



# PRIMARY SCHOOL DROP-OUTS BREAKING THE VICIOUS CYCLE

Intersecting factors contributing to primary school drop-outs in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi.

BRIDGET C. CASSIE





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All monetary figures are provided as us dollars and/or Malawian kwacha. One us dollar is equivalent to 453 MWK. All photographs are by the author unless otherwise cited. In some cases, names have been changed to protect identities.

COVER IMAGE (*Image 1*): Nhtembo Drama Club, Usisya, Malawi



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explored the how knowledge, attitudes and practices of youth, guardians, teachers and institutions affect primary school drop-outs in Malawi. To do so, the study first explored the experiences of various individuals present in the area, and then investigated what local factors influenced primary school drop-outs. The study involved five primary schools in the Nkhata Bay North region, three larger schools and two smaller schools.

The study employed a mixed methods research strategy, with case study principles. Surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and participatory observation methods were used to collect data. Research respondents included primary school students, primary school drop-outs, primary school graduates, classroom teachers, Primary Education Advisors (PEA), guardians, NGO workers, Village Headman (VH), the District Education Manager (DEM) and more. These respondents were gathered from around the village and district. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model and Risman's theory of gender as a social structure were used to guide the study.

Based on the findings, the study suggests that there is a lack of connectivity between the individual, their family and community network, and the policymakers. Furthermore, the study indicates that females in rural Nkhata Bay North are more adversely affected by this lack of connectivity than their male counterparts.

Moreover, the study finds that other conditions like parental education background, understaffing of teachers, regional customs and practices, and low socio-economic settings can have negative impacts on primary school drop-out rates in Nkhata Bay North.

*KEYWORDS: Malawi, primary school, drop-outs, gender, mixed methods research, gender as a social structure, ecological systems model, individual to structure relationship, customs and practices, low socio-economic setting.*

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DEM	District Education Manager
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
EFA	Education For All
FPE	Free Primary Education
GoM	Government of Malawi
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
MALGA	Malawi Local Government Association
MDGS	Millennium Development Goals
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MoEST	(Malawi's) Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSO	National Statistical Office
ODL	Open Distance Learning
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PSIP	Primary School Improvement Plan
SRH	Sexual Reproductive Health
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nation's Children Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

*“Education is the most basic insurance against poverty...societies that make education their top development priority are more resilient, prosperous, just and peaceful” (UNESCO, 2011, P. 3).*

In line with UNESCO’s quote, development scholars have agreed that policies favouring human capital accumulation are likely to lead to better institutions and support a country out of poverty (Bjørnskov & Méon, 2013; & Glaesar et al., 2004). However, the widening gap between a country’s rural and urban population is producing uneven access to education, health and social services (Adams, 2002). As of 2011, 55% of the global population lives in rural areas across the world, and about 35% of this rural population are classified as extremely poor (IFAD, 2011, p. 16). Youth in Sub-Saharan Africa equate to 62% of the total population, and among the rural populace this number is likely to be much higher (IFAD, 2011, p. 65). For example, Malawi is one of the ten poorest countries in the world, with a GDP per capita of less than 900 USD (CIAA, 2013). Malawi’s population is 90% rural – this population often lives in hard to reach locations (NSO & ICF Macro, 2011, p.3). On top of this predominantly rural population, the population of children under the age of 14 years old is approximately 46% of the total population (WB, 2012, p. 5). Development agencies and governments explain that education is a strong mechanism to alleviate marginalised populations out of poverty and to fully participate in their communities (GoMa, 2010; UNICEF, 2007; & the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). In the case of Malawi’s young population – progressive education policies have been put in place, but these policies are not effectively reaching the rural populace. These policies promote gender equality and offer support for economically vulnerable students. Without these policies reaching the rural populace, economically vulnerable countries cannot fully experience poverty alleviation.

## 1.1 Statement of problem

Malawi has, however, made a concerted effort over the past few decades to increase school enrolment. Schools in Malawi have also been trying to increase the quality of education since the introduction of the Education For All (EFA) policy. This policy was introduced by UNESCO in 1994. Following the implementation of these policies, which focused on free education and Universal Primary Education (UPE), the quality of Malawian education dropped nation-wide (Mcnamara, 2013; & Chimombo, 2005).

Malawi’s EFA policy increased primary school attendance over the last 20 years, but grade retention, dropping out of primary school, and as mentioned above – the quality of education – remained an issue across the country (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003; Kunje & Stuart, 2003). The 2010, Malawi Demographic Health Survey (MDHS) found that 17% of primary school drop-outs didn’t make it to the end of standard eight, and 3% didn’t make it to the end of standard one (p. 16). Kunje et al. (2011) outlined that the government put a number of policies in place to curb drop-out rates in Malawi from the mid 1990s to the 2000s. These policies were aimed at keeping children in school by offering equal opportunities for both

males and females to receive secondary school bursaries. Additional policies were made to tackle economic vulnerability, by making uniforms non-compulsory, and by designing re-admission policies for pregnant girls who had to drop-out of school. The re-admission, as well as the school bursary policies illustrate the role gender plays in Malawi as an obstacle for educational attainment (Chalasanani et al., 2012).

Gender issues in Malawi are distinctive and can be reflected through a number of daily challenges that women and men face in Malawi. The gender division in Malawian society is engrained in many aspects of Malawian life and magnified in rural settings. This gender divide can be exemplified in customs such as household roles, daily work expectations, and also in traditions such as the female initiation ceremony. The current policy environment of the national government is to counter this gender divide and push for gender mainstreaming in education, the workplace, and daily life. Strauss and Thomas (1995) explain that if a country can make improvements in women's education, this should lead to improvements in employment. Additionally they should also aim to eliminate gender inequalities in the job market, which should result in non-market benefits such as increased child nutrition and lower fertility (Strauss & Thomas, 1995).

This study recognises rural Malawi's challenges with school drop-outs at primary level. Due to this, the research aims to learn about the main challenges hindering effective education service delivery at village level in rural Malawi. This will be achieved by investigating the knowledge, attitudes and practices towards education in a rural case study setting. On top of this, this research analyses the interaction of social structures – such as social norms, traditions and customs –, as well as institutions – such as the government, schools, religion, and traditional authorities –, and how they interact with the individual on education issues. Gender is a considerable obstacle in Malawian society, therefore this study will take a classical feminist approach to analysing the data. This analysis examines how gender interacts with other significant factors and ultimately influences an individual's decisions about their education. Youth's classification for the purpose of this study includes children between the ages of 10 through to 35 years old. This classification is developed through UNFPA (2012, p. 1) and Africa Union's (Kabumba, 2009, p. 1) classification of young people and youth.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

### **1.2.1 RESEARCH QUESTION**

How do knowledge, attitudes and practices of youth, guardians, teachers and institutions influence drop-out rates in primary schools in the village of Usisya, Northern Malawi?

### **1.2.2 SUB QUESTIONS**

The following sub questions will enhance the main research question by investigating the structural, social-cultural and economic factors that contribute to local experiences of education. We will also look at the policy backdrop of global, national and local education and what role this plays in educational attainment.

- To what extent do structural factors influence school attendance in Usisya? (These factors could include institutions at national, regional and local levels, government policies and also community traditions and norms).
- To what extent do social-cultural factors influence school attendance in Usisya? (These social-cultural factors could include traditions, initiation ceremonies, HIV/AIDS, a child's household role, community and family expectations, etc).
- To what extent do economic factors influence school attendance in Usisya? (These factors could include household resources, transportation costs, with specific focus on poverty).

### 1.2.3 MAIN OBJECTIVE

The study seeks to address the following main objective:

*To investigate the main challenges hindering effective education service delivery at the village level in rural Malawi.*

#### **Specific objectives**

The research will have the following specific objectives:

- To discover the knowledge, attitudes and practices among youth, guardians, teachers and institutions regarding the (lack of) benefits of education in Usisya, Malawi;
- To explore the role that governance structures and socio-cultural structures play in primary schooling in Usisya, Malawi;
- To ascertain how gender is experienced at various levels of society and whether gender combined with other significant factors contributes to primary school drop-outs in Usisya, Malawi.

## 1.3 Justification of the study

Usisya has been chosen as a case study for other rural and hard to reach areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings from this research aim to assist in the evaluation and comparison with other Sub-Saharan African countries with similar economical and geographical backgrounds. Especially areas which also experience similar challenges with regard to high drop out rates and grade retention in primary school. Community members in Usisya look to education as a way out of poverty, towards a better future, and economic stability. Regardless of these strong feelings towards education many young people continue to drop out of school or attend school on an irregular basis. Additionally this study aims to contribute to academic debate on rural development and education.

## 1.4 Outline of dissertation

To investigate the objectives of this study and answer the research questions we will start by outlining the previous research on this topic, and draw on specific examples to help highlight any gaps in knowledge. Following on from this we will take a closer look at how classical feminist views of development influence the study. After which, we will look at

the theoretical approaches that will aid in the analysis of the findings. In chapter three we will review the context of this research, which will be summarized in the thematic framework. In chapter four we will look at the methodology and research design that underlies the data collection and analysis stages, as well as outlining the limitations to this study. Following these introductory sections we will delve into the findings of the research in both chapter five and six. Thereafter, in chapter seven we will utilize the theoretical framework to discuss the findings. This chapter will highlight the main findings and how they fit into the Social Structures Systems Model (SSSM) – which will be explained in full in chapter two. Finally in chapter eight we review the findings and extrapolate some useful policy recommendations for future initiatives. The section following the conclusion is the glossary; please refer to this section for further understanding of foreign language and foreign terms used in this thesis.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Related empirical studies

There is an existing body of research focused on school drop-outs in Africa. Many articles place an emphasis on vulnerable children; in particular those whose circumstances have been affected by HIV. Other studies take a broader view, looking at a number of African countries and the various factors that influence school attendance. Case et al. (2004) looked at 10 African countries (including Malawi) with a particular interest in whether caregiver and orphan relatedness effects school attendance. There have also been recent articles written that look solely at the situation in Malawi such as Chimombo (2005), who took an in-depth look at the quality of the education system. In the following sections I will examine various factors that have been studied in relation to school attendance in Africa. I will use studies that have been carried out in Malawi and other African countries. Although there are differences between African countries, a number of similarities can be found; therefore by using the research carried out in these countries, I can provide greater insight into the primary school drop-out situation in Malawi. Below is the summary of the factors describing a number of direct and indirect aspects that influence educational attainment, apart from the individual. Following this, the theoretical framework will discuss two theories which will then be combined to connect these various factors into one theory. This theory will eventually show the spaces where policy and intervention recommendations can be made to decrease primary school drop-outs within this context.

#### 2.1.1 DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

##### **Gender**

Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa concerning gender have found varying results regarding gender and school attendance. Fleisch et al. (2012) found that females are slightly more likely to attend school than males – but in this case the difference was marginal. On the other hand Tuwor & Sossou (2008) discovered the opposite, that females were less likely to attend school than males. Additionally, Case et al. (2004) looked at differences between gender and also whether being an orphan interacted with gender to predict school attendance. They established that in 8 of the 10 African countries for which they had data – including Malawi – girls were at a significantly greater risk of not being enrolled in school than boys. They hypothesised that due to the increased household responsibilities of orphaned females, it is possible that female orphans are at risk with regard to school enrolment. However, they found that this was not the case, as orphanhood was established to have an equally negative effect on school enrolment for both boys and girls.

From these studies it seems as though it is not simply a case of one gender being more likely to attend school than the other. It is more complicated than this, with gender in combination with other risk factors possibly affecting individuals. Therefore both females and males are seen to experience challenges with school attendance, so they have been equally considered in this study. The other known factors that interact with gender will be mentioned further in the literature review.

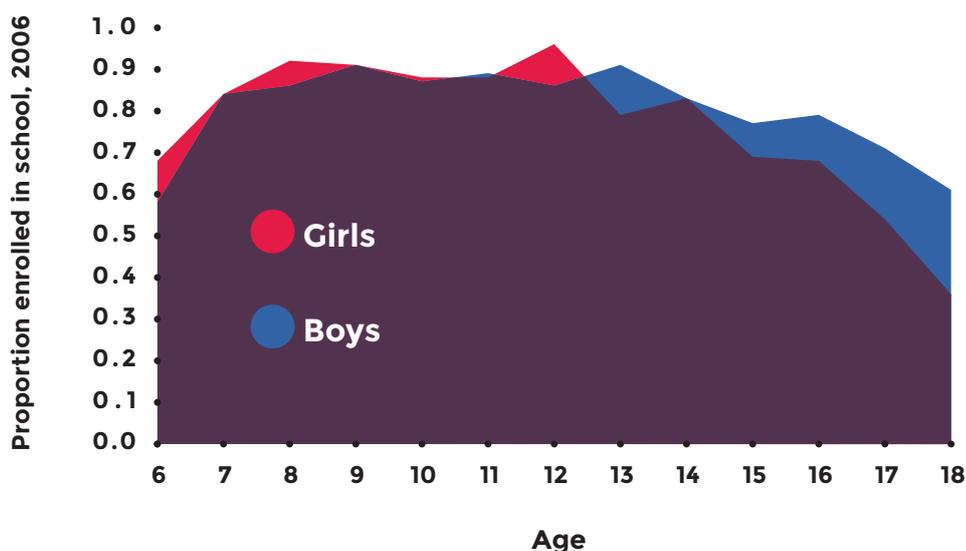
## Age

There is a general consensus in related research that school attendance rates increase from age six. This can be explained by children starting at staggered times throughout the school year or enrolling late then plateauing until the teen years. Enrolment rates decrease from around 13 years of age, as the children reach puberty (Case et al, 2004; Grant, 2008; Fleisch, et al., 2012). Figure one depicts a graph of Grant’s (2008) analysis of Malawian children’s school attendance that exemplifies these findings.

Age is an important factor when analysing the data and will be mentioned in the knowledge, attitude and practices section in chapter five with relation to youth’s experience of school.

**Figure 1:** Current school enrolment, 6-18 year olds, 2006, Malawi.

(SOURCE: Grant, 2008, p. 1611.)



## 2.1.2 ECONOMIC FACTORS

In Malawi, primary school education for children between the ages of 6-13 years old is free. However, additional costs such as uniform, school materials and transportation (to and from school) are the responsibility of the guardians. Studies have looked at poverty’s role on decreased school attendance from a number of angles. For example, Orkin et al. (2014) and Kidman et al. (2012) both established that poverty had a negative effect on school enrolment. The relationship could be a little more complicated though; Case et al. (2004) discovered that those from wealthier households were more likely to attend school.

They also noted that there was no difference between orphans and non-orphans when controlling for household wealth however, orphans in general live in poorer households than non-orphans. Fleisch et al. (2012) state that it is not so much as household wealth decreases school attendance also decreases, but that there are children living outside the social welfare safety net who are not receiving their entitled benefits. From these studies it is apparent that economic vulnerability in connection with other variables plays a role on school attendance in African countries. This will be discussed further in chapter six, as economic vulnerability is a significant factor combined with others factors that contribute to decreased school attendance in Usisya.

### **2.1.3 ORPHAN-HOOD FACTORS**

#### **Orphan status**

There are one million children in Malawi who are orphaned (UNICEF, 2007, p. 8). Half of all orphans in Malawi have been orphaned as a result of the AIDS virus (UNICEF, 2007, p.8). UNAIDS (2008, p. 13) define three types of orphanhood – maternal orphans (those who have lost a mother), paternal orphans (those who have lost a father) and double orphans (those who have lost both parents). These three terms have been utilised in my research data collection and analysis stage. Many children in Malawi have living parents residing in Malawi or outside of Malawi – but are living with a non-parent relative or non-relative – these children are defined as virtual orphans (Case et al., 2004, p. 492). Kidman et al. (2012) found that double and maternal orphans are more at risk of being out of school. Sharma (2006) showed that orphans are less likely to be enrolled in school.

There are also a number of studies that look into how the school attendance of children is affected by their household situation. Case et al. (2004) make their predictions regarding kinship and school attendance based largely on Hamilton's rule. Hamilton's rule states that the degree of relatedness (from the orphan to the household head) governs altruistic behaviour. In other words they expect the educational needs of children in households led by closer relatives to be more sufficiently met. They discovered evidence in the ten African countries to support their hypothesis.

Chirwa (2002) additionally discovered how traditional kin structure determines who takes care of an orphan. He established that problems can arise due to social exclusion and stigma drawn from the economic burden the orphan may bring to the family.

Fleisch et al. (2012) reached similar conclusions, finding that those children living with biological parents or grandparents were much more likely to be in school. Interestingly, this was also the case when controlling for other circumstances. They state that those children living with other relatives, siblings, non-relatives or are themselves the head of the household are particularly at risk for not attending school.

Orphan status is discussed a lot in the literature however, it is more often than not discussed in conjunction with family structure and kinship relatedness to a child's guardian. In chapter five, we will look at knowledge, attitudes and practices that surround both guardians and youth's individual family structures and what role it has on educational attainment in the case study village.

## **HIV Status**

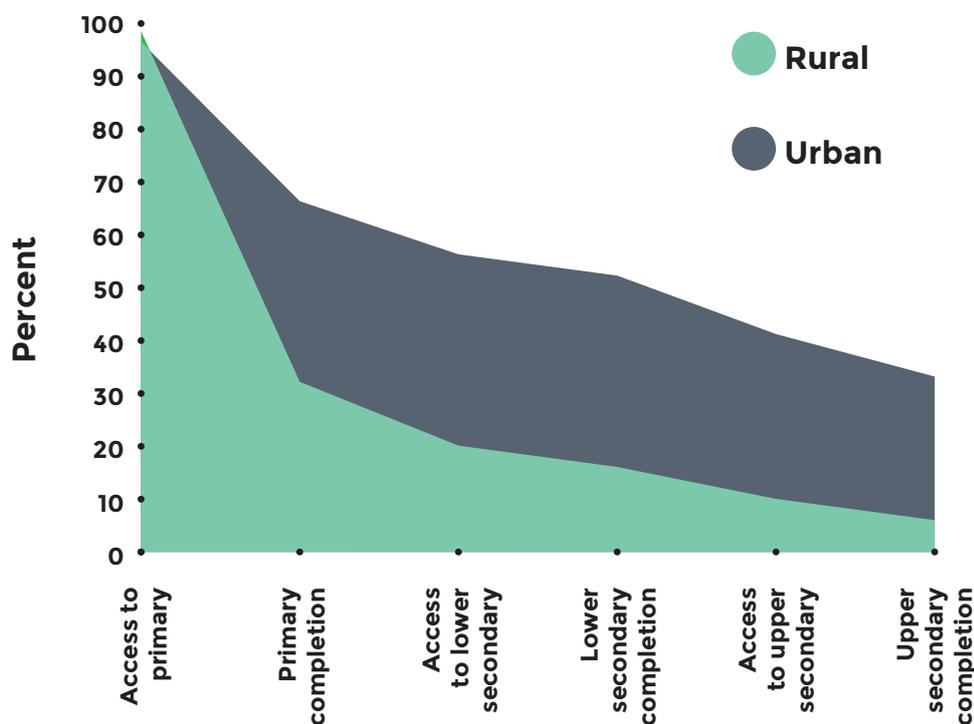
Orkin et al. (2014) discovered that being an HIV/AIDS orphan or having a caregiver with HIV/AIDS did not directly affect school attendance. However, it did have an indirect impact through a person's economic vulnerability. Ainsworth et al. (2005) researched the impact of parental mortality on primary schooling in Tanzania. They found that there were irregularities in school attendance for children with HIV-positive parents. Attendance was also negatively affected by the death of parents particularly in the month's prior. Effects were especially prevalent amongst girls, particularly if their mother died. HIV status is closely related to other variables such as economic vulnerability and orphan status. Therefore HIV/AIDS does not appear to have a direct correlation with dropping out of school, but mostly irregular attendance for female students. However, it does often result in a higher likelihood of being both economically vulnerable and orphaned, which have been established to affect school attendance. The local prevalence of HIV/AIDS in this area will be mentioned in chapter three, where I will outline how HIV/AIDS affects the individuals living in the Nkhata Bay North region in Malawi. In chapter five we will look at whether HIV/AIDS affects school attendance in Usisya.

