:

> *"Emerging evidence suggests that an additional and worrying challenge is that even where educational resources are made available and accessible, education of the youth is not fully valued by some communities. This is demonstrated by low attendance in schools, which are relatively well resourced."* (MoEST, 1999: 1)

Equity

There are lots of disparities in the provision of educational institutions between rural and urban areas. There is better access to schools in urban areas than in rural areas. There are also differences in attainment between girls and boys. Data on attainment in primary education is however rare. Table 1 below presents data from an Integrated Household Survey of 1998 on the percentage of children attending school in rural and urban areas by sex. At secondary level, approximately 39% of students are female, while at tertiary level the enrolment of females is 28%.

Table 1: Percentage of children in age group attending school by sex

	RURAL		URBAN	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
5 to 7 years old	43.2 (1.51)	48.2 (2.26)	72.3 (4.35)	69.5 (3.97)
8 to 10 years old	84.1 (1.53)	84.9 (1.61)	96.3 (1.49)	93.5 (2.01)
11to 13 years old	91.0 (1.29)	91.3 (0.83)	96.2 (1.17)	88.9 (1.96)
14 to 16 years old	85.7 (1.34)	80.8 (1.57)	94.0 (1.71)	85.0 (2.17)
17 to 19 years old	71.8 (1.88)	39.9 (2.39)	81.8 (2.56)	65.1 (3.68)
20 to 24 years old	31.5 (2.38)	7.6 (0.66)	43.7 (3.40)	26.5 (4.23)

Source: National Economic Council (Poverty Monitoring System), 2000

The Management Structure of Education

Education in Malawi is organized in three levels or hierarchies. At the top is the Ministry of Education Headquarters. This is the central office which develops policies, programmes, and projects for education development of the entire education system. Below the central office are Education Division Offices. There are a total of six education division offices in the country. Their functions mirror those at the ministry headquarters, except that they cater for smaller areas. The ministry, therefore, mostly works through these offices in implementing its policies and programmes. Below the Division offices are the District Education Offices. There are thirty four district education offices. The district offices look after primary schools and Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) in their respective locations. According to the Ministry of Education, and The Malawi National Commission for UNESCO (2004), the primary schools are further organized through a zonal system, with each zone having a Teacher Development Centre (TDC). These centres look at issues of staff development, and sharing of ideas and innovations. The country has 317 education zones in total. Each zone has an average of 10 primary schools. Figure 1 below summarizes the structure of education.

Figure 1: The Structure of Education in Malawi

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │    Ministry     │
                    │  Headquarters.  │
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             ↓
         ┌───────────────┌───────────┐───────────────┐
         │               │ Divisions │               │
         ↓               └─────┬─────┘               ↓
┌──────────────────┐          ↓          ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Teacher Training │   ┌───────────┐    │  Conventional Secondary  │
│     Colleges     │   │ Districts │    │         schools          │
└──────────────────┘   └─────┬─────┘    └──────────────────────────┘
                             ↓
                       ┌───────────┐
                       │   Zones   │
                       └─────┬─────┘
                   ┌─────────┴─────────┐
                   ↓                   ↓
      ┌───────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
      │  Community day        │  │   Primary    │
      │  secondary schools    │  │   schools    │
      └───────────────────────┘  └──────────────┘
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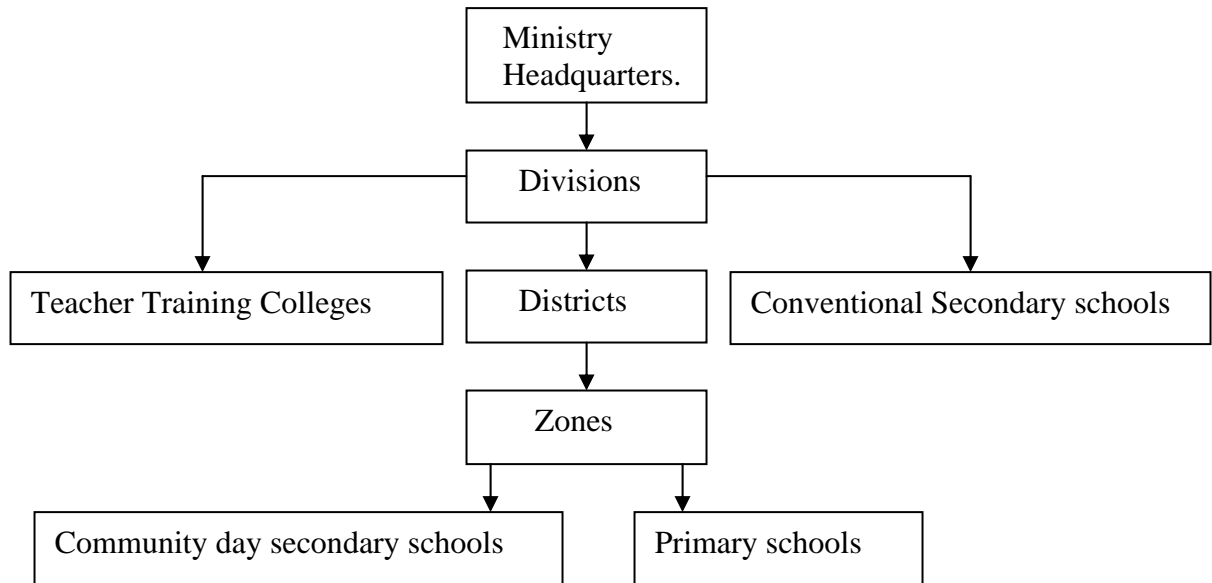
(Source: Naunje, 2004)

With reference to primary education, primary school teachers are recruited centrally by the central office. Once recruited, they are posted to Education Division Offices. This is done with the staffing needs of schools in the divisions in mind. Dictated by the staffing requirements of the districts, the division offices allocate the teachers amongst the districts. The teachers are allocated to the District Education Manager who places them in particular schools in the district. It is therefore the responsibility of the District Education Manager, assisted by the Head Teachers of respective schools to ensure that the teachers are performing their duties well. In addition to this arrangement, each education zone has a Primary Education Advisor (PEA) who supervises and offers professional advice to teachers to improve their competence and performance.

The payment of teachers is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education headquarters. The central office gets funding from the National Treasury, and sends the money to the Education Division Offices. The Education Division Offices in turn issue cheques to the District Education Managers in their respective Divisions. It is the District Education Managers who finally pay the teachers in their respective districts.

In terms of management of disciplinary cases involving teachers, there are a number of sanctions which can be administered to offending teachers according to the type of offences. These range from deduction of pay; interdiction with half pay; interdiction without pay; being suspended; to being dismissed. The District Education Manager does not, however, have the mandate to implement these disciplinary actions. He/ she can only recommend for a particular course of action to be taken against a teacher and wait for the higher offices to administer the punishment. The District Education Manager has, however, the power to shift teachers from one school to another within his/ her district. The centralization of functions was, however, acknowledged by the Ministry of Education, and it was stated that efforts were underway to devolve some of the functions to the lower offices following recommendations from an independent study carried out in 1988. In its report it stated that: "Administration of education over the years has been centralized at the Ministry headquarters, but following recommendations of an independent study, some steps have been undertaken to decentralize the management of the system" (Ministry of Education and UNESCO 2004:17) Despite the amount of time that had passed since the recommendations were made, a lot of work needed to be done to decentralize the management of education.

1.1.2 The State of Poverty in Malawi

The Malawi Government in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), 2002:5 defines poverty as "a state of continuous deprivation or a lack of the basics of life". It recognizes that poverty has many dimensions including income poverty and human/ capability poverty. The MPRSP states that, poverty exists at different levels, such as at individual, household, and national levels. This study will mostly focus on household poverty which has a direct effect on individual poverty. The MPRSP quotes a 1998 Integrated Household Survey which defined 65.3% of the Malawi population as poor. The poor were defined as those whose consumption of basic needs (both food and non-food) was below the minimum level estimated at MK10.47 per day in 1998. *[In 1998 1US$= MK31.1].* Within the poor group, 28.2% of the total population was living in dire poverty. It was recorded that some sections of the population were more affected with poverty than others. These included: land constrained small holder farmers, labor constrained female-headed households, estate workers or tenants, casual workers,

destitute or disadvantaged children- such as orphans, street children, child heads of households-; persons with disabilities, low income urban households, the elderly, the uneducated, and the unemployed. The paper attributed poverty to several factors such as constraints on land productivity due to rapid environmental degradation, and limited or inadequate access to land; constraints on labor productivity due to low levels of education, poor health status including HIV/AIDS, lack or limited off farm employment, rapid population growth, and gender inequalities; constraints on capital due to lack of access to credit. The relationship between poverty and school drop out had been made worse due to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS which had reduced the life expectancy at birth to 39 years. This made children to assume responsibilities at an early age, such as caring for sick parents, and caring for siblings after the death of their parents.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Education plays a major role in the process of development. It is argued that, a literate population brings more benefits to society and can therefore, be a catalyst for development. The World Bank (2006: 136) states that:

> Educational attainment has various societal benefits that are not fully captured by the individual. For example, it is generally associated with enhanced democracy and lower crime, while girls' schooling in particular has been shown to reduce fertility, empower women, and thereby contribute to the welfare of children in the family. In addition, education has intrinsic value, enabling people to lead fuller lives as informed and active participants in society.

The importance of education in the development of a nation or a society, gives developing countries very good reasons to invest in the education of their people. Because the costs of education are very high, most poor people in developing countries find it difficult to afford its expenses. This is the reason why, most governments, using public resources, invest highly in education by offering Universal Primary Education (UPE).

Malawi introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994 after a change in Government from one party dictatorship to multiparty democracy. Education was made free but not compulsory due to problems of access. Free Primary Education resulted in the abolition

of school fees and the wearing of school uniform was not mandatory. As a result of this development there was a positive response from society as enrolment increased tremendously. It was noted that school uniform and school fees were true barriers to children's education. However, the gains made in enrolment were soon reversed due to high drop out of pupils. The problem has remained very high up to date, although school fees and school uniforms are no longer mandatory. In the study area, which is the country's main tobacco growing area, there are more primary school drop outs than in other districts in the country. The drop out rate for Kasungu is above the national average (Refer to table 2). It is reported that pupils drop out of school in order to take up jobs in tobacco estates. It is assumed that children see more of the immediate gains from working in tobacco farms than remaining in school because the benefits from school are not guaranteed or may come after some more years of studying. This means that, although the country has a high rate of primary school drop out, Kasungu as a place, has specific factors which result in higher drop out than the national average.

This study was, therefore, carried out to answer the question: ***Do children drop out of school as a result of deprivation or as a matter of choice?***

1.3 Research Objectives

The general aim of the study was to find out the cumulative factors which led to children dropping out of primary school. It was meant to find out if children dropped out of school due to threats to their livelihood or due to conscious choice. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify households' perceptions of school/ education led factors that influence choice.
- To discuss attitudes and cultural factors which influence educational attainment between girls and boys.
- To describe threats to household survival which force children to drop out of school.
- To understand the role played by parents in the process of children dropping out of school.

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1.4 Research Questions

The study was meant to find the cumulative factors which resulted in children dropping out of school. It was carried out to find answers to the following questions:

- What role does access to and relevance of education play in children dropping out of school?
- What deprivations exist in the household which force children to drop out of school?
- What role do attitudes, customs and cultural practices play in children dropping out of school, and with particular reference to gender roles, parents, and individual choice?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of education in Malawi cannot be over emphasised. It is the one thing which can make a difference in the lives of people between the poor and non-poor. The study basically stems from my personal interest in the field of education. The area under study had been going through a change of fortunes in terms of income from tobacco earnings.

Due to slow economic growth, the economy of Malawi had been unable to absorb all school graduates to give them gainful employment opportunities. It was previously noted in the study area that, those who dropped out of school to engage in tobacco farming could become more prosperous than those who continued with education. This was the case, because earnings from tobacco were high as compared to earnings from other occupations especially civil service employees. This meant that children opted to drop out of school as a matter of choice, after considering alternative courses of their lives. However, due to a new range of economic factors such as structural adjustment programmes and competition from other tobacco producing countries, the earnings from tobacco have greatly reduced. In spite of apparent poverty, the tobacco growing areas still have very high rates of primary school drop out (See table 2). In Kasungu district, the

community with the assistance of a non- governmental organisation, Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM), have embarked on a campaign to bring children who dropped out of school back to the classroom.

This study therefore aims at finding out the underlying causes of school drop- out among children. The findings will be useful to the Ministry of Education, Development Planners, the community, and other interested organisations dealing with education and development to focus their attention and interventions on the root causes of the problem as seen in the eyes of the concerned population.

Table 2: Drop outs Rates for Kasungu and Malawi

	Standard 1			Standard 2			Standard 3			Standard 4			Standard 5			Standard 6			Standard 7			Standard 8		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Kasungu	22.57	23.27	22.93	11.25	13.64	12.46	16.83	15.16	15.99	16.25	13.19	14.74	20.79	24.48	22.61	21.05	24.01	22.51	12.33	23.67	17.7	27.99	42.3	33.99
National	21.32	24.95	23.18	7.73	7.11	7.42	14.84	16.52	15.68	13.05	13.33	13.2	16.18	17.57	16.88	13.98	17.39	15.64	12.79	20.92	16.62	15.45	27.24	20.57

Source: Ministry of Education: Education Management Information System (EMIS)**, Education Statistics 2005,** Lilongwe, Malawi

CHAPTER TWO: DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the study area. It shall present the geographical location of Malawi, its economic standing and some other factors related to the topic under discussion. A look will also be taken on the district of Kasungu in order to present a closer picture of the area under which the study was carried out.

2.2 Malawi: The Country Profile

Malawi is a country in Southern Africa. It is located between Latitudes 9°S and 18°S, and Longitudes 33°E and 36°E. It is land locked and shares common boundaries with The United Republic of Tanzania in the North and North East; Zambia in the West; and Mozambique in the South and South East (Refer to Figure 2)

The country has a total land surface of 118, 480, 00 square kilometers. Nearly 30% of the land is covered with a fresh water lake, Lake Malawi and arable land makes up 34% of the total land surface. It has an approximate population of over 12, 000, 000 people according to the projections of the National Statistical Office (NSO, 2005).

The country's economy is based on agriculture which is rain fed. Its major export earnings come from tobacco, which was popularly known as '*Malawi's Green Gold'*. Tobacco is followed by tea and cane sugar in importance. The heavy reliance on rainfall means that the country is vulnerable to changes in rainfall pattern. The country lies in the climatic belt known as Tropical Continental (Interior) Climate, also called Sudan type of climate. It has three major seasons namely: cool, dry season; warm, wet season; and hot dry season. The cool, dry season lasts from May until August. It is dry with relatively low temperatures. The hot, dry season lasts from September to November. It is dry with progressively increasing temperatures. The warm, wet season lasts from December to March or April. Because there is a single rainy season, crops are grown in the warm, wet season which runs from November to April (Peters, 1969).

Most of the crops are grown on small land holdings by small scale farmers who utilize customary land. Tobacco which earns the country's largest share of foreign exchange is grown by both smallholder farmers and estate farmers with larger land holdings. Tea and sugar cane which require more technical and mechanical inputs in production are mostly grown in large estates owned by foreign investors.

Figure 2: Map of Malawi
(Source: United Nations, 2004)

2.2.1 Tobacco Farming in Malawi.

Commercial tobacco farming in Malawi dates back to 1889 when Virginia tobacco was introduced by David Buchanan (Mwasikakata, 2003). Since that time it was grown by white settlers in estates up to independence in 1964, when government decided to introduce tobacco farming to Malawians as a way of enhancing foreign earnings. Due to lack of technical skills among smallholder farmers, production was limited to estates. The estate sector mostly used the tenancy system of production.

According to Mwasikakata (*ibid*), a tenancy agreement is made when the owner of an estate enters into a contract (usually verbal) with a tenant to grow tobacco on the landowner's estate. The farmer provides all the inputs such as fertiliser, seeds, and pesticides; plus rations of food (mostly maize) to the tenants' household each month. The tenant is responsible for growing the tobacco and selling it to the estate owner at the end of the season at a predetermined price. The price is set by the Tobacco Association of Malawi (TAMA) and depends on the quality/grade of the tobacco. Once the tobacco is ready for sale, the farmer will assess it and fix a price according to the quality. He then deducts the costs of all inputs and the food rations given to the tenant and his family. Any balance is given to the tenant as a lump sum payment for the whole year. If the value of tobacco is less than the inputs and the rations advanced to the tenant, it is usually carried forward to the following growing season as a debt. Many tenants are consequently forced to stay on for more seasons in an attempt to clear off the accumulated debts. In this case many tenants and their families enter into cycles of increasing debt, misery and poverty.

It is further argued in Mwasikakata that the majority of the tenants have very low levels of education. Most of them do not complete primary school. As a result they are taken advantage of by estate owners by over charging them because they do not have the basic skills to understand and negotiate their contracts effectively; and to understand the provision and pricing of inputs and food rations as well as the sale of tobacco at the end of the season. It is therefore noted that people become tenants for lack of a better alternative, or as a last resort for their survival.

In an attempt to increase their production quota, tenants usually employ all the available labour force in the household. Eldring, et al (2001:38) states that "poverty and economic necessity exert major pressures on families to make use, as early as possible, of the time and labor of children to assist family survival, often at the expense of schooling".

2.2.2 Structural Adjustment Programmes.

Between 1980 and 1993 Malawi underwent 10 structural adjustment programmes which were aimed at stabilizing the economy. One of the requirements under the programme was that barley tobacco, which fetches the highest incomes, should also be grown by smallholder farmers. The move was taken to increase income levels of smallholder farmers so that they could afford the high, unsubsidized costs of crop inputs for both tobacco and maize. However, due to high population densities, land holdings per family were very small for households to have enough land for barley tobacco and maize. The outcome was an exodus of farmers from large estates, although this did not eventually translate into an increase in food security. Due to small landholdings, farmers abandoned the production of maize for barley tobacco. The earnings from tobacco were, however, not adequate to allow them purchase enough maize from the open market. It was noted that the situation of the poor got even worse off. Malnutrition became common among children and women. Smallholder farmers could not afford the cost of crop inputs for the tobacco farms as well as food crops to make them more efficient. This increased the cycle of poverty (Baker, 2000).

