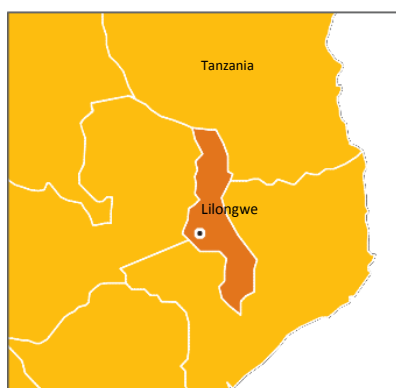




Strengthening Social Accountability in the Education Sector in Malawi (SSAES)



CARE believes that when citizens meaningfully participate in decision making and service providers engage with them seriously, access and quality of services for the poor will improve. In Malawi, CARE is using the Community Score Card combined with technology to allow school service users such as parents and community members to firstly, meaningfully participate in monitoring teacher absenteeism and provision of learning resources at schools and secondly, facilitate spaces for these citizens and the education service providers to engage seriously. The aim is for teacher attendance and teaching learning materials (TLMs), including textbooks, to be available at school, therefore leading to children having a higher quality of education.

OBJECTIVES

The World Bank funded project **GPSA Strengthening Social Accountability in the Education Sector in Malawi (SSAES)** is being implemented by CARE Malawi, in partnership with the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) and technical partner Souktel. The 3-year project (January 2015- December 2017) is covering a total of 90 schools in six education districts of Mzuzu City, Kasungu, Dedza, Balaka, Mwanza, and Mulanje. **SSAES has two key components, first to decrease teacher absenteeism and second to increase the level of efficiency, transparency and accountability in the school textbook procurement processes.** SSAES uses the Community Score Card combined with technology to 'close the feedback loop' between citizens, education service providers and government by providing evidence and assistance to government agencies to act upon the feedback they receive.

POLICY CONTEXT

In 2004, Malawi's Ministry of Education developed a National Strategy for Community Participation in School Management. This strategy gives elected community members in the School Management Committee (SMC) the mandate to oversee all management and school development initiatives including procurement of teaching learning materials in order to reduce fraudulent practices and monitoring attendance and punctuality of both teachers and pupils at school. The strategy also gives impetus to the communities to take leadership in addressing teacher absenteeism and monitoring procurement processes at the school level and recognizes the community as key owners of education management and governance in their schools. The SSAES project works directly with the School Management Committee, teachers and local government to assess the quality of education services provided, identify problems, jointly design solutions and enable systematic data collection needed at all levels.

MONITORING TEACHER ABSENTEEISM – CARE’S INTERVENTION

CARE Malawi worked with Souktel to develop and operationalize an ICT platform through which quantitative and qualitative data on teacher attendance in the participating schools is monitored and reported by use of mobile phones held by community members, often parents, within the School Monitoring Committees (SMCs). SMC members take turns to visit the school in their



Figure 1 SMC Chairperson sending SMS

district ahead of 7am when teachers are expected to be in school. The SMC monitor combines a walk around school classrooms with a review of the teacher sign-in book in the head teacher’s office. If the teachers have not reported to school by 9am then the monitor sends an SMS to the monitoring platform held at the CARE office detailing the teacher absent and what reason has been given for this absenteeism.



Figure 2 Head teacher showing teacher attendance list

To gain the reason for a teacher’s absence, monitors combine asking head teachers, the teacher themselves and their own community knowledge of the teachers’ possible whereabouts. Acceptable reasons are illnesses with a doctor’s note, or caring for a sick family member/funeral, unacceptable reasons are for instance personal reasons such as laziness, drinking the night before and tending to their other business for supplementary income. Once the monitor has sent the SMS it is recorded by the ICT platform managed by CARE. Each month CARE generates a report which highlights the total number of teacher absenteeism cases and reasons why. This report is shared with local education authorities in order to give a view of the extent of the problem in each district. A Community Score Card is then administered to gain further insight into the qualitative reasons for absence.