### **2.1.4 GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS**

As mentioned earlier majority of Malawi's population lives in a rural setting. Therefore getting to and from school can be an expensive and a time-consuming task. Fleisch et al. (2012) discovered that there were geographic factors that were related to school enrolment - more specifically those living in smaller towns were less likely to be enrolled. As you can see in figure two, urban-based students in Malawi have a higher probability of accessing all grades of education. To incorporate these findings into the research, both larger primary schools and smaller more remote primary schools will be included. This will help to differentiate whether or not distance and rural versus urban education plays a role in school attendance. These issues will be discussed with relation to individual experiences of schooling in chapter five.

**Figure 2:** Access probability to the different grades according to living area.

(SOURCE: WB, 2010, p. 108.)



### 2.1.5 FAMILY FACTORS

#### Attitudes to schooling

As mentioned earlier, the effect that kinship has on school attendance can be looked at in terms of the way individual children are treated. Attitudes towards schooling and also attitudes towards the need for each child to be educated may play a role in school attendance. As explained above, Case et al. (2004) found that orphans and non-orphans in exactly the same household had varied school attendance levels. One factor that could be the cause of this difference is how the head of the household feels about the importance of education for each child.

Ainsworth et al. (2005) drew the conclusion that schooling is seen as an investment by parents, where the sole purpose of education is future employment prospects. It naturally follows from this that guardians invest money in their children's future in the hope that they will see a return on their investment. This line of thinking can naturally affect parents' decisions on whether to send their child to school and how much extra they are prepared to invest in the child's education.

It is also relevant to look at the attitudes towards the schooling itself. Malawi has been making changes to its education system to ensure that all children are attending primary school. Unfortunately, they do not have the resources to provide quality education for all children. For example, as of 2000, Malawi needed 84% more qualified teachers to reach

the goal of UPE by 2015 (Nilsson, 2003, p. 13). If you refer to the saying that “no quality of education can surpass the quality of the teachers” – in the case of Malawi, students are surrounded by unqualified teachers, which can hold them back from reaching their potential. As very few children move onto higher education, many parents do not see the value of education. Parents do however see the contribution a child can make to the family’s income – through petty trading, working in family farms, as well as through marriage for which they receive dowry (HRW, 2014). Consequently there are some conflicting attitudes towards education in rural areas across Malawi, as they cannot see the direct results of education.

From these four points, it is important to note that guardians’ and parents’ attitudes towards education play an important role in whether or not a child attends school. In chapter five, the respondent’s attitudes towards local education will be shown and we will see whether the local community believes this has an effect of school attendance.

### **Parental education background**

The effect of a parent having gone to school can also influence the decision-making process for school attendance. Grant (2008) discovered through qualitative surveying in Malawi, that children whose mothers had been to school were two times more likely to attend school than mothers who had not. Therefore school attendance of a female caregiver would seem to have a significant influence on their attitude towards school. In addition it would influence the decision made over whether or not a child goes to school.

Although there is some research on how caregiver attitude can affect whether a child is sent to school, this study hopes to add to this scholarship. In chapter five, local respondents will discuss whether a guardian’s education background plays a role in school attendance.

### **2.1.6 ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL DEBATE IN THE RESEARCH TOPIC**

It is clear from the factors summarised above that a lot of research has been done on school attendance in African countries. What I believe is lacking however is an integrated model that illustrates the interactions between these aspects and also includes the institutional and policy environment of a given setting. In the following I will combine two useful theories that can work to piece this complicated puzzle together. From this we can get a clear idea of which areas are the best focus for policy developments to yield the biggest improvement in regular school attendance in rural African settings.

A research gap that has become apparent is the lack of knowledge on the interactions between the micro and macro level of a person’s world, including the context in which they live. To understand the knowledge, attitudes and practices surrounding dropping out of school, we will examine how the interactions between both the micro and macro level influence an individual’s likelihood for educational attainment.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research on the KAP of youth towards education in developing countries, will be conceptualised through a classical feminist lense. In addition it will be grounded in structural theories, which focus on the interaction between all levels of a society. This study uses two existing analytical frameworks that focus on social structures to guide the research. First I will employ Risman's (1998) theory of gender as a social structure, which is grounded in sociology theory. This theory outlines how the individual level interacts with the institutional level to perpetuate gender inequality. In addition to Risman's theory, I have included a supplementary education model theorised by Bronfenbrenner (1979) – the ecological systems model. This model is predominantly used in education theory and also consists of spatial social structures that interact and effect the development of an individual. Both theories illustrate how interactions within and between different systems in society may lead an individual – in the case of this research – to drop out of primary school. Risman's theory has been combined with some relevant aspects of Bronfenbrenner's model to create the Social Structural Systems Model (SSSM). This model is built on Risman's theory, Bronfenbrenner's model and other relevant scholars that have utilised theories of social structures and education in development research. This model illustrates how interactions with different levels in a community and society result in diverse experiences of education – you can see this presented in figure five. The SSSM will be used in chapter seven to help illustrate where gaps in policy and local interventions can be made.

These theories and approaches can add to existing research on education and development, and also add to the pool of knowledge in both education and sociology scholarship. They also provide useful categories for the presentation and analysis of the findings in chapter five, six and the discussion in chapter seven.

### 2.2.1 KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES (KAP)

The findings presented in chapter five will show the knowledge, attitudes and practices of individuals involved in this research. This analytical framework will help to clearly understand the individual and their educational experience. In addition it should clarify how the knowledge, attitudes and practices of an individual are shaped by their interactions with their community network.

Existing research on KAP in education and development is difficult to locate and characterises a missing gap in knowledge in this area. One study undertaken by Nambatya (2010), on KAP towards HIV/AIDS in Uganda provides some relevant discourse that can be useful in the context of this research. She explains how youth's attitudes and knowledge are shaped and determined by their environment (Nambatya, 2010). This ideology links in with both Risman's and Bronfenbrenner's theoretical frameworks. Nambatya (2010) adds to her argument by expressing that youth's decisions are shaped by the message that seems the most appealing through their religious background, customs, family background and demographics. So a child is more likely to make a decision based on how their priest, family and local traditions shape the norms surrounding this decision. Nambatya (2010, p. 5) concluded that attitudes and knowledge always precede behaviour. So she believes that engrained social norms and the socio-cultural background of a person will always play a role in how a person acts.

The remaining theories in this chapter agree with Nambatya's (2010) argument – that social norms and socio-cultural determined beliefs do shape an individual's decision-making. Additionally, the other scholars also add indirect structures they believe to be involved in shaping this decision-making. Therefore these KAP can be shaped by traditions and norms that directly surround them, but the indirect structure a person lives within also plays a role. The classical feminist approach discussed in the following section brings these two ideas together.

### 2.2.2 INTERSECTIONALITY – A CLASSICAL FEMINIST APPROACH

In this study we will use Phoenix and Brah's (2004, p. 76) definition of intersectionality – “*as different dimensions of social life that cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands*” – such as ‘gender.’ As exemplified in the literature review, as well as in the following chapter, we can see that in rural Africa gender interacts with a number of factors to influence primary school attendance. Many feminist scholars in education believe there is a need for future studies to look at multiple and intersecting factors that restrict education opportunities (Pini, et al., 2014; Tolhurst et al., 2012; & Phoenix & Brah, 2004). Hence this research aims to utilise classical feminist lead intersectionality.

Another contribution to intersectionality is what Pini et al. (2014) explain as a defined knowledge gap present in feminist education and rurality research. Pini et al. (2014) elucidate how rural feminist education research is not common in academia – this type of research is often focused on urban centres. Feminists studying education in rural settings rarely consider intersections among gender, and other aspects such as economic vulnerability, structure, customs, and traditions (Pini et al., 2014). As an exception to this rule, Porter's (2011) study in rural Malawi and Ghana found that gendering of tasks, as well as intersections with transport, punishment impeded on girl's mobility and ability to attend school regularly. Therefore a significant goal of this research is to draw attention to intersectionality in rural and educational development scholarship.

Tolhurst et al. (2012, p. 1831) explain the need for feminist based theory that links multiple levels from the individual through to institutional practices, legal frameworks, and societal discourse. This consequently connects with both Risman's and Bronfenbrenner's theories that illustrate the relationship between these levels structurally and spatially.

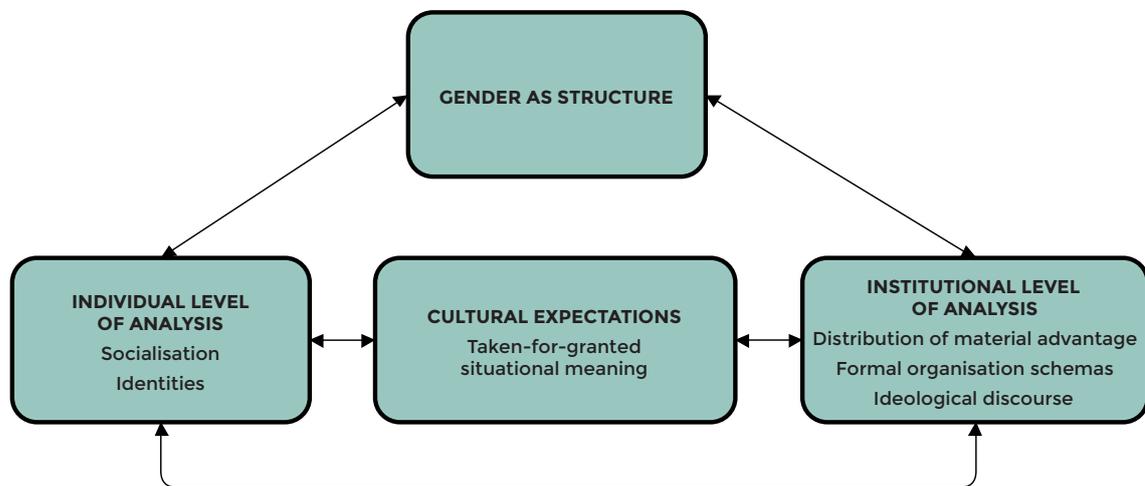
Gender has a vast history in education and development research. It plays an influential role with regard to access to education, access to job opportunities, heightened household responsibilities, school inequalities, and freedom to act autonomously. This study is interpreted through a classical feminist perspective that recognises the importance in including all aspects of a child's life in education and development research. Therefore this study will look at various socio-cultural influences such as home life, community networks, traditions and customs, and religious influences, as well as direct and indirect structural constraints and economic factors. The knowledge, attitudes and practices of the respondents will help to illustrate how these factors play a direct role in the lives of rural Sub-Saharan African people.

### 2.2.3 GENDER AS A SOCIAL STRUCTURE

*“Individuals are products of their social worlds, but not determined by them.” (GIDDENS, 1984, P. 26)*

The first analytical approach comes from a Risman’s (1998) sociological theory on gender as a social structure. She derived her theory from Giddens’s (1984) theory on structuration, where he argued not to analyse just agents and structure separately. He affirmed that people needed to look at how they interact to produce and reproduce rules and resources mediating institutionalised patterns. Risman’s theory illustrates three distinctive, but interactive dimensions of the gender structure presented in figure three. Legerski & Cornwall (2010, p. 452) describe these levels beginning with the individual level – where gendered identities are created and the lack of negotiation of an individual can reaffirm ‘doing gender.’ Doing gender is defined when a person acts in a way that is prescribed by their gender (Risman, 1998, p. 295-296). The next level is the interactional level – which is where gendering of tasks, social norms and daily routine contributes to gender inertia. The last level is the institutional level – whereby local level and national level governance reaffirms biases. In this level, resource distribution and gender ideologies have a role in the doing or the undoing of gender (Deutsch, 2007). Risman argues that the three interlocking, but distinct levels – individual, interactional and institutional – are part of a structure that constructs, and also perpetuates gender inequalities in society.

**Figure 3:** Risman’s gender as a social structure model, 1998, p. 297.



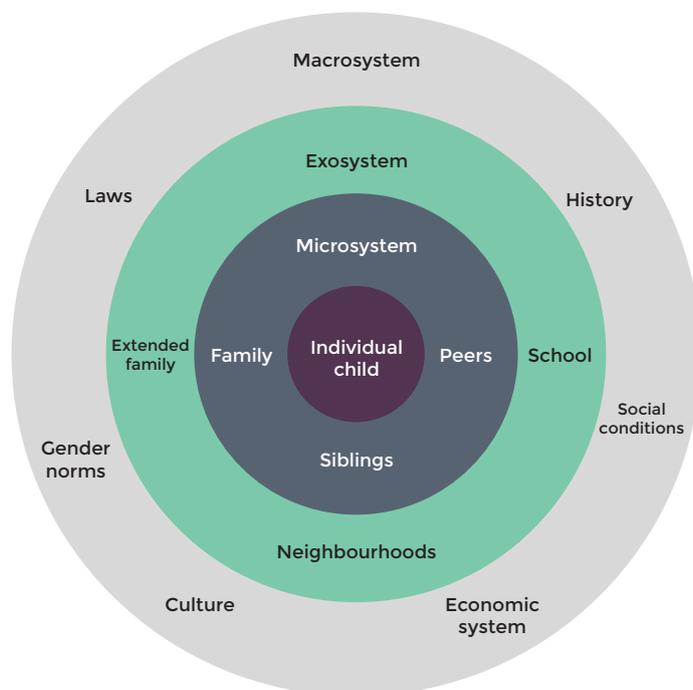
In Risman’s (1998, p. 296) book on Gender Vertigo, she explains her theory of gender as a social structure, stating that it has consequences for every aspect of society. Risman much like KAP, classical feminist intersectionality and the following ecological systems model realise that all levels of society shape an individual’s experiences. Additionally, in this research we are not only focused on the role social structures have on the individual, but we also need to be aware of the role of the individual in decision making. How all levels interact and influence each other is illustrated by the arrows in figure three. The interactions between all levels of the ‘gender as a social structure’ model, have been included in the sssm shown in figure five.

Risman's theory has provided a useful backbone for this research. Her use of an interactive three levelled system provides the format for the sssm in figure five. Risman's theory also contributes structure and a clear perspective of the scale of interactions. However, her theory focuses specifically on how these interactions perpetuate gender inequalities. As mentioned in the literature review, gender together with a number of other factors may lead to primary school drop-outs and not specifically gender inequalities, which is why we can not use this model on it's own. Consequently, to fit the context of this study, the relevant factors that are included in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, will then be combined with Risman's model to produce a newly adapted model displayed in figure five.

#### 2.2.4 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS MODEL

Bronfenbrenner's theory is used to describe the complex system of relationships between a child and the multiple levels of their social environment. Bronfenbrenner's model is made up of various levels - much like Risman's theory - and focuses on how these levels interact with each other and influence an individual. Bronfenbrenner's model is presented in figure four, where you can see the circular systems that represent different levels of society - much like Risman's description of individual, interactional and institutional. By using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach we can look into the development of a child and link this closely to the local context and why a child might drop out of school.

**Figure 4:** Ecological systems model, adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979.



Unlike Risman's theory of gender as a social structure, Bronfenbrenner's model has been used in development and education research before. It can therefore provide us with examples of utilising structural theories in development research. For example, Fotso et al. (2009) focused on increasing the knowledge known on the psychosocial impact of orphanhood amongst urban poor in Nairobi, Kenya. They used the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems framework to explore the connections between the child, their household and their neighbourhood. Kainja (2012) looked at orphans in Malawi, specifically at how child-related policies and service delivery were meeting the needs of orphans. She used the Bronfenbrenner model to explain how a child's development is shaped by the context in which they live. She expanded that a child's development is complex and allows for interactions between different systems. Kainja (2012) also stated that by including these types of interactions in policy-making can result in meaningful policies and services that embrace family values, roles and the local customs. Academic scholars agree that these systems shape the development, values and belief systems of a child, and can determine what types of decisions a child would make regarding education, health, and so forth (Kainja, 2012; Mteweale, 2012; & Fotso, et al., 2009).

A final study that has helped refine this model is Mteweale's (2012) thesis on the influence of traditional customs and practices on girls in secondary school in Morogoro, Tanzania. Mteweale (2012) utilised the ecological systems model in her analysis stage and found that traditional customs and practices influence negatively on rural girls secondary education in this region. Additionally, she established that poor school environments, socio-economic conditions and parental education backgrounds play a negative role on girl's secondary education. Mteweale (2012, p. 26) coined the term 'interpersonal relationships' - which explains the relationship in the microsystem between family background and the school environment that can influence girls' education positively or negatively. Her use of the ecological systems model and how she has defined interpersonal relationships has been adopted in this study.

The last point that connects both Risman's and Bronfenbrenner's model is that the interactions within Risman's institutional level and Bronfenbrenner's Macrosystem (see figure four), are very important in analysing the findings. Mteweale's (2012) findings show that the political system and education policies can assert and support gender mainstreaming, and anti-drop-out policies. However society's customs and belief systems can act as a barrier to these, especially in rural areas. Therefore both policy-related structures, as well as societal norms, customs and belief systems will be included in the models to highlight the similarities, as well as the differences between ideologies of education. Chapter six includes the local and national findings that fit into this institutional level of analysis.

The social structural relationships between both Risman's and Bronfenbrenner's models are relevant to the study. However the contained concentric systems in Bronfenbrenner's model are not applicable in the case of this research. Each system in his model determines the nature of the smaller circle within it, so problems in one system can determine decision-making in another setting. In the case of this study there are a number of girls or boys who are economically vulnerable and are not supported by their family, but still continue on to secondary school. Moreover, some girls who have become pregnant and are told by family or peers to stay at home will return and complete primary and sometimes

secondary education. Therefore this research needs to consider both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for decision-making by individuals. Both models include the individual level, but the agency an individual has is not included in these models – therefore the KAP perspectives discussed earlier in this chapter bring life to the individuals. Youth, guardians and teachers from the community give their individual experiences and highlight their personal values, knowledge, and attitudes towards school. Through this knowledge a new model has been adapted to include these theories – the Social Structure Systems Model (SSSM) – which has been presented in figure five.