A study conducted by FAFO Institute for Applied Social Sciences, (Eldring, et al 2001) indicated that although primary education was free in Malawi, it had little effect to children of tenants because of the following reasons: Conditions of poverty were so hard that children had to abandon school and contribute to the labor needs of their families for immediate survival; due to the high rate of deaths as a result of HIV/AIDS, children took up responsibilities as heads of household hence dropped out of school. Sometimes this situation was forced upon them by estate owners in order for the children to pay off the debt, which their parents left behind.

Children were mostly hungry and lacked appropriate clothing to look decent at school, hence took up jobs in estates as an alternative to schooling.

2.3 Kasungu District

Kasungu district is located in the Central Region of Malawi. It lies in the fertile Lilongwe- Kasungu plain which has well drained loam soils suitable for agriculture.

The conditions in the area are very favourable for tobacco production. Consequently, this is the area which produces the largest quantities of tobacco on which the country's foreign earnings come from. The tobacco is produced by local farmers who employ the tenancy system of farming as well as smallholder farmers on customary land holdings. The area has a lot of children who drop out of school. It is the view of many people that most children drop out of school to take up jobs in tobacco estates. This study was therefore be carried out to find the causes of school drop-out in children, and the tasks that the children undertook after dropping out of school. The focus was on households of children who had dropped out of school before completing the primary circle.

2.3.1 The Characteristics of the Population of Kasungu

The majority of the people in Kasungu are small scale farmers who cultivate crops on their own plots of customary land. Most households grow maize for food and tobacco for sale. Maize is the staple food crop for most Malawians. The maize is supplemented by other crops such as groundnuts and peas. Farming is mostly rain fed; as such the people's lives are mostly influenced by changes in rainfall pattern. Along the Bua river which is one of the big rivers in the country, people practice small scale irrigation farming and they grow vegetables, and sugarcane for sale. Small scale fishing, using traditional equipment such as fish traps and fish baskets, is also an important activity along the river. Apart from selling tobacco, people also get income from small scale trading, such as selling merchandise in trading centres, brewing and selling of a locally brewed spirit known as *Kachasu*, and selling their labour in tobacco estates as tenants, drivers, watchmen, etc.

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Figure 3: A woman distilling a local spirit, Kachasu, for sale
(Source: Author, Fieldwork)

Culturally, the people belong to the *Chewa* ethnic group which is found in most districts in Central Malawi and Eastern Zambia. They are mostly known by their strong belief in the cult of *Nyau/ Gulewamkulu,* which is a masquerade dance performed by initiated, male members of a secret society. Essentially, all male members of society are expected to be initiated into the cult in order to be recognised as respected adult members of society. The masquerade dance usually comes out of its secret hiding and performs in public during cultural functions, such as installation of a new Chief or Village Headman, funeral ceremonies, etc. Although its influence is weakening due to challenges posed by modernisation and Western-oriented religion, the cult still exerts a considerable influence and attraction in most communities among people of all ages.

In terms of education, it is reported in Todd, et al, (2002) that between 83.3% and 90% of adults aged between 15 and 24 years in Kasungu did not complete primary education. Although the average National primary school drop out rate is high in Malawi that for

Kasungu is above the national average. Table 2 shows the drop out rates across all classes from standard one to standard eight for Malawi and Kasungu district. This means that the drop out problem in Kasungu is worse than in most districts of the country.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the economic standing of Malawi. It has described the history of tobacco farming, which is the major export crop, and the effect of the structural adjustment programmes on the economy. A closer look has been taken on the district of Kasungu describing the economic activities of the people in the district, and their cultural practices. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. It first defines the concepts which are key to the paper and then presents the approach used to put the research in perspective. A review of relevant literature is made, which is followed by a presentation of how the theory will be operationalised in an analytical framework and approach.

3.2 Definition of Key Concepts

The Capability Approach was utilized to put the study in a broader perspective and as a framework for analysis. Using the approach brings up a lot of concepts, which are very much related with each other and feature highly in the whole study. This section will therefore, define the concepts which are used. The concepts such as Freedom and Functioning are closely linked to each other and important for the understanding of the Capability Approach. Other concepts are Poverty, Children and Household.

3.2.1 Freedom

The whole of the Capability Approach centers on the concept of Freedom. Development is seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. In his book, **Development as Freedom**, Amartya Sen (1999) contrasts the idea of development as freedom to achieve valuable functionings to utilitarian ideas of development such as growth in Gross Domestic Product, Technological Advancement, Social Mobility, and Industrialization, which are just means to achieve valuable functionings. Freedom focuses attention on the ends of development namely the human being. Using the concept of freedom, poverty is seen as a form of deprivation, which brings a lot of **unfreedoms** such as preventable morbidity, premature mortality, lack of gainful employment opportunities, etc. Attention is paid at the **'Capability'** of the person to lead the kind of life he/she values or has reason to value. Freedom therefore results in an interrelationship of the capabilities. The capabilities can on one hand be enhanced by public policy, but on the

other hand, the direction of public policy can also be influenced by the participatory capabilities of the people. Freedom in this case enhances the ability of the people to help themselves, and also to influence the world around them, i.e. the agency aspect of the people.

Freedom plays both constitutive and instrumental roles. Constitutive roles of freedom point at the expansion of freedom as a primary end in itself. Examples of the constitutive roles of freedom include avoiding premature mortality, avoiding starvation and malnourishment, freedoms associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation, etc. Instrumental roles of freedom point at the expansion of freedom as a principal means of development. This concerns how different types of freedoms, rights, opportunities and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general and thus to the promotion of development. The enhancement of one type of instrumental freedom therefore results in the advancement of other freedoms.

3.2.2 Functioning

The term functioning reflects the various things a person may value doing or being. Sen (*ibid*) points out to a range of functionings from elementary ones such as being well nourished, and being free from avoidable diseases to more complex ones such as taking part in public life and having self respect. Functionings differ from Capability in the sense that Capability is the substantial freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations; or put simply, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles. Capability can therefore be referred to as 'means' to various ends, while functionings are 'ends' in themselves. Sen (1999:75) distinguishes between the two by citing an example of an affluent man who chooses to fast as having the same functioning achievement in terms of eating, or nourishment as a destitute person who is forced to starve. However, the affluent man has a different capability set than the destitute, i.e. the affluent man can choose to eat well and be well nourished in the way the destitute cannot.

Functionings are therefore a set of a person's achievements or accomplishments, while Capabilities are a set of 'real opportunities' or alternatives available to him or her.

3.2.3 Poverty.

The term poverty has been defined in various ways. The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP) defines poverty as a state of continuous deprivation or a lack of basics of life. As in most literature, the poor are described in quantifiable and income terms as those whose consumption of basic needs (food and non-food) fall below a defined poverty line. However, defining poverty in income terms fails to take into account individual differences and variations such as disabilities, gender, age which create differences in people's needs. This study therefore, adopts the definition by Sen (1999), which looks at poverty as capability deprivation. Poverty is described as a failure of basic capabilities to reach certain minimally acceptable levels. The functionings vary from such elementary capabilities as being well-nourished, adequately clothed and housed to complex social achievements, such as taking part in public life without shame.

3.2.4 Children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child define a child as "a person below the age of 18, unless the law of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger" (www.unicef.org). It is, however, reported that the monitoring body for the convention encourages states to review the age of majority if it is set below 18, and increase the level of protection of all children under 18. The guiding principle of the convention which is spelled out in Article 3 (1), declares that "in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration:" (Buergenthal, et al , 2002: 93-94)

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi refers to children as those people under 16 years of age. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) in Malawi, the official primary school going age for pupils is between 6 years and 16 years. It is, however, likely to find pupils aged 18 years in senior primary school classes.

This study therefore defines children as those persons under the age of 18 years and are still staying with or being supported by their parents/ guardians.

3.2.5 Household.

The description of the term Household varies from one cultural setting to another. In Western and Developed countries, it is easy to identify a household due to the composition of families which are usually nucleus. In developing countries such as Malawi, the identification of a household poses a lot more challenges due to extended family links and communal type of life styles.

The National Statistical Office of Malawi (NSO, 2005) defined a Household as a group of persons, related or unrelated, who live together in the same dwelling unit, who make common provision for food and regularly take their meals from the same pot or share the same grain store, *nkhokwe,* or who pool their incomes for the purpose of purchasing food. This is the definition which is used in this study as it fits well with the conditions of the study area. It was common during the fieldwork to find a grandmother to a school drop out, who could give adequate information on factors, which led to a child to drop out of school although the immediate parent was not available.

3.3 Review of Relevant Literature

This section reviews studies which have been carried out and literature which has been written on the issue of poverty and school drop outs, and other related factors. It takes into account factors that play a role in educational attainment such as culture, gender, and the role of parents in the process of children dropping out of school.

A study conducted by Naunje (2004) on magnitude and causes of school drop out in Chiradzulu district in Malawi, found that teachers' cruelty and social economic background of the pupils played major roles in children dropping from school. He cited examples of cases where teachers administered punishments which were not proportional to the offences committed by pupils, such as digging a pit latrine for coming late to

school. On social economic background of the pupils, it was reported that contrary to conventional views the abolition of school uniform resulted in children from poor households dropping out of school. The study noted that the use of school uniform made all pupils look the same. The use of civilian clothing on the other hand made children from poor households more embarrassed in their torn and rugged clothes. This made them stay away from school. Surprisingly, the study noted that the cost of second hand civilian clothes on the open market was much less than the cost of school uniform. Naunje (*ibid*) also quotes a study carried out by Carventes (1965) in the United States of America on causes of school drop out. The study observed that most pupils who dropped out of school were from low income families. However, the reasons for dropping out had nothing to do with lack of school fees and other financial support.   The reasons had to do with lack of parental support and concern, and instability among others.

Chimombo & Chonzi (1996:37) carried out a research on school drop out and teenage pregnancies in Malawi. The study found out that school drop out was essentially a result of "Lack of Effective Demand for Schooling". The study, which was quantitative, identified those factors leading to drop out ranging from laziness, to marriage, pregnancy and distance to school. Demand driven factors place the responsibility of drop out on the household where decisions to engage in education are made. It was observed that households allow their children to drop out of school as a survival strategy. Children get involved in selling commodities for the upkeep of their families, or doing piecework *(ganyu).* This is clear as observed by the high rate of absenteeism on market days. Poverty is therefore a main factor in dropping out of school. Where there are many children attending school in a household, and the opportunity cost of education is high, parents are forced to make tough decisions. The research reports that in such difficult circumstances, social and cultural norms play a big part in influencing the decisions of who will continue with education. For example, allowing a boy to continue with school and letting a girl drop out.

Similarly, writing on Gender and Education as determinants of household poverty in Nigeria, Okojie (2003) cites various factors which work against the educational

attainment of girls. She notes that besides well known benefits which female education brings to individuals, households, and society; many developing countries exhibit a lot of gender inequalities in education in favor of boys. Besides poverty, custom and cultural factors also play major roles in perpetuating such inequalities. She notes that poor households most often do not have enough resources to invest in human capital. This reinforces trans-generational poverty links. It is noted that for poor households, the demand for education will be low if there is low public expenditure in education, low educational attainment of parents, and low availability of non-earned income. Where public expenditure is low, poverty increases the gender gap in attainment between boys and girls. Okojie cites studies done by the World Bank in 41 countries where there was a difference in enrolment between boys and girls. It was noted that the greatest differences occurred among the poor than the non-poor. These differences come about due to a number of cultural factors. In countries where parents have to pay fees for their children/ wards, poor households may not afford the cost of the fees plus loss of child labor. If the household is unable to educate all of its children, it will usually prefer to educate a son than a daughter due to the perceived higher benefits of boys' education on the labor market. Where households depend on their offspring for assistance in old age, poor households are likely to invest in the education of their sons if custom demands that sons should provide old age support. It is also noted that where households are less able to afford domestic support, they make use of the child labor of their daughters in domestic work. This leaves them with less time for studying and may result in repetition of classes and eventual drop out. For poor households, it is therefore assumed that an increase in public spending in education will have a positive effect on educational attainment of their children.

The case for increased public spending in education in favor of the poor is supported by Addison & Rahman (2003), who argue that lack of public support for primary education is a major factor towards low attainment in primary school of children from poor households. The two analyzed data on education spending from 21 developing countries between 1993 and 1996. The analysis indicated that public spending was skewed in favor of higher education than primary education. Since children from poor households rarely

go beyond primary education, they less often benefit from such public support. This leaves the parents with a major contribution to make towards the education of their children in primary schools. It is, therefore noted that, the only way to support the educational attainment of the poor is to increase public spending in primary education. It is, however, noted that the poor usually lack the capacity to change the status quo because they are less organized to take collective action. Where action may be attempted, they face a lot of opposition from the beneficiaries of public spending in education who are usually better off, have more resources to organize, and are therefore more influential in society.

Similarly, an Integrated Household Survey (IHS) conducted in Malawi and published in 2000 showed that although access to secondary and university education is limited, there was a smaller percentage of children from poor households attending. Table 3 below shows the percentage population attending disaggregated by wealth group and sex:

Table 3: Percentage of population attending secondary education and university, by wealth group and sex

	Ultra-poor		Poor		Non-poor		All	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Attending Secondary education	2.23 *(0.24)*	0.97 *(0.16)*	2.56 *(0.21)*	1.45 *(0.14)*	4.79 *(0.34)*	3.58 *(0.49)*	3.35 *(0.22)*	2.17 *(0.22)*
Attending University	00.1 *(0.01)*	0.02 *(0.01)*	0.02 *(0.01)*	0.02 *(0.01)*	0.12 *(0.04)*	0.06 *(0.03)*	0.05 *(0.02)*	0.03 *(0.01)*
IHS weighted population	*1,322,296*	*1,399,621*	*3,045,440*	*3,263,365*	*1,683,674*	*1,674,169*	*4,729,114*	*5,937,534*
IHS Sample	*6,394*	*6,775*	*14,501*	*15,599*	*8,050*	*7,978*	*22,551*	*23,577*

Source: National Economic Council, (Poverty Monitoring System), 2000

The table shows that although access to secondary and university education is low, there are fewer children from poor households than non-poor households. This means that for poor children to benefit from public spending, there should be more investment by

governments in primary education. Investments in secondary and higher education mostly benefit the people who are already better off in society.

Birdsall (2004) supports the idea of increased public spending in education of children from poor households. She writes that investing in children has the advantage of enhancing human capital and the productive potentials of individuals and nations. She, however, suggests the encouragement of private investment in education provision. She says private ownership of education facilities will increase competition and give poor households a choice. She writes that without choice, consumers are mere 'beneficiaries.' Where educational services are privately owned, governments should provide vouchers to poor households so that they can purchase services which are satisfactory to them. Such demand-driven services are likely to be effective and will be adjusted to the needs of the clients. This will therefore give consumers a voice in the education of their children.

Similarly, the World Bank in its 2006 Development Report recommends that governments should take special efforts in encouraging disadvantaged groups, such as the poor, girls, and minority groups to enroll and remain in school. It cites measures, such as having girls' only schools; female role modeling; and special latrines for girls as interventions which have worked in some countries to increase the attainment of girls. The report, however, states that the gains made in access can only be sustained by corresponding qualitative inputs. It notes that increased public spending in primary education can only bear fruits if the resources are directed towards the improvement of quality of services, such as purchasing instructional materials, training and in-servicing teachers. Without qualitative improvements, education will not be effective and will result in increasing the gap between the poor and the non poor, as the non poor will always have resources to enroll their children in private schools of better quality.

McBride (2006) conducted a study in Zomba, Malawi on orphans, their female carers and education. He noted that the high incidence of HIV/AIDS in Malawi has had a big negative impact on female education due to the high number of children who are orphaned. He notes that orphans are less likely to remain in school due to poverty, and

lack of counseling services. It was observed during the study that girls who get orphaned usually engage in risky behavior in order to get the needed support to stay in school. This consequently put their lives in danger. The study suggested that apart from counseling services, school feeding programmes would help ease the problems that poor households face in keeping their children in school. Other activities that the research recommended to break the cycle of poverty and deprivation of orphans included: free secondary education, the provision of vocational education, business training and start up businesses.

MacJessie-Mbewe (2004) conducted a study in Malawi on the relationship between rural communities and Education. The study observed among other factors that there was lack of involvement of communities in school affairs apart from taking part in school/ infrastructure development. It also noted a mismatch between some elements of the school curriculum and the rural environment, saying some subjects which are considered important for rural improvement were ignored in schools, or teachers lacked the necessary teaching skills.

The lack of interaction between schools and rural communities could be a result of education being taken as a catalyst for development and modernization. Skelton & Allen (1999) writing about culture and global change noted that development and culture were seen as two things which could not exist together. Culture was taken as the opposite of development. As a result, for development to take place, developing countries had to abandon their cultures which were seen as backward and primitive. The only way to modernize was to adopt western values. Formal Education was therefore seen as the way forward in instilling 'appropriate' values to communities.

Similarly, Worsley (1999) noted that the history of development has not been successful because development planners ignored indigenous cultures of the communities they were meant to develop. He noted that even after attaining self governance, political leaders and planners of developing countries overlooked culture and emphasized on development along the path of westernization. He stated that: "Political development should be measured in terms of the empowerment of the ordinary citizenry and their right and

freedom to develop their own initiatives." (Worsley, 1999: 36). For example, Kadzamira & Rose (2001) writing about educational policy and practice in Malawi, noted that the first education development plan (1973-1980), produced after independence prioritized secondary and tertiary education at the expense of primary education. The main objective, it is reported, was for education to provide manpower to fill the posts left by the colonial government. The lack of integration of local cultures in the process of development, and the consequent lack of appreciation of local cultures in formal education resulted in rural communities failing to see the relevance of education beyond its modernization influence.

Writing about child work practices in Africa, Kielland & Tovo, (2006) stated that, people of other cultures should be careful about criticizing the local ways of doing things. They argued that habits, which are incomprehensible to the foreign eye, may have not only cultural functions, but also very rational and practical ones. Citing about child labor practices, they stated that the practice is part of the socialization process of the child. It was noted that, child labor builds character and is, therefore, desirable. They, however, argued that although the process is an ancient one, its exploitative element is recent. During the hunting and gathering periods, children were well protective from exploitative labor practices. However, the advent of colonialism, and its consequent changes to settled farming, plus the recent issues of globalization have resulted in children doing more exploitative work, even in the household, to help with household upkeep. The two stated that, some actions, which appear bad to a foreign eye, could be done in the best interest of the child. For example, they cited cases where the education systems of some African countries were of low quality, that its usefulness was inferior to the education obtained at home and in the family. This could be the reason why some households withdraw their children from school in the interest of socializing them at home to face the future challenges of life. They stated that in some cases, there have been negative returns to investment in formal education. For example, due to the questionable relevance of the curriculum, formal education resulted in high unemployment of educated people, who could not find jobs corresponding to their qualifications, but could not do manual labor because they were overqualified

3.4 The Capability Approach

As mentioned earlier, the study employs the **Capability Approach** by **Amartya Sen** in trying to link the issue of school drop out to poverty. A presentation of the approach and how it will be applied in the study are made in the following sections. A closer look shall first, however, be taken of the historical background of the approach.