The overall aim is to collect data on teacher absenteeism with reasons in order to first see if extra monitoring by community members reduces teacher absenteeism by adding an extra level of accountability and highlight any unexpected root causes for teacher absenteeism that need addressing at the institutional government level.



Figure 3 & 4 Head teacher and senior teachers committed to the SSAES project

MONITORING AND REPORTING ON PROCUREMENT OF TLMS – CARE’S INTERVENTION

Through SSAES, CARE has recently started supporting communities in monitoring the procurement of teaching and learning materials (TLM) which includes chalk, chalkboards, exercise books, text books and school stationery. So far text book delivery monitoring has started in the project districts. The monitoring process is led by the SMC in partnership with the head teacher. The head teacher provides the figures for expected number of books as promised by the ministry, then the community monitors count the number of text books on delivery and record on a monitoring sheet. Any discrepancies between expected and actual can then be raised to the head teacher and reported to the local authorities where necessary. Since text book delivery only occurs annually,

[illegible]

Travel distance to school: The cost of transportation to schools is half the teacher's salaries and often teachers who do not have a house on the school site are required to travel at least 5km. Many of the roads to rural schools are long, dust tracks a couple of miles off the main road. During heavy rains, the distance to school and bad road conditions lead to teacher absenteeism's. Communities are willing to help build teacher houses on the school site but need local government support for resources.

SUCSESSES

Teacher absenteeism:

Before SSAES implementation, teacher absenteeism was a serious challenge reported by 22% of teachers in Balaka and up to 83% of teachers in Mwanza districts. This is despite the finding that 57% of teachers lived within a ten-minute distance to the schools. These absences lead to huge losses in learning time for learners and consequential adverse effects on learning outcomes.

- ❖ After 18 months of operation, SSAES has seen a drop in teacher absenteeism across all school districts.¹ A head teacher in one of the schools indicated that before the SAESS intervention, teacher absence could be as high as having a teacher away from school for three to four days per week, but it has now come to almost zero with most teachers being present for five out of five days per week². Some teachers are now concerned that their absenteeism will be reported to the Ministry of Education. This fear has consequently eliminated the habit of teachers absenting themselves from school without written reason.
- ❖ Teachers who have good attendance also commented on how they like the system as they understand teacher absenteeism is a problem and they see it as good practice that teachers who are absent without good reason are reported.
- ❖ An unexpected positive outcome is that it has aided head teachers with supervision of teachers. The community monitoring element has broken social relations that made it difficult for head teachers to supervise teachers. For instance, head teachers have commented how before the program teachers were being absent and not reporting to head teacher, but now with the project teachers are reporting to head teacher if they are to be absent and explaining why. The community monitors can also take cases of absenteeism to the Primary Education Advisor, strengthening his position as



Figure 7 SMC demonstrating monitoring process

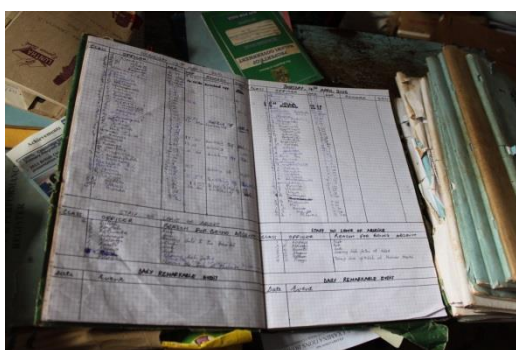


Figure 8 Teacher supervision register

head teacher as it prevents a negative tension between head teachers and their teachers.

- ❖ Community members have also become more empowered and state that before the project they were not aware of their role in the school community and their presence was not there. Now, they feel they have learnt their role and how they can engage to make the quality of their children's education better.

Procurement of TLMs

Procurement of Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) takes place in 87.5% of the schools using funds from School Improvement Grants being led by School Procurement Committees or School Management Committees. Before the implementation of SSAES, there was inadequate monitoring of the procurement process by the community at both school and district levels. Only 19.4% indicated that all materials ordered were available, delivered or collected. Prior to SSAES, most of the accountability measures that the National Strategy for Community Participation in School Management states should have been led by the community through SMCs and procurement committees were only done by a head teacher. Only 56% of the procurement deliveries at schools were received and signed by both Head Teacher and community.