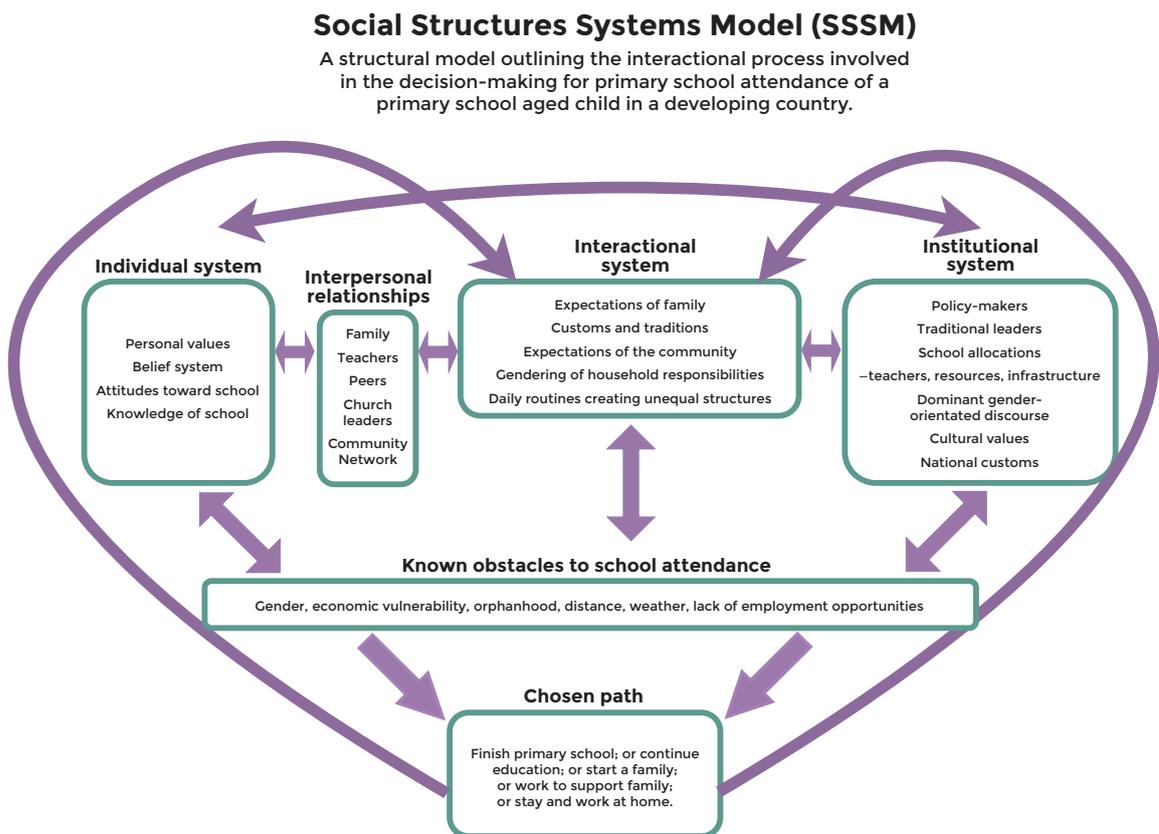
### 2.2.5 SOCIAL STRUCTURE SYSTEMS MODEL (SSSM)

Risman’s framework (1998) has provided the structure and a strong scale perspective for analysing how the social structural environment of a person influences the knowledge, attitudes and practices of an individual. But what this theory also tells us is how the KAP of an individual influences these social structures. Through Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model we also see how spatial relationships between various levels may affect a person’s decision to complete primary school or not. Finally, the addition of Mtewele’s (2012) concept of interpersonal relationships to the ecological systems model has contributed greater value to this analysis. Interpersonal relationships between family, school, peers, church and the community play a large role in Malawian society and therefore are an important component in this study. The SSSM hypothesises that if all interpersonal relationships and the structure in which an individual exists have similar ideology, then either school attendance or non-attendance will result from this relationship. For example if all interpersonal relationships and institutions agree that education is important, this would theoretically lead to more children attending and completing school. This newly adapted model explains that interactions with different systems and interpersonal relationships also have a significant weight in the decision-making process. As Heiss (1981, p. 95) explains –

*“The expectations we face during ongoing interaction often push us to behave as others want us to.”*

We as humans make choices about our day-to-day lives. These choices are typically embedded in the social structures that we exist in, they are often determined by an array of values, beliefs, customs, and expectations. However, as it was mentioned earlier, every person has their own intrinsic or extrinsic motivations to choose their path. Therefore there is space in this model for individuals to break out of this potentially vicious cycle and be an exception to the rule. Consequently, what the SSSM shows is that a person’s decisions will be made through objective knowledge, attitudes and the practices following this process. The discussion in chapter seven will illustrate where in this model discordance and/or gaps are occurring and offer some policy recommendations, as well as local initiative ideas to try and reduce primary school drop-outs in the area.

**Figure 5:** Social Structures Systems Model (SSSM) – adapted from Risman’s (1998, p. 297) *Gender and Structure model* and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) *ecological systems model*.



### 2.2.5.1 Operationalisation of terms

For the purpose of this research, I have combined these two models using the ideas mentioned above to fit the context of this study (see figure five). Below I will describe the operationalisation of the terms included in the model using concepts coined by Risman (1998) Mtewe (2012) and Bronfenbrenner (1979). This model operationalises Risman’s three levels of structure as well as Mtewe’s interpersonal relationships to describe the social structure that the individual exists within. The model above illustrates how known obstacles influence school attendance decisions, and finally how these decisions are illustrated in the chosen path of the individual. The labels included in the SSSM will be incorporated into chapter five and six to show how the local context fits into the model. Chapter seven will discuss the part of the model that demands the most attention by policy-makers, NGOs and also local community networks. Each dimension of the SSSM will be explained in detail below.

The individual system contains the beliefs, values, knowledge and attitudes of an individual. These aspects of the individual are developed through interactions with the institutional system – such as policies, national customs and so forth. The interpersonal relationships that shape a person’s interactional system also define an individual. The relationship between interpersonal relationships, the individual system and the interactional system is about who an individual interacts with regularly and what type of belief systems and values they impart on the individual. The middle system – the

interactional system – functions as the intermediary between the interpersonal relationships and the institutional systems. It affects the institutional system by adding to national customs, values and gender-orientated discourse. The interactional system also learns from what is politicised through policymakers and traditional leaders about the education system. This is then disseminated through interpersonal relationships at home, school, church and in the community to the individual system. The institutional system affects the individual indirectly through interactions and interpersonal relationships, but can also have a direct affect on how a child experiences school at the individual level. The three systems and their interpersonal relationships – listed above – affect individuals. However the known obstacles discovered in previous studies and found through the data collection process can act as an obstacle to steer the individual down a specific path. They affect all aspects of the model as they perpetuate the cycle of drop-outs in the area if they become a social norm. The chosen path is the final decision made by the individual by means of the aforementioned dimensions. It is determined by these dimensions and does not always result in continuing with education. This is the point in which individuals can decide to become part of the vicious cycle or complete primary education and move on. Lastly, the arrows leading from the chosen path through to the interactional system signify the experiences an individual has, which leads them to become part of others educational choices in the future.

### 3. REGIONAL THEMATIC CONTEXT

This chapter offers a broad overview of the regional and local context in which this research has taken place. The first section of this chapter focuses on the national context in Malawi – more specifically the current geopolitical, economic, gender and educational environment. Within this section we will look at issues concerning educational attainment in Malawi schools. Following a description of the national context, we will take a closer look into the regional socio-economic setting of Nkhata Bay North, as well as its educational system. After the relevant issues in the region have been clarified, we will focus on Usisya – the village in which this research was based. Within this section we will provide a description of the education environment in Usisya. As the research was guided and influenced by the locally based NGO – Temwa – recommendations will be made considering the NGO in the discussion chapter of this thesis. Due to this relationship with the NGO, an explanation of the NGO will be included in the conclusion of this chapter.

#### 3.1 Malawi: The national context

Malawi is a small landlocked country situated in South East Africa. It is considered by most to be *'the warm heart of Africa'* (Gartner, 2008, pp. v). Malawi is encircled by three countries – to the West is Zambia, to the South East and across the Southern border of Malawi's Lake Nyasa is Mozambique, and on the Northern tip and Northern regions of Lake Nyasa is Tanzania (refer to map 1). According to the World Bank data bank, as of 2013 Malawi has a population of 16.36 million people (WB, 2013). Of this population around 11% of the adult population aged 15-49 are living with HIV/AIDS (WB, 2013).

The official language in Malawi is English, however the national indigenous language is Chichewa (CIAB, 2013). Religion is also a very important part of Malawian culture. Approximately 83% of people in Malawi identify as Christian (CIAB, 2013). Christianity came to Malawi in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century through the arrival of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries. Today Christianity along with Islam, supernaturalism, and traditional belief systems such as ancestral spirits, traditional medicine and also witchcraft to some extent are practiced (Gartner, 2008). Because of the prevalence of religion in Malawi, religious leaders are an important resource for many lay citizens – and their messages about sex and morality carry a great deal of weight (Trintapoli, 2011, p. 2).

## Map 1: Malawi in Africa

SOURCE: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMalawi\\_in\\_Africa\\_\(-mini\\_map\\_-rivers\).svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMalawi_in_Africa_(-mini_map_-rivers).svg)



As of May 31<sup>st</sup> 2014, Malawi has a newly elected president Peter Mutharika who has a very controversial political past in Malawi. After his first 100 days in office he has already been accused of nepotism and creating division with his cabinet appointments (Masina, 2014). His policies on education, gender equality and other sectors within the government have not revealed themselves fully, and therefore we cannot be sure of what this new government brings for the future of Malawi.

On top of political unease, the HIV/AIDS epidemic amongst other diseases has placed a heavy burden on Malawi. From the total 40 million people infected with HIV worldwide, 70 percent live in Sub-Saharan Africa (WB, 2002, p. 1). Malawi has one of the lowest life expectancies in the world, primarily due to the predominance of HIV/AIDS and also other communicable diseases (Wachira and Ruger, 2011, p.1). The life expectancy for females is averaged at 55.2 years old and the life expectancy for males is averaged at 54.9 years old (UN, 2013). The challenges in addition to the AIDS epidemic are many, including poverty, population growth, food insecurity, land scarcity and limited economic prospects (Gartner, 2008). The diverse topography of Malawi also holds many difficulties, including the construction of transportation systems that can improve the equality of resource allocation

across urban and rural areas (Conroy et al., 2006). Fuel is also in short supply and regardless of the recent devaluation of the currency – the prices for fuel and consequently food and agricultural goods remain high (Lewin, 2013, p. 37). Additionally the gender-related challenges in Malawi also perpetuate inequality throughout the country – this topic has significant effects on education so it will be discussed in the following section.

### 3.2 Gender inequality in Malawi

The European invasion in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century significantly altered gender relations in Malawi, especially for the matrilineal groups in the south (Verheijen, 2014, p. 30; Davison, 1997, p96; & Hirschmann & Vaughan, 1984, pp. 2-3). The control men had over material resources increased, while women’s control diminished. Men gained privileged access to education and wage labour, which gave them a virtual monopoly on cash, on which women increasingly depended (Verheijen, 2014, p. 33). Since this time Malawi has become a signatory to a number of gender-related international declarations and conventions that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women (GoM, 2014, p. 5). Some of these conventions and declarations include the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights and Rights of Women (1993); the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development (2008); the Millennium Development Goals (2000); and the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action (GoM, 2014, p. 5). Although they declared these various conventions across all sectors of society, gender inequality in Malawian society still remains status quo.

Women constitute 52 percent of the population of Malawi, however they are more often than not marginalized in both social and economic sectors (GoMa, 2010, p. 11). Gender is a big factor of inequality in education and employment in Malawi, however when combined with poverty and social vulnerability, women remain significantly marginalized compared to their male counterparts (GoMb, 2010, p. 51). Assigned gender roles in society, especially in rural Malawi perpetuate this vicious cycle where few women work outside of the agricultural sector (GoMa, 2010, p. 15). Unfortunately the result from this defined position in society is high levels of illiteracy – 56 percent of women aged 15-24 are illiterate compared to 28 percent of men in the same age bracket (GoMa, 2010, p. 15). Gender division in Malawian society is often keyed as a significant factor influencing irregular school attendance and is a predominant reason why females and in some instances males are leaving school (GoMa, 2010, p. 12).

If there are declarations in action, then why are these not being integrated into policies and adequately implemented into all sectors of the Malawian governance system? The UN’s country report on Malawi (2010) explained that there is a policy and implementation gap regarding gender that a number of consecutive national plans of action have not been able to effectively address (UN Malawi, 2010). The GoM Millennium Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) for 2011-2016 (GoMb, 2010, p. 51) explain that there are three main policy challenges that lead to this gap in gender equality – the lack of gender disaggregated data, poor commitment to resource allocation towards gender mainstreaming, and lack of institutional capacity to analyse and systematically mainstream gender.

### 3.2.1 GENDER NORMS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In addition to structural challenges, gender norms also affect school attendance in Sub-Saharan Africa. Early marriage and forced marriage are a common occurrence in African countries. In Malawi according to the United Nations one out of two Malawian girls will be married before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (HRW, 2014, p. 1). Many Malawi scholars have agreed that early marriage contributes to higher rates of female school drop-outs, which affects equal access to education for both males and females (HRW, 2014; Mkandawire et al., 2014; Verheijen, 2014; Archambault, 2011; & Tuwor and Sossou, 2008). Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2014, p. 15) noted that child marriage in Malawi stands at 37%, which is higher than the regional Sub-Saharan African average. They went further to say that in Malawi child marriage is prevalent due to high rates of teenage pregnancy, economic vulnerability, and traditions and customs that tolerate subordination. This is especially prevalent in rural areas that do not have adequate education and employment opportunities (HRW, 2014).

Human Rights Watch (2014) explained that reproductive health education is often inadequately taught in Malawi's schools and does not prepare young people with the knowledge to make well-informed choices before becoming sexually active. Parents are not willing to talk to children about how to protect themselves – often due to taboos – which lends to the subordinated position of females in society. Human Rights Watch (2014) also pointed out that females often remain financially tied to their often alcoholic and abusive spouses, and regardless of whether they wished to return to school in most cases spouses or in-laws would not allow them to continue school after marriage.

With regard to religion, there has been a small amount of research on how local religion affects school attendance. Tuwor & Sossou (2008) and HRW (2014) outline that some traditions and customs in Malawi such as religious practices like initiation ceremonies, polygamy, extra-marital relations and also Satanism affect, more often than not, female children's school attendance.

As mentioned in chapter two, economic vulnerability plays a big part in decision making in rural Africa. There are many studies that have voiced their opinion of how women are often forced to place their bodies in harm's way when providing for their families (HRW, 2014; Archambault, 2011; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Chimbiri, 2007; & Munthali, 2004). This often results in unwanted pregnancies and forced marriages because in most cases they do not have choice over whether or not they will use contraceptives. Verheijen's (2014) study in northern Malawi believes that contrary to what previous researchers have extrapolated, many women choose to use sex as a way to provide for their families and improve their lives. One example from HRW (2014, p. 24) illustrated how one young girl chose to get a boyfriend as a means of economic support. Economic vulnerability is a considerably relevant topic, and cases of sugar daddies and forced marriages due to economic vulnerability are not uncommon in the case study area.

Females are not only turning to sex as a means of individual empowerment and/or economic support, but as HRW (2014, p. 18) mentioned, girls are often chosen to stay at home instead of attending school:

*“In Malawi, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school when families face financial constraints because of their low social status and the costs of educating them.”*

The WHO (2012) points out in their summary report on women's health in Africa that gender discrimination begins at an early age. They go on to say that young girls often bear the responsibility or are forced to take responsibility for household work, which is often a hindrance to their education.

The absence of clear legislation means that most legal matters are handled through customary procedures, which is not always in line with progressive national and international gender policies mentioned in the previous section. The attitudes, knowledge and practices of youth, guardians, teachers and the community that lead to the subordination of women will be discussed in chapter five and six. We will see how it affects school attainment in the case study area and how it fits in with international debate on the effects of gendered customs on education.

### 3.3 The structure of the education system in Malawi

The formal education system in Malawi comprises of eight years in full primary education, four in secondary and four in university. The official entry age into Primary school is six years old. However very few children enter school at this age due to long travel distances, lack of uniform – even though uniform is considered not compulsory –, and household responsibilities (Wamba & Mgonezulu, 2014, p. 324). Secondary education is made up of four form levels, which currently absorbs only 30% of primary school leavers (Wamba & Mgonezulu, 2014, p. 324). The tertiary level only absorbs 4% of eligible secondary school students across the country, where the main university – The university of Malawi in Lilongwe – only accepts 1,000 students per year from across the country (Wamba & Mgonezulu, 2014, p. 324).

As 46% of the population are under the age of 14 years old, it is therefore important that the education for a large proportion of the populace is adequate and effective (WB, 2013). In line is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Free Primary Education (FPE) has been Malawi's educational goal since 1994 (Mcnamara, 2013, p. 48). After the policy was implemented in 1994 across the nation, the amount of primary students rose (Mcnamara, 2013, p. 48). The levels of supply by the state were and are subsequently too low for the demand that has been required by schools. The problems that have sparked debate among academics and educators in Malawi are that there is a lack of funds specifically allocated to raise the quality and amount of teachers – therefore the quality of education has dropped (Mcnamara, 2013; & Chimombo, 2005, p. 168). The fact that a significant number of those enrolled in primary education either repeat or drop-out of the system means that the gains expected from increased primary school access have been diminished (Wamba & Mgonezulu, 2014, p. 327). Out of every 100 children entering primary school, only 46 complete standard 8 (MoEST, 2008). The overall repetition rate at primary school level in Malawi is at 25% (MoEST, 2008).

### 3.4 Educational attainment in Malawi

Following on from what the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) noted – the enrolment has risen across the country, but the constant attendance of students has decreased (MoEST, 2008). Less than half of the children who start first grade make it to the end of eighth grade (Field, 2009, p. 31; MoEST, 2008; & Chimombo, 2005, p. 157). About

half of all Malawian youth, markedly both females and males equally, are currently enrolled in either primary or secondary education (GoM 2009, p. 47-8). However only 8 percent of the population has managed to complete secondary school (GoM 2011, p. 26-7). What is happening to the majority of students who originally enrolled in school? The results from the 2005 Integrated Household Survey indicate that the main reason for both males and females to drop out of school is lack of interest (32%), a lack of money (28%), early marriage and pregnancies (11%) and feeling too old for education (7%) (GoM, 2005, p. 30). A secondary issue in the Malawian education system is equality. Girls tend to be under-represented in secondary and tertiary education and the drop-out rates among young females are often worse than males in their age bracket (Wamba & Mgomezulu, 2014, p. 327). The impacts of HIV and AIDS regularly result in females turning into caregivers and at times breadwinners for their family, which takes precedence over education (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003).

The quality of the education as well as the predominance of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Malawi, has affected the attendance of students across the country. Malawi's education system is facing a rather problematic future where large numbers of pupils will be taking a lot longer to complete primary school. This is due to deaths in the family, increased financial pressures, and students often dropping out before they achieve this goal (Chimombo, 2005, p. 168). Primary education is underfunded and compared to all Southern African countries, its primary expenditure is the lowest, whereas its secondary and higher education funding is the highest (DeStefano, 2011, p. 2).

As exemplified above, gender divided customs and traditions often force females, more often than males out of school. Because of this NGOs and donors are focusing on improving schooling in Malawi for females (Stambach 1998, Chimomobo 2009 & Kadzamira & Rose 2003). However this change has not been accompanied by deeper transformations to a system of gender relations that obstructs female education. Household work, care-work for the elderly, and care-work for people living with HIV is feminized and post-menstrual girls have their rights to schooling questioned through sexualized bullying and in some cases impregnation (Chisamaya et al., 2012; Bisika et al., 2009; & Kadzamira & Rose 2003). Few girls complete primary school and they are still under-represented at high school (Kamwendo 2010; Chimomobo 2009; & Davidson & Kanyuka 1990). In 2009, 104,852 girls across Malawi dropped out of school at standard 8 and 324,439 girls repeated standard 8 (Wamba & Mgomezulu, 2014, p. 330).

### **3.5 Regional context: Nkhata Bay North District**

The Nkhata Bay North District is a lakeside district situated in northern Malawi. The centre for the district government and regional hospital is the small lakeside city of Nkhata Bay (refer to map 2). The district is becoming more and more popular to overseas tourism and local tourism – which has resulted in an increase in NGOs and donors supporting the area. Nkhata Bay North however suffers from food insecurity, inadequate access to safe water, increased numbers of orphans –mostly due to the high rates of HIV/AIDS in the district, gender based violence, environmental degradation, and inadequate local governance systems for effective policy implementation (GoM, 2009).

### **3.5.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION**

As of 2010 the population of Nkhata Bay North District is approximately 200,000 people and has a population density of 53 people per square kilometre (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 9). The district is mostly made up of two major tribes – 64% Tongas and 33% Tumbukas who reside in the mountainous lakeshore north of Nkhata Bay North (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 9). HIV/AIDS in the region affects 17% of the population (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 9).