3.4.1 Background to the Capability Approach

The capability approach owes its origin from the history of development. It was born following the outcome of decades of development, and its consequences on the lives of the people it was meant to serve.

The concept 'development' has had changing meanings over time (Lund, 1994; Nederveen Pieterse, 2001; Gasper, 2004). Nederveen Pieterse (2001: 1) states that: "Everything that development used to represent appears to be in question, in crisis". The modern term of development, dates back from the post world war era of development thinking. This was following the destruction and reconstruction of Europe based on the Marshall aid. The success of the reconstruction exercise in Europe led many to believe that a similar approach could be applied with similar outcomes to newly independent countries, which were seen as backward, or poor. It was felt that, with proper planning and injection of aid, growth along the path of Western developed countries would result. The state had the primary responsibility of planning for development. Development funds were provided by donor organizations, and money lending institutions, such as NORAD and the World Bank respectively. The primary aim of development was economic growth. Rapid economic growth, it was noted, would have spread effects to all people: "if we look after growth, then growth would look after development" (Lund, 1994: 4). In the course of time, mechanization and industrialization become part of development as in Rostow's Stages of Growth. It was felt that development would be in phases, and societies would consequently, move following these stages ranging from traditional to the stage of mass consumption. However, the results of growth were different from what was anticipated. It was noted that development had brought negative outcomes such as rural-

urban disparities, with urban areas pirating on rural areas, which resulted in rural poverty; and social economic disparities, whereby, rich people become richer, while the poor become poorer. The results of development by growth and industrialization resulted in a change of focus from modernization to dependency.

Under the dependency school of thought, it was envisaged that development would come with growth from within. This would result in accumulation of capital by national governments, which would trickle down to the ordinary people after cutting off ties with the developed countries. This strategy, however, did not yield the expected results.

Following decades of development and its consequences on the people, there was another change in approach from economic growth to human flourishing. This was termed, alternative development. In general, the alternative development school of thought paid attention to social and community development. A focus was paid to the development of a vibrant civil society, the empowerment of local people, and the provision of basic needs. Under this approach, the role of the state in development was greatly reduced.

In spite of these changes in approach to development, the conditions of the poor did not improve much. Along the lines of alternative development, Amartya Sen came up with the idea of development as freedom. He argued that all the efforts to achieve development had missed its primary target, which are, the people. He stated that well being or poverty is more than just adequacy or inadequacy of income. Income is just one of the means to achieving a type of lifestyle/ functioning. Development should, therefore, emphasis on enhancing the capability of the people to lead the kind of life they have reason to value. It should give people the freedom to seize opportunities available to them to create their own well being.

3.4.2 Description of the Capability Approach

The capability approach looks at development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. It looks at poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities (i.e. the substantive freedoms a person enjoys to lead the kind of life she/he has reason to

value), or as a form of unfreedom, rather than lowness of income. Other forms of unfreedom include lack of functional education, lack of health care, lack of gainful employment, etc which put people at a disadvantage (Sen, 1999).

The instrumental role of freedom concerns the way different kinds of rights, opportunities and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general and thus promoting development. It is noted that different types of freedoms are interrelated and an enhancement of one type can greatly help in advancing other types of freedoms. Sen cites five types of instrumental freedoms which contribute to the general capability of a person, but also serve to complement each other. These are Political freedoms; Economic facilities; Social opportunities; Transparency guarantees; and Protective securities. Taking a look at Social opportunities as an example, the approach describes these as arrangements that society makes for education, health care, and so on which influence the individual's substantive freedom to live better. Such facilities are important for conduct of private life, such as living a healthy life, avoiding preventable morbidity, and premature mortality, being able to read and write; as well as effective participation in economic and political activities. For example, illiteracy can be a barrier to participation in economic activities, which require production by specification and strict quality control; political participation may be hindered by the inability to read newspapers or to communicate in writing with others involved in political activities.

The approach contrasts income poverty from capability poverty; and human capital from human capability. Under income and capability, it is noted that although income and capabilities are very much interrelated, income is just an important means to capability. A similar income does not necessarily mean similar capabilities. Different factors play a role in how different people would convert their income into capabilities. Some of them could be disabilities, illness, environmental factors, relative deprivation, and gender differences. For example, Sen (*ibid*) states that a person who is denied an opportunity for employment, but is given a handout in terms of unemployment benefit, may look less deprived in terms of income, but would look deprived in terms of the valuable opportunity of having a fulfilling occupation. On the other hand, better education and

health care does not only improve the quality of life directly, but they also increase a person's ability to earn an income and be free from income poverty. "The more inclusive the reach of basic education and health care, the more likely it is that even the potentially poor would have a better chance of overcoming penury." (Sen, 1999:73)

On Human capital and Human capability, the two are also interrelated but human capital is rather narrow and falls within the human capability. Human capital emphasises on enhancing the productive quality of human beings. For example, human capital emphasises on education, learning and skills development in order to make people become more productive and contribute more to the process of economic expansion. On the other hand, human capability focuses on the ability- the substantial freedom- of people to lead the lives they have reason to value, and to enhance the real choices they have. It says, given personal characteristics, social background, and economic circumstances, a person has the ability to do certain things that she/ he has reason to value. The reason for valuation may be direct or indirect. Direct valuation includes functionings that may directly enrich her/ his life such as being well nourished, being in good health, etc. Indirect valuations include functionings that may contribute to further production, or command a price in the market. Human capital therefore focuses only on the indirect valuation. For example from a human capital perspective, education can make a person more productive, hence enhance human capital. This can add to the value of production in the economy as well as the income of the educated person. However, from a human capability perspective, even with the same level of income, a person may benefit from education by reading, communicating, arguing, making informed choices, being taken seriously by others, etc. In this case the benefits of education exceed its role as human capital in commodity production.

The Capability Approach has received support as well as criticism from a number of writers. Bourguignon (2005) supports Sen by indicating that poverty reduction cannot end by equalizing incomes without looking at social inequality. He notes that the thinking of equalizing income can only work if individuals transform income into welfare in the same way. He cites examples from North America where attempts to equalize incomes

through transfers of income in favour of the poor led to Social Exclusion and stigmatization of the poor. He said the transfer of income could not end the 'feeling of poverty' experienced by poor people. Similarly, Alkire (2002) states that policy makers should not aim at equalizing the income of people, for example an old farmer and a young student. Instead, they should aim to equalize the capability each one has to enjoy valuable activities and states of being. Using the idea of Capability, she cites an example of a Rose Cultivation project funded by OXFAM in Pakistan. The project, which targeted some extremely poor women, was greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries. Apart from the increase in income, the project had more benefits. One woman is quoted that she had satisfaction working with others as a group; had inner peace because her garlands of roses were used in the Saints' shrines and to decorate the Qur'an sheriff; and people in the village respected her. This supports the idea that mental states and command over commodities are relevant to well being.

Nussbaum (2005) supports the idea of using Capabilities to measure a society's welfare. She, however, criticises Sen for not spelling out a minimum set of Capabilities acceptable for human existence. She states that it is important to have a list of fundamental entitlements as opposed to asking people for their preferences. She notes that deprived people (mostly women), frequently exhibit "adaptive preferences". These are preferences that have been adapted to their second class status. Sen, however, stated that compiling a list of fundamental entitlements would be undemocratic and would not take into account differences in preferences across societies. The task of coming up with fundamental entitlements was left to the concerned societies to reflect different settings and priorities.

This study will therefore seek to find out if children drop out of school as a matter of choice. Given the quality and relevance of the education system, do children drop out of school due to the availability of opportunities which would make their lives better than if they had continued with schooling? The study will also on the other hand, try to establish if cases of drop out are a result of capability deprivation. It will seek to find out what type of deprivations or forms of unfreedom, force children to drop out of school. It will try to establish if children drop out of school as a means of coping up with unfreedoms which

threaten the immediate existence of their lives or their households. It will further seek to find out if there are differences in opportunities at household level between boys and girls, which result in capability deprivation of one sex in favour of the other. It is common practice in many societies that although household income and other opportunities may be high, their distribution is not uniform among household members. This may lead to deprivations in the members who are less favoured as compared to those who get preferential treatment. The study will find out whether children drop out of school as a result of lack of entitlements over which their households can command, or due to lack of productive possibilities. For example, lack of command over an adequate supply of food, and means of mobility can result in children dropping out of school. Finally, the study will find out if any unfreedoms at household level such as ill health, illiteracy, etc among members of the household contribute towards the deprivation of opportunities for schooling in children of the respective households.

3.4.3 Analytical Framework and Analytical Approach

The Framework presented below (Figure 4) will be used to explain the approach that will be employed in the analysis of data.

Figure 4: Analytical Framework for the study
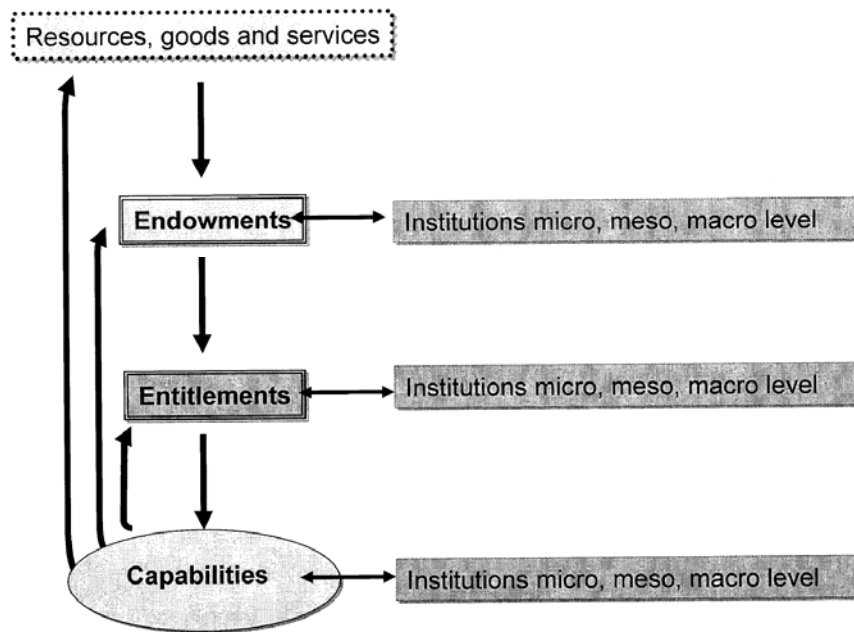
(Source: Vibeke Vågenes-Lecture material)

The framework looks at the resources, services and goods that are available to a community for public use, such as schools in this case. It looks at the resources that a community is endowed with. Endowment is defined as the rights of a person to resources. Education being a public resource means that every Malawian child of the required age has a right to access it. This study will look at the availability of schools in the study area as a public resource which offers education services to the people. Apart from availability of schools to the public, the study shall also find out the views of the clients of the education services, i.e. parents and children; and other stakeholders on issues such as access and relevance. It will establish whether schools as an endowment have contributed to the drop out problem. If there are problems related to education which result in drop-

out, a closer look shall be taken to find out where the problems originate. Are they school specific problems, or problems related to the District Education Office, or indeed the National Ministry of Education? Where the system is failing the public, the study shall look at what forms of feedback do the people have to influence change in their favor, i.e. human agency.

Under Entitlements, the study shall look at how households utilize their entitlements to work against, or in favor of taking advantage of public resources, such as education services for their children. Entitlements are defined as the resources that a person can effectively command. This has to do with resources which are at the command of individuals or households as opposed to community resources. These may include food stocks, labor, land, buildings, trees, etc. The study shall explore whether school drop out is a result of entitlements failure or not. Where there is entitlements failure, the study will find out if the failures are a result of factors that have to do with the household, or whether the failure is a result of factors outside the control of the household.

Command over resources and rights gives people the capabilities to improve their lives. Capability has been defined as the freedom to achieve desired functionings. The study will try to explore whether school drop out is a result of capability deprivation, or a matter of choice. Is it a result of other factors on which individuals, households, and society place more value than schooling? Given the perceived relevance of the education system, the study shall look at other factors, such as culture which communities value and establish if such factors influenced the choices that people make with regard to schooling. Where there are capability deprivations, the study will present what type of deprivations exist at household level to force children out of school. It will also describe what influences the gender of the child had in the process of dropping out of school. Apart from the child, the influence of the gender of the household head in the process of dropping out of school will also be described where appropriate. The influence of parents' levels of education on the drop outs will also be presented. Where there are deprivations, the efforts made by households to change the state of affairs will be discussed.

3.5 CONCLUSION.

This chapter has described the theoretical framework of the study. It has defined the key concepts, described the analytical approach, and the analytical framework. It has also reviewed the literature which is related to the topic under study. This has covered literature related to education and development, culture, gender and children. The next chapter will present how the study was designed and the methodologies employed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the way the   h was designed and conducted. It will present the research sample, and the methods used to collect primary data. How the data was analyzed will also be discussed, followed by a presentation of the limitations and challenges faced in the process of data collection.

4.2 The Research Sample

The research targeted 20 households where children dropped out of school. 10 households where girls dropped out, and another 10 where boys dropped out. The reason was to find out any differences in the reasons for drop out; and any variations between them in their narratives. At every household, the head was interviewed, as well as the child who dropped out of school.

The sampling was purposively done. Focus was given to the children who had dropped out of school in the previous twelve months after five or six years of schooling, that is, those who dropped out in standard 5 or 6. However, due to practical problems such as drop outs getting married and shifting to distant locations, the sampling had to be done by snowball. This meant that even those children who dropped out of school before or after 6 years of schooling were included.

Besides targeting the households, key informants such as the District Education Manager, a Traditional Leader / Chief, the District Social Welfare Officer, and Primary School Head teachers were also interviewed in order to get their opinions and experiences on the issue of school drop out in the area. The sampling of schools from where school drop outs were accessed, before following them to their households, was done with the assistance of the District Education Manager who helped identify those schools located in areas

which have a lot of tobacco estates which were supposed to have a lot of drop outs due to the availability of employment in tobacco farms.

4.3 Collection of Primary Data

The study employed a **qualitative research design.** The approach was suitable for the study, because it enabled the researcher to get the experiences, attitudes, and views of the households affected by the problem of school drop out on how they view the issue and its causes. Views of other stakeholders were also sought. The study involved the children who dropped out of school in order to get their experiences, and narratives (Kitchin & Tate, 2000; Ten Have, 2004).

According to Limb & Dwyer (2001), qualitative methodologies explore the feelings, understandings and knowledge of others. The aim is to gain a deeper insight into the processes shaping the social world. The emphasis in Qualitative research is to understand the lived experiences and to reflect on and interpret the understandings and shared meanings of people's worlds and social realities. It is not aimed at carrying out statistical descriptions or generalizable predictions, but to seek subjective understanding of social realities.

Qualitative research has, however, come under criticism regarding subjectivity and positionality of the researcher. It is argued that the positioning of the researcher, by herself / himself and by the research subjects, influences what information is given and how the subjects' "truths" are represented. It is noted by many researchers that the boundary between the insider and outsider is difficult to negotiate.

Another critique is that some of the understandings produced in qualitative research are gained from unrepresentative samples or from carefully selected quotes. Some of these criticisms can, however, be overcome if researchers are rigorous and accountable to the subjects in the research process. It is also important for the researcher to be reflective and to acknowledge one's role in the construction of knowledge.

4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

These interviews were used to collect data from **heads of households** where a child or children dropped out of school. A total of 20 household heads were interviewed. 16 of these were female; 2 were male, and on 2 occasions both parents contributed to the study. The interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents There were more female respondents because some households were female headed, while for others, the men were not available at home. The interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to get the opinions, attitudes and experiences of parents and guardians on the issue under discussion as well as the motivations and rationale which direct their actions. According to Mikkelsen (1995), in a semi-structured interview, an interview guide is used with the topics and issues to be raised specified in advance, mostly in outline form. The outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection systematic for each respondent. Logical gaps in the data can be anticipated and closed. Interviews remain fairly conversational and situational. However, in semi-structured interviews, important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted. Interviewer flexibility in sequencing and wording questions may result in substantially different responses from different perspectives, thus reducing the comparability of the responses. In this study, heads of households were interviewed in order to know their levels of education, their means of livelihood in relation to the sizes of their families, reasons why their wards/ children dropped out of school, and their attitudes towards the education of children. Their views on the effectiveness of the education system were also sought. The use of a tape recorder allowed the conversation to flow smoothly without any interference which comes with writing down the interview (Refer to appendix 1 for interview guide). The only case where the researcher did not use a tape recorder was where a female informant refused to have the interview recorded because it made her feel uncomfortable. As a result, the interview was conducted, and sketchy notes were taken. The transcription in this case took place immediately after the researcher got out of site to ensure that the information gathered was not lost.

4.3.2 In-Depth Interviews

The aim was be to gain a deeper understanding of the problem in the area as it was observed by **key informants**. These are people who have special knowledge on the topic under discussion. These included the District Education Manager, the District Social Welfare Officer, a Group Village Headman, a Primary School Head teacher and a Primary School Deputy Head teacher. These sources provided information on causes of school drop out in children; what tasks children undertake in the area; and the attitudes of the people in the area towards education. Cultural factors and Education related factors which push children to drop out of school were also discussed. (Refer to appendix 2 for interview guide)

Figure 5: Interview with a Group Village Headman
(Source: Fieldwork)

Mikkelsen (1995:104) refers to key informants as 'outsiders with inside knowledge' who can answer questions about other people's knowledge, attitudes, and practices besides their own. They can provide in-depth, inside information if a trustful relationship is established with them. An interview with a key informant can be carried out quickly, and hence can serve both time and expenses. Their information can compliment data obtained from other sources. It is reported, however that the approach is susceptible to biases due to the small size of the sample. Lack of acquaintance or confidence in interviewers may cause distortions in information. In this study, the key informants were keen to take part and gave very useful information. The uses of different key informants with different expertise meant that the data could be triangulated and draw better conclusions. There was, however, contrasting information between the Group Village Headman and the other Four Key Informants on the influence of culture on children's educational attainment. While the other key informants cited culture, especially the *Gule Wankulu* cult as having a negative effect on children's educational attainment, the Group Village Headman disputed that factor and said the cult cannot be blamed for the drop out problem experienced in the area.