- ❖ With SSAES in place, the community monitors play a large role in recording textbooks received against expected delivery. In many of the schools monitoring text books, SMC were able to show the number of books received on last text book delivery.
- ❖ The community members also revealed feeling empowered by their responsibility in the procurement process, and increased ownership of the schools.

¹ One primary school reported cases of absenteeism hitting 10 a week but now only about 3 cases a week and all these have valid reasons.

² Another head teacher provided the figure of 12 out of 50 teachers being absent at a time before the interventions. With the intervention, this has reduced to about 5 out of 50 teachers at a given time.

KEY LESSONS

- ❖ **Sensitize the community well during project inception:** Teachers and community members conducting the monitoring need to be properly informed about the project process and where results from the monitoring go and how they will be used. This prevents unnecessary fear and uncertainty about the project which can lead to opposing reactions to the project and negative side-effects. Uncertainty amongst teachers with regards to where the records of absenteeism went led to some hostility towards the project due to the perceived unfairness to the teachers, by being reported without taking into account many of the underlying causes of absenteeism due to long distances to schools, lack of infrastructure, poor remuneration that cannot adequately cater for a teacher's household needs³ and lack of housing in schools. The project needs to be treated as a collaborative effort to improve education quality for Malawian children and remind teachers of their duties. During the sensitization process however teachers need to be at the center of inception so they understand the process and overall objectives.

- ❖ **Close the feedback loop:** The feedback loop between community members (data collectors) and data processors needs to be strong. Not informing the data collectors on the outcomes of their efforts creates the risk of demotivating data collectors as they cannot see whether their time is worthwhile. If teachers see no action emerging from the monitoring process, there is a high likelihood that teachers will revert back to absenteeism, thus undoing all gains made through SSAES.



Figure 9 SMC and pupils

- ❖ **Recognition and rewards to teachers with good attendance:** Teachers with good attendance want to be recognized and rewarded for their hard work and need to see that those teachers who have high rates of absenteeism without good reason need to be reprimanded in some way. This will prevent motivated teachers from feeling discouraged. Such recognition can be an automatically generated text message sent from ministry thanking them for their 100% attendance in a month, or even a bonus of 2000kwa to their monthly pay cheque if they have 100% attendance. Teachers not turning up to school need to be appropriately disciplined. If they see no action against their absenteeism then they will continue to be absent.

- ❖ **Gender roles:** Reasons given by some female teachers for being absent were childcare and home issues. Where these gender roles still exist it is important to not unfairly punish female teachers for absenteeism due to these issues.

- ❖ **Motivating project participants/communities and teachers:** Teachers would feel more motivated if getting some kind of training from the project. Teachers with good attendance need to receive rewards this will then motivate other teachers to improve their attendance as they will then be able to also get rewards.

- ❖ **Looking beyond teacher absenteeism to root issues:** Teacher unions need to be strengthened. Teachers stated fees for teacher union membership comes directly from salaries however the teachers do not get support for salary rises, teachers don't get promotions, training workshops or support for new teacher housing. Teachers do not know how to elect chairs for the Union or even who the elected chair is. This raises a question of a lack of accountability between teachers and the Union and thus the need to work on getting teachers' rights respected.

- ❖ **Supervision alone is not enough:** Supervision coupled with incentives need to be combined. Also a teacher's plea was that the future sustainability of the project needs a force. In order for a learner to achieve a certain level of education, there needs to be follow up and monitoring beyond this project.

³ ~90% teachers have other businesses as supplementary income



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For further details and cases on Community Score Cards, please visit:

<http://governance.care2share.wikispaces.net/The+Community+Score+Card+CoP>

Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package, CARE International is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE International places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. To learn more, visit www.care-international.org.