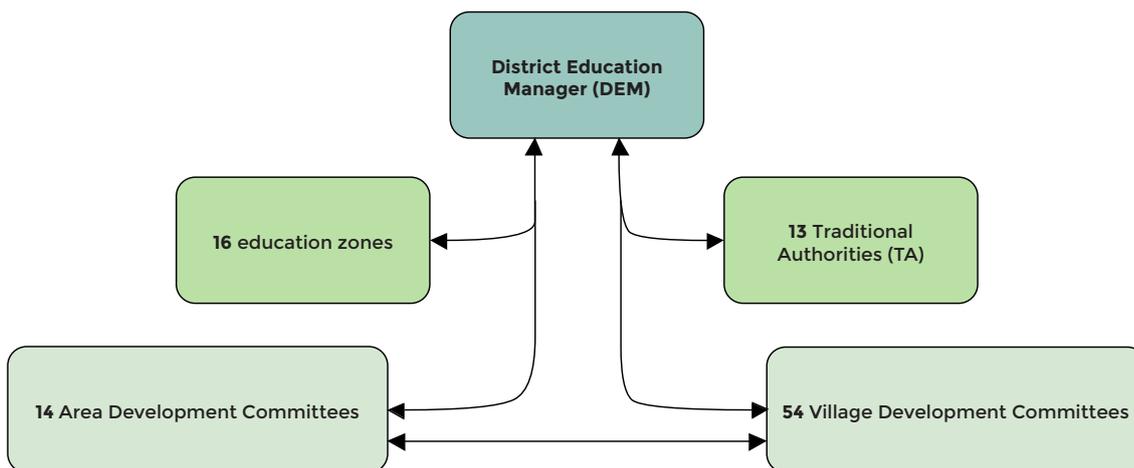
The age distribution for the region is similar to the national average with 44% of the population below the age of 15 years old (MALGA, 2006, p. 13). The implications from such a young population result in an increased need for under-five clinics and primary school education facilities (MALGA, 2006). To sustain economic growth in line with the Malawi Growth and Development Strategies (MGDS), the district focuses on tourism, mining, agro processing and cotton processing. Migration in the region results in a large fluctuation of the population migrating south or across the borders to Mozambique, Zambia or Tanzania – as there are few local employment options (MALGA, 2006).

The regional government includes the district officials, as well as traditional leaders and traditional authorities, group village heads and village heads (MALGA, 2006). Nkhata Bay District Assembly works in line with national government legislation through a decentralised reporting system back to the government officials in the capital city, Lilongwe (MALGA, 2006). Community focused processes taking place in Nkhata Bay North are not numerous and well documented. There is however a community development office in the district that offers support in projects for community development including women affairs (MALGA, 2006).

### **3.5.2 EDUCATION IN NKHATA BAY NORTH**

Within Nkhata Bay North there are 16 education zones headed by 16 Primary Education Assistants (PEA), 13 Traditional Authorities, 14 Area Development Committees and 54 Village Development Committees (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 9). This structure works together to promote regional and local education activities. You can see an example of the hierarchical structure in figure six. The adult literacy rate in Nkhata Bay North is 77% for females and 91% for males, which is higher than the national average of 56% for females and 72% for males (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 9). There is a difference to the overall average, however this is due in part to the economic position of the urban dwellers based in Mzuzu and Nkhata Bay (NSO & UNICEF, 2008, p. 193).

**Figure 6:** Nkhata Bay North hierarchical district education system



The terrain in some parts of Nkhata Bay North provides a barrier to educational development, since some paths to school are long – and especially in rainy season – very dangerous. Additionally construction and infrastructure building in the more mountainous and sandy areas near the waterfront, remains expensive (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010). Because of lack of infrastructure in schools and homes, poor sanitation is a problem, often resulting in yearly outbreaks of cholera and bilharzia (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010).

One Primary Education Advisor (PEA) who is the facilitator between the local teachers and the District Education Manager (DEM) heads each of the 16 educational zones. The total number of pupils in Nkhata Bay North in 2009 was 76,787 – 39,132 males and 37,655 females (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 10). From the teachers in Nkhata Bay North 80% are qualified teachers, however majority of them are stationed in the larger centres (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 10). The qualified pupil teacher ratio in 2009 was at 110 students to every teacher (Nkhata Bay District Council, 2010, p. 10).

### 3.6 Local context: Usisya

The red dot marked on map 2 shows the location of Usisya, which is approximately 25 kms north of Nkhata Bay along the lakeside. Usisya has a population of approximately 18,000 people (Lewin, 2013, p. 15). The area is positioned in a rather remote location, only reachable by a two hour four-wheel drive journey or by boat along the coast. They have one health centre, seventeen primary schools and two community day secondary schools. Usisya experiences the same issues that characterises rural development across Sub-Saharan Africa – poverty, malnutrition, high infection rates of HIV/AIDS, and lack of basic infrastructure (Lewin, 2013). Subsistence farming is the main source of income and food in the area. Fishing is also a big source of income in the area, especially for males, but also for females who often dry and sell small fish named *usipa*. Unfortunately both farming and fishing can sometimes impede on children’s regular school attendance due to family needs and sometimes due to children’s interest in economic wealth over education.

The village has one Tribal Authority (TA) who is based in Mzuzu – he is in charge of the traditional governance system. While he is not present in Usisya two senior acting chiefs based in Usisya act on his behalf and the large number of village chiefs for smaller villages feed complaints and queries to these two men.

### 3.6.1 EDUCATION IN USISYA

The education system in Usisya suffers from the same issues that Nkhata Bay North as a district experiences. Additionally Usisya schools experience issues with lack of safe drinking water, inadequate school blocks, lack of housing for teachers and long travel distances of up to 5 kilometres from home to school (Village Development Committee, 2014). Another issue affecting some of the schools in the area is treacherous terrain during rainy season. Schools located in the mountains and also along the lakeshore experience issues with precarious pathways to school – for example there is an annual incidence of school children drowning in the river on the way to or from school during rainy season.

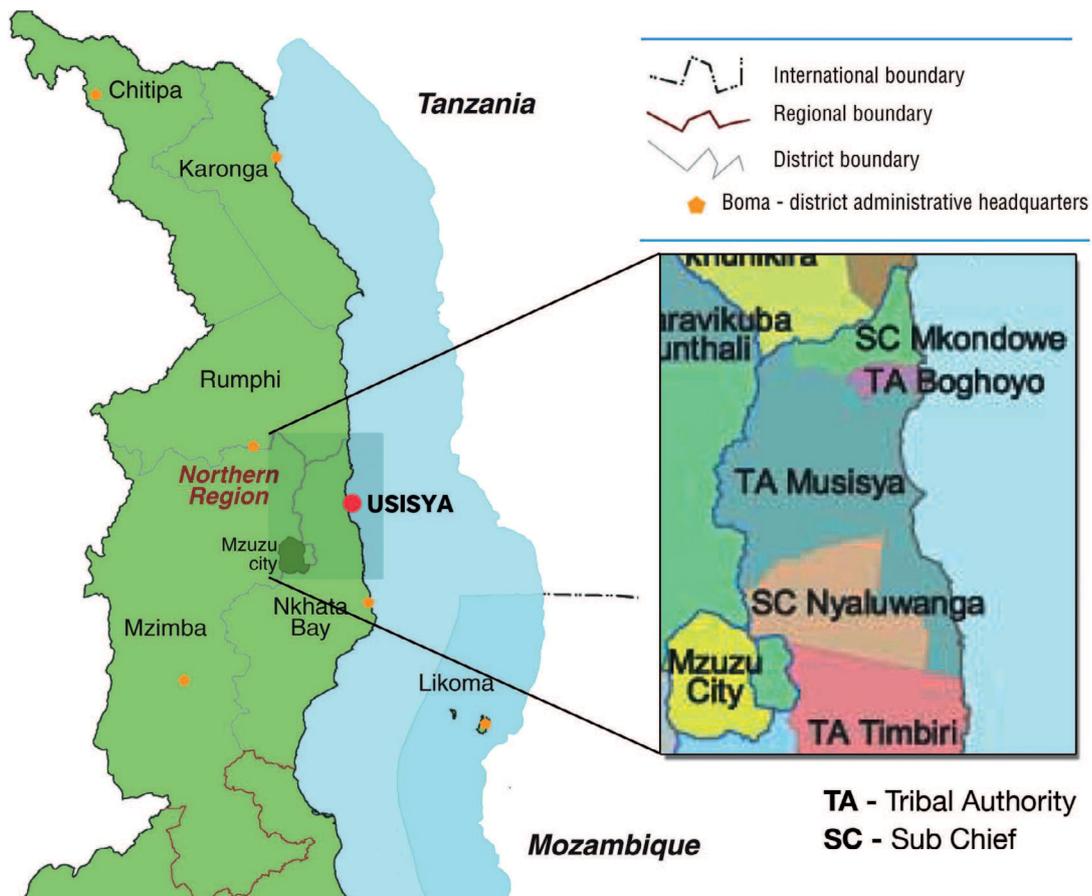
There are 6,513 students' enrolled in primary schools in Usisya – with a ratio of 98 female students to every 100 male students (Village Development Committee, 2014). There are 360 Usisya students enrolled in the two local community day secondary schools (Village Development Committee, 2014). Of the primary school teachers teaching in Usisya primary schools, 48% are unqualified teachers and are currently undergoing Open Distance Learning (ODL) (Village Development Committee, 2014). The teacher to student ratio in the area is around 100 students to one teacher. Due to this, the quality of education in Usisya is low, as teachers do not have sufficient time and classroom space to teach all students adequately. These issues as well as economic vulnerability, local customs, and traditions result in low attendance rates for students, as well as high drop-out rates in the area.

## 3.7 Temwa

Temwa is a registered charity in the UK and began working in Nkhata Bay North in 2004 (Lewin, 2013, p. 16). The aim of Temwa as an NGO is to facilitate change through capacity building, guidance, and support by promoting long-term sustainable development in Nkhata Bay North. They have a rather broad focus as an organisation on education, agriculture, health, education, skills and enterprise development, and forestry. They chose to work in Usisya, in the Nkhata Bay North, due to its remote area and rural development issues (Lewin, 2013). The government and NGOs have neglected this area in the past because of transportation difficulties and its inaccessible location (Lewin, 2013). Their ultimate goal as an NGO is to facilitate social capacity of the community so that they can take their own social action to realise change (Lewin, 2013). Temwa's development formula is putting the communities at the centre of decision-making, with high levels of accountability and trust between all stakeholders (Lewin, 2013). The stakeholders include, the community, the government, partner NGOs, donors and capacity-building partners (Lewin, 2013).

**Map 2:** Map showing the location of Temwa’s catchment area within Northern Malawi

SOURCE: Lewin, D. (2013, p. 17) IA Report.



The catchment area for Temwa (refer to map 2) is 30,000 people, across 89 villages and they employ 30 full time employees. The on-going projects that they are undertaking include HIV/AIDS education, support and testing services; sustainable farming initiatives; food security and environmentally friendly farming techniques; community agroforestry; skills and training microloans; school building and bursary schemes and running a community centre and library. They currently do not have adequate community baseline data to evaluate the community, however they do have a community profile survey and a food and nutrition survey which provide them with basic information about the community (Lewin, 2013).



due to accessibility to transport in the area. There were schools that were considerably more remote and experienced more challenges with drop-outs than the four schools chosen, unfortunately due to time constraints and local transport constraints, these schools and the surrounding areas were not included in this research.

## 4.2 Sample selection and data collection

To answer the research questions, data was collected using basic quantitative methods and more thorough qualitative research methods. The data collection process began with desk study, followed by field observation, surveys, interviews, focus groups and participatory workshops. Each step of the process will be explained further below. To gain a well-rounded understanding of the structure of the national education system and how it interacts with the individual, respondents were chosen in association with the systems explained in the sssm. The purpose of each system in the research process is explained in full in table 1. For more information on the research population please refer to appendix one.

**Table 1:** Separate systems of participants involved in the study

LEVEL	INTERVIEWEE	PURPOSE
Institutional system	Nkhata Bay North District Education Manager (DEM)	To look at the connectivity between District educational systems and the local education systems in place.
Interactional system	Usisya Primary schools, Usisya Secondary school, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), Usisya Medical Centre, village chiefs, Usisya zone and Ruarwe zone Primary Education Advisors (PEA), religious leaders, school committees and other institutions.	To see how local entities and leaders of the community link to the district government on education policies. To look into the connectivity of traditional and religious leaders to governmental education policies.
Individual system	Young people, guardians and teachers	To see what guardians and young peoples attitudes, knowledge and practices are towards education in the Usisya zone.

## 4.3 Research design

From an ontological and epistemological perspective I believe it's important to be subjective and understand how you, the researcher, affect the work. When undertaking research it is important to understand that there are a number of viable truths, and to incorporate these into the research process. I worked to achieve this specific goal by collecting basic data through a mixed quantitative and qualitative survey. Following this I was able to locate some specific findings of interest and build upon these by discovering more specific, personal details through interviews, focus groups and participatory observation. The quantitative data collected from the survey added in locating predominant themes from within the survey sample. From these themes I was then able to delve further into the differences and similarities of each theme through interviews, focus groups and participatory observation. This process as described by Bryman (2012, pp. 633-639) funnily enough as a *process* approach. This approach begins with quantitative research which gives the researcher an idea of the structure of a respondent's social life. This is then followed by the qualitative process which examines patterns and processes that exist behind the initial findings. This process combined with the sssm both look at the spatial and structural systems of an individual's life. By focusing on the respondent's life, and the structure, which the respondent's live in, this helped the researcher gain insight into community member's attitudes, knowledge and practices with regard to education. The preliminary participatory observation of the community, in schools, church, women's groups, HIV teen club and community meetings gave voice to this process. This research also has elements of what Punch (2013, pp. 150-154) refers to as a descriptive case study approach, where data is collected from words and actions of the respondents. This was a big part of the survey process and also key informant interviewing process. Through both the process approach and the descriptive case study approach the researcher hoped to gain access to the real life context of primary schooling in Usisya.

By utilising Usisya as a case study representing other small and hard to reach areas, hopefully these findings can be used and adapted to other similar Sub-Saharan Africa locations. So far the researcher has just touched the surface of the problem in the area, as the analysis done thus far has only been applied to this village. However this case study and the findings that have come out of it should be useful to compare and analyse other small rural villages that experience similar issues with children dropping out of primary school.

### 4.3.1 CREATING A BASE THROUGH SURVEYS

During the first two months I carried out a combined quantitative and qualitative survey across the village. I took a stratified purposive sampling approach in locating survey respondents. The fifty cases who took part in the survey were made up of male and female individuals that fit into my pre-defined categories (this information can be found on table two in appendix one). The sampling for the survey was gathered through interactions with local head teachers at the five schools I visited in the area. Extra sampling was also located through snowball sampling, depending on connections of my research assistants or from survey respondents. The purpose of the surveys was to collect ground level data on Usisyan families. This data included the respondent's attitudes and knowledge

towards primary school, general information on household resources, and the practices of the children and family with regard to retention and dropping out of school. From this information I was able to compile some of the main reasons why people believe youth are dropping out of primary school in Usisya. The basic findings from both the knowledge and attitudes education survey and the household resources survey can be found in appendix two and three.

#### **4.3.2 INTERVIEWING INTO EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES**

With the in-depth structured, semi-structured and the occasional unstructured interviews I took a sequential approach to sampling. The sampling for the sixty-five interviews was dependent on how the focus of the research evolved. For example as I became more concerned with gender and pregnancy related drop-outs, I began to interview more mothers of pregnancy drop-outs. Table three in appendix one outlines the category and interview types that each of the interviewees fit into. The initial short semi-structured interviews with secondary and primary teachers, head teachers and students describe the school context in Usisya. Following these initial semi-structured interviews and surveys were planned interviews. These interviewees were purposively located depending on what they could add to the previously collected data – for example: forced marriage, sugar daddies, parents, primary school drop-outs and teachers. Questions were asked surrounding the following themes – quality and experience of education in Usisya, gender norms in Usisya, sexual reproductive health knowledge and understanding. An important part of this process included structured interviews with key informants who represented policy, local non-governmental organisations, community initiatives and traditional governance leaders. Each level of interviews helped to distinguish the structure of education in Malawi and how it connected or did not connect to the local context. The general interview protocol is included in appendix four.

#### **4.3.3 FOCUS GROUPS ON COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING**

The thirty-one participants for the focus groups were gathered through informal conversations with interview respondents and my research assistant's community network. The church leaders however asked us if we would like to do a focus group, so in this situation they facilitated the meeting and a fellow researcher and I moderated the discussion. The school committee focus group was gathered together by an influential female gatekeeper who introduced me to a number of useful interviewees in the area. A list of the five focus groups, their gender and classification can be located in appendix one, in table four. Additionally the description of the focus group protocol and how each group was moderated is included in appendix five.

The purpose and process of each focus group was dependent on the group participating. In the case of the drop-outs, themes were identified through the survey process and the interviews and then discussed thoroughly within the group. Themes discussed were cultural norms, sexual reproductive health, gender, education in Usisya and decision-making. The school committee discussed similar topics as well as parental attitudes to education, and how governmental and societal structure influences their lives. The church leaders looked at themes covering religions role in education, structural

barriers for education, cultural barriers for education, and how gender influences education. The final focus group with the primary school students was an unstructured one and was to gather basic information about what these children thought about school in Usisya, and their experiences of students dropping out at their school.

#### **4.3.4 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

The Participatory workshops took place specifically to understand how the youth in the community were experiencing schools. The workshop with the HIV teen club was to find out what kids do during their days and what role they have in their household. Looking at whether gender divisions are clear from a very young age. After this the drama club illustrated reasons why children are dropping out of primary school from their perspective. After the drama we discussed the drama and solutions they would propose to this situation. The purpose of both workshops was to understand the local context and also learn more about primary school drop-outs through the voice of children. The workshops were formed through two different means – the HIV teen club is a club that is organised by Temwa, therefore organising this workshop was done through NGO correspondence. A teacher at Nhtembo primary school runs the drama club. Working with the children in this drama setting was more fluid than the teen club workshop – I went through the process of getting to know the kids, dancing with them, playing netball, being taught by them. Both workshops illustrated children’s experiences in Usisya and also helped me gain some insight to the knowledge and attitudes children have towards education

On top of the above interactional processes, the data collection also included field observations throughout the case study village of Usisya. This included attending church, primary school lessons, general observations of the surroundings, and day-to-day interactions with community members. The purpose of these observations was to try and gain an understanding of what it was like to live in this community and why decisions were made on a daily basis. The field observations were a continuous process, as my language ability grew. Also as my local understanding of time and relationships developed, so did my understanding of my surroundings and community interactions.

The classroom observations were of particular interest, because they provided a way to understand how teachers and students interacted during class time. They also highlighted how teachers in the village carried out their lessons and utilised the curriculum. I observed standard seven or eight classes at four of the five primary schools. The purpose of observing only the senior classes in primary school was because these were the standards where most children dropped out.

**Image 2:** Nhtembo Drama Club, Nhtembo primary school, Usisya, Northern Malawi



#### 4.4 Data management and analysis

The survey data was analysed through SPSS. The quantitative and qualitative data was entered into SPSS and coded through an iterative process. This data was utilised to uncover any differences or similarities in attitudes towards school and government obstacles, gender division at school, at home and between drop-outs. Finally this information was used to generate some general information about the respondents, such as household resources, gender and school history.

Throughout this process and building on from the SPSS findings was the analysis of interviews, focus groups, participatory projects including posters and videos. The data collated on SPSS was then manually reviewed and compared to the other data analysed through Microsoft Word. The coding process also followed Bryman's (2008) coding advice of reviewing your interviews and data not once, but twice to locate some useful notes and possible codes prior to starting the coding process. The coding was an iterative process where codes were constantly adapted to make sure the data was logical and transparent. Codes were adapted from the words in the text, however it was mostly a discourse combined with content analysis of the text, therefore the codes were selected through analysis of what was happening during the interview and also what was being said.

