

Country report- Malawi

1. Background

The Norad funded development cooperation portfolio of Save the Children Norway (SCN) consists of health, education, child rights governance and child protection activities that are implemented in country programs together with partner organizations, including government authorities and civil society organizations at national, district and local levels. Activities to prevent and respond to Violence Against Children (violence against children) in and around schools have been implemented as part of projects within these country programs, either as components of the education program or the child protection program.

SCN will, during 2018, begin work on a new five-year strategy to prepare for applications for funding to Norad, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). With this review, SCN is expecting to get an overview of the totality of its interventions in relation to violence against children in and around schools and increase its knowledge of the effects and lessons learned. The review will guide SCN and SC staff and partners at country levels in their development of proposals to Norad under the theme "Violence Free Schools".

As part of the methodology and planning process, Malawi with its Quality Learning and Accountability project (QLA) was selected as one of three SC country offices to visit for in depth study. This report presents findings from interviews, focus group sessions and meetings with SC staff, representatives from education and social welfare government authorities, national network partners and human rights institution, community structures, and teachers and children from three schools in the districts of Mwanza and Neno in Malawi.

The consultants, Mr. Stephen Katende and Ms. Gabriella Olofsson, visited Malawi between January 29 to February 1st (for Gabriella who left after lunch) and February 2nd (for Stephen who spent the last day visiting a former EU funded project on violence against children). During the visit the consultants interacted with the following stake holders:

At national level

- A workshop with SC staff (7 staff, including M&E, involved in various aspects of the Norad funded Education and Child Rights Governance interventions)
- Individual conversations with:
 - Margaret Masamba, Senior Manager for QLA Project,
 - Thandizolathu Kadzamira, Senior Manager for Child Protection and Child Rights Governance
 - Brenda Phiri, Child Protection Manager
 - Donnex Bengo, Child Rights Governance Manager
- A meeting with representatives from the Malawi Human Rights Commission, the NGO Coalition for Child Rights, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and SC staff (6 persons)
- A spontaneous meeting in Neno district with 2 representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

At district level

- a meeting with the Coordinator for the Primary Education Advisors at the District Education Management Office, and the District Social Welfare Officer in Mwanza district.

At local level

Mwembedzi Primary School, Mwanza District

- FGD with 8 girls
- FGD with 8 boys
- FGD with around 10 representatives from the community structures: representatives from School Management Committee, Mothers Group, Parent/Teacher Association, the Child Protection Worker, and the patron of the child led club.

Lipongwe Primary school, Mwanza District

- Interview with deputy head teacher
- FGD with 4 teachers (2 male, 2 female)
- FGD with 9 representatives from the Child Protection Committee, the School Management Committee, the Parent/Teacher Association and the Mothers Group.
- FGD with 16 children (8 boys, 8 girls)

Chididi primary school, Neno District

- Interview with head teacher
- FGD with 8 girls
- FGD with 13 boys
- FGD with 15 members of the community structures comprising of School Management Committee, Child Protection Committee, Parent/Teacher Association and Mothers Group
- Short interview with 2 teachers

The Focus Group Discussion and interviews revolved around the following questions:

1. What was the situation like before the project in relation to violence against children in school?
2. What has changed since the project started? Examples?
3. Why has it changed?
4. What will remain when the project ends?
5. How will the community sustain what has remained?

2. Overview of the Quality Learning and Accountability project

The Quality Learning and Accountability project (QLA) integrates the thematic areas Education and Child Rights Governance with the aim to:

- improving the quality of the learning environment in primary schools in order to reduce dropout rates of learners
- improving teacher skills in provision of psychosocial support and delivery of lessons with a special focus on numeracy and literacy lessons,
- strengthening the capacity of Civil Society Organizations including child led organizations to promote and monitor child rights implementation (through international instruments of UNCRC and ACRWC in Malawi)
- improving school and local governance processes and management through increased participation and engagement of communities, community structures and children, and
- ensuring that children's rights are protected at both school and community levels.