4.3.3 Life Histories and Narratives.

The aim was to gather narratives, life stories, and experiences of children who have dropped out of school. According to Somekh & Lewin (2005), a life story is a personal account in the teller's own words; or a narration of lived experiences. A life story is turned into a life history by the researcher through her/ his analysis of the social, political, economic, and historical context of the life story itself. "At its simplest, a life history is a life story or oral history with additional dimensions"(Casey, 1993, quoted in Somekh & Lewin 2005). The use of life histories shows that lives are not free floating, but are socially constructed and complex.

It is however, recognised that life stories can be blurred and problematic. It is difficult at times to distinguish them from autobiographies. Some of the stories told are contingent upon remembered events that are amenable to being told, and may contain both facts and fiction. Another challenge concerns the ethical issue of representation and the telling of

the lives of others, for multiple unknown audiences. It is therefore important to think deeply about confidentiality, informed consent, and non-exploitative participation (Kvale, 1996; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). In this study, narratives were obtained from school drop outs in order to look at events in their lives which culminated into their dropping out of school. It was noted during the fieldwork that children's stories were not coherent, and their lives were not extended enough to construct Life Histories. Instead, an emphasis was placed on their narratives following probes from an interview guide. A total of 22 children contributed to the study. There were 12 girls and 10 boys. The narratives were used to learn from the drop outs how they spent their lives after dropping out of school, and their future plans. The method also enabled the researcher to find out any differences in the reasons for dropping out of school between boys and girls. The study recognised children as agents, who had stories to tell about themselves besides the information gathered from their parents/ guardians. Apart from getting the consent of the children to take part in the study, permission was also sought from their parents. (Refer to appendix 3 for interview guide)

4.3.4 Direct Observation and Photographs

Observation was done and photographs were taken to observe the tasks that children usually engage in the area. Mikkelsen (1995), states that the method can be used to observe social differences, behaviour, action and symbols, as well as structures which provide information to complement and verify information which has been gathered from other sources. It is usually handy where the researcher has limited time at her/his disposal. It is, however, argued that the time factor may at times result in the observation of superficial information.

In this study, the method was used to check the types of tasks that children in general play in the area in order to verify information collected from interviews and narratives. Attention was paid to finding out if children were involved in tasks which might be detrimental to their schooling. In general, the method was used to provide **complimentary evidence** to the information gathered from other sources as a way of adding value to the time spent in the field (Hay, 2000).

 Figure 6: Girls taking care of siblings on a market day.
(Source: Author, Fieldwork)

4.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

The data was analyzed through a coding process and presented mainly as narratives. Firstly, the interview text, which was transcribed as verbatim was screened to separate the text which was relevant to the research concerns and theoretical framework from the rest of the text.

According to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), relevant text is defined as the passage or passages from the transcript that express a distinct idea related to the research concerns. The relevant text for each group of respondents was compared in order to group related passages and get repeating ideas which were common to most respondents. The repeating ideas were then placed under appropriate themes in line with the research concerns. Using the research concerns, the ideas from the respondents were presented in the writing as narratives using quotes from the research participants. Where there were some

appealing ideas which were isolated from the repeating ideas, efforts were made to include them in the writing. The reason being that the study was not meant to make generalizations about the study area and the participants, but to give space to the research participants where their views and opinions could be expressed. However, where reference was made to such isolated texts, which are termed 'orphan texts' by Auerbach & Silverstein, it was acknowledged in the writing that those ideas were expressed by a single participant.

4.5 Reliability and Validity of the study

According to Kitchin & Tate (2000), all good studies whether quantitative or qualitative need to be valid and reliable. Similarly Kirk & Miller (1986:20) noted that, "objectivity is the essential basis of all good research"

Kitchin & Tate, (2000:34) state that, validity is concerned with the "soundness, legitimacy and relevance of a research theory and its investigations." They distinguish types of validity relating to theory from types of validity relating to practice. Those relating to theory concern the integrity of the theoretical constructs and ideas that support and provide foundations for empirical research. These include content validity, face validity and conceptual validity. On the other hand, validity relating to practice concern the soundness of research strategies used in the empirical investigation and the integrity of the conclusions drawn from the study. These include construct validity, analytical validity, ecological validity, and internal validity.

Reliability is defined as the "repeatability or consistency of a finding" (Kitchin & Tate, 2000:34). It should however, be acknowledged that qualitative research aims at getting feelings, views and attitudes of a limited number of research participants (May, 2002; Holt-Jensen, 1999). As a result, issues of repeatability of findings, and generalizations are not of primary concern. Since qualitative research studies touch on people's subjective experiences, perfect validity in not theoretically attainable. As Mikkelsen, (1995:207) argues, it is better to "lay open your values and your methodology" than aim for

unobtainable objectivity. This study therefore agrees with Kirk & Miller (1986:20), who define validity as the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way. Reliability is similarly defined as the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research.

The approach that was taken in data analysis and presentation in this study has been explained in section 4.4. Besides that, several measures were taken to ensure that the study is valid and reliable. Firstly, the data was collected by the researcher individually. This allowed him to probe further to elicit longer answers from respondents to ensure that he understood what was being said. Besides that, questions were asked in a number of ways to reduce the chances of misunderstanding. Although the boundary between the insider and outsider is difficult to negotiate during interviews, the researcher had the advantage of sharing the same language with the respondents. This reduced the likelihood of bias which comes about by the filtering of information through interpreters and assistants. The researcher comes from a background of teaching. This allowed him to use his interactional skills to put respondents at ease, and get information that was valuable to the study. It should, however, be acknowledged that the fact that the researcher was a graduate student 'studying overseas' drew a line between him and the respondents. However, the respondents had valuable knowledge which he was looking for. Therefore, he had to lay his mind open and take the role of a learner so that he could be educated on the information he was looking for.

Several Key Informants who have wide knowledge about the area, and the issue under discussion were interviewed. This allowed the researcher to cross check the data from different perspectives. The interviews were recorded on tape. This had the advantage of allowing the conversations to flow freely and smoothly without the interruption of note taking. As noted earlier, the use of the tape recorder proved to be a barrier at one point. One interviewee did not feel free to have her views recorded on tape. The researcher therefore had to allow the interview to be conducted first, and take notes immediately after the interview was over to avoid forgetting some details.

Although a lot of effort was taken to clear out any circumstances which could cloud the research process, some issues could not be controlled. The following section discusses the limitations of the study and challenges that were encountered in the process of collecting data.

4.6 Limitations of the study and challenges encountered in the Field

A number of challenges were faced in the course of data collection. The first was the lack of data on school drop outs in some schools due to poor record keeping. This resulted in teachers relying on memory to get the required names. In some cases, long distances could be covered following a pupil, who had supposedly dropped out of school only to find that the child was an absentee for the previous three days.

In some cases, the targeted school drop outs could not be found in their homes. Some had moved to take up jobs elsewhere, some were visiting relatives, and some had got married and joined their spouses. This made the researcher to change the way of getting the school drop outs by adopting the snowball sampling method. This method eventually worked as many school drop outs knew about other pupils who had also dropped out of school in other villages.

Originally the study was meant to get life stories from school drop outs. However, this method could not work out as children's stories were less coherent and did not have much major events to document. Instead, narratives were obtained using an interview guide which was already available.

There were some cases where the researcher could not conduct interviews, because people in the area suspected that he was a member of a satanic worship group and had come to collect the identities of the children so that they could be followed up later on to have their body parts removed and used for ritual in order to get rich.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the practical aspects of the study. It has presented the research sample, and the various methods used to collect data. The chapter has shown that the process of data collection was clouded with some challenges which have also been described. The chapter has shown the efforts which were taken to ensure that in spite of the challenges faced, the study should remain valid and reliable. The chapter also described how the data was analyzed and presented. The next chapter shall present the results of the study, with regard to the role played by the education system, in pupils dropping out of school.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SCHOOL DROP OUT

5.1 Introduction.

This chapter will present the role played by the education system in influencing the choices of pupils and parents which lead to the dropping out of school. Attention will be paid on access to education services, the relevance, and ownership of education services in relation to other priorities and challenges that are presented at household level. The role played by the government in pupils dropping out of school will also be discussed. The section will also discuss the chances that communities and parents have to influence change in their favor where things are not moving according to their wishes.

5.2 The role played by the Government in Educational Attainment.

As previously mentioned, the Malawi Government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994. Following this development, school fees were abolished, and the use of school uniform was not mandatory. Government continued with its role of providing the teaching staff, and providing teaching and learning materials to schools. These materials included textbooks, exercise books, pens, etc. The idea was to transfer the cost of education from parents to government. According to Ministry of Education/ UNICEF (1998), government prioritized to undertake the following initiatives under the Free Primary Education (FPE): provide sufficient learning materials and teachers; be responsible for the provision of classrooms, furniture, teachers' houses, sanitation facilities and boreholes; abolish all forms of fees; introduce community schools; and encourage the participation of girls in education. The role of the community was to work with government in creating a better learning environment for the pupils through their labor contribution in the provision of infrastructure, such as classrooms, furniture, and teachers' houses among other things. This would ensure ownership of education services by the community and ensure that school management is adjusted to the needs of the clients. The other roles played by the community in school management are defined in a Handbook for School Administration *(Appendices 10.4 & 10.5)*

It was noted in this research that government had not done all its tasks satisfactorily and shared the blame for failing to retain pupils in its schools. This will be elaborated upon below.

5.2.1 Teaching and Learning materials

It was noted that for the past two years up to the time of data collection, government had not supplied schools in the study area with teaching and learning materials. This had the effect of pushing the cost of education back to the parents and guardians.

The District Education Manager highlighted the limited role government had played in the provision of educational resources:

"It is indeed the responsibility of government, or to be precise our office to provide learning materials. This is the mandate of the Supplies Unit of the Ministry of Education to procure and supply resources to all pupils in schools. It should however, be acknowledged that there has been sometime since the last consignment of materials was given to schools. I remember that it has been two years now since pupils got learning materials." ***The District Education Manager***

Where there are pressing needs in a household, the need to provide for the learning needs of the children are not given the priority and may at times give parents good excuses to withdraw children from school.

A Head teacher agrees with this observation as he points out to the poverty levels prevalent in the area

"Of course primary education is free, but there are some other costs such as education materials like pens, exercise books, etc that parents may not afford if they are so poor. Of course parents have been freed from buying school uniform, but some can't afford even exercise books for their children……… Such things can force pupils out of school even though education is free." ***A Head Teacher.***

On the other hand, parents and school drop outs presented a broad picture of the causes of school drop out. In most cases, school drop out was not a result of a single factor, but a combination of several factors. However, it was noted that despite having a combination of factors, the proximate causes of drop out had mostly to do with school related factors. For example, a sixteen year old standard seven boy had earlier dropped out of school due to hunger, but resumed after the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society started issuing out free maize to most needy households. However, the boy dropped out later on citing the following school related reasons as the proximate causes of drop out:

"I did not have school clothes, exercise books and pens." **A 16 year old boy who dropped out in class seven.**

Government's failure to provide learning materials to pupils pushed some of the cost of education provision back to the parents. In communities where poverty is highly prevalent, this resulted in parents withdrawing their children from school.

5.2.2 Access to Educational Services

After the introduction of free primary education, the government opened up many schools to reduce the distances that pupils had to travel to school and also to accommodate the increased enrolment. Without school uniform and with the abolition of school fees, the response from the public was overwhelming. Kadzamira & Rose (2003) reported of an increase of over 50% in enrolment from approximately 1.9 million to nearly 3 million. However, the gains made in enrolment did not last long as cases of drop out increased.

Up to now a lot of people in the study area feel that government made a very good effort to reduce the walking distances of pupils to school and create spaces for new pupils. Most school drop outs and their parents/ guardians felt that distance to school was not an issue leading to drop out. Communities are endowed with schools, which make traveling to school easy. One parent commented that government had done a good job in reducing distances that pupils have to walk compared to what the case was before:

"We used to walk long distances. Schools were far and wide that time. For example Lisandwa 3 was at Kamphulu, and another school was at Chatalala. These days schools are close. They are just on the veranda." **A mother of a school drop out.**

The above statement shows that although distance is perceived in relative terms, households feel that government has done a satisfactory job in making schools available and closer to the people than before.

Although school uniform is not mandatory, there were cases where it had limited the access of pupils to schooling in some schools in the district. Many parents cited school uniform as a proximate reason why their children had to stop going to school. It was reported in the course of data collection that most pupils who could afford school uniform abused the school uniform rule in order to disguise themselves in their civilian clothes to carry out unlawful acts. It was therefore agreed that emphasizing on school uniform would reinforce discipline among pupils and also act as a form of identity. The District Education Manager was aware of this situation and had this to comment on the issue:

"...it is not mandatory for pupils to wear school uniform. However, on the other hand schools see it necessary for pupils to put on school uniform, because it enforces discipline and is a form of identity. If a pupil is in school uniform he/ she is bound to be well behaved even if he is not in school premises, because he/she is likely to be identified as a school pupil. However, those who are truly needy are not chased away from school, but we encourage the use of school uniform. For example, at one time a pupil was hit by a car and died while coming from school. However, because he was putting on civilian clothes and was so shabby, it took some days before his body was identified." **The District Education Manager**

Due to this observation, schools have some degree of freedom in implementing the school uniform rule. Some schools are strict and serious with the rule, while others are relaxed. Most parents and school drop outs, however, stated that schools are very serious with the rule that even those who are truly needy have to purchase school uniform for their children. This limits the attendance of pupils and leads eventually to drop out. A

standard six girl who dropped out of school had this to say after she was asked why she dropped out of school:

"I did not drop out of school as such. I was chased away from school because of school uniform and also I did not have exercise books." **A girl who dropped out in standard six.**

 Figure 7*:* **Pupils coming from school in their school uniforms.**
 (Source: Author, Fieldwork)

It should, however, be noted that not all schools were very strict with school uniform. It was nevertheless noted that, even where the school is relaxed with school uniform, pupils would impress upon their parents and guardians to buy them school uniform. This was the case, because going to school without uniform identified pupils as being needy, which would bring about a feeling of shame. Some pupils who did not have school uniform felt that their civilian clothes were not decent enough to be put on at school. To avoid the feeling of shame, pupils opted to stay away from school and eventually dropped out.

5.2.3 Relevance and Ownership of Education.

The Ministry of Education stated that among its major challenges it should strive to improve the relevance of the education system. It was noted that even in those schools which are well resourced, the attendance of pupils was less than satisfactory. This showed the low value that parents attached to the education of their children. Most parents who were interviewed looked at the relevance and benefits of education in terms of human capital. This is where education would give the individual knowledge and skills which would command a price on the market. Most parents expected their children to get jobs after schooling so that they could help them and other relatives later on in life. However, due to economic factors, school graduates rarely got jobs. This led to frustration. One parent made the statement below after she was asked about the relevance of education:

"Their education is good and useful. It makes a difference in life. You can become a teacher or a clerk when you get educated and you cater for yourself. Of course my first born boy does not have a job. He has been working at the estate without pay as a volunteer for seven years. He goes there every Tuesday. We had hoped that if a vacancy would appear, they would consider him, but up to now, that has not happened" **A mother of a school drop out talking about her son who completed secondary education.**

Parents rarely looked at the intrinsic role, and wider benefits of education in terms of capabilities such as being able to read and write, taking part in public life, being taken seriously by others, making informed choices, plus other benefits. Instead there was a lot of emphasis on the instrumental role of education as a bridge to a better future for its beneficiaries. A mother of a girl who dropped out of school had this to say about the benefits of schooling:

"School is good because that's the future. Without school they will be slaves. They should learn so that may be in the future, they could help me." **Mother of a school drop out.**

One boy who dropped out of school on his own will told his father that he did not see the benefits of going to school since his brothers who went further with schooling were just

living an ordinary life like any other villager. To him, school did not make a difference in the lives of his brothers:

*"The other reason he was citing was that all his brothers who continued with school up to form two are just staying in the village and also doing farming like anyone else, so he did not see any reason why he should proceed with education. Of course I explained to him that people have different fortunes and your luck may be different from the luck of your brothers but he did not listen." **A father of a standard 7 drop out.***

Although some parents acknowledged that education is good, they were unable to explain how good education was in its own right. Parents agreed to the benefits of education, but some showed dismay at the education that their children were currently getting. One parent indicated that her children were getting good education, but her example showed her dismay at the fact that her children could not read and write even after four years of primary education:

*"Their education is very helpful. Even if a child drops at one point, it's good that they should be enlightened. Look at these children, this one (pointing) is in standard three, that one (pointing) is in standard four, but all of them do not know how to read and write." **A mother of a standard six drop out.***

The observation from parents on the relevance of education reflects the outcome of a study conducted in six African nations. The study concluded that enrollment and completion rates of primary education are not very good and consistent indicators/ predictors of outcome. The study reported by Ellis (2003), quoted by Ibrahim (2005:8) reported that:

> Kenya had the lowest completion rate, at 63 percent, but 65 percent of its sixth grade students achieved minimum literacy skills— a better outcome than in any other country. Malawi's completion rate was almost identical to Kenya's, at 64 percent, yet only 22 percent of its sixth grade students could demonstrate minimum literacy Skills.

Due to the low value that the community place on education, most parents react silently by withdrawing their children/ wards from school, instead of making efforts to change the state of affairs in their favor. It may be true to say that communities look at themselves as 'beneficiaries' of the education system, not as clients. Parents do not have a sense of ownership of education services, and as a consequence choose to remain apathetic to whatever happens in the school. They do not have the agency to influence change. They withdraw their labor from those activities that are meant to improve the learning environment. One school that the researcher visited had eight classes, but there were only two permanent classrooms. Some of the classes were held in temporary shelters made from grass, while the rest were held under trees. The Deputy Head teacher of the school lamented about the community's attitude towards the school in the following words:

"I should not hide; the community here is a difficult one. In terms of self-development (the spirit of self- help) , this school opened in 1998, but since that time, we can't point at any type of development work that has taken place apart from the kiln that was used to construct the two classroom block that you have seen. It's proving difficult to mold more bricks for more classrooms in order to do away with these temporary shacks. When we call for a meeting they do not turn up. Even the chiefs do not show interest, so that these temporary sheds were constructed by the pupils." **A Deputy Head Teacher.**

Figure 8: An interview in a standard 8 classroom
(Source, Fieldwork)

One parent whose daughter dropped out of a private primary school due to the problem of school fees said her daughter could not go to a government school where there are no school fees because, even in government schools, there are some demands on the parents which she could not meet.