Lastly, observation notes and also guides for documenting qualitative interviews was guided by Mclellan et al.'s (2003) article on field methods. They clarify what should be included in interview guides should always be driven by the context of the study and the research questions (p. 67). One top of guiding the formation of the interview guides, I also used Mclellan et al.'s (2003, pp. 74-76) guidelines for labeling each individual interview, for ease of examination during the analysis period.

## 4.5 Positionality

In line with a classical feminist perspective it is important when researching another environment and group of people that we consider our positionality. From my perspective as a feminist it is important to not look at females as a homogenous group of people. Problems occur when women or men are lumped into one category. There were times when I disagreed with the gender division in Malawian society or the treatment of women, but I still had to see it from a number of angles because there is not just one way of thinking.

As I gained more knowledge of the specific gender roles in the village, I realised how different my perceptions of gender were from the people surrounding me. The most difficult thing I discovered was trying to not project my own thoughts about what is right and wrong onto the respondents. This was a daily struggle in Usisya and I did at times talk to the research assistants about this topic. The research assistants were the only ones who experienced my constant questioning and sometimes criticism of local customs, traditions and gender division. The effects this had on the findings of my research is that at times I may appear over critical of the gender division in Usisya. However I have explicitly tried to be as neutral as I can in this respect, because I do understand that my view of gender is not specifically the right view.

I did, however, create questions to gain some understanding of local perceptions of gender. One of these questions was ‘what the respondent thought of a workingwoman who were single and 28 years old, with no children?’ Many men and women said that “she wanted a baby”, and others said, “This women was greedy.” What would these people think of me, a white woman, of 27 years old, who has no children and has been living in sin with her boyfriend for seven years? The fact that I was 27 and did not have a baby did affect my research sometimes – some women felt sorry for me. They thought I was unable to have a baby. Although I explained that this was not the case, they continued to feel sorry for me. In this situation it did affect the research, especially with women and some men. In the village people generally hold women with more children in high regard, the fact that I was 27 and did not have a baby made it difficult for women to place me in the hierarchy of things. Many women, who knew this about me, felt that there was an even bigger barrier of understanding between us. When changing my research assistant from a young single male in the last month, to a young mother with a child, this was no longer an issue.

So if the respondents I interviewed felt sorry for me, then what did they think about my outsider status? My outsider status did affect my everyday activities. As a foreigner living in Usisya I came across some respondents who refused to speak with me. Some respondents only wished to speak with me if they were getting something out of it (refer to box one). These experiences resulted in constant adaptation to the introduction of interviews, surveys, focus groups and chance meetings. I needed to learn some useful sentences in Tumbuka so people could understand the exact purpose of my presence. Sometimes I would use humour to try and elicit some interest from respondents who were not initially interested in taking part. Basically it was an iterative process that involved a lot of adaptation to the local sense of humour, and also involved constant changes to how I presented myself to the local populace.

## 4.6 Limitations of the study

Planning research is not an easy task – when undertaking research there is going to be some validity issues, and it is hard to choose the best approaches. As can be seen in all current literature, using a mixed methods approach can help to give your research more validity and subsequently substantiate your results (Stone & Campbell, 1984; Cresswell, 2009; & Sumner & Tribe, 2008). One specific limitation to this study is explained in full in box one – this covers the issue of aid culture in Malawi.

Another limitation to this study was the issue of coordination and time management. There were a number of occurrences where communication with the local NGO and research participants resulted in cancellations of important workshops, transport to the field, and interviews. The main challenge was the difference in how we perceived time. My experience of appointments and time management is quite different from Usisya's. I am used to booking appointments and arriving on time, but in Usisya many people double booked their schedules and turned up to meetings two hours after the agreed meeting time. Once I understood this, I was able to prepare appointments by setting them at one to two hours before the proposed time. The double booking problem was purely because people didn't keep memos of what they were planning and relied solely on a mind that was often consumed with where their next meal would come from.

The national elections that took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May also added to cancellations of important interviews. Many key informants including the PEA were involved in elections as voting officials – therefore they were required for training and manned the voting booths on the day of the election. Another external challenge was the school holidays from the end of April to the beginning of May. As this was in the middle of my data collection period it made it difficult to locate teachers during this time for interviews. As teachers often came from outside of Usisya, they were more likely to visit their hometown during this period.

### BOX 1: SOCIAL DESIRABILITY AND AID CULTURE

Social desirability as Bryman (2008) defines it, is “the distortion of data that is caused by respondents’ attempts to construct an account that conforms to a socially acceptable model of belief or behaviour.” In the case of Usisya, there were many times when interviewees were answering specifically for monetary support and resources. There is a history in Malawi of foreign aid workers and missionaries supplying donations and resources for free. Many members of the community believed that as a foreigner in the community it was my job to supply resources and monetary support. Due to these expectations it was difficult to differentiate between honest responses and social desirability. One very difficult aspect was how to differentiate whether people were taking part to get something from me, or to contribute to the research. Most of the time I think it was a combination of the two.

Some people are in dire need of support, but in my position as a researcher I found it unethical and also not sustainable for me to give out donations. I had a few cases where it was difficult to say no – such as an elderly woman caring for orphans who asked for support to clothe her children, and another elderly woman that requested I help a young lady because she was an orphan. This experience is not just felt by foreigners, but also local NGOs and policymakers. The local District Education Manager (DEM), Mzondi Moyo outlined that one of the biggest challenges that he, donors, and other policymakers experience is expectation of monetary gifts. He outlined that –

*“...we are having a large fraction of our people who are just expecting hand-outs from (the) government. And the government doesn’t have enough – the government will request from this donor and from that donor...to support some of these lazy people, drunkards, and so forth.” (MALE, DEM, NKHATA BAY, 22-04-2014)*

He continued to explain that the communities he deals with in the district have expectations, but they are not willing to achieve these goals themselves. From my experience in Usisya I experienced aid culture on a daily basis, with local people asking for money for education, food and support for their family. There were families and individuals I conversed with that seemed to have no drive to execute these goals themselves.

#### 4.6.1 CHILDREN AND RESEARCH

Researching the knowledge, attitudes and practices of children means that it is important to include children in the research process. Many authors are calling for children to be subjects in research and to be considered agents rather than passive bystanders (Young & Bartlett, 2001; Punch, 2002; Bourdillon, 2004; & Riley, 2013). Previously development research has not considered children as actors for development. However recent academics, such as Bourdillon (2004) have called for the inclusion of children in research. Children can often be the gateway to project resolution, environmental change and also in some cases are the protagonists for change. However, children researchers believe that like adults there are limits to researching with children – your dominant position as a adult will play a big part in the way a child answers your questions (Young & Bartlett, 2001; Punch, 2002; Bourdillon, 2004; & Riley, 2013). Therefore constant reflection for my dominant position was considered throughout the data collection process. As well as the consideration of contacting and locating gatekeepers for consent prior to the interview or workshop. Additionally, the power relations amongst the community needed to be taken into account, especially when involving children. As the community is made up of many tribes, it was important to locate gatekeepers for consent to interview or workshop with younger family members.

#### 4.6.2 LANGUAGE ISSUES

The local language spoken in Usisya is Tumbuka. Unfortunately due to research preparation and time constraints leading up to the field research, learning Tumbuka was not possible. Due to this a research assistant was needed for the entirety of the data collection period. Locating a research assistant was not very difficult, as there were only a small selection of people who could speak English well enough and were not already employed. Due to the undesirability of the location for many city dwellers, English capabilities were not of a professional level – at times some of the translations were not accurate.

Both research assistants that I worked with went through a similar process of training – by working through the survey and research questions to become familiar with the study. The training for each assistant included making sure they accurately translated questions and answers as literally as possible. I required that they give me the words of the respondent and not their own. If they were to supply me with their own words, they then needed to differentiate between the two. This could be troublesome at times, because of various reasons – first they were not well spoken in English so it was difficult to thoroughly explain subtle differences in the local language. Additionally, it was difficult to explain these subtle differences within my questions. Therefore, it would mean that the full meaning of the questions and answers would often be lost in translation and would not be fully understood by both the respondent and interviewer. These problems and more would have been solved if the researcher had more experience with the language prior to entering the field. As a Bryman (2012) mentions, learning the language is one of the first and most important steps to having valid research.

### **4.6.3 GENERALISABILITY**

Due to the small sample that was gathered through purposive sampling, it will not be possible to generalise the findings of this research. These limitations were considered when undertaking this research, however due to time constraints and transport difficulties, broadening the sample size was not possible. The data collected consists of mostly qualitative findings and therefore has led to a deeper understanding of the local context. A number of studies in rural Sub-Saharan Africa have not focused on in-depth qualitative data from both youth and guardians on this subject. To fill this gap in research, the study forewent breadth and focused on depth. However although this study highlights the situation in Usisya specifically, there are a number of remote rural villages across Malawi and Sub-Saharan Africa that could compare or utilise the findings and recommendations to fit their local context.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

Each step of the research process, including the surveys, interviews, focus groups and participatory workshops were part of an iterative process. Each section required a certain amount of basic training prior to undertaking the first pilot of each method. Due to the short research period of four months in the field, the learning phases involved in each method, and a lack of language capabilities, a deep analysis on my research topic was not plausible. The data collected from the field is qualitative in nature and shows a more in-depth understanding from a small proportion of the population. The findings are not conclusive, but hope to add to research on primary school drop-outs in the global south. Both the strengths and weaknesses discussed in this chapter need to be considered when reviewing the following section on the findings of this research.

## 5. KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES TOWARD EDUCATION

The following chapter aims to answer the study's main research question through the investigation of how knowledge, attitudes and practices of people in the village of Usisya influence local primary school drop-out rates. The thematic framework in chapter three illustrates the educational backdrop in Nkhata Bay North and more specifically Usisya. You can also locate the specific village a respondent is from by referring to the Usisya map presented in map three. Additionally an overview of the research population who took part in this study can be seen in box two. This box clarifies the basic demographics of the respondents and what household resources they generally have access to. The empirical findings explained below should add value to the already gathered information on education in the district and hope to add to the small amount of research done on education in this particular area.

The first section of this chapter will begin with what Risman (1998) keys as the individual system - where knowledge, attitudes and personal values towards school are formed through interpersonal relationships and structure. The second section is the interactional system, where interpersonal relationships project customs, traditions, and expectations of both the family and community, which can assist in the re-creation of unequal structures. We will finally review some known obstacles are in the way of finishing primary school within the local context. Finally we will summarise the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the respondents in the conclusion of this chapter and continue on to the following chapter that reveals the role of the institutional system in educational attainment in this rural setting.

Throughout chapter five and chapter six, the examples and information will be narrated through the described experiences of the respondents that took part in the research. It is important that the findings of this research be told through the voices of the local population - however it is essential to consider the limitations and biases that make this process difficult. These have been outlined in chapter four. Please note, guardians are used to include both biological and non-biological parents throughout the findings section.

## **BOX 2: THE RESEARCH POPULATION**

Here is a short overview of the research population's characteristics. This is given in order to provide a clear overview of the people who participated in the research.

Out of the youth respondents 48 percent is male and 52 percent is female. They have an age range of 5 to 32 years old, with 84 percent between the ages of 12 to 22 years old. Interestingly 75 percent falls within the reproductive age (15-45). The most common work respondent's guardian's do is farming. Almost all respondents work at home for their family as an activity outside of school.

Guardian respondents also had a slightly bigger female group than male with 63 percent. The guardian's age runs from 28 to 83 years old. Out of all guardians who took part, 70 percent fall within the ages of 28 to 60 years old.

Out of the teacher respondents, male teachers consisted of 63 percent. The age range of teachers involved in the study is 23 to 53 years old.

All respondents considered themselves Christian. Popular denominations are the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP), African church, Anglican, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, as well as other smaller denominations.

Out of the 83 respondents who took part the household resources survey, 52 percent of the respondents has a radio, while only few have a television. Only 12 percent of the respondents surveyed had access to electricity.

Table six and seven in appendix four include further information on the which areas have more access to electricity and also what type of resources households generally have access to.

We will now move on to the findings of this thesis, whereby the sssm concepts will provide the structure of this thesis. The following begins with data collected from the micro level.

## **5.1 Individual system**

Out of the 147 people involved in this research from the village of Usisya, 50% of them were youth. Youth that took part in the surveys, interviews, focus groups and participatory workshops summarized that dropping out of primary school in Usisya was a problem. Youth that participated in the survey explained that both early and unwanted pregnancy are two of the main reasons children are dropping out of primary school in Usisya. Through thematic coding of both the interviews and focus groups data I found that 100% of people regardless of their gender or background, mentioned pregnancy as a reason that girls were dropping out of school. The other reason primarily mentioned was economic vulnerability, which will be explained further in chapter six (for a continuation of drop-out reasons mentioned in the survey, refer to figure ten, included in appendix two). In addition, out of the 17 female primary school drop-outs - interviewed, surveyed and who took part in the focus group - 15 left school due to pregnancy. One female drop-out told me that once a girl gets pregnant, there is no future for her in education (female, 20 years old, Chiweta, 08-05-2014).

Temwa's NGO worker specialising in education explained that they work closely with the community to support drop-outs and try and talk them back to school (female, Education officer, 25 years old, 15-05-2014). She explained that the community's knowledge of education remains rather positive. She also explained how school committees such as mother's groups, school management committees, AIDS clubs and Parent/Teacher Associations (PTA) are working as a collective to promote education in Usisya. The PTA chairs that I communicated with generally had positive views on education, however they highlighted some of the challenges that Usisya deals with on a daily basis. They concluded that economic vulnerability is a big factor characterising high drop-outs rates in Usisya, this factor often leads to early pregnancies, early marriages and leaving school to work as a fisherman or work in part time piece work (*ganju*). Although leaders in the community generally have positive feelings towards education, the general public who are struggling with economic vulnerability can often see education as a luxury compared to day-to-day survival.

From a teacher's (*Azambizi*) perspective – a local female teacher, Mary describes her experience of teaching in Usisya, which can be seen in box three. From her knowledge of local education issues – which is also shared by other primary and secondary school teachers in the area – training is a big problem and also lack of guidance from parents. Many youth explained to me that it was the parent's responsibility for them to attend school, but Mary explains that it should be the joint responsibility of the children and the parents.

### **BOX 3: A TEACHER'S (AZAMBIZI)**

#### **PERSPECTIVE – KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES**

Mary is a primary school secretary and also teaches standard one. She has one year of teaching experience. She believes children drop out because of age – because they are much older than their classmates. This is usually because they had to repeat years.

She believes that students have a lack of guidance and counselling. Most learners' move around freely after 10pm and their parents do not guide them. She says this often results in pregnancy, and drug and substance abuse. She believes that there should be an organisation to teach people the purpose of school and also the positive effects of school attendance. Some activities exist in the northern city Karonga, such as 'Nyambe Nyambe' – where they use drama to teach people about the goodness of education. But in Usisya they don't sensitise adults and the community about the purpose of education. However, on Fridays the teachers do help learners write poems to teach them about education and they also teach the children about drug and substance abuse. The PTA and parents should do some separate activities to tackle these topics and promote aspirations for the learners.

She believes that there are not a lot of role models for children in the community. There is a lack of opportunities, so learners stop learning and drop out of school. Girls from ages 15 to 17 are often having children. Some parents however are educated and help their kids to continue with school. When a child does not go to school, the teacher will ask their parents if their child goes to school? Usually the parents think their child goes to school, but actually they don't. It should be both the learner and the parent's responsibility to attend school.

Finally Mary talked about training for teachers. She mentioned that last term they had some training through Temwa, and also when she was in college she had some training on some practical ways to work with children with disabilities. She learnt some special learning skills, so she can adapt her lessons so all her students may experience school. She does believe however that they need more training for teachers. Some teachers are from the 1970s and haven't had any subsequent training since then. Their teaching techniques are very old fashioned. PIKA is a new training and teaching technique that was introduced in 2005, however many teachers have not had training in this and therefore don't know the processes. The textbooks they are now using have changed, but the teaching techniques for many teachers have not. (Nhkutu, 26-02-2014)

#### **5.1.1 KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION**

What these three sets of respondents could agree on was that unwanted pregnancy was a significant factor locally that contributed to primary school drop-outs. From this information I wanted to ascertain whether parents were giving their children advice about school and SRH. As you can see in box four, collectively the interviewees described whom they learned about SRH from. The drop-out youth mention their uncles and aunties,

mothers, grandparents and clubs. The secondary school graduates mention secondary and primary school teachers and the health centre. Most people said that the health centre offered the most accurate information, however most respondents said they trusted their grandparents and aunties .

**BOX 4: WHERE DO USISYA YOUTH LEARN ABOUT SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH?**

*“My aunty (gives me the most accurate information). Most girls they are going to their aunties.”* (FEMALE, FORCED MARRIAGE, 17 YEARS OLD, NHTEMBO, 12-05-2014)

*“We are learning about HIV/AIDS (from our mothers, aunties and uncles)”* (MALE, PRIMARY SCHOOL DROP-OUT, 17 YEARS OLD, CHIWETA, 08-05-2014)

*“(The most accurate information was from) my teacher, in secondary school.”* (FEMALE, SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATE, 18 YEARS OLD, NHTEMBO, 16-05-2014)

*“(The best places I learned about SRH) was secondary school, health care training and lastly primary school.”* (MALE, SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATE, 23 YEARS OLD, NHKUTU, 19-05-2014)

One guardian I discussed knowledge transmission with explained that children get the real answers from the older generation (Female, vice chair school mother’s group, Nhtembo, 01-05-2014). When explicitly discussing what type of advice guardians give their children about SRH, one female guardian explained the taboo surrounding discussing SRH topics with your children. She explained that according to their culture, children seek SRH advice from their grandmother and from this they do not receive accurate information (Nhtembo, 14-05-2014). Furthermore, she explained that this information is old fashioned and often embedded in tradition and customs – such as the local tradition where menstruating females should not put salt in food when cooking.

The teacher’s experience in box three illustrates how teachers within one school can differ in experience. With a number of girls leaving school due to unwanted pregnancy – both males and females require accurate knowledge about SRH. As a local health care worker, Mr Munthale explained – the life skills education taught at schools is accurate, but he doesn’t feel confident that the teachers are explaining it thoroughly –

*“The reproductive changes that happen to both girls and boys are not explained in depth and they end up not being well equipped.”* (MALE, HEALTH CARE WORKER, MUTENTHE, 25-04-2014)

Mr Munthale was not as positive about SRH education in schools, not just because of the teaching style, but also due to youth life choices –

*“There are problems with teen mothers and teen pregnancy. (Which results from a) lack of knowledge and motivation. There are not many activities to teach the kids about sexual reproductive health and the kids have a lack of motivation to stay in school.” (MALE, HEALTH CARE WORKER, MUTENTHE, 25-04-2014)*

The District Education Manager (DEM), Mzondi Moyo took a different stance on life skills education in Malawi. He mentioned that previously teachers would concentrate on other more “important” subjects, but since life skills became examinable in 2010, teachers are not able to run away from this subject (male, DEM, Nkhata Bay, 22-04-2014). He went further to say that teachers have become more and more open to discussing topics which were previously taboo. Mzondi Moyo believes that it may not be the best, but it is improving because the teachers have an obligation.

To bridge any problems with SRH education Mr Munthale recommended connecting the health centre with the schools. He stated that this would be difficult due to understaffing, but they would work around it and he even told me that – *“The whole class can come! All reproductive questions can be answered here in full. When the information they are given is not accurate or what they know is not accurate, then they need to confirm with us. We know about these things.”* So potentially a solution to both issues with SRH education and high rates of pregnancy related drop-outs may be for the health centre and the local schools to collaborate.

### **5.1.2 ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION**

There is a wide range of attitudes towards education in this village, which can sometimes be conflicting. The following includes community’s attitudes towards education in Usisya.