In the two districts of Mwanza and Neno the project targets community structures such as School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs), Mothers Groups (MGs) and Child Protection Committees (CPCs), as well as district structures such as the District Council, the District Education Management Office, the District Social Welfare Office and the District Child Protection Committee, to strengthen their support to the improvement of the quality of education in primary schools as well as promote issues of child rights and child protection. Child Led Clubs are established by SC in every school in order to strengthen children's role as rights holders and actors in the work to improve the learning environment through promotion of child rights and child protection in schools. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare (MoGCSW) are the primary duty bearers and policy holders in education and gender and child protection issues respectively, and are national level partners to SC.

In the proposal to Norad, two local NGOs are described as central to the community-level implementation of the QLA in the two districts of Mwanza and Neno. These are the Association of Progressive Women (AWP) in Mwanza and Community Action for Sustainable Development Organization (CASDO) in Neno. SC has worked to strengthen the capacity of these partners to deliver quality interventions at community level, while being in charge of the national and district level co-ordination with government structures and other non-governmental stakeholders.

It was the high scores of the QLA project in the Mid Term Review (MTR) that made Malawi an interesting country to visit in this global review of the Norad-funded work on violence against children in and around schools. The MTR used the QLE framework to assess how the education interventions progressed. According to this framework, the project demonstrated significant progress on Guiding Principle 1 (emotional and psychological wellbeing of the learners: 25.6% at baseline to 95.3% at midterm), on Guiding Principle 3 (child-centered teaching and improved learning outcomes of all learners :44.2% at baseline to 88.4% at midterm), and Guiding Principle 4 (close collaboration between school and parents/community: 74.4% at baseline to 88.4% at midterm). Furthermore, according to the MTR the proportion of children participating in development meetings

increased from 19% at baseline to 57.3% at midterm (57.7% females; 56.9% males). The majority of children (67.5%) who reported to participate in development meetings were from Mwanza district (67.8% males and 67.2 % females) while 47.2% were from Neno district (46.9% males and 47.5% females).

3. Findings related to the prevention and response of violence against children in and around the school

The following section describes the consultants' observations and findings (based on the meetings and interviews with the stakeholders) in the following main areas:

- Intervention design
- Relevance in relation to violence against children
- The methods used during implementation
- Results
- Sustainability

3.1 Intervention design

The QLA project is informed by a country wide Child Rights situation analysis, that included consultations with children, teachers, civil society organizations, and government authorities. Consultative meetings were also held with stake holders in the district and at national level (including ministries and national coalitions of NGOs) in the process of writing the Norad proposal. SC staff with thematic experience from CRG and CP were instrumental in developing the design together with EDU staff, building on experiences from earlier projects, like the Reducing Teenage Pregnancy, and with links to other donor funded projects, like the EU-funded project on early marriage.

3.2 Relevance

From the perspective of SCN's ambition to create Violence Free Schools, the QLA project is still in its early stages. SC staff confirm that more efforts are needed to sensitize communities on violence against children, and, as we shall see below, on Positive Discipline. Due to this early stage of addressing violence against children, information obtained from FGDs with children and adults during the visit do not acknowledge that violence against children is a relevant issue. When asked about changes in relation to violence against children, children confirm that corporal punishment is not so common anymore among teachers in school and that bullying between pupils has reduced. Cases of rape and harassment of girls by adults in the community are being reported, although not always taken care of by the police, according to community structure members. However, what emerge as important concerns for the communities are the lack of means to pay for school expenses, child labor (sometimes expressed in terms of "trafficking") and child marriages. An important task as perceived by the community structures as well as the Child Led Clubs within the QLA project is to make sure that children do not drop out of school.

District officials confirm that corporal punishment is common in schools and at home, and that early marriage and teenage pregnancy are challenges in the local culture. When they have reached the age of menstruation, young girls are treated as mature women by their families which moves them into a position of marriage and child bearing that makes it easy for them to drop out of school, according to a District Social Welfare Officer.