"Even in government schools, they sometimes request for contributions and they frequently invite parents for some issues and I am too busy for that." **A mother of a girl who dropped out from a private school.**

The problem of lack of ownership and apathy in the management of schools can be attributed to the nature of the education system in the country. Education in Malawi is centrally managed. All primary schools throughout the country use one common curriculum. This means that the curriculum is too general and not suited and adjusted to the needs of specific local communities. Thus, without jobs on the market, school graduates and communities cannot see the effectiveness and relevance of education. With teachers centrally recruited and posted to schools, parents and communities have very

little influence on how the teachers perform their duties. Although all schools are encouraged to establish School Committees and Parents- Teachers Associations, the roles of these organizations are centrally defined. Their terms of reference are found in a Handbook issued by the Ministry of Education. Members of the committees get inducted on how to perform their duties by school head teachers *(Appendices 10.4 & 10.5)*. Such a Top- Down approach to school management is unlikely to elicit a spirit of ownership in communities.

Where everything is centrally done including the payment of teachers; parents and communities, even if they have the capacity to organize, may have problems having their concerns attended to. This is the case, because schools do not have the capacity in themselves to improve on most areas since resources are brought from the central office and major decisions are not made locally. When asked on what opportunities local communities have to influence change in their favor, one Head teacher responded that parents could ask for favors by channeling their concerns to their Members of Parliament who will relay their concerns to the appropriate Minister when the National Assembly (Parliament) convenes. Another alternative was to channel their concerns to Ward Councilors who are closer to the people. These Councilors would in turn channel these concerns to the District Assembly where development issues concerning the district are discussed and attended to. However, at the time of the research, all districts in the country had stayed for over a year without Ward Councilors following the expiry of the term of office of the previous office holders.

5.3 Conclusion.

This chapter has discussed the role played by the government in children dropping out of school. It has been shown that after Free Primary Education (FPE) was introduced in Malawi there was a good response from the public in terms increase in enrolment. Government equally made very good efforts to increase the number of schools to accommodate the increase. However, government's failure to provide learning materials, plus the varied implementation of the school uniform rule have the effect of limiting

access of pupils to education. The chapter has also noted that some members of the community under which the study took place do not appreciate the relevance of education. This is the case because school graduates cannot get paid employment and education is looked at from a human capital point of view as opposed to a human capability point of view. This feeling is made worse by the centralized management of the system, which does not give parents/ communities a voice on their expectations in the management of schools. Where households are striving to meet a lot of needs, the issue of providing for the school requirements of children may take a secondary priority. The next chapter looks at deprivations which occur in households which influence the choices of whether children stay in or drop out of school.

CHAPTER SIX: THREATS TO HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

6.1 Introduction

This chapter shall take a look at choices that households make in the face of deprivations or threats to their survival. It shall discuss the deprivations that exist at household level which force children to drop out of school, or force parents to withdraw their children/ wards from school. Faced with such threats, the actions of households to reverse the situation or to improve their lives shall also be discussed.

6.2 Food availability and Educational attainment.

As previously mentioned, Malawi is an agricultural country whose economy relies mostly on the export of primary agricultural products. Tobacco is the main cash crop which is mostly grown in the area where this study was conducted. Apart from tobacco, most smallholder farmers also grow maize which is the staple food crop for most people in the country. Agriculture is rain fed which means that farming households are vulnerable to changes in the pattern of rainfall. Most households in the study area grow tobacco as well as maize in their gardens. Where the stock of maize is not sufficient to provide the food needs of the households, their earnings from tobacco are used to purchase food from the open market to supplement their stocks. The use of the same plots of land for cultivation takes away valuable nutrients from the soil which needs replenishing. It is therefore a necessity to apply fertilizer to the farms in order to get a good harvest. Where households are too poor to afford the cost of farm inputs, the government has in the past years been supplying the people with inputs through the Targeted Input Programme (TIP). The programme supplies crop inputs such as high yielding seed varieties, and fertilizer to needy households. The delivery and administration of the inputs has, however, been riddled with problems so that at times some very needy households have been overlooked. This problem coupled with the drought that was experienced during the growing season reduced the command over food stocks that most poor households had. As a result, the education of children was compromised as households paid more

attention to the acquisition of food. As Sen (1989: 90) puts it "the compulsion to acquire enough food may force vulnerable people to do things which they resent doing, and may make them accept lives with little freedom"

In general, it was reported that Malawi experienced an historical record of maize production in the year 2006. This was due to favorable weather conditions, and increased input uptake due to the government input subsidy programme (USAID, 2006). It was, however, noted that the area under study experienced a drought in the growing season, which resulted in a failed maize and tobacco crop for most households. As a result most households experienced famine. The food security report from USAID acknowledges this exception and states that: "Despite this positive picture at national level, there are a few localized problem areas: parts of Kasungu, Dowa, Ntchisi, Mzimba, Rumphi, Phalombe, Nsanje, Mangochi, and Nkhata Bay districts where production was affected by unfavorable weather conditions such as prolonged dry spells and floods. The worst affected areas are Kasungu district and the surrounding areas…. Some of these areas will require emergency assistance in the current consumption period." (USAID Update, available on www.reliefweb.int).

Agreeing with the above observation, the words from a Group Village Headman summed up the situation as follows:

"A lot of people work hard in their daily tasks to support their households, but sometimes it just doesn't work. For example, this year we had a dry spell from 14th January up to 22nd February, and the sun was blazing so that it was a poor sight to look at the crops. …This affects the attendance of children in school. For example, a pupil needs to take a bath, eat, apply lotion, etc before going to school. But if a parent cannot afford to buy soap, then it becomes difficult for the child to go to school. Sometimes you find that parents risk the little food they harvested by selling some to buy items needed by the child to be in school. Some parents are really trying hard" **A Group Village Headman**

During the study, most children cited hunger and other associated problems as the main reasons for dropping out of school. Some children dropped out of school because they at times went to school without taking a meal and may even find no food upon return from

school. In their words, they said, they couldn't read what was written on the chalkboard because of *'darkness in the eyes'* caused by hunger.

Figure 9*: A failed tobacco crop*
(Source: Author, Fieldwork)

A twelve year old girl stated her case that she failed to continue with school, despite her parents' encouragement, due to the hunger problem:

"They encouraged me to go to school, but looking at the way we were staying, I felt it was not possible. We were not eating anything in the morning; sometimes I could come back from school and find that there was no food as well." ***A 12 year old girl.***

Due to the hunger problem, the issue of acquiring food takes the primary concern of most households. Where the survival of a household is threatened by hunger, the issue of buying exercise books and school uniform for the children gets a peripheral attention. It was observed that in most cases dropping out of school in the senior primary classes was

not only a question of hunger, but it was coupled with a feeling of shame due to the way the older children, who are mostly adolescents, looked like compared to their friends. Although older children could persevere with little food, their presentability posed a further problem to schooling. One boy summed up the problems he was facing in the following words:

"There is a problem of hunger here that once we wake up and take a bath; we leave for school without eating anything. When we get to school, it's difficult to read. You can't see the writings on the chalkboard or in the text book.
……. There is also a problem of clothes. For example, last Monday I had wanted to go to school, but I do not have school uniform, I do not have a good short trousers, I do not have a shoe. The thing is we are so many here so for the parents to afford to buy clothes for seven children is not possible." **A boy who dropped out in standard 7**

Even some parents acknowledged that challenges which used to be there in most years, such as poor clothing become big issues resulting in dropping out once the children grow up. Where the provision of food takes priority of households, other school needs may suffer. One parent shared his experience about his daughter dropping out of school, although they were making efforts to ensure that food was made available for the children:

"We tried to encourage her to remain in school that we will try where we can manage to buy her requirements. But she felt uncomfortable with the clothes she was wearing at school. You know she is a big girl now and needs several clothes to wear, and needs to be well dressed when in the company of her friends" **A father of a standard 6 drop out.**

This state of affairs shows that for children to learn satisfactorily in school, it is not only the capability to be nourished which counts, but also the inner state of mind. Issues such as relative deprivation can result in children feeling uncomfortable in the company of their peers and eventually dropping out of school. The feeling of shame can force children and households to make tough decisions where they feel they do not have a choice. One girl dropped out of a private school because her parents could not afford the cost of boarding fees, mock examinations plus other school requirements. This was in

spite of the presence of a government school where she could attend school for 'free'. In her words she said she could not go to a government school, because she was feeling ashamed to be in the same class with her younger sister. She therefore opted to drop out of school.

"The problem is that my younger sister is also there in the same class so I feel ashamed to be in the same class with her (she laughs)" **A standard seven drop out.**

Where children dropped out of school, they assumed more responsibilities in maintaining the upkeep of their households. Sometimes households are forced to withdraw their children from school in order to use their labour in securing food, or alternatively to keep the home and take care of younger children while parents are out looking for food. The District Education Manager noted that the problem of children taking responsibilities is a long standing one. He cited cases where schools which are located close to a market are usually almost empty during market days known as *kabwandira*. With hunger, the problem was made worse:

"A lot of households lack necessities to send their children to school. In some cases, children are absent from school in order to take responsibilities at home, while their parents are out doing businesses to source income for the household. The problem is worse during periodic market days known as Kabwandira. If you go to a school which is near a market on a market day, you will find that there is very high absenteeism on that day.
….on market days the pupils are either told to go to the market to buy or sell merchandise, or they are asked to take care of the young ones, while their parents go to the market to buy things." **The District Education Manager.**

One grand parent gave evidence of such responsibilities which are placed on the shoulders of children when narrating her grand daughter's case:

"Lucia has not been out of school for long. She just stopped during the period of hunger. You know it's difficult to learn when the stomach is empty. When hungry you cannot see what the teacher writes on the chalkboard. So she stopped school and tried to pick up some employment in order to get food.

*She was tying tobacco into bundles and weaving them together and was getting green maize and pumpkins as a payment". **A grand mother of a school drop out.***

The availability of food is therefore an influencing factor in the education of children. Not only are the efforts of households directed towards the acquisition of food, but the lack of attention towards other forms of well being such as good clothing, have been seen to affect the attainment of children from deprived households. With the prevalence of hunger, parents are faced with tough choices. Where the children are kept in school, there is the opportunity cost of education, where households have to sacrifice the labour services of the child in order for him/ her to attend school. However, the occurrence of direct costs of education such as the purchase of exercise books, text books, and school uniform places a further burden on households, which are already faced with the threat of hunger. This leaves households with very little freedom but to keep the children out of school and allow them to contribute towards the survival of the household.

6.3 Occurrence of illness in households.

For poor households who live marginal lives, the occurrence of unfreedoms or shocks can directly affect children's chances in educational attainment. It was noted during the research that cases of ill health and death of a household member, especially the breadwinner, can have negative consequences on the schooling chances of the children.

In Malawi, there is a hierarchical arrangement of health services from primary health services (health centres); secondary health services (district hospitals) to tertiary health services (central hospitals). The health centres are found in all districts and offer general health services. Each district has on average, ten health centres. They are managed by medical officers who have a certificate in clinical medicine. There is on average a district hospital in every district. These hospitals provide a back up service to those provided at the primary level. They are managed by a doctor and they offer surgical services, mostly obstetric emergencies, and general medical and paediatric care.   Attention at the district hospital is usually given following a referral from the health centre. Where a case is too

complex for the district hospital to handle, it is referred to a central hospital, which is the highest form of medical care a person can get in the country. There are three central hospitals in the country. They provide services similar to the district hospitals along with a range of specialist surgical interventions. The lower medical centres therefore act as gate keepers for the higher medical centres.

Every citizen is entitled to free consultation and medication at a government health institution. However, due to long distances between health centres, people at times prefer to treat their ailments by purchasing pain killers from local traders before seeking medical attention. Sometimes the up take of health services from government hospitals is negatively affected by the absence of essential drugs and the perceived poor attitude of health workers towards local people. Although medical attention in government institutions is offered for free, households have to meet the costs of transport to the health facility. Where a person is hospitalized, a relative usually stays around as a guardian to look after him/ her. The household therefore has to provide for the upkeep of the guardian by making available necessities such as food, soap, etc.

The presence of alternative medical attention, such as traditional healers known as *asing'anga* and private health clinics gives people a choice on which type of care to seek for their illnesses. The use of traditional medicine and private clinics goes with a cost on the household.

The occurrence of illnesses in a household affects the chances of children from poor households more than others. Where a member of a household falls ill, children suffer in two ways. Firstly, there is little attention paid to the educational needs of school children, as most resources in the household are channeled towards the upkeep or the care of the ill person. Secondly, children at times get directly involved in the care and maintenance of the ill person or take up roles that have been left by the person who is taking care of the ill person. This consequently, results in children losing out on their education.

For example, a twelve year old girl dropped out in standard three because of the illness of her younger sister in order to assume the business of her mother, as the mother was occupied with the care of the baby. The mother reported how the illness affected the girl and resulted in dropping out of school.

"There were a lot of problems for her to drop out of school. Since I am the only one taking care of the children, I have a lot of work to do. I need to do gardening, cooking, fetching firewood, and then look for her school requirements. At one time the baby fell very ill and that was the point when she left school. There was little assistance from me due to the illness.
… I had problems in getting money, because I could not go to the mountain to fetch firewood for sale. So Monica had to go instead and fetch the firewood and sell for the money we needed to take the baby to the hospital." **Mother of a standard 3 drop out.**

As shown in the case above, the household which was female headed meant that the mother was performing both roles of a bread winner and a care giver. The occurrence of illness meant that one of these roles had to be compromised and the child would come in to assume the compromised role. In this case the girl had to assume some of the bread winning roles of the mother as the mother took care of the sick sister.

Similarly, a boy who dropped out of school reported that he dropped due to lack of support from parents following the illness of his grandmother. It was noted that all the resources of the household were channeled towards the upkeep of the sick relative with no resources left for school requirements, such as decent clothing, and exercise books. When asked about his parents' sources of income to meet school needs he said:

They would sell sugar cane, cassava, etc. It was therefore difficult to find clothes for us to look decent at school, and then with the illness of my grand mother, it made life difficult for everyone. **A boy who dropped out of school.**

These cases show that for deprived households, the occurrence of a shock, such as an illness to a member of the household leaves them with very little choices and very little chances of life bouncing back to normal. Even where health services are free, the time

taken to care for sick relatives, plus the resources which go with the upkeep, mean that households experience disruptions, which they are unable to come out of without a permanent damage done to the prospects of children's education.

6.4 The occurrence of death and its effects on education.

Similar to illnesses, the occurrence of death in a household results in negative developments in relation to the education of children. The UNDP (2005) indicates that Malawi has an average life expectancy of 39.5 years. This indicates the occurrence of deprivation in terms of premature mortality and the ability to live to a mature age. A lot of people die and leave children who are dependent. The occurrence of death, especially of an adult member of a household, usually leaves children in a big risk of having their chances of education getting compromised.

According to the results of the study, people used to see the visible negative effects of death where the man as 'head' of the household dies and leave behind a woman and children. The traditional role of a man as a breadwinner meant that children felt a sense of helplessness when the man is not available. This affected their attainment in school. In most cases reported in the study, children dropped out of school following the death of their fathers, as they were the ones who used to provide for their school needs.

It was nevertheless noted that even the death of a mother had negative effects on their children and affected their chances of continuing with school. Even where the material needs of school children were met by the father, the lack of psychological support which the mother gives affects the children and has negative consequences on their education.
The following are selected cases from parents and children narrating the reasons, which resulted in someone dropping out of school. All of the cases were caused by death in the household and the subsequent lack of support for the children.

"This has not happened when her father was around.
….. He was a tractor driver at the estate. So with his earnings we could support the children, but since he died late last year, it has been difficult to make ends meet and support the children adequately." ***A mother of a school drop out.***

Another parent explained her case that her son was unable to continue with school following the death of her husband. This was followed by her daughter getting pregnant from a married man. Fearing for more responsibilities, the woman married off the daughter to the man who made her pregnant:

"She was made pregnant by a certain man so I was annoyed and I took her to the man and left her there. So she is married and stays with the man. Of course she complains of problems in the family, but I tell her that that's what she was asking for by becoming pregnant.
….. The man is married. The other wife is there: She is therefore a second wife.
…… When their father was alive, we did not have a problem because he was working as a watchman at the estate so we could pay for school fees and other expenses. But since he died, it's difficult for me to look after the children being a woman." ***A mother of a school drop out.***

In most reported cases where death resulted in school drop out, it was the death of the man which was mentioned except in a few cases where it was noted that children dropped out of school following the death of a mother. Even in such cases, it was not explicitly stated that the death of a mother resulted in drop out. It was noted that informants of the study looked at the issue of death and drop out through gendered lenses. For example, in one case, a boy dropped out of school following the death of his mother, and the ill treatment he was getting from his step mother. As a result, he dropped out of school and left home to seek employment elsewhere. Although the boy cited the ill treatment of his step mother as the reason for dropping out of school, the study noted that the absence of the biological mother meant that the boy lost the support he used to get from his parents in his education plus other areas, and consequently, decided to leave school and fend for himself.

"My step mother used to deny me food when my father is not at home; this made me lack energy to attend classes hence I dropped out of school.
…. I saw that I was becoming poorer. I did not have decent clothes to wear at school. My short trouser could show my buttocks. This made me ashamed as people used to laugh at me, so I decided to leave and take up a job." ***A 16 year old school drop out.***

In a related case, the death of a mother resulted in a boy dropping out of school although the father was available and used to supply all the food and other material needs. The father was a 'wealthy tobacco farmer' who had three wives and 21 children. This shows that it's not only the capability to be nourished and well dressed which matter for children to be in school. Other factors such as the love and care of parents also play a big role in school attainment of children. The state of the mind is equally important in children schooling besides the instrumental happiness that material possessions can bring. In the words of the father, the family was happy because they have the means to meet most of their material needs:

"My family is very happy because we have most of the things that we need. When we lack some things, we just sell some of our property to get the things that we need, so we are happy."

Asked why the son had dropped out of school, he said the boy was just naughty to leave school, because there were no needs that were unmet in his life:

"For him to drop out of school, I have struggled with him, I take care of his school needs, I sometimes spank him to go to school, but he refuses to go for no reason at all. But I am still trying to get him back to school because all his relatives are in school except him." ***A father of a 12 year old drop out.***

In a society where a lot of children drop out of school due to lack of material needs, the parental/ maternal deprivation of love and care suffered by a child is rarely appreciated. The traditional role of the fathers as breadwinners makes it difficult for them to acknowledge the lack of attention being paid to the psychological needs of their children when the mother, who is traditionally a care giver, is absent.