From the 14 drop-outs and 19 guardians surveyed approximately 94% said that they would return to school if they could. This 94% also have positive attitudes towards education (this is illustrated in figure eight and nine in appendix two). When the 14 drop-outs were asked what changes needed to be made for them to return to school three survey respondents believed that they were not able to manage school regardless of any changes being made. Two of these three survey respondents explained that without changing personally they couldn’t return to school. They felt that regardless of any changes made at home, school or in the government, the only way for them to return to school would be for them to change their own attitudes. Their motivation to return to school is low because they already felt too old for primary school – this has been discussed in the literature review as one known obstacle to school completion.

A communities attitudes towards education also play a role in how the individual experiences education. Wamba and Mogomezulu (2014, p. 329) discuss how schools are associated with the government, donors or missionary organisations in Malawi, however communities themselves do not feel they have ownership of their local school. This idea of lack of connectivity between the school and the local community is a problematic situation in Usisya. The guardian population is largely uneducated, so therefore they find it difficult to relate to schools and consequently promote the schooling of their children. A local

primary school teacher noted that community and school relationships are bleak probably because they feel separated from schooling (male, Sangano, 20-03-2014). Each school should have a mother's group, school management committee and a PTA – the smaller schools may have one of these groups, but the larger lakeside schools generally have all three committees. These committees are in place to create a link between the community and the schools. Guardian's that were interviewed explained that these groups often contradict themselves – they tell the community they will do one thing and either do not follow through with it or do the very opposite of what has been proposed. However the committee members who took part in the research explained that they lack funding and support from the community and therefore cannot support needy children and other students without this. From the attitudes of both the guardians and the school committees, it may be beneficial if there was more interaction between both parties.

### 5.1.3 PERSONAL VALUES

Personal values of guardians really set the stage for what types of values local individuals have towards school. Some guardians, explained what they thought about education and it's benefits. For example one school committee member told me that –

*“The importance of education is for children to be able to support themselves. Because (some) children (have) lost their parents so this can be a problem.”* (FEMALE, VICE-CHAIR PRIMARY SCHOOL COMMITTEE, NHTEMBO, 29-04-2014)

Two other guardians explained the values they try to impart on their children. One female guardian explained to me that school is important, because when a person is educated they can solve problems and if someone works they can help make Malawi a better country (female, guardian, Nhtembo, 14-05-2014). A male PTA chairman for a local primary school explained that the world is changing and it's not time to get pregnant, go fishing or just stay at home. It's a good time to encourage children to become doctors or be employed, so they can live a good life (male, PTA chair primary school, Chiweta, 06-05-2014). Although as previously mentioned knowledge transmission is taboo with guardians – some guardians do believe education is valuable and explained this passionately when queried.

### 5.1.4 CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As mentioned earlier, it is considered taboo in this community, and in many Malawian villages, to talk directly with your biological children about their bodily changes. Mr Munthale explained this situation for me –

*“Normally (they talk to) friends and parents. But for more sensitive topics they talk to their uncles and aunties. Not usually their real parents. It is even hard for children to talk to their biological parents about HIV/AIDS. This is not good.”* (MALE, HEALTH CARE WORKER, MUTENTHE, 25-04-2014)

Customs and beliefs hold significant value locally and I could see young people in schools understood a number of customs from a very young age. For example one woman described a young mother as an “old woman” and continued to explain to me that this girl’s baby is her diploma and this child will supply for her in the future (Female, informal chat, Nhtembo, 30-04-2014). The term “old woman” is a common phrase used to describe a girl, regardless of her age who has had a baby. This type of ideology often perpetuates female ideals of womanhood and what is expected of them when they give birth, regardless of their age. They are welcomed into a club, but it revolves around child bearing and family, not education. This conflict of family and/or education will be discussed in the following chapter. Informal advice about pregnancy and other common beliefs in the village affect what it means to be an individual.

## 5.2 Interactional system

The interactions a child has on a daily basis with their guardians, teachers and their community can play a big part in how they experience education. The interactional system as discussed in chapter two can also affect the institutional system by adding to national customs, values and gender-orientated discourse. But this system also learns from what is politicised through policymakers and traditional leaders about the education system.

### 5.2.1 ALCOHOLISM AND COMMUNITY NORMS

One of the main practices that is hindering males attendance in school is alcoholism. A fellow researcher’s assistant speculated that at least 70% of men in the village were alcoholics. Peter who is living openly with HIV told me that local boys his age are drinking beer, (they are also) gambling and stealing (male, LHIV, 16 years old, Nhkutu, 12-05-2014). He suffers from AIDS related illnesses and still manages to go to school with with rarely any problems. He explained that HIV/AIDS doesn’t affect his school attendance. Unlike him, four of the boys I interviewed explained that alcohol as well as fishing was part of the reason they left school. Many locals are associating alcoholism with the fishing culture in the village. The senior acting chief told me that many boys are just roaming about and doing nothing. They are going fishing in the lake and buying alcohol instead of food (male, GVH, Lvuwu, 21-05-2014). Association with men and alcoholism is becoming a national norm, with common appearances of drunk and disorderly men roaming in urban centres, as well as rural villages. At the village level certain people condemn alcohol as one of the biggest problems in Usisya – to illustrate this every evening all the small home-style bars around the village are full of men drinking and watching TV.

However, not only males are involved in this lifestyle, females also take part. One of the boys from my focus group as well as a number of female teachers I interviewed noted that many girls are dancing at these evening bars. Although in most religions and also in most villages women are not allowed to drink alcohol, women still become involved in this side of rural Malawian life. Females generally use this type of activity as a means of economic relief (Verheijen, 2014), which will be discussed in-depth in chapter six.

Therefore both males and females are grow up surrounded by these national norms that place one as a potential alcoholic and the other as a potential prostitute. If young people experience these norms in either everyday conversation or through community member's habits, then it may become part of what is considered normal behaviour.

### 5.2.2 GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM

The learned experiences we have through our interpersonal relationships also teach us about gender. So how do teacher's deal with gender in their classroom? A local female primary school teacher told me –

*“That in many subjects we have gender related topics...we focus on both boys and girls.” (USISYA, FEMALE, PRIMARY TEACHER, 28 YEARS OLD, 13-05-2014)*

In the case of this teacher her character showed that she actively tries and teaches in a gender neutral way, or what she believes would be a gender neutral way. However other teachers that I encountered were not very open to gender mainstreaming. A male teacher who taught in a small mountain school married one of his previous students and when observing his classes he used gender specific examples of dowry and marriage as well as using females from within his class as examples (Primary school, 20-03-2014). All the female students used as examples in his class were embarrassed and moved uncomfortably in their chairs when referred to by the teacher.

From a completely different perspective, a local education-based NGO worker, Rosa said from her experience gender equality in the classroom is a rarity. Girls are generally less confident to write on the board and the class laughs more when a girl makes a mistake. In her specific field she openly tries to challenge this stereotype and teaches the kids that mistakes are fine and you can only learn from them (female, NGO founder, British, 32 years old, Ruarwe, 13-04-2014). Another male teacher based at a local primary school in Usisya explained his experience of the gender divide in the classroom. He noted that boys will raise their hands to answer questions, however girls don't answer, they don't have the confidence to speak out loud in class (Usisya, male, primary teacher, 18-03-2014). Although teachers know about national policies of gender mainstreaming, they don't actively use these methods in their classrooms. Especially when – as mentioned in box three – teachers have not had recent training in these techniques. If school is perpetuating these gender norms, then gender inequality, as discussed in chapter three will remain an issue in Malawi.

## 5.3 Known obstacles

The following section includes two of the obstacles that presented themselves in Usisya. This section offers some differing experiences with these known obstacles to school attendance and provides some additions to previous studies in this area. Chapter six will also include some known obstacles that relate closely to the institutional level, such as economic vulnerability, weather and distance.

### 5.3.1 PARENTAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The effects of a parent's education background on a child's attendance has been seen to affect whether or not a child will complete primary school. Within the local context, from the guardians who were surveyed only 6.3% had finished primary school. From the guardians who took part in the study, educated guardians who had also lived abroad in either Zambia, Tanzania or South Africa had more children who had completed or were planning on completing school. However, many uneducated guardians, even well respected individuals in their community, felt that they were unable to encourage their children to attend school because they themselves had dropped out. A local church leader and vice-chair on a primary school committee voiced their opinions on how uneducated parents feel inadequate and therefore feel they don't have the right to advise their child to attend school (male, church leader focus group, Usisya, 11-04-2014; female, vice-chair primary school committee, Nhtembo, 20-04-2014).

From this we can see that the education background of a guardian does affect school attendance in the local context. However this study provides a deeper understanding of why community members in Usisya are not pushing school attendance. It shows us that individual inadequacies, which are present in most of us, play a role in a guardian's choice to push (or not) for the education of their child.

### 5.3.2 IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHER UNDERSTAFFING

Guardians often do not see the result of completing education in Usisya. There is a lack of job opportunities, with no current chance of development in the area. Therefore as mentioned in the literature review parents often prioritise household responsibilities and moneymaking opportunities. Teachers can sometimes be in sole charge of compelling students to remain in school. However, they are dealing with a number of challenges on top of this - large classes, lack of infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, amongst other issues. Teachers who took part in the study explained that they tried to compel drop-outs to return to school, however due to these challenges spare time to follow-up on drop-outs was often infrequent.

Teachers are busy and well respected in Usisya. On the other hand, some of the students and drop-outs who took part in the study did explain that teachers often took days off during the week. These days off were usually to collect their salaries, to do some errands in a bigger city, or to attend funerals. The problem with taking these days off is that there is no relief teachers in the village and classes will often be sent home for the day. This directly affects students learning experience and in this particular situation they have no decision-making power over the regularity of their education. On separate days I observed that a number of the children were sent home for this reason. The parents do have the added benefit of their children helping them farming or fishing. However, the children slowly creep behind with the curriculum that is consequentially linked to the high retention rate in Usisya primary schools. In Usisya primary schools, 14% of students are repeating a standard (PEA, 2013).

Although teachers do require holidays, in some cases it appeared that some teachers were abusing this power. One female teacher from a local lakeside primary school took a day off to purchase goods for a party. Another example is the training for the elections that took place on May 20th. Before the election all schools in the area closed for two to three days prior to the elections to train and prepare the school. Two out of the three schools did not have voting booths at the school. The training of the teachers took much longer than required. In these cases, their needs to be clear-cut organisation by the government – so school lessons don't come second to elections.

## 5.4 Conclusion

To conclude this section we can see that the knowledge, attitudes and practices of an individual are shaped through their interactions with their community. Within one entity of the support network there can be differing views on education, such as the female primary school teachers account on the knowledge of teachers in Usisya. Across all groups of people who took part in the study there is a common theme of gender division that is embedded in the community's decision-making processes. So from this micro level descriptive analysis we can see the basis of a child's support network. However, to delve deeper into this we will look at how structure, socio-cultural and economic factors influence school attendance in Usisya in the following chapter.

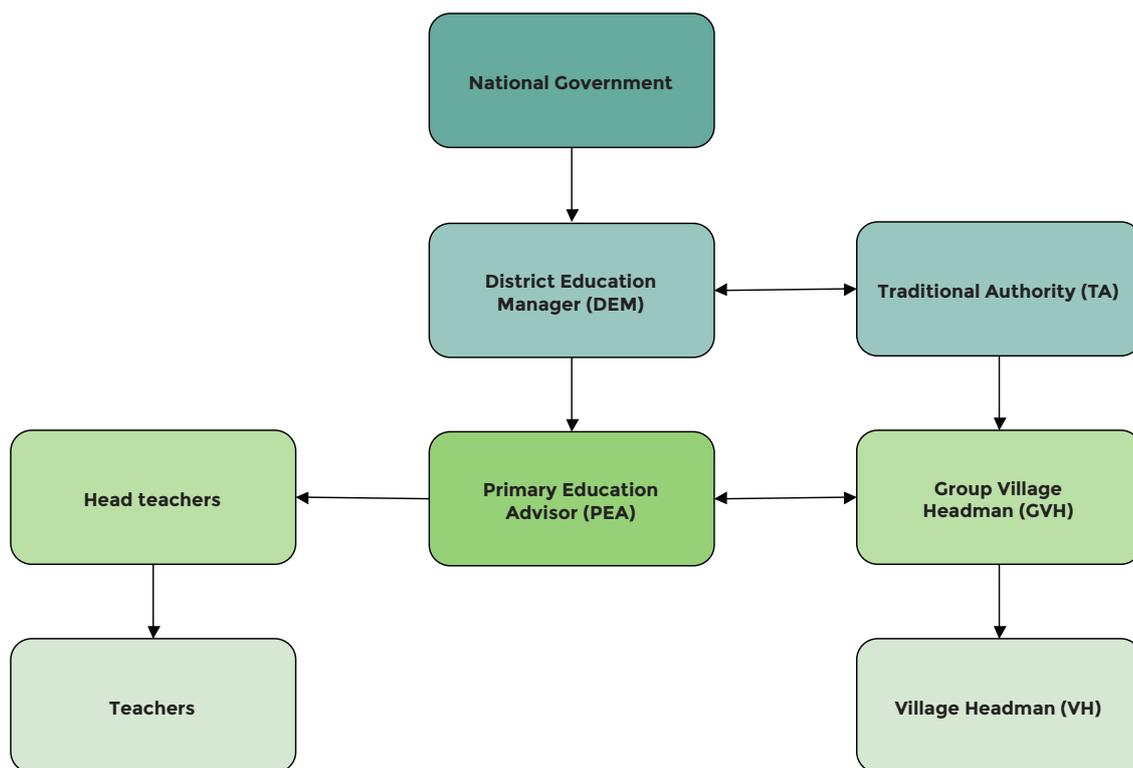
## 6. STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO EDUCATION

The following chapter reviews some of the larger structural factors that influence primary school attendance in rural Sub-Saharan Africa. This chapter aims to answer the remaining research questions that focus on the extent in which structural, social-cultural and economic factors influence school attendance. We will look at what structural barriers are in place – whether they are basic institutions, cultural norms or economic barriers. Four key informant interviews, as well as a number of Village Headman (VH) interviews supported the findings in this chapter. The following section will examine how global, national, regional and local education policies are implemented, enforced and monitored in local communities.

### 6.1 Structural factors – institutional system

Education in rural Malawi as mentioned in chapter three has been through many changes in the last 20 years. The changes that have occurred at a global, national and local level have been significant, but to what extent have these changes affected the local education systems? In the case of the Malawian government there is a hierarchy in place that feeds from the national level, all the way down to the teachers and students in the classroom. The hierarchy for education policy-making links the current political party through the country's decentralised government. Each district feeds information down to the primary education advisors (PEA) that are allocated to each specific tribal authority (TA) in that region. The PEA links down to the head teachers, then the teachers from each school. The group village headman (GVH), is linked through the TA and PEA then relays ideas through to the village headman (VH). Refer to figure seven for a visual representation of these relationships.

**Figure 7:** Visual representation of the relationships of government structure in Malawi



There are a number of laws in place nationally and regionally concerning drop-outs in Malawi. It is the job of the DEM to reiterate these policies to the PEA and head teachers that fall in his district and monitor whether these policies are being implemented or not. In Usisya the regional policy changes are often reaching the schools and the parents in the community. They know all about the policies and have explained to me what is ‘*right and wrong.*’ Parents, teachers and students have told me on number of occasions the importance of education, as both a way out of poverty and a means for future family support. Policies in place to counter drop-outs in Usisya have been introduced as a selection of by-laws – these bye-laws aim to compete against high drop-out rates in the zone. They have compiled these drop-out bye-laws to keep in line with national changes in education legislature and work towards achieving national goals in a local context. The bye-laws work towards trying to eliminate harmful practices in the village such as early marriages, forced marriage, teacher and student relationships, alcoholism, traditional customs such as the coming of age ceremonies and dances.

The complications that teachers and local chiefs see with these bye-laws is that it may take a sufficient length of time to be approved, and consequently implemented. There may also be problems with a lack of enforcement by the local chiefs. Also due to community norms and specific customs, some family’s preconceived biases may result in ineffective enforcement of these laws. A final important issue to take into account is the lack of knowledge of the bye-laws by the community – whereby locals may be persecuted for breaking a law they are unaware of. The local PEA explained to me that they often fine community members who break laws, regardless of whether they knew this law was in place or not (male, Gustaf Omega Kamanga, PEA, 48 years old, Nhkutu, 09-04-2014).

He specified that the laws were enforced this way so that people could learn from their mistakes. One of the many problems with this is that in some cases the fine is much more than people can afford. People should also be aware of the consequences of their actions prior to committing an offence.

### 6.1.1 CONNECTING THE INSTITUTIONAL TO THE INDIVIDUAL – GENDER POLITICS

There are rules and regulations that give the impression that Malawi and the local governance system are progressive with their policies. But to be honest what is said on paper is often the opposite of what is enforced through local governance systems in rural locations. This is referred to as policy evaporation – *“this is where the commitment to pursue equality remains at the level of rhetoric and paper statements, and is not integrated into the actual design and implementation of reforms”* (Leach, 2003, p. 7).

Gender division in Malawian society has revealed itself as a big issue for irregular school attendance and has been a predominant reason for female students, and in some cases male students having left school. Therefore progressive rules and regulations have been put in place across the education sector in Malawi. Mzondi Moyo describes the district process he plans to take to promote gender equality in the region –

*“We will include traditional leaders in school government structures – there is a topic where we cross certain issues which covers both HIV, and gender issues. And this one is directly taught to the parents. (It is taught in) school, through government structures, and also to traditional leaders. So we are really doing something. We formally train those people on the importance of looking at gender issues positively. (We teach them) how they can ensure that every sex fully benefits and participates in society.”* (MALE, DEM, NKHATA BAY, 22-04-2014)

Mzondi Moyo explains that Nkhata Bay North is a progressive district with regard to gender. However this may be another case of policy evaporation – as gender related drop-outs continue in Usisya regardless of these progressive strategies.

As an example, the national and district laws surrounding pregnancy in Malawian public schools support female and male suspension, followed by re-admission after 6 months (Chalasanani et al., 2012). However the local governance system is not adequately enforcing these rules. Majority of the females who took part in the study left school and did not return after they had their child. One guardian illustrated that some females in the village did return to school after their pregnancies. She explained that after having a baby, some girls will return to school, however not to the community day secondary school, but the community night secondary school (female, guardian, Nhembo, 14-05-2014). Apparently if a girl has a child she cannot return to the normal school, but night school. The problem with night schools is that the time is significantly shorter than the day school – lasting less than three hours a day, with larger classes (male, guardian, Nhembo, 16-05-2014). Students who attend the night school often are less likely to graduate than the day secondary students.

**Image 3:** Two girls and a baby, Nhtembo primary school, Nhtembo primary school, Usisya, Northern Malawi



### 6.1.2 LACK OF WORK OPPORTUNITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

With a government full of paper policies and no direct enforcement, remote locations lose out on the development of education systems, employment, infrastructure and health systems that could bring them out of poverty. Many interviewees and focus group participants noted that jobs opportunities in the area at the local NGO, health centre, lodge and schools go to people who come from outside of Usisya. One female drop-out mentioned that there are no opportunities except with Temwa, but they all hire from outside of the village (17 years old, 20-05-2014). Although job opportunities are often available outside of Usisya, many locals wish to remain in Usisya, and if they choose to stay they will most likely remain unemployed. My two research assistants want to continue their education and remain working in Usisya, however they both mentioned the lack of opportunities for educated people in the village.