It has been noted that the occurrence of deprivations in the household, result in compromising the opportunities of schooling for children. It has furthermore been noted that most children dropped out of school due to hunger, which was caused by the drought

experienced in the growing season. The lack of opportunities to make money such as lack of gainful employment resulted in some households failing to purchase maize from the open market. It can be concluded that most deprivations were a result of factors external to households. Cases of hunger occurring due to weather conditions have been high lightened. The occurrence of unfreedoms such as poor health and death in a household have also had a major impact on children's schooling chances. It has been noted that not only are deprivations related to physical, material and pathological causes. The inner state of the mind equally plays a major role in the attainment of education. The absence of a caring parent and the consequent lack of attention can result in a reduction of chances for children's education in spite of material support being readily available. It was however, observed that because people look at issues through gendered lenses, the roles played by the mother who is a care giver, in the education of the children is rarely appreciated. This results in children lacking the necessary support to continue with their schooling once the mother is not available.

The observations from the study have shown that where people have an adequate amount of food, they are in a position to lead a comfortable life. A good harvest means that households can meet their nutritional and other needs. However, most households are vulnerable to external forces, which pose major challenges to their well being. According to Ellis (2000:62), vulnerability is defined as a high degree of exposure to risk, shocks and stress; and proneness to food insecurity. Depending on the availability of resources and commodities over which households can command, households can either show resilience or be highly sensitive to shocks and stress. Resilience is the ability of a household system to bounce back from shock or stress; while sensitivity refers to the magnitude of a household system's response to an external event. The most sensitive households are therefore those who would suffer a permanent damage to shocks, such as weather changes, illness, or death in the household. It should, however, be noted that many households had devised coping strategies in spite of the unfreedoms that were being faced. Ellis (*ibid*) defines coping as the methods used by households to survive when confronted with unanticipated livelihood failure. Many households showed a sense of agency and resilience in order to cope with existing challenges. Some of these coping

strategies included doing small scale businesses, such as brewing *Kachasu*, taking up temporary employment, selling off some assets in order to off set the challenges met, growing vegetables by the Bua River and sell at the open market, etc. For example, one household head reported that her daughter was sent back from school due to lack of school uniform, during the period of hunger. The following was her reaction to the situation:

When she came back she was very much concerned. I promised to find school uniform to ensure that she goes back to school. That was when I hired the services of a certain man to cut down that tree you see over there and saw it into timber which I sold. I used the money to buy the cloth and pay for the tailoring. **A mother of a standard seven girl.**

Such responses show a high sense of resilience to stress. Such coping strategies allow households to sail through periods of challenges without a permanent damage being done to the education of the children. However, other households are more sensitive to unfreedoms than others. Their coping strategies to shocks and stress may result in permanent damage being suffered by members of the household. For poor households, their entitlements may be limited to land and labour. Without the proper levels of education, their only way to cope with unfreedoms like hunger is to use their labour and work on their farms/ land. To maximise returns, they employ most of the labour available in the household. This may therefore involve withdrawing children from school. Where children withdraw from school, the older ones mostly get involved in the process of coping with the shock or stress suffered. This may take the form of involving them in small scale businesses; taking care of their siblings when parents are away looking for means of livelihood; or taking up temporary jobs. The case below shows the high sensitivity of the hunger problem and its effect on another female-headed household.

"The problem was that when I am going to the garden to work with the rest of the children, she would stay behind at home to look after the baby. She would carry the baby on her back, prepare porridge for her, and feed her" **A mother of a drop out.**

This case shows a household where all the children had to get involved in the cultivation of vegetables meant for sale to militate against the problem of hunger. As a result the children had to drop out of school.

It was observed during the study that even where a household is highly sensitive to shocks, they preferred diversifying their sources of livelihood by engaging in other activities than tobacco farming using the tenancy system. It was noted that most people who ended up as tenants were migrant labourers from other districts in the country. Most indigenous members of the community felt cultivating tobacco as a tenant was a very tough and unrewarding job. It was therefore a job done by immigrants to the district, who did not have prior knowledge of the job and conditions involved. Most household heads, school drop outs, and key informants agreed to this observation. The few tenants that the researcher interacted with were all immigrants from other districts. Their working and living conditions were apparently worse off than the local people.

Figure 10: A Tenant and the researcher, on the way to transport tobacco.
(Source: Fieldwork)

A Social Welfare Officer in the district working on the issue of child labor stated his observations on the origins of tenants:

"Most of the children, who are working in Kasungu come from other districts, such as Ntcheu, Dedza, Machinga, Mulanje, and Phalombe. Kasungu is just on the receiving end. The estate owners go to these districts and talk to them about employment and getting good monies. When they hear that and taking into account the conditions in their homes, they succumb to such talks and come to Kasungu. With financial problems, they think when they work and get money, they will go back to school. However, once they start getting money, they forget altogether about school" **A Social Welfare Officer.**

Similarly, the District Education Manager indicated that enrolment in some schools in the district keep fluctuating following the calendar of the tobacco growing season and the migration of tenants:

"In some situations, the communities living close to the schools are tenants. As such, enrolment is seasonal. For example in the third term, enrolment is higher than the other two terms because thus when tenants come to take up jobs in the tobacco estates. When the crop has been harvested and the tenants get their annual pay, they leave and consequently, the enrolment goes down due to the departure of the children from tenants' families." **The District Education Manager.**

These observations show that despite the occurrence of unfreedoms in households, and the consequent availability of low value jobs, households make some choices on how to cope with stress and shocks. Depending on how sensitive or resilient a household is, their coping strategies may either affect the chances of children remaining in school or dropping out. Those households which have other commodities at their command, such as trees, natural grass fields, livestock, etc are more resilient as they can sell off some of these commodities as a coping strategy against shocks and stress.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at threats which exist at household level which force children to drop out of school. It has been noted that poor households are mostly vulnerable to

shocks and stress such as unreliable weather conditions, ill health and death. Where such unfreedoms occur, the way households cope, can either affect the chances of children in school or not. For most vulnerable households, children get engaged in means of coping with stressful events hence their chances for education suffer. It has, however, been noted that households do not just remain passive in the face of unfreedoms. Most of them are actively involved in militating against such shocks. Their means of coping may include diversifying their means of livelihood such as growing crops along rivers for sale, selling off some of their assets, and doing small scale businesses. For vulnerable households, the coping strategies may involve the contributions of school children, which result in their schooling opportunities suffering.

Besides threats to livelihood which force children out of school, some children drop out due to the direct or indirect actions of their parents. Similarly, cultural factors have a very big role to play in the educational attainment of children. The following chapter discusses the effect of culture on drop out. Reference is given to gender, as well as actions of parents in the process of dropping out.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ATTITUDES AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

7.1 Introduction

This chapter shall take a look at the influence that culture and attitudes play towards the attainment of children's education. It shall discuss the issues of gender and how it has affected school attainment. Attention shall also be paid on the role parents played in children dropping out of school. The section shall discuss whether culture and attitudes influenced the choices that were made at household level when children dropped out of school.

7.2 The Role of Gender in Educational Attainment

Gender is a highly debated subject and its meaning varies depending on the perspectives of the writers. The meaning of gender ranges from the roles played by males and females according to their sexes; to differences among individuals, even of the same sex. The second meaning covers cases of differences in sexuality, ethnicity, color, class, etc. In contrast to sex which is generally universal, and biological; gender is cultural and socially constructed. Clarke (2000: 56) cites cases of change after the second world war in the 'cultural turn' in which things which were regarded as natural were actually socially constructed. For example, women's movements showed that the idea of sexuality and the normal family with its "wage-earning, bread-winning, patriarchal head of household and its nurturing, domesticating and domesticated housewife/ mother" were not the natural order of things. He noted that this state of affairs was legitimatized and underwritten by reference to these patterns being natural: men's nature being to hunt and gather, while women's biology predisposed them to bring up babies and mop up what babies bring up. Such socially constructed roles are subject to challenges and change. The roles that males and females play vary from culture to culture. Gender plays a big role in peoples' lives and opportunities that they get, including the education of boys and girls in different societies (Butler, 1999; Lippa, 2005).

Kasungu district is mostly a matrilineal society. Heritage is followed from the mother's side. This means that a mother's line is the most important in the family. Although there is emphasis on the line of the mother, authority usually rests traditionally with the matrilineal uncle, i.e. the mother's brother (Peters, 1997; Phiri, 1983). According to the culture of the area as in most districts in Malawi, gender roles are culturally well defined. In general, the father's role is to take care of the food needs of the household, or in other words, the father is the bread winner. By default, this places responsibility on the father as the head of the household. Men usually play such roles as doing small scale businesses, working outside the home, farming, etc. These are usually roles which bring income to the household.

Figure 11: Men providing bicycle taxi services at a trading centre
(Source: Author, Fieldwork)

The role of the mother is to take care of and maintain the household. This includes doing such chores as cooking, washing, caring for sick relatives, etc. It should, however, be mentioned that females are also involved in some activities which generate income for the household, such as doing small scale businesses, getting employment in estates, farming, etc. As summed up by Moser (1993) women play reproductive, productive as

well as community roles. She states that "The division of labour within the household gives women primary responsibility not only for domestic work involving child care, family health and food provision, but also for the community management of housing and basic services, along with the opportunity to earn income in productive work."(Moser,1993:40). Children naturally get inducted into the traditional roles played by males and females and accept them without raising any questions. The occurrence of different gender roles in the household for boys and girls affect the chances of educational attainment between the two sexes differently.

Similarly, the roles played by males and females are valued differently by members of society. Men's productive roles which bring an income are more valued than women's roles. A lot of writers have attributed the difference in gender roles and the way they get valued to imperialism/ colonialism, which attached a wage to the tasks done by men, hence putting them in a privileged position (Duggan in Visvanathan, et al, 1997; De Groot, 1996). This coupled with the cultural and future roles and expectations of society from sons and daughters results in viewing girls and boys from different perspectives. Such factors influence children's chances in life, including in getting an education. In cases where there are scare resources in the household to go round, parents usually lean back on custom when deciding who benefits from scarce resources. This results in deprivations on the part of the less favorable members of society.

It was noted in this study that gender and culture play major roles in children's school attainment. While drop out figures for the whole country show that more girls than boys drop out of school across all classes, that for Kasungu shows a different picture. Although the drop out rate is above the national average, there are slightly more boys dropping out of school in the junior classes, although the differences are marginal. Why more boys than girls drop out of school in junior classes could be a matter of further research. In the senior classes, there are more girls dropping out than boys and the differences are quite remarkable (Refer to Table 2). This reflects the effect of culture on education in favor of boys. This observation was echoed by the District Education Manager:

*"If we look at the enrolment in the junior section, you will actually find that there are more girls than boys in schools. The situation changes as we move from the junior to the senior levels." **The District Education Manager.***

Several factors explain this state of affairs according to the observations made during the study. These have to do with society's and parents' expectations from their children; and Roles played by children in the household among others. Some of these factors are discussed below:

7.2.1 Expectations from parents and society.

The roles played by different people in society according to their sexes have already been outlined. It was generally observed that the reproductive roles played by women influence the choices of most households on children's education. The reproductive roles include bearing and raising children, and maintaining the household. Although parents did not explicitly state this point, it was apparent during the study that girls did not get the necessary support they needed to remain and excel in school. It was noted that households paid attention to preparing the girls for their future roles as wives and mothers than preparing them for productive tasks. It was observed that it was a normal practice for girls to drop out of school, even without being pregnant, to get married. Several key informants of the study gave evidence of early marriage of girls as a major reason for dropping out of school:

*"The major issue is early marriage. For the three years I have been at this school, we have never had a case of a girl becoming pregnant at school. But we just hear that such and such a pupil has got married, and some get married when they are fourteen or fifteen years old. For example, last year a very small girl got married to a certain man working somewhere down the road." **A Head Teacher.***

When a Social Welfare Officer was asked the reasons for high school drop out in the district, he singled out early marriage among other reasons:

"Some of the reasons could be our culture and traditions, copying from others, early marriage, getting attracted with money and hence seeking work, etc. For example, on

culture and traditions, there are some parents who encourage their children to get married so that they can have grand children and earn the respect of people in the community. There are also others who encourage their children to marry in order to have a large community of relatives so that they can be given chieftainship over their community." **A Social Welfare Officer.**

Several people that the author consulted to verify the issue of chieftainship informed him that many household heads really prefer to have many and large families so that they can become village heads. This has the advantage of being respected, controlling land, and controlling any type of 'development' work that comes from government. One example of such type of development work is the registration of individuals to benefit from the Targeted Input Programme (TIP), a programme in which government gives free farm inputs to most poor households to boost agricultural production. It is common knowledge that a lot of village heads receive these inputs and sell them off, to people who can afford, at a lower than the market value. It was therefore noted that the more people a village head would have, the more inputs he/ she would receive. Where such inputs are sold off, there would be more private income for the village head. Since in matrilineal societies heritage is followed from the mother's side, women have a big responsibility of producing offspring to ensure continuation and expansion of the clan or household.

Such expectations from women have an effect of scaling down the ambitions of girls and focus their attention on what society expects them to be. One mother who was asked about the value of education to her daughter, who had dropped out of school, gave the following answer:

*"I just want her to be well educated, because if a child is educated, she doesn't suffer much. I just want her to know more things, how the country is moving; she should know what has gone before and have foresight for the future. **That's all I want, because these days a girl can't get educated up to the point of getting a job, it's difficult**. She should just learn to get enlightened"* **A mother of a drop out**

Although it was not explicitly stated by many households, there is a passive acceptance and an expectation that girls would later on have to get married and maintain the home. This gives parents of the girl, especially the mother, the responsibility to induct the

daughter on as many household chores as possible to avoid embarrassment and shame in case the girl does not live up to the expectations of the husband and society at large. For example when the author was following up a girl who dropped out of school, he observed that the girl and her elder brother had both dropped out of school 'temporarily' during the period of hunger when there was very limited food available in the household. Although by this time the household had harvested enough food, only the boy had returned to school. When asked why the girl did not return to school as the boy did, the parents could not give a convincing reason. They only stated that *"She will return later"*

On the other hand, the future roles of the boy as a breadwinner for the household means he also needs to be well prepared to face the challenges of 'providing' for his family. This may as well include taking care of the needs of parents in their old age. Consequently, boys are kept more in school to increase their chances of getting an employment in the future. Alternatively, parents also induct their sons in tasks such as fishing, weaving fish baskets, farming plus others which can bring money. These tasks can, however, be done after the school day, while others are seasonal. This gives the boy a chance to attend school longer than the girls. Since boys usually married later than girls, they spent more years in school than girls. It was therefore a common observation that boys who dropped out of school did not get straight into marriage, but were involved in small scale businesses or were given plots of land to farm by their parents. For example, one boy who dropped out of school and was employed to drive an ox-drawn cart stated that he saw no reason to continue with school, because all his brothers who continued to secondary school ended up being given plots of land to farm just like any other village boy who did not make it to secondary school. The tasks that are performed by boys and girls show the different expectations that society had between the two sexes. This could be the reason that girls would drop out of school when the parents feel that they have mastered the ability to 'run' their own households.

7.2.2 Roles played by Children in the Household.

The different roles that are played by males and females give varying chances between boys and girls in school attainment. Because females play more than one role, girls are more disadvantaged than boys when it comes to time spent on their studies. Girls play both productive and reproductive roles. The reproductive roles, which involve the maintenance of the household, are more regular, and time consuming than the productive ones. As a result of this burden of domestic work, girls have less time devoted to their studies and less time to relax than boys. On the other hand, boys are mostly free after school, so that they can play, as well as study. As a result, boys are more likely to do well in school than girls. The District Education Manager cited more work for girls as a factor which leads to poor performance by girls, and eventual drop out:

"..there are also other challenges such as girls being given more work to do at home than boys. Most girls are kept busy at home after knocking off from school, while boys have time to play and to study. By the time the girls retire to bed, they are too tired to pick up a book and read." ***The District Education Manager***

For example, in one family that took part in the research a boy had dropped out of school but his younger sister was still in school. When asked about the tasks that the two perform at home, the mother said of the boy that *"He just stays. He does completely nothing."* When asked about the tasks done by the girl she said:

"This one, when she comes back from school, she does a lot of work such as washing dishes, cooking nsima, if there is no food and we manage to buy maize, then she has to pound the maize, etc." ***A mother of a boy who dropped out of school.***

Thus, the burden of domestic work performed by girls does not accord them enough time to study after knocking off from school. This affects their performance, and may result in repeating classes, and eventual drop out.

It was, on the other hand, noted that the roles played by boys do not always work in their favor when it comes to educational attainment. In some cases, boys have been forced to drop out of school as a result of the division of roles according to sexes. In most female-headed households, the women felt there was a gap which needed to be filled by a man. The absence of a man gives women the feeling that the family is deprived of someone who should provide for its needs. Phrases such as *"for I am only alone",* and *"I do not have a man"* were very common among female household heads. It was noted that the presence of a boy in such households places the responsibility of providing for the household on his shoulders. When boys grow up to adolescence, they become more responsible and assume the productive and 'male' roles of the household. They take up the roles left by their fathers in the household. This comes from their own initiative as a matter of responsibility, or at times in consultation with the female head of the household. As a result, they drop out of school in order to look after their homes and families. For example, one 17 year old boy dropped out of school after having a discussion with his mother in order to take up the responsibility of looking for food for the household. When narrating his case, he said:

"Okay, for me to drop out of school there was no food, so I could stay from school in order to look for piece work and buy food. And then after my father had left, I was alone. It was difficult for my mother to look for food. So I can say I dropped because of the problem of lack of food at home." **A 17 year old drop out.**

When asked to explain further what he meant by 'being alone', he said: *"I mean, I was the only man to look for food."* Apart from looking for the food needs of the household, he also performs other male roles such as *"construction of a bathroom, construction of houses, cultivation of crops during the growing season, etc"*

Similarly, another parent reported that her grandson dropped out of school in order to look after the household after the man who was previously heading the household died. Although the grand mother was willing to provide for the school needs of the boy, he insisted that it was his responsibility to look after her instead.

"I was telling him 'this school is free, it does not need any fees. On my part, I will try to make sure you have soap available to keep your school clothes clean.' But he said no, that's not wise. It was good for him to pick up a job and assist me in turn. Since I did not want to compete with him for words, I allowed him to leave." **A grand mother of a school drop out**

As it has been noted, the roles that are played by children in the household can work against their educational attainment. Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys because they perform more tasks. This leaves them with less time to study and play. On the other hand, the absence of a male household head in a family has also been seen to affect the schooling chances of some boys. Boys automatically see it their responsibility in the absence of a man to assume the roles that men play in the household. This puts their educational chances in jeopardy.

As it has been noted too that although communities are endowed with services such as schools, there are different factors which influence how people make use of such services. The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi (1994) entitles all children to an education. Different sections of the constitution protect the interests of children both boys and girls in their pursuit of an education. For example, section 25 (1) states that all persons are entitled to an education. Similarly, stating the rights of children, section 23 (4, b) states that all children are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation or any treatment, work, or punishment that is or is likely to interfere with their education. In spite of entitlements to an education, it has been observed that various cultural factors work against the educational attainment of girls. Micro level factors at the household and community levels present barriers to girls' schooling. Factors such as the burden of domestic work and the expectations of society from girls in terms of their present and future roles result in persistent deprivation of educational chances which limit their capabilities to gainful employment opportunities later on in life. Similarly, with little education, their capabilities to stand up and claim their rights are compromised. This has the effect of confining girls to a second class status as compared to men since they cannot afford to earn an income, fight for their rights, and break the cycle of dependence from men.

7.3 The Role played by other Cultural Practices

Malawi has different ethnic groups and every group is identified by its own culture. Although most of the cultural elements are similar, there are some distinctions between them. It should however, be acknowledged that culture is an elusive term which can pose problems when trying to define. Schech & Haggis (2000:16), state that the way the term is used in such expressions as "popular culture"; "national culture"; "consumer culture"; "global culture"; etc makes it difficult to pin down its meaning. According to Bocock (1992:232) quoted in Schech & Haggis (2000:21), culture is defined as "the meanings, values, and ways of life of a particular group". Worsley (1999) define culture as a way of life of a particular population. Using these definitions, it is therefore possible to talk of a culture of a community, a nation, an ethnic group, etc. Elements of a culture therefore include the type of food people eat, their dances, their dressing, their etiquette, how they conduct their functions such as weddings and funerals, etc. According to early development theorists, development was linked with modernization and Westernization. This meant that developing countries had to modernize after acquiring western values which were a prerequisite for development. This meant developing following the path taken by Western, Developed countries. The chief agent in the modernization and development process would be Western- style education (Lerner, 1959; Inkeles, 1969; Schech & Haggis, 2000). However, there have been shifts in the meaning, actors and perspectives of development (Lund, 1994). Despite these shifts in perspective, the role of education in the process of modernization, and social engineering remains important (Pieterse, 2001; Huntington, 2002). It was noted therefore that for developing countries to achieve development, they had to discard their cultures which were seen as backward and primitive and were a barrier to development (Worsley, 1999; Skelton & Allen, 1999). It was, however, observed that the neglect of the indigenous cultures of developing countries might have resulted in the failure of the development theory to achieve its desired outcomes. This position was further enhanced by the success of 'Ex-Third World' countries in East Asia, which developed by following their traditional and cultural values. It was noted that the countries in East Asia developed due to the adherence to the values of Confucianism, which include deference, loyalty towards superiors, identification with

the organization, and placing a high value upon education (Worsley, *ibid*). It was further observed that the idea of acquiring western cultural values in order to pave way for modernization could not be attained because where two or more cultures interact; they result in creating a hybrid culture (Tomlinson, 1999; Worsley, *ibid*). According to Moore (2000), the Western oriented school curriculum can at times sideline children from certain backgrounds in favor of other children. He noted that children from particular backgrounds may find a close mismatch between what is expected and valued at home, and what is expected and valued at school. In cases where there is a general curriculum for the whole country, this is more likely to be the case than where the curriculum is adjusted to meet the needs of local communities. The general curriculum may as well fail to incorporate the needs of local communities and also fail to tap local knowledge to make learning meaningful to pupils (MacJessie-Mbewe, 2004).

In Kasungu district, the majority of the people belong to the Chewa ethnic group which is a matrilineal society. Amongst the most important cultural activities of the Chewa is the cultural dance *Nyau* or *Gule wamkulu*. It is a dance performed by initiated, male members of a secret society. Essentially every adult male has to be initiated to be accepted as a respected adult member of society. The *Nyau* commands a lot of respect among both the initiated and uninitiated members of society. Uninitiated members therefore look forward to the time of their initiation in which they shall be welcomed to the adult fold of society. The *Nyau* has its headquarters at Mziza which is also the headquarters of one of the most senior chiefs/ Traditional Authority in the district. It therefore has a magnetic pull on the lives of the people in the district.

It was reported during the study that the dance is highly respected in the area and as a result it has an uncontrollable effect on children's chances of schooling. It should, however, be noted that the issue of *Nyau* only come up during interviews with key informants and a group village headman. No household head or school drop out referred to *Nyau* as having an effect on the issue of drop out. Several reasons could explain this factor. Firstly, *Nyau* being a dance practiced by initiated members of a secret society meant that all information concerning it was a privilege of only initiated members, hence,

they could not talk about it to an 'outsider' who was apparently not initiated. Secondly, there could have been more pressing issues which resulted in children dropping out of school than the issue of *Nyau*. Thirdly, due to the magnetic attraction and the advantages people see in the dance, people could be blind to the negative effects of the dance on the educational attainment of children. Finally, it could be a matter of choice that people could value and hence prefer the dance even if it has negative consequences on children's education, given the relevance and effectiveness of the education system.

All key informants of the study cited *Nyau* as having a negative effect on the schooling of children in the area. The key informants, who Mikkelsen (1995) refers to as 'outsiders with inside knowledge' were not initiated themselves, and hence, could give a more objective picture of the issue than initiated members. However, the views of a Group Village Headman, who is initiated and is also a custodian of culture and tradition, adds another perspective to the issue. The key informants cited the respect that *Nyau* is accorded in the area, and its attraction to school children who are willing to abandon classes and get into secret society once in progress. Similarly, they cited cases whereby classes would be abandoned as pupils get excited once a masked dancer, *Nyau* appears in the school premises. Citing the issues which result in children dropping out of school, a Deputy Head teacher had this to say:

" …and then the problem is made worse here because of the culture. Most children, once they get into nyau, they do not want to come back. For instance, this time after the crops have been harvested like this, any time the cult starts, children will stop school and rush to them.
…how nyau contributes to school drop out is that here people believe so much in the nyau cult, and as of now most children have joined. And then what happens at the secret hide out, well I have not been there myself of course, makes the children to become interested. So instead of children becoming interested in their education, they leave school and join nyau." **A Deputy Head teacher.**

These views were echoed by a Head teacher whose statements emphasised the importance of *nyau* to the area. When commenting on the causes of drop out, he said:

"This has to do with the environment from which the pupils are coming from. For example, our school is in the area of Traditional Authority Njombwa. Even on the map of Malawi, the area of Chief Njombwa is well known for Nyau. So most boys drop out due to such factors that attract their attention.
Nyau in this area is a respected dance. It is revered in the culture. So the pupils get attracted to it because it is taken as a religion. Then at the nyau, there is good food which is served plus the opportunity to make money.
And then Nyau has a force or a magnetic attraction on most people so most pupils will follow. For example, if Nyau passes through this school area, it means all pupils will stop whatever they were doing and follow the Nyau. Its something which they fail to resist, something they find too attractive to resist." **A Head teacher**

Similar sentiments were also expressed by the District Education Manager. His observations showed that the issue was not restricted to particular schools but was a district wide phenomenon.

"The issue of Nyau is truly a problem in this district. Many pupils absent themselves from school once Nyau is in progress. If you visit schools which are close to a dambwe (secret hiding place for Nyau), you will find that classes are almost empty when Nyau is in progress. All pupils rush to join the cult. Nyau is a religion in this area and has very high respects among the community, plus the food which is served makes it more attractive to pupils than being in school." **District Education Manager**

The views presented above show that the issue of *Nyau* is an important one in the district. It has big attraction on communities in the area. It was noted that the *Nyau* as a cult has more value and exerts a big influence on people's lives than many other things. This is noted by the reception a *Nyau* dance gets when it comes out to a school or in the streets. When the dance is being performed, the audience usually gives presents to the dancers, mostly in the form of money as a mark of appreciation. This has an added advantage of attracting young boys to join. In an area which is experiencing shortage of food due to drought, the efforts made to acquire 'good food' when *Nyau* is in progress shows the value that society places on the cult.

On the other hand, a Group Village Headman objected to the view that *Nyau* could be responsible for low attainment of children in school. He argued that the dance has been

there for quite long, and people have all along been getting educated. He therefore felt that *Nyau* did not have any effect on children's schooling. In his words he said:

"When it comes to culture, its difficult for me to point out that culture can force children to quit school. Even long time ago we had Nyau and people still got educated. You find that people who have been initiated can continue with Gule Wamkulu/ Nyau but still go ahead with their education. Here the only cultural dance that we have is Gule Wamkulu/ Nyau which is found at the headquarters of our Traditional Authority Njombwa at Mziza. That comes out on special occasions only such as the coronation of a chief, and other special functions. This cannot be attributed to the problem because it does not occur frequently." **A Group Village Headman**

The views of the group village headman show that there could be other factors besides *Nyau* which influence the attainment of children in education. It must be noted that culture, is a way of people's life. Among the community where this study was conducted *Nyau* is an important component of the culture. Although from a modernization point of view culture is seen as a block towards the path of development, for a people who value their culture, anything that may challenge it may appear unwelcome. This depends on the value that they attach on their way of life. Given the relevance of the education system and how it answers the needs of local people, it's unlikely that people in the study area can appreciate the effects of education and be willing to make compromises on their culture in the interest of children's education. According to Kadzamira & Rose (2003), the changing of the educational calendar in Malawi coincided with cultural initiation ceremonies, which resulted in an increase in cases of school drop in many parts of the country. The ceremonies which take place after harvesting when there is plenty of food are an integral part of people's lives and their influence cannot be ignored. The timing of the school calendar to coincide with initiation ceremonies means households have to choose between sending their children to school and getting them initiated. Where there is a mismatch between what is valued and expected at home and what is valued and expected at school, the school expectations are likely to be given secondary consideration. This will result in the educational needs of children suffering.

7.4 The Role played by Parents in School Drop-out

This section shall discuss the role played by parents in the process of school drop out. It shall discuss the direct as well as indirect roles that household heads have played which eventually resulted in children dropping out of school. Parents play an influential role in the lives of their children in many ways. In education, parents can either encourage or discourage the schooling of their children by the support they provide to the children, and to schools.

The actions of parents both at home and their relationships with schools influence the outcome of their children's learning to a great extent. In communities where families have to forgo the household labor contributions of children in order to allow them to attend school, parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children are getting the most out of their schooling. This gives parents and households the responsibility to give their support and contributions to schools to ensure that schools reflect the values and priorities of local communities. The questions of how much parents contribute towards the management of schools in their locations, is to a great extent a reflection of their interest in the education of their children. According to Ibrahim (2005:6), parents who have an interest in their children's education are in a position to hold leaders accountable, and contribute where there are gaps. She notes that:

> Parents who are well informed of policies and resource allocations in the education sector and involved in decisions regarding their children's schooling exert considerable influence and contribute solutions. Involved communities are able to articulate local school needs, hold officials accountable, and mobilize local resources to fill gaps when the government response is not adequate.

The contributions of parents towards the management of schools allow schools to be adjusted to the needs of local communities, and fosters demand for education. Given the opportunity costs of sending children to school, the contributions of parents can ensure that communities get social benefits from their children's education. However, the contributions of parents towards school management is a question of how well informed

they are. This is as well a result of both their interest and their levels of education. Parents who have attained a certain level of education have the confidence to articulate their needs without a feeling of shame. Effective education can therefore give the individual the "capability to take part in community life" without shame. (Sen, 1999: 89).

As noted earlier, parents in the study area have an apathetic attitude towards the schooling of their children. Their contributions towards the improvement of the school environment, and to school management are less than satisfactory. It was noted that most people in the area take themselves and their children as beneficiaries of the education system rather than clients. From this study it was observed that this attitude could be a reflection of the levels of education which influences how well informed parents are about their expectations from government, and their expected roles. This study established that all school drop outs come from households where all parents had dropped out of primary school themselves. Some had not been to school altogether. The only exception was one case where the father of a drop out had completed primary school and had two years of secondary education. Since parents who drop out of primary school are more likely to get low paying jobs or to be unemployed, they face problems to meet the school needs of their children. Children from such households are the ones who need the resources that governments invest in education more than others. However, due to the low levels of education, their parents may not have the literacy levels to keep them informed of the roles government is expected to perform towards the schooling of their children. Where they have such information, they may not have the confidence to take necessary action to demand change in their favor. This results in the children lacking the necessary support to remain in school, hence they drop out. As noted by the Social Welfare Officer for the district, there is a vicious circle of low education attainment from parents to children which may take time to break:

"Most if not all parents are poor and have very low education. Some have not even been to school. As you know, development is a gradual process. It takes time to see progress, so if parents are not educated, that is passed over to the children. It's like a vicious circle, uneducated parents which later results in uneducated children." **Social Welfare Officer.**

It was noted in the study that it is not only the indirect effects of parents' education which result in drop out. Parents have also been directly involved in cases where they have discouraged their children from attending school, or have taken actions which have frustrated their children and resulted in dropping out of school. It was noted that where some parents have low education levels they deliberately discourage their children from continuing with school because the children become 'big headed' once they get more educated than their parents. This could be a result of lack of confidence and a feeling of loss of control of such parents over their children. According to a Group Village Headman, the practice of being rude towards parents usually occurs more among boys than girls:

*"But even looking at boys, sometimes when boys go to school, they become big headed so that they do not listen to their parents. As a result parents get discouraged and stop supporting them with their school needs." **A Group Village Headman.***

Similarly, one parent reported that her son decided to drop out of school without any good reason when the parents were very willing to support his school needs. When the parents tried to persuade him to get back to school, he answered rudely. The following statement from the mother shows how their own educational attainment was used by the boy as a justification for dropping out of school:

*"When he left school, I told him that he is being unreasonable and I told him to go back to school. He however answered me back saying if I failed to continue with my education, why should I force him to continue with his education. He continued saying if I want I should be the one to go to school instead of him. When I heard that I just left him considering that he is grown up and I cannot drag him to school if he does not want to learn." **A mother of a school drop out.***

In a related case an eight year old girl dropped out of school due to lack of support from her parents. She reported that her parents did not buy her exercise books and pens. Although the cost of these items was not much according to the girl, the father did not

appear to get concerned with her education. The girl reported that she dropped out of school as a result of being angry at the actions of her father who frustrated her efforts to get exercise books and pens on her own initiative. Her mother agreed to her observations and blamed the husband for lack of interest in the education of his children. The girl, who appeared much upset by her father's behavior, stated that:

"After the maize was harvested, I used to go into people's gardens to collect any left over maize (nkunkha) which I could sell and use the money to buy exercise books. Now when I bought my own exercise books, my father could come home and pluck pages from my exercise books and use them for wrapping his cigarette to smoke." **An 8 year old school drop out**

The above case shows that apart from the many cases where parents had to stop their children from attending school in order to contribute their labor to the household, there were also cases where children had to stop school due to the direct and indirect actions of their parents which discouraged them.

It has been noted that parents play a big role in their children's education or lack of education. Parents can hold school authorities accountable where their actions fall below the expected standards. Where there are shortfalls, parents can come in to bridge the gap and ensure that children are getting satisfactory education. Such human agency, however, requires parents who have the necessary literacy skills and confidence to communicate their concerns to appropriate authorities, and suggest required interventions. Such parents are also willing to contribute their expertise, ideas, and labor towards the improvement of school management and learning environments. The study has, however, noted that most parents from the affected households do not have the needed education to keep them informed of the standards expected from the education system. Where they are informed, they do not take necessary action to hold authorities accountable. As a consequence, the children lose out on their schooling. It has also been noted that some parents are directly involved in actions which discourage their wards from continuing with their education. According to the findings of this study, these ranged from telling the children to quit

school when there is a minor problem in the household, to direct discouragement for fear of the children getting better educated than the parents.

7.5 Conclusion

The chapter has looked at the effect of culture on children's educational attainment. It has been noted that the expectations of society, communities and people on boys and girls work to the disadvantage of girls in their education. Similarly, boys and girls get different support in their schooling opportunities at the household. Girls have more work to perform which leaves them with less time for study. As a result they lose out on their schooling. It has, however, been noted that at times the gender division of labor can work against the attainment of boys in school. This is mostly the case where boys assume the duties of an absent male 'head' in a house.

The study has furthermore noted that the culture of the area has a big effect on the schooling chances of children. It has been observed that people in the area place a high value on their culture to the disadvantage of the schooling of their children. This, it has been observed, could be a result of the perceived relevant and effectiveness of the education that children get in the area. Apart from culture, the direct and indirect roles that parents play in the process of children dropping out of school has been highlighted.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter shall discuss the findings of the study. It shall discuss the roles played by the education system, cultural factors, and the threats to livelihood which have resulted in children dropping out of primary schools. It shall discuss the factors which make communities in the study area fail to utilize the education resources that they are endowed with. Education as a public good has intrinsic and instrumental values. Intrinsic roles are those which give the person satisfaction because education is good on its own right. Such capabilities include the ability to read and write, taking part in public and community life, being taken seriously by others, making informed decisions, etc. Besides these capabilities, education has an instrumental role. This allows the educated individual to contribute towards the economic development of her/ his community and country. There are also personal advantages, which accrue to educated individuals in the process of contributing towards economic development. These may include getting financial benefits such as a salary, which can help the beneficiary to afford some other goodies. This part shall therefore discuss factors which make individuals and households fail to make use of their entitlements, resulting in deprivation of the capabilities which come about as a result of being educated.

8.2 Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study shall be discussed by getting back to the research questions. An effort shall be made to discuss whether the research questions have been answered and how they have been answered using evidence gathered in the study.