Another structural factor that influences school attendance – which is governed by paper policies – is a lack of basic infrastructure. One focus group participant noted –

*“Many children will fail to go to school because of rainy season.”* (FEMALE,  
CHURCH LEADERS FOCUS GROUP, TEMWA, NHKUTU, 11-04-2014)

Many interviewees explained that a bridge would need to be built to help their kids get to school. During the four months I resided in the village two primary school girls drowned in the river and another man drowned on a separate occasion in a different river. When I asked Mzondi Moyo about this issue he explained –

*“(this) does not belong to this sector – that’s bridges. So that one is for (the) public sector. We can communicate with our colleagues, (however) we are not supposed to build bridges.” (MALE, DEM, NKHATA BAY, 22-04-2014)*

In this situation it is not the job of the education sector to build bridges, however we can hope that the different sectors in the district government collaborate where locals lives are concerned.

## **6.2 Social-cultural factors – customs and gender-orientated discourse**

A number of the gendered ideologies and social norms influence school attendance in Usisya and often contribute to high female drop-out rates. For example one female in the drop-out focus group mentioned that she wanted to study at boarding school, because in Usisya she feels she cannot learn. There is a lot of work – collecting firewood, cooking, cleaning, caring – “we cannot read” (Usisya, 25 years old, 30-04-2014). Females generally have a lot of household responsibilities, but they are also bound by customs and traditions that highlight the gender divide in the village.

A church leader told me that according to their traditions the girl child should get married and have a man, and that is what her life should consist of (male, church leader focus group, Nhkutu, 11-04-2014). A number of local customs supported by families are hindering national policies on gender equality in classrooms. Customs such as when a child menstruates for the first time, this girl is kept out of school for a week. Although this custom is not accepted as part of school policy, many girls are still practicing this. One female teacher believes that 20% of girls, who have begun menstruating at her school, will be kept home for the entirety of their first period (female, primary school teacher, Usisya, 28 years old, 13-05-2014).

These customs results in loss of education and adds to the large problems with retention in local schools. Regardless of teachers and NGOs trying to advocate for changes to the traditional customs in their area, they are still being practiced. I came across two young people who had been forced into marriage – one female and one male. The female told me she was not happy with her future, because she would like to learn in school, but her parents forced her to marry (17 years old, Nhtembo, 12-05-2014). One local girl explained to me her experience with forced marriage and how in her own way she deconstructed the norms that were expected of her, and defied this tradition (please refer to box five to read Rechelle’s story). These customs are resulting to high drop-out rates in local schools, especially among females, but also among the local male population.



#### **BOX 5: RECHELLE'S STORY**

Rechelle is 17 years old – she left primary school at standard six. Her mother is working in Tanzania and sending money to Usisya to support her and her two younger sisters. She told me that the aunty she lives with loves money – she will do anything for money. At 15 years old her aunty accompanied by her family tried to force her to marry an older man from South Africa who was offering the family a lot of money. She pleaded with her family saying that ‘she didn’t want to get married’, so they decided against it. At 16 years old her aunty and her family were propositioned by another older man from Tanzania, once again she begged them to stop and once again they accepted. The last time it happened when she was 17 years old, her aunty told her that if she didn’t marry this man she would have to leave the house permanently. She told her that she would now have to buy everything she needed like soap, for herself. She left the house with nowhere to go, as her whole family sided with her aunty.

Without any other option, she chose to marry her boyfriend. Unfortunately due to the local customs surrounding marriage it is unusual for a female to remain at school when she is married. It is usually only up to the husband as to whether she can attend school or not. Rechelle told me that “...because they want me to marry someone, I (decided to) marry someone who I love.” She left school and now has a very small baby girl named Lucy. When I asked her if she is happy, she told me she is happier here than with her aunty. The only thing she is worried about is that her sisters will also be forced into marriage by her aunty. Customs in the village often detail how an individual should live – in this case Rechelle was able to play a role in her future. (Female, Nhtembo, 19-05-2014)

IMAGE SOURCE: *Barbara Lammertink, Usisya, Malawi*

## 6.2.1 RELIGION, CUSTOMS, AND SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

Religion as mentioned earlier in chapter three is a big part of life in these small Sub-Saharan villages, therefore traditional healers and church leaders are very influential people. The church represents a significant part of the local population's socio-cultural understanding. Decisions made by the local populace are embedded in religion, on top of traditions and customs. Because of this the church and traditional religions are often intertwined with home life and schools in the area. The church leaders who were involved in this study explained that they often give advice to students about the importance of education and school. One church leader is currently holding afternoon lessons for students studying for their primary and secondary examinations. The church leader focus group illustrated the problems with the national and local education system and were well aware of the structural problems facing Malawi. For example, they openly criticized teachers for taking time off and contributing to loss of education, but they also understood that there is a lack of teachers in the zone (males and female, church leaders focus group, Temwa, Nhkutu, 11-04-2014). Although the church leaders are positive about education, there are still aspects of their teachings that could contribute to the high rates of primary school drop-outs in Usisya. One main issue that is present in many countries in the global south is the teachings regarding sexual reproductive health. Most churches in the village do not openly teach about HIV/AIDS and contraception – some can openly condemn these topics. As church leaders are held in high esteem their opinions of SRH can contribute to either the lack of knowledge or a lack of trust towards contraception. Consequently unwanted pregnancies and the high levels of HIV/AIDS continue to affect the local youth's school attendance.

There remain discrepancies between government policies and the church leader's opinions that influence dropping out of school. I interviewed a church leader and he described the feelings he has towards teenage pregnancy and how he tackles any teen pregnancy situations when they arise. He told me that if a girl gets pregnant they should leave school for 10 months to one year to look after the baby and after this period return to school and leave the baby with her parents (male, church leader, Nhtembo, 07-04-2014). However when asked about whether boys needed to leave school due to pregnancy, he said *"No! We don't like that. It's just enjoyment for them, boys are not pregnant, girls have the child, boys give her a baby, so boys remain in school"* (male, church leader, Nhtembo, 07-04-2014). To add to this, we talked about early marriage and he said that – *"getting pregnant and not going to school is not good, but if a girl becomes married after she has slept together with (her boyfriend) that is good. To her mind she has left school already, (especially) if her parents have no money it is good for her (to get married and leave school)"* (male, church leader, Nhtembo, 07-04-2014). These discrepancies result in general confusion across the community, one part of society says that boys can enjoy sex and not deal with the repercussions, and the other section says that both males and females should equally deal with the consequences of their actions. In box six you can see a specific case study of a women and her daughter who left school because she was told she is a satanist. This story illustrates common issues that occur due to religion and customs in the village that affect female's school attendance.

## BOX 6: SATANISM AND SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

Astrida left school when she was younger because she was pregnant. Her husband passed away some years ago. She is living in Usisya with a household of women, her sister, daughters and her sister's children. She is working hard to provide for them. Her two daughters have both left school, one has left because of pregnancy. Astrida's other daughter was recently pulled from school because she had turned into a satanist.

Astrida describes the transition her daughter experienced –

*“She came home from Nhtembo primary school, studying at night. She was cry loudly in the morning. She was chasing people and acting crazy. From 2009, she was learning and was doing these things and going to school. She was having a lot of time off school because of satanism, so teachers told her to leave school. First we went to pastors, then traditional healers and finally St Johns hospital. She got medicine from St Johns.”*

The medicine she takes as described by Astrida, is something that can make her feel more human again. She wants to return to school and finish secondary school, but they are not sure if she will be able to cope.

Satanism has affected schools in various ways – one local primary school had three teachers transferred because they were accused of Satanism by a group of female students. The villagers had decided to take action into their own hands and attack the accused teachers. The DEM then transferred these teachers for their own safety. The community was then punished by the DEM – they received no replacement teachers, which left the school understaffed, with only one female teacher (the remainin gender proportions of teachers can be seen in figure eleven). Satanism often effects schools through female students accusing teachers of teaching them Satanism. A case just like this occurred as we were leaving the field where two teachers and a pastor were accused of teaching Satanism to a primary school girl. The accused and the girl and her family visited the local chief and tried to solve the problem with the parents. Because they did not come to a solution, the family and the accused would need to go to a traditional healer who would decide through her traditional healing techniques who was innocent. (Female, guardian, Nhtembo, 15-05-2014; male, senior acting chief, Lvuwu, 21-05-2014)

## 6.2.2 FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

Box six examines custom's power over decision-making. Education or family is also a common decision made by young females in Usisya. Due to traditions surrounding pregnancy and marriage, many youth are often removed from school, which results in a large population of uneducated youth in Usisya. Two of the female drop-outs who took part in the study mentioned that they were happy to be looking after their children and

did not see themselves returning to school in the future (female, primary school drop-out, Nhtembo, 22 years old, 14-05-2014; female, forced marriage, 17 years old, Nhtembo, 19-05-2014). They saw positive futures for their children and wanted their children to go to school, so they decided that it was their time to focus on their family. Who is to say that this is the right or the wrong way of thinking? Education or family is a common choice made by young females in Usisya, but males also need to make similar decisions. One male I interviewed left school because his girlfriend was pregnant and was forced to marry her (male, passed primary school, 27 years old, Nhkutu, 21-05-2014). He told me that his girlfriend did not end up being pregnant, but they continued to live together as husband and wife. This meant that both of them could not attend school. Once married, many people leave school, even if they are not having a child. The customs surrounding marriage and pregnancy result in pressure from children's family and possibly the church. In the case of Usisya with low economic wealth and low job opportunities, the direct benefits of education are not readily seen, so are often not believed.

### 6.3 Economic factors – re-creating unequal structures

Out of the 14 drop-outs who were surveyed eight mentioned that economic pressures were stopping them from returning to school. The vice chair of a local primary school's mothers group, illustrates this issue for both girls and boys in Usisya –

*“Money, is getting pressing here. (Girls) say that they are having sugar daddies. They are (getting) money (from them). If they get money, they go to Mzuzu and buy china dresses. Boys are fishing. After fishing (they) just get money – after (getting) money (they) go and drink beer.”* (FEMALE, VICE CHAIR SCHOOL MOTHER'S GROUP, NHTEMBO, 01-05-2014)

Economic vulnerability is not explicit to Usisya, but is prominent across Sub-Saharan Africa. Due to high rates of HIV/AIDS in the district, death rates are high across the village and many households are living solely on subsistence farming. One guardian, usually female, heads the households – in some rare cases a child heads the household.

As discussed in chapter two, orphanhood in accordance with other factors has been found to relate to high rates of drop-outs in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Usisya the added factors that influence orphans school attendance are often added household responsibility and economic vulnerability. However, others may not experience any obstacles because they are living with wealthier or education-focussed guardians. The following quotes illustrate the two ends of the spectrum –

*“Because of different parents, (they) look like (they are) not their children. Sometimes (they) buy some things and give (the) biological child more than the orphan.”*  
(FEMALE, VICE CHAIR SCHOOL COMMITTEE, NHTEMBO, 29-04-2014)

*“Here we have one (orphan). The boy here is (my) ... grandson, he has his mother, but he lost his father. His mother lives in Nkhata Bay. He has been living here for 1 year and 11 months. (To encourage him) I tell him to please pass his exams.”*  
(FEMALE, VICE CHAIR SCHOOL COMMITTEE, NHTEMBO, 29-04-2014)

Not only do orphans experience economic vulnerability, but also single parents. Many women are caring for their children without support from the child's father. One woman with four children – whose children's father lives in the village – explained that he does not support her and the children, and that she has to help herself and ask her relatives for help (Usisya, female, vice chair, school mother's group, 01-05-2014). A number of households are headed by women – these women generally rely on subsistence farming. Due to this, weather changes affect their lives and their children's lives more so than other wealthier or stable families in the village. As a result of this economic stress some women turn to harmful practices that can often start from a young age –

*“(Some) children stopped (going) to school, to look very nice and dress nice... (Especially) children who don't have both parents (and have) no money. Young girls (get) clothes through (their) mother, girls (who have) grown get (these) from (their) sugar daddy. Many children (choose to) look nice and (have a) sugar daddy, and get pregnant.”* (FEMALE, VICE CHAIR SCHOOL COMMITTEE, NHTEMBO, 29-04-2014).

This quote shows that girls can choose money over education purely for aesthetic purposes, but there are often economic reasons behind these choices. Children and families are making choices based on the social structures they are embedded in. The social structures perpetuate economic vulnerability, as remote locations are less likely to receive more job opportunities, governmental support and infrastructural support. Part of this social structure is gender. Gender interacts with economic vulnerability through gender-related customs and gendered division of work. The partition of work is often dependent on the gender of a person – such as the female caregiver and farmer and the male fisherman. This division of work combined with economic vulnerability creates gender specific coping mechanisms such as the already described use of sugar daddies in the village. However male primary school students also have coping mechanisms to tackle economic vulnerability – they often turn to fishing –

*“Fishing practices are contributing to the failure of male pupils to go to school. Usisya is a low income area, so sometimes (they have) problems to find food for the family (so they need to turn to fishing).”* (CHURCH LEADERS, CHURCH LEADER FOCUS GROUP, TEMWA, NHKUTU, 11-04-2014)

Gender division combined with economic vulnerability is perpetuating cycles that could be potentially harmful for the youth of Usisya. Males are leaving school to fish for food and buy alcohol, and females are turning to sugar daddies for food and to buy clothes.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Global, national, regional and local structures are active in urban Malawi. The challenge for smaller rural villagers in Malawi is that their remote locations do not attract job opportunities, teachers, and government officials. Traditional customs and gender norms are suffocating young people's education opportunities by creating strong disapproval to any of those whom deviate from their rules. The governmental structure in Malawi is in place, aiming at stimulating an entire village to promote and complete primary school education. However, this process contains a number of obstacles due to the economic instability of these small remote villagers. Although community members may have positive opinions of education, the struggle with economic vulnerability can often see education as a luxury compared to their daily survival needs.

## 7. DISCUSSION – INTERPERSONAL PATHWAYS TO A FUTURE

In chapter five and six we uncovered the various influences involved in primary school drop-outs in rural Malawi separately. This chapter looks at the intersectionality of these factors and what can be done to minimise the drop out rates. This chapter's aim is to highlight what part of the Social Structures Systems Model (SSSM) requires the most attention in solving issues of educational attainment in rural Malawi.

Firstly we will review how the findings discussed in chapter five and chapter six fit into the SSSM. Through a classical feminist perspective we will outline how gender as well as other factors have a significant effect on schooling in the local context. After which we will discover which part the system within SSSM demands the most attention, and demarcate some recommendations for rural Sub-Saharan African communities who are experiencing similar challenges. Additionally, this chapter will end with suggestions for the local NGO that can effectively aid in promoting educational attainment in the Usisya area.

### 7.1 Fitting into the SSSM

Collectively chapter five and six are categorised using concepts from within SSSM. These two chapters tell us a story of the local context and explain that there are multiple factors, as various levels, which play a part in primary school completion. Chapter five clarifies the knowledge, attitudes and practices of individuals and the interactional system that surrounds these individuals. This chapter also discusses the known obstacles in the local context and how they differ from the general findings from other countries discussed in chapter two. Some factors discussed in chapter two were not included in the findings section of this research, as they were not seen to affect local school attendance throughout the data collection process. Chapter six examined how the government structure aims to stimulate education in the region – however, local customs, gender norms and economic vulnerability often contribute to its failure. The findings listed above show that there is a predominantly negative relationship between the individual system, interactional system, institutional system and educational attainment. For the SSSM to show positive results in this particular setting we would need –

- ...children with educated guardians and qualified teachers;
- ...guardians and community members who break taboos by giving advice to their biological children;
- ...guardians, teachers and community members who do not expect their children and students to contribute to the household economically;
- ...guardians, teachers and community members to promote gender-mainstreaming;
- ...education policies to be actively implemented and enforced at a local level;
- ...the customs and traditions to promote education above all;
- ...the economic environment to be stable.

As this is unlikely to occur in Usisya and across Sub-Saharan Africa in the near future – therefore this hypothesis would predict that no children would ever pass primary school. This is however not the case – at least four young people I talked to had finished secondary school and a number of the young people in the village have finished primary school. One female had even gone through to tertiary education in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi.

In the case of the sssm, it does help to clarify how multiple levels of an individual's life affect their hypothesized chance of completing primary school. This model provides us with a theoretical look at what would be needed to reach a positive rate of school attendance. However, surprisingly this model also shows that failure in completing school is not the only possible outcome. Some people can break the vicious cycle. These exceptions are those few children who manage to finish primary school and move on. Although many young people experience the same obstacles in each system of their life, they are often aware of these obstacles and are constantly trying to change what is often considered normal. Diane's story in box seven illustrates a different life history with positive results. Diane did not conform to the social norms that informed the other youth who took part in the study.

#### **BOX 7: DIANE'S STORY - INDEPENDENT WOMAN**

As a teenager her parents had often had suitors for her from South Africa. She was told to marry an older man from South Africa when she was 17 years old, but confronted her parents. Diane told them that she wanted to finish school and go to university. Her parents allowed her to continue with her education. She completed secondary school with great marks and moved to Lilongwe to study human resource management. Along the way she fell in love with a doctor, got pregnant and was forced by her boyfriend to abort the baby. She refused, left university and ran away to stay with relatives in Tanzania. After this ordeal she returned to Usisya to live with her parents. She worked part time at the community library and felt like she had taken a million steps backwards. However, she is now in charge of bookings and reservations for a number of popular lodges in Nkhata Bay North. She is living together with her baby girl Suzy in Nkhata Bay. She considers herself a role model because she has a job, a beautiful child and is completely independent. (Diane, 23 years old, Nhkutu)

Although Diane had a child and was mistreated by her boyfriend, she is living independently and employed. The sssm has offered some theoretical ideas of how structure and community life intersect, but for practical use this model is not suitable. The model outlines the system in which an individual in this specific context lives in, but it does not highlight the exact points where policy implementation and local initiatives are needed. The following examines areas in the model where I believe need more attention, as well as offer some ideas on how to use this model to lend theoretical ideas to practical solutions.

## 7.2 Bending norms through interpersonal relationships

We have established that the sssm is a theoretical model and does not fit well practically into development practice. However there is a part of the social structures systems model that could be examined in depth and worked on to improve school attendance in the local context. From the findings discussed in chapter five and six the main finding that has revealed itself is the lack of connectivity between the three systems. More specifically, the interactions with an individual's interpersonal relationships are an important part of this model. They shape how an individual first experiences customs, traditions, community expectations, gendered discourse and social norms. As mentioned in chapter six, the policies in Malawi may be progressive, but they keep on hitting a brick wall. Institutions generally hold positive opinions of education and function through a hierarchical system that rarely reaches rural settings. So for positive results, it may be better to work with the local population. Therefore both the policymakers and local community can locate a culturally relevant way to workshop the challenges resulting in a loss of education in rural Sub-Saharan Africa. Specific examples of this will be illustrated in the following section.

## 7.3 Interventions at an interpersonal level

Interventions that would include the community would be beneficial for the youth in Usisya. By including all facets of the community in sensitisation meetings to understand the benefits of education, all members of the community could become part of the process. There are school committee initiatives trying to tackle the problems with primary school drop-outs, but funding constraints hinder these local initiatives. Although they experience challenges due to funding they continue to function as a community watch –

*“I’m (in the) mother’s group. It’s my duty to find people (who) don’t go to school. I chase them (back to school)...we search the village. Children (who) get their period – (we) collect the girls. (We tell the guardians) do not keep them for one week, get them back to school.”* (FEMALE, VICE CHAIR SCHOOL MOTHER’S GROUP, NHTEMBO, 01-05-2014)

*“Well it’s the job of the PTA. It’s the job of the school management, (the) mothers group, to tell the children to go back to school.”* (MALE, PTA CHAIR PRIMARY SCHOOL, CHIWETA, 06-05-2014)

### 7.3.1 FEEDING PROGRAMMES

The school committees understand their role in the community – other school committees are taking their roles a step further than the larger lakeside schools have. Sangano primary school’s mother’s group is trying to tackle issues of economic vulnerability by providing porridge to students on Tuesday and Thursday. A number of interviewees that I talked to, including the local education officer for Temwa mentioned that a feeding programme for all schools would promote school attendance in the community. Mzondi Moyo explained that feeding programmes would be great, but the governments funding can not feed almost 50% of the population five days a week (male, DEM, Nkhata Bay, 22-04-2014).

Mr. Moyo's personal idea is that people in the villages need to be more self-sufficient. For example there is one community in his catchment that has got large farms. The parents asked for the district government's support with their own initiatives to feed learners with their own maize. The district government decided to give them fertilizer, to help them with their own initiative. He told me that if a community has their own initiative, the local and regional government would happily support them. The lakeside areas have larger issues than the smaller mountain communities with both food insecurity and larger populations. Because of this, feeding programmes in these villages are very difficult. For the school committee to start these initiatives and get the support of the government they need to have more of the community supporting them.

### 7.3.2 CONNECTING HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Another intervention that could be tackled at the interpersonal relationships level is the connectivity of local schools and health centres. The health workers and teachers mentioned separately that they wish to adequately teach SRH. However they stated that they do not have the staffing, resources, class time, and in some cases knowledge to teach this subject adequately -

*“(It) would help (to connect the hospital to the schools). Because the children will learn more because (it's not just) school.”* (MALES, GUARDIANS, MIDDLE-AGED AND SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATE, CHIWETA, 08-05-2014)

The vice chair of a local school committee mentioned that teachers and parents both supply children with background knowledge on sexual reproductive health, but the health centre could add to this (female, vice chair school committee, Nhtembo, 29-04-2014). On top of the health centre and the schools, Usisya could include the community through sensitisation sessions. One mother expressed that to try and stop early pregnancies outsider support and local support can band together to battle this issue -

*“It's a waste getting pregnant... we can call children to (get) together and to teach them. After that (we) can change. (I'd teach them) like the way what you (are) doing here, I (will) call them to learn and they can understand.”* (FEMALE, GUARDIAN, 50 YEARS OLD, NHTEMBO, 15-05-2014)

## 7.4 Interventions for Temwa

The last section of this chapter includes the recommendations for the local NGO, Temwa. Temwa is well prepared to support individuals and works closely with the community. They have been active for ten years and are integrated into the community. Because they are known amongst the local populace and know the local context, they are an effective mechanism to promote change at the interpersonal level. As there is a lack of connectivity between the individual, their family, the school and the local community, Temwa could work to rectify this issue. As Temwa works closely with schools and the community they

can position themselves as a bridge between these two entities. Then they can promote SRH education and educational attainment amongst both boys and girls in their catchment area. Temwa can adequately utilise their position in Usisya by advocating accurate SRH education and a stronger connectivity between the health centre and the local schools.

Additionally, Temwa can organise sensitisation meetings with parents, chiefs as well as local religious leaders – both on SRH’s role in school attainment in the area, and keeping the community up to date on new SRH information. Also to access youth that may not be enrolled in school at all, out-of-school youth programmes and counselling programmes could be a useful way to introduce education and SRH education to this populace. As Wittenberg et al. (2007) state, sex education in a country should be accessible for young people and children so they can have free access to sexual and reproductive health information. They should be equipped with knowledge and skills to protect themselves. They prescribed that in Malawi out-of-school youth programs for these children to protect themselves against HIV and STIs would be an added bonus to spread knowledge to children who may not be enrolled in school. (Wittenberg, et al., 2007, p. 9).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Primary school drop-outs remain an issue in Malawi. Overall, FPE has achieved a lot with regard to progressive policies and expanded the number of school attendees three-fold (Abuya et al., 2013). The achievements of FPE however, are overshadowed by the limitations of reaching their goals caused by high rates of drop-outs nationwide. Malawi's government, as well as other sub-Saharan governments are implementing progressive policies without adequate implementation methods in place. Locally these policies are not being activated and the community is still unaware of what direct benefits can come from education.

In the case study zone, the main findings that result in these high rates of primary school drop-outs are gender-related norms and economic vulnerability. However the reasons children drop-out of primary school are not just related to wealth and gender. This research highlights the multifaceted system that surrounds an individual who attends school in a rural sub-Saharan African setting. Customs such as forced or early marriages are pushing children out of school. Early pregnancy is resulting in high rates of female drop-outs regardless of a gender mainstreamed re-admission policy.

Many obstacles are occurring in different systems of a child's life, and all add to the considerable amount of social norms surrounding education, health and life in rural Malawi. Although these norms have been found to perpetuate a vicious cycle that results in high drop-outs rates, there are alternatives. Their families, teachers, community and nation shape social norms – from a very young age children understand what is expected of them (refer to image four). It is therefore important to empower both young women and young men to push past social norms and encourage them to take part in all levels of society. As mentioned in chapter seven, by the promotion of local initiatives supported, implemented, and enforced by the whole community, school drop-outs in rural Malawi can dissipate.



From a gender perspective it is important for multiple understandings of gender to be studied. As Risman explains (2013, p. 747-748) social scientific understandings of gender are constantly being built upon in theoretical debate. She calls for more understanding of gender-related discourse in other parts of the world. In this study we can see how gender plays a role in school attainment, but also how it is not the only reason a child will drop out of school. It is important to contextualise the meaning of gender in every part of the world. Future studies involving gender and education should consider the local context, various levels of direct and indirect barriers to education, and whether the interactions between these levels are healthy or not.

Although this study explains only a handful of the local population's KAP, it offers an idea into how the local education system is perceived and experienced. It aims to provide some ways to understand not only the micro level of education and development issues, but also the interactions with the macro level. This study begins to uncover gaps in scholarship on education and development, which therefore require more research. Further study on school drop-outs in a rural setting would supply both comparison and innovative ideas on reducing drop-out rates. There is a need for further study into how interactive initiatives from both national and local lead groups may reduce drop-outs in rural settings. Finally it is important to look further into how non-education may be supporting rural development, as not all youth may fit into the education system.

# GLOSSARY

## TERMINOLOGY FROM THE FIELD

*Asambizi*: Teachers

*Full primary school*: Full primary school encompasses standard one up to standard eight. In the last three years Nhkutu Primary school, a primary school located in Usisya was upgraded from a junior primary school which covers standard one to standard 4, to a full primary school.

*Guardian*: is referred to as someone who is not the biological parent of the child they are caring for.

*ganju*: ganju or piece work is temporary employment that usually consists of work such as building and infrastructure construction, as well as odd jobs for wealthier families.

*Tumbuka*: The local language in Nkhata Bay North, apart from Tonga which is spoken in the lakeside town south of Usisya, Nkhata Bay.

*Usipa*: Whitebait, or very small fish. Usipa is the main fish families eat in Usisya.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH POPULATION

**Table 2:** Number of people surveyed

SURVEY TYPE	GENDER		TOTAL
	Male	Female	
Primary/Secondary Teacher	6	4	10
Attend Secondary school	2	3	5
Guardians	7	12	19
Primary School Drop-outs	7	7	14
Primary School Graduates	1	1	2
Total	23	27	50

NOTE: Due to a research assistant miscommunication, one adult female was removed from the data analysis process, as she did not fit into the specified interviewee category list.

**Table 3:** Number of people interviewed

Interview Type	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Chiefs	2	0	2
Drop-outs	5	6	11
Primary School Teachers	5	3	8
Secondary School Teacher	1	0	1
Guardians	6	6	12
Passed Primary School	1	1	2
Passed Secondary School	1	2	3
Primary School Students	8	1	9
School Returnee	0	2	2
Secondary School Students	2	2	4
NGO employees	1	3	4
Policymakers	3	0	3
Church Leader	1	0	1
Health Care Worker	1	0	1
Home Based Care Worker	0	1	1
Traditional Healer	0	1	1
Total	37	28	65

**Table 4:** Number of people participated in focus groups

FOCUS GROUP TYPE	GENDER		TOTAL
	Male	Female	
Church Leaders	5	1	6
Female Drop-outs	0	6	6
Male Drop-outs	5	0	5
School Committee	0	4	4
Primary School Students	6	4	10
Total	16	15	31

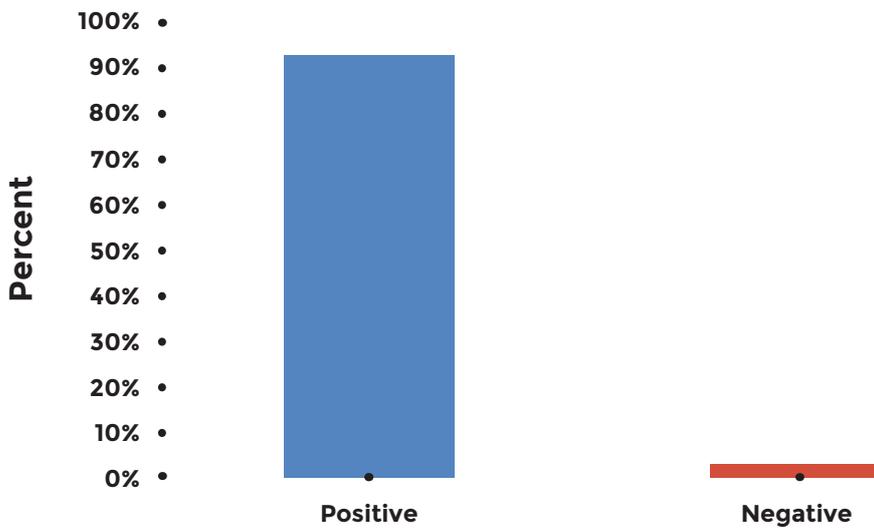
**Table 5:** Enrolment numbers of five primary schools involved in the study

SOURCE: Ruarwe PEA (2014) and Usisya Village Development Committees (2014)

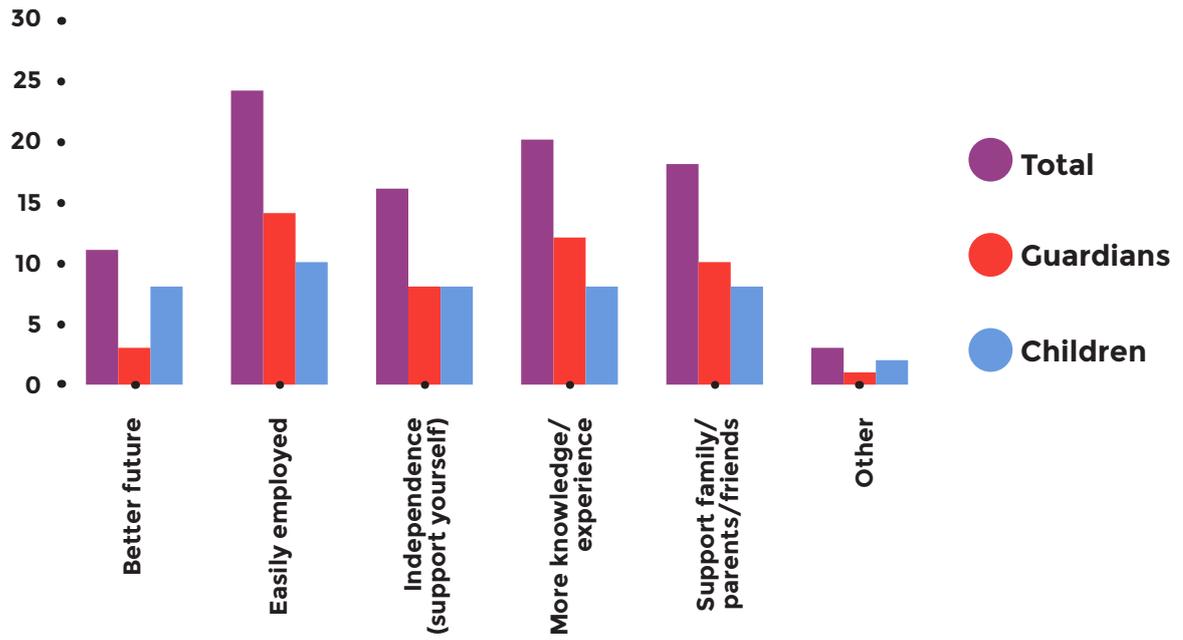
TOTAL STUDENTS ENROLED AT THE FOUR USISYA PRIMARY SCHOOLS	
Nhkutu full primary school	744
Nhtembo full primary school	720
Usisya full primary school	720
Sangano full primary school	158
Total enroled in four primary schools	2342
Total enroled in 17 primary schools in Usisya zone	6513
Comparison primary school enrolment	
Ruarwe full primary school	341

## APPENDIX 2: EDUCATION SURVEY RESULTS

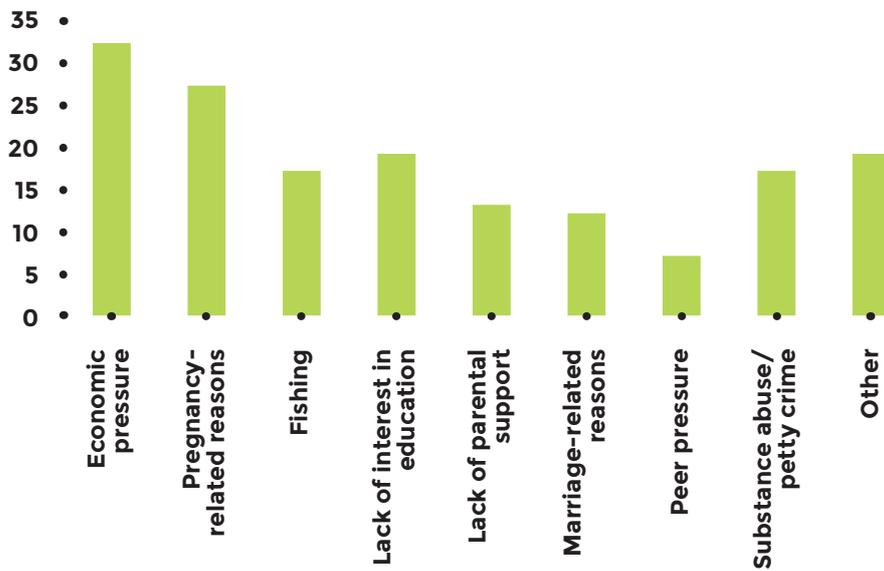
**Figure 8:** Children and guardians' attitude towards education



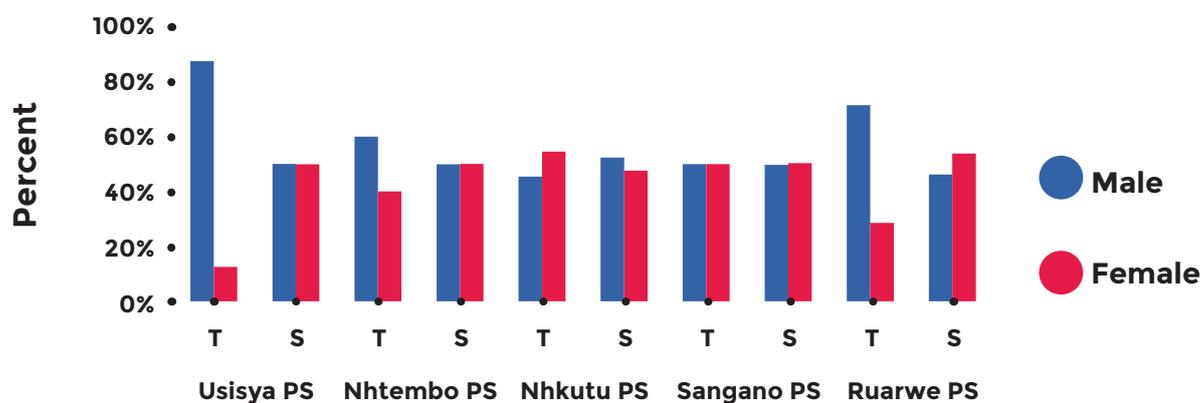
**Figure 9:** Description of positive attitudes towards education



**Figure 10:** Number of drop-out reasons mentioned in the survey



**Figure 11:** Gender proportions of teachers/students at five schools involved in this study



### APPENDIX 3: HOUSEHOLD RESOURCES SURVEY OUTPUT

**Table 6:** Crosstabulation of participant's location compared to access to electricity

		ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY		TOTAL
		No	Yes	
Participant's location	Nhtembo	18	2	20
	Mpande	14	0	14
	Nhkutu	12	0	12
	Kacheri	20	8	28
	Sangano	2	0	2
	Ruarwe	6	0	6
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>82</b>

	CASES					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>PARTICIPANT'S LOCATION* ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>96.5%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 7:** Frequency table – total resources available in the household

		FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
Total no. of resources*	1	3	3.5	3.7	3.7
	2	2	2.4	2.4	6.1
	3	14	16.5	17.1	23.2
	4	18	21.2	22.0	45.1
	5	13	15.3	15.9	61.0
	6	7	8.2	8.5	69.5
	7	23	27.1	28.0	97.6
	9	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	82	96.5	100.0	
Missing	System	3	3.5		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

\*RESOURCES INCLUDE: koloboyi (lamp made from paraffin and bottle), torch, paraffin lamp, radio, television, cellphone, landline, bed with mattress, mattress without frame, sofa set, table and chair, table only, chair only, reffridgerator.

TOTAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD		
N	Valid	82
	Missing	3
<b>MEDIAN</b>		<b>5.00</b>

#### **APPENDIX 4: GENERAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Prior to the interview the research assistant and I would outline purpose of the interview and consequently why we would like them to be involved in this interview. After this would be clearly explained we would explain the confidentiality of their involvement of this study and ask them to be honest and open throughout the interview process. For key informant interviews and interviews with English speakers it was common to record the interview, during these particular interviews I would ask their permission to record the interview. Interviews usually took place in or outside people's houses. For the key informant interviews they took place in their place of work, either at the District Council, in the Secondary School teacher's office or in Temwa's office or community library. All respondents were asked prior to the interview process if they wanted to take part in the study, to make sure they had free-prior informed consent (FPIC).

#### **APPENDIX 5: GENERAL FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

##### **Introduce moderators, translators, and record keepers**

The moderator for the focus group today will be (\_\_\_\_\_) who will moderate the discussion in Tumbuka. Also myself, Bridget Cassie (and Barbara Lammertink) will be moderating the discussion through (\_\_\_\_\_), in English. (\_\_\_\_\_) will also be translating from Tumbuka to English. It is best that you speak in Tumbuka, so you can therefore have a more in-depth conversation on the topic that is not at all restricted by language proficiency. When you are finished speaking, please allow time for the information to be translated back to us in English.

##### **Introduce topic of research**

So now we will introduce ourselves.

My name is Bridget Cassie, and this is my assistant (Manasseh Rhover/Aggie Batasi). I'm from New Zealand, however I'm a student of International Development Studies at Utrecht University in Holland. My research is focused on education in Usisya. I am specifically interested in the reasons and thought process behind why children are dropping out of school in the area.

We plan to use the information we collect today to highlight new strategies and recommendations for the improvement of health and education services. It will also be used while writing our master theses.

- Does anyone object to the recording of this conversation?
- Feel free to debate, critique and disagree, there is no right or wrong way of thinking. You don't need to reach a consensus.

Since we are undertaking two separate research topics, we will have two discussions today. One discussion will cover health and the other will focus on education. Each discussion should last about 30 minutes.

- Focus Group takes place during this space -

### **Closing questions**

Before we finish, I would like to hear what you think should be done to prevent women and men, and boys and girls from dropping out of primary school[...]?

What did you think about the subjects we have discussed? Do you think that this group covered issues that are important to women and girls? Do you think that this group covered issues that are important to men and boys?

### **Close the focus group**

Thank you all for your time and ideas. This has been extremely helpful. As I said in the beginning, the purpose of this discussion was to help me learn about educational decision-making that leads to children dropping out of primary school. I hope we can use the ideas that have been discussed today to locate new strategies and recommendations for the improvement of education services in the area.

Do you have questions for me or about the research in question?

Thank you for your help.

End of the Focus Group Discussion

Let us end with a prayer