The first question the study was meant to answer was: ***What role does access to and relevance of education play in children dropping out of school?*** The study observed that access to education, and the relevance of education played significant roles in children dropping out of school. It was firstly, noted that following the introduction of Free Primary Education there was a strong positive response by the community. This was

shown through an increase in gross enrolment. The setting up of new, junior primary schools to reduce walking distances to school, increased the number of pupils attending school. Similarly, access to primary school was increased when school uniform was not mandatory. However, evidence gathered from the study has shown that, access to primary school has been limited due to financial constraints brought about by the demands on households to purchase school uniforms, and learning materials. It was noted that, government had failed to provide learning materials to pupils in school, and as a result the direct cost of providing for the materials was pushed back to the household. For poor households, this resulted in children dropping out of school. Another area which had limited the access of children from poor households to education was the confusion surrounding the implementation of the school uniform rule. The study observed that, this was a place specific factor for Kasungu, and did not apply to other places in the country. Due to experiences noted with the school uniform rule, the district gave schools more autonomy to decide who could be allowed in class without school uniform. This factor resulted in differences in how the rule had been implemented from one school to another. This led to some pupils being denied access to schooling because they did not have school uniform. As a result, cases of children dropping out of school due to lack of school uniform were many.

Secondly, with regard to the relevance of education, the study had observed that, the community did not find the education their children were getting to be relevant. In the first place, the community looked at the relevance of education in terms of its instrumental value in providing a formal employment to graduates. This was, however, due to the type of curriculum, which was academic oriented and used to train pupils for white collar jobs, or formal employment. Children who went to school were not found to be useful to their communities. With the scarcity of jobs due to economic factors, chances were very rare for primary school graduates to get an employment. As a result, households did not see the reasons for keeping their children in school. To them, school did not make any difference in their children's lives. In addition to lack of formal employment opportunities for primary school graduates, the poor outcomes from primary schooling resulted in households not seeing the immediate, tangible benefits from

children's education. The failure of some children to read and write after several years of schooling, made some parents to doubt the usefulness of keeping children in school. This resulted in households withdrawing their children from school and socializing them on life survival skills at home.

The study was also conducted to answer the question: ***What deprivations exist in the household which force children to drop out of school?*** The study had noted that, some children had dropped out of school due to the presence of deprivations/ unfreedoms in their households. These ranged from hunger, illness and death in the household.

Firstly, with regard to hunger, it was observed that, the area under study had experienced a drought, which resulted in the failure of maize and tobacco, which were the areas' and Malawi's main food and cash crops respectively. It was further noted that, the drought affected Kasungu and other surrounding places, while the rest of the country had enough rain. The hunger problem was, therefore, a place specific factor since the country as a whole, had enough food reserves. However, the poor harvests from the maize and tobacco fields meant that some households did not have both food, as well as, money to purchase maize from the open market. This resulted in some households becoming more vulnerable. For such vulnerable households, they had to withdraw their children from school, in order to help in coping with the hunger situation. Most affected households allowed their children to take up temporary jobs, undertake small scale businesses, or cultivate vegetables for sale. Some, especially smaller children, had to keep the household while their parents were out looking for sources of livelihood. Some children dropped out of school due to lack of attention paid to school needs, because households channeled all their resources towards coping with the hunger situation. The lack of exercise books and school uniform, were reported to be the proximate causes of dropping out. The lack of decent clothes, soap, shoes and other necessary items were reported to be responsible for dropping out of school, especially among adolescents.

Secondly, the occurrence of illnesses in some households also resulted in some children dropping out of school. This was mostly the case with households, which did not have a

steady source of income. Female headed households were the most vulnerable, because of the combined roles of breadwinner and care giver for the household head. The occurrence of illnesses affected children's chances of schooling as they had to take up responsibilities such as, taking direct care of ill persons, or taking up responsibilities that had been left by the ill person, or the one looking after the ill person. At other times, resources which could be used to keep children in school were channeled towards maintaining the sick person. This resulted in children losing out on their schooling.

Thirdly, the occurrence of death in a household resulted in some children dropping out of school. The effects of death were most visible where the man, as head of the household and breadwinner, had died. The absence of the man made some households unable to provide for the school needs of children, as well as other forms of well being. The study, on the other hand, noted that the death of a mother also had negative effects on the schooling chances of children. The absence of the mother resulted in children lacking the necessary support to keep them in school. This support, it was noted, was psychological, moral, as well as material.

The third question this study went out to investigate was: ***What role do attitudes, customs and cultural practices play in children dropping out of school, with particular reference to gender roles, parents, and individual choice?*** Culture is an important component of people's lives in every community. Cultural elements can be used to distinguish one community from another. In Kasungu district, culture plays a major role in peoples' every day lives, including children's socialization and education.

Firstly, with reference to gender roles, the study noted that the community socialized its boys and girls in line with the traditional roles played by men and women. Boys were socialized to head families and be breadwinners, while girls were socialized to take care of the households. With the effectiveness of the education children were getting put to question, the community used to socialize its children in practical ways which could ensure a secure future. As a result, boys were socialized in tasks such as fishing, weaving of fish baskets, etc. These tasks, however, did not interfere with boys' schooling. As a

result, boys stayed longer in school. Similarly, girls were socialized in household chores such as cooking, washing, and other domestic tasks. Since the tasks performed by girls were more than those for boys, they lacked the time to concentrate on their studies. This resulted in poor performance and subsequent drop out. A more important factor was the practice of girls dropping out of school to get married before completing primary school. The study noted that, once girls had comfortably mastered the running of a household, they would get married and manage their own homes. This appeared to be a normal practice, and could be a traditional way for parents to ensure that their daughters would be taken care of by a man in the future. The study further noted that, the practice of women getting married and having many children, brought respect to heads of households and village heads. This could explain why the practice of girls dropping out of school to get married, even at a tender age, appeared to be acceptable. The study, on the other hand, noted that in the absence of a male head in some households, boys dropped out of school to assumed roles of the 'man' in the household. These occurred as the boys grew up and felt more responsible towards their households. As a result, their educational chances suffered.

Secondly, the study noted that some parents played major roles in the process of their children dropping out of school. Although most household heads had little education, and could not hold school authorities to account for their failures, there were other cases whereby parents directly discouraged their children from getting educated. It was brought to the attention of this study that, there were cases whereby parents would deliberately withdraw their support to school children, fearing that the children would be rude, or 'big headed' once they become better educated than them. Boys were particularly reported to be rude to their parents once they get to school. As a matter of trying to ensure that the child did not get out of control, some parents withdrew their support to ensure that the child does not stay in school. Furthermore to the influence of parents, it was observed that parents gave more support to children in socializing them to tasks at home than at school. Parents did not appear to care about what happened to their children in school. The attitude of apathy could be attributed to the levels of literacy of the parents, as well as the lack of tangible benefits from children's education.

Another area where culture played a major role in children's education was the cultural dance, *Gule Wamkulu/ Nyau.* It was noted that the dance had a magnetic force in the community, that it influenced the choices that households were faced with. The observation made from the study was that, the dance affected the schooling chances of children. Children used to leave school and join the cult once in progress. When a masked dancer appeared on school premises, students would abandon classes and follow in excitement. This brought up the question of what the community valued most. It was, therefore, a matter of choice for communities to show their attachment in favor of their culture as opposed to children's education due to the foreignness of the school curriculum, and the effectiveness of formal education to the community.

8.3 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the findings from the study using evidence gathered in the course of the research. The research questions were revisited to assess how they have been answered by the facts discussed in the preceding chapters. The final chapter sums up the study by presenting the conclusions drawn, and the recommendations made.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction.

This chapter shall give a short summary of the study, and the general implications of the findings. The Analytical Framework shall be revisited in order to discuss how effective it has been in dealing with the issues under study. The chapter ends with recommendations made to different offices dealing with the issues of education, and people's well being.

9.2 Summary

The study has, thus observed that the issue of school drop out in Kasungu district comes about as a result of a varying range of factors. It can however, be concluded that most factors relate to deprivation of basic capabilities. These range from the lack of command over adequate amounts of food, ill health, death in households, to lack of decent/ school clothes, and poor provision of education as a social service. The lack of social opportunities in education such as provision of learning materials, limited the access of children to education. Similarly, the lack of a functional educational system for the community, affected the choices that people made regarding the future of children. It had been noted that, there was a mismatch between what the community valued and what was valued in education. Due to this conflict of values, the values of the community prevailed over those promoted by the school. This explained the support some cultural practices such as *Gule Wamkulu/ Nyau* got in spite of its perceived effects on children's chances in education.

It had, furthermore, been noted that besides parents of school drop outs being poor, they had low educational levels. This negatively affected their capacity to organize and take authorities to task for failing to meet their obligations. Some directly discouraged their wards/ children from pursuing education. Girls were particularly deprived due to the cultural roles women play as caregivers, wives and mothers. These reproductive tasks were given preference over schooling opportunities hence affecting their future capabilities for gainful employment, and community participation among others.

9.3 Implications of the Findings

As it had been noted earlier, education plays a major role in the process of both community and national development. Besides the private gains that come directly to an educated person, a lot of studies have shown that a functional basic education gives more returns to society and communities. Basic education has direct effects on development because it enhances democracy by improving the quality of debates among local people, and allowing them to make informed decisions; it increases agricultural productivity since literate farmers are well informed and are flexible to adopt improved agricultural practices; it results in improved health because enlightened individuals can effectively control and prevent infectious diseases; and it reduces fertility rates. The education of women reduces the gender gap between men and women, and improves the health and educational prospects of children.

This study has observed that, the education that is provided in the study area is not fully appreciated by the community. Its relevance is limited to getting a formal employment. With access being limited due to poor provision and poverty, only very few people manage to go beyond primary level and get employed. This has the effect of creating elites, who get alienated from the community. Kasungu district, and Malawi as a whole being generally rural, means that education promotes the migration of people from their communities to urban areas in search of jobs, which are not readily available. This results in a negative return to investments made in education, since communities do not benefit from the educated persons. Since the education offered is not relevant to the needs of the communities, the pupils who drop out do not make significant contributions to their communities. As such, the high investments that the government and its development partners make in education constitute a waste of scarce resources, which do not translate into social development. The study has further noted that, where the educated people stay in their communities, questions linger over the usefulness of their education to community life. The high rates of drop out in the district mean that only very few people complete primary school. Where such people could make an impact, it could be minimal to have an effect on community life.

It is therefore, the observation from this study that, for social returns to be realized from the funds invested by government and its development partners in basic education, the educational system should be inclusive of all people. Efforts should be made to target vulnerable and poor households to ensure that their children remain in primary school up to the point of completion. Besides that, the curriculum should be reviewed to ensure that what is taught in school has practical use and relevance to the lives of people in their own communities. Social change can only take place if there is functional universal primary education. However, households can only be willing to allow their children remain in school, if they are assured of the tangible benefits coming out of children's education.

9.4 Linking evidence to theory

The Capability Approach provided a theoretical and analytical background to this study. The Capability Approach was developed following the shifts in the meanings of the concept 'development', and how it could be achieved. The approach looks at development as freedom to choose between various types of lifestyles. It therefore, emphasizes on the need for individuals, governments, and development organizations to enhance the capability of individuals to lead the types of life they value. This involves, enhancing the life chances of individuals to allow them to take advantage of opportunities, and removing those barriers which prevent people from living a life of freedom. This study looked at education as a social arrangement, which improves the life chances and opportunities of individuals to lead a better life. On the other hand, the lack of education limits an individual's choices in life. The study looked at the endowments, and entitlements for individuals, households and communities, which affect their basic capabilities associated with being functionally literate. It looked at the role of government/ Ministry of Education in providing and running schools as a community endowment, and a social organization. Factors which allowed households and individuals to utilize such an endowment were considered. These included entitlements within the households such as labor, education, skills, and food stocks; as well as cultural factors.

The study agrees with the Capability Approach that, the lack of basic capabilities makes individuals accept lives with little freedom. The study, therefore, noted that primary school drop out in the district, was not a matter of choice, but of deprivation of basic

capabilities. These ranged from poor organization and running of schools as a social organization and an endowment; to lack of entitlements in the affected households. Schools as a social arrangement limited the access of pupils from poor households. Similarly, the relevance of education to community development was questioned. The lack of capabilities which come as a result of being educated, such as the capacity to organize, and to take an active part in public life, affected the agency of the households involved. School drop out was, in most cases, a reaction to the poor provision of education.

The drought which affected the study area reduced the entitlements over adequate amounts of food of most households. This resulted in lack of the capability to be nourished, which influenced school attendance, and eventual drop out. Most affected households were vulnerable and the only entitlements available to them were their labor and land. This left them with little choice but to utilize their available entitlements to maximize their chances of survival. This involved utilizing the labor of their children/ wards in coping with the hunger situation, which resulted in children dropping out of school.

Similarly, unfreedoms such as illness and death in the household affected household entitlements and utilization of endowments. The occurrence such unfreedoms, resulted in vulnerable households utilizing the labor of their children as a coping strategy. Although households were faced with deprivations, their effect on different household members varied according to cultural factors. For example, girls were more deprived of educational opportunities than boys when there were illnesses in the household. This was due to their cultural role as caregivers. The study further noted that, with poor provision of education, girls were deprived of schooling opportunities as households allowed them to get married, as a traditional way of securing a steady future. Furthermore, the social organization of education as a public resource influenced the choices that households had to make, with reference to culture. It was noted that, there was a conflict of values between the cultural practice of *Gule Wamkulu/ Nyau* dance, and education. With the relevance of education put to question, the community upheld its cultural values by

supporting the cultural practice in spite of its supposed negative effects on the prospects of children's education.

9.5 Recommendations

In the light of the observations made from the study, a number of recommendations have been made to reduce the problem of drop out among children in the study area. Some of the recommendations can be fulfilled with urgency, while others will take time and need more effort and resources. All recommendations have, nevertheless, been put forward for consideration:

- The Ministry of Education should review the primary school curriculum so that it emphasizes on survival and entrepreneurial skills. Since a small fraction of primary school graduates precede to secondary school, the primary curriculum should instill skills that will allow its clients improve their lives within the rural environment. In this case primary school graduates will be useful to their communities and the role of education will be fully appreciated by communities.

- The Ministry of Education should decentralize further the management of education to give local communities power over the education of their children. District Assemblies, which are closer to the people, should be given the mandate and support to employ primary school teachers in the district and deploy them according to staffing needs.

- Schools should strengthen the links that exist between them and the communities they serve so that they can learn and benefit from each others' experiences. Besides asking communities to contribute towards the building of school blocks, schools should make use of available local knowledge in entrepreneur skills, etc to make education meaningful to its recipients.

- The Government should put in place social welfare programmes during periods of shocks and stress such as hunger to allow communities raise money for supporting their households. Programmes such as food for work, construction and maintenance of rural roads, etc can give households opportunities to raise money hence can support their needs including the needs of school children.

- To ensure that children from poor households benefit from public spending in education, government should ensure a steady supply of learning materials to

pupils in primary schools. Similarly, there should be a steady supply of qualitative teaching materials to primary schools to make education meaningful to its recipients.

- Government should put in place school feeding programmes in the area to cater for the nutritional needs of children from vulnerable and highly sensitive households.
- The management of education in Kasungu district should carry out a situational analysis on the implementation of the school uniform rule to ensure that children from poor households are not denied access to education.

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Appendices

10.1 Interview Guide for Household Heads

Biodata:
Marital status:……………. **Age:**…………………… **Sex:**……
Highest class attained in education:………………………..
Occupation:…………………………………………………

How many children do you have/ How big is your household?

What do you do for a living?

Is the family/ household comfortable with the way you are earning a living?
(Please explain your answer- If not comfortable, and what measures are taken to supplement or make things better?)

How many children are at school?

How many children are out of school?

Why did some drop out while others are still at school?

Whose decision was it to drop out of school?

What choices were there for him/ her to drop out of school or to continue with schooling?

What reasons/ factors made him/ her to drop-out of school?

What is the relationship between you and the child/ children who dropped out of school?

What is the relationship between you and the children who are still at school?

What type of education have your children received? (How effective is their education?)

After dropping out of school, how do they spend their daily lives?

What contributions do they make towards the upkeep of the household?

Are you happy with the way they spend their lives?

How else would you have wanted/ wished their future to be like?

Do you think it was possible to do something to prevent him/ her from dropping out of school?

Are there any chances that he/ she could get back to school again?

10.2 Interview Guide for Key Informants

Boidata: Age:…………………….. Sex:…………………….
Marital status:……………………. Highest class attained:……………
Occupation:………………………..

What efforts are being made to address the issue of children dropping out of school?

What are the causes of school drop in children in this area?

Are there major differences in the drop out between boys and girls?

What can be attributed to these differences between boys and girls?

Do school drop outs contribute towards the upkeep of their households, and how?

From what family backgrounds do most school drop-outs come from? (Economic and Educational background of parents or guardians).

Do attitudes and cultural practices contribute towards school attainment?

Are there any educational related factors which influence children's educational attainment?

Are there any other factors besides those discussed above which contribute towards children dropping out of school?

10.3 Interview Guide for Child/ School Drop-Out

Boidata: Age:……………………… Sex:…………………….
Marital status:……………………. Highest class attained:……………
Occupation:………………………..

Who do you stay with?

What is your parents'/ guardian's occupation?

When did you start schooling?

How was your performance at school?

What are the things you liked most at school?

What things did you not like while at school?

At what level did you drop out of school?

What factors made you drop out of school?

Whose decision was it for you to leave school? Why?

What role did your parents/ guardians play in the process of you dropping out of school? (What did your parents do, or say about you dropping out of school?)

How do you spend your time now that you are out of school?

What type of work do you do at home, or outside the home?

Are you happy with the type of life you are living now?

What were your ambitions/ How else would you have liked to spend your life?

Where do you see yourself in one year from now?

What else do you plan to do in the future?

Do you think something could have been done to ensure that you did not drop out of school? (Explain your answer)

10.4: Roles of the School Committees

1. To maintain school buildings and provide adequate school furniture.
2. Help with the day to day running of the school. For example, admission of pupils; punctuality of both teachers and pupils.
3. Employ and dismiss non- teaching staff. For example, school watchman.
4. Control school funds through the District Education Office.
5. Help to raise enrolment and encourage parents to pay school fees in time *(Not working now since school fees were abolished)*
6. Responsible for the discipline of the school i.e. teachers, pupils, and parents.
7. Organise the community to own school developments.

10.5: Roles of Parents- Teachers Associations

1. Works hand in hand with School Committee in issues like running development projects.
2. Foster cordial relations between school and parents.
3. Ensure that programs of the school are relevant to the goals of the community.
4. Discusses pupils' successes and failures in their meetings.
5. Opens a bridge of communication between school and community
6. Ensures that teachers participate in community affairs.
7. Assist in arranging functions such as open days which bring parents and teachers together.
8. Brings to the notice of parents problems that teachers face such as absenteeism, late coming, etc.
9. Brings to the notice of teachers problems that pupils face once they return from school.