3.3 Methods used during implementation

Training and awareness raising on violence against children

In order to improve learning outcomes of children in literacy and numeracy, the project has facilitated trainings of teacher trainers jointly with Teacher Training Colleges, SC teams from the Reducing Teenage Pregnancy project and the Sponsorship Basic Education Programme, involving experienced people in different areas. The trainings build on three blocks: one on Literacy, one on Numeracy (for teachers grade 1-4) and one on Effective Teaching Practices (for teachers grade 1-8). The training on Literacy/Numeracy is facilitated by tutors from teacher training colleges plus SC staff building on learnings and materials from the Sponsorship Basic Education Programme. Effective Teaching Practices aims at improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of children's rights and child protection issues in addition to enhancing their skills on how to effectively deliver lessons. The block builds mainly on materials developed within the earlier Norad funded project Reducing Teenage Pregnancy. The training aims at building the capacity of a pool of trainers from the MoEST staff and SC partners. MoEST facilitates the cluster level teacher trainings while the local level partners organize the events in the districts of Mwanza and Neno jointly with SC staff. The training is offered once a year split into three different sessions (Literacy, Numeracy and Effective Teaching Practices).

Trainings of trainers for members of Child Led Clubs are facilitated by SC staff jointly with the local SC partners after which the trainers (MoEST staff) facilitate cluster level trainings. The primary role of the Child Led Clubs is to promote child rights and child protection in the school. Club members follow up on children who are absent from school, in order to make sure that they do not drop out, inform their peers about child rights, including their right to protection from violence and the importance of education, and sometimes take on a role to hold teachers to account when they do not show up in the class room. Representatives from all Child Led Clubs have been trained on child rights and child protection in addition to enhancing their skills on issues of accountability and their roles in school operations and management. The training has also been delivered to matrons/patrons, head teachers and community structures. One aim is that every Child Led Club shall be represented in meetings with the local support structures of School Management Committees (SMC), Parent/Teacher Associations (PTA), Mothers Groups (MG) and Child Protection Committees (CPC). The impression is that primarily the MG interacts with the Child Led Club, specifically in supporting girls' needs and vulnerabilities in school.

A reporting mechanism

A local reporting mechanism is available in all visited communities, and is well known by all groups, at least in theory. It is explained as follows: the teacher calls parents when a child does not stop misbehaving in school. When teachers talk to parents, it is sometimes revealed that there is an issue within the family that needs to be sorted out. In this situation, the community structure may be of assistance or it can involve the social welfare officer.

The Child Led Club members and community structures do home visits and talk to parents about the importance of sending their children to school. They follow up on drop outs and try to convince parents to change their mind. If the Child Led Club is not successful in making a child return to school they report to the matron/patron of the Club. If the matron/patron fails to convince the parents of the child, she/he reports to the head teacher. If the head teacher fails to convince the parents, he reports to the district social work officer and, if there is reason, to the police.

Suggestion boxes are not in use in the visited schools. An interview at the District Education Office reveals that the 'Suggestion Box' is not always working as planned due to lack of sensitivity to violence and abuse among children and adults.

Monitoring

SC and Partner staff together with the District Education Management Office (DEMO) staff monitor the project. More DEMO staff (Head Teachers and Section Heads) are expected to be trained in teacher supervision and mentoring of teachers in 2018. According to the MTR, mentoring is too rare and teachers as well as SC staff say that they need more capacity building on psychosocial support.

3.4 Results so far in relation to violence against children in and around schools

The results as observed and discussed in interviews are presented in the following categories:

- Reduction of violence
- Study results
- Cooperation between stakeholders
- External factors influencing outcomes
- Un-expected results
- Gender differences
- Less successful components

Reduction in violence against children

The focus group discussions with children recounted that there is less corporal punishment, less fight among children in school (previously there was bullying, throwing stones at each other, pinching...). Boys revealed examples of how they have handled bullying and fights among children in school, while girls mainly talked about early marriage, and their efforts to bring girls back to school. Members of the Child Led Club said that they talk to the teachers about corporal punishment: "If a child complains, we go to the teacher and ask for an appointment and then discuss with him/her".

Members of community structures said that trafficking and child labor have reduced thanks to the sensitization. The community structures also reported conducting sensitization of community members aimed at improving the knowledge of children's rights and responsibilities. Factors that contribute to good outcomes in terms of reduced cases of violence and abuse are, according to various voices from the focus group discussions and interviews, the community structures' and the child led club members' persistence in coming back to parents who keep their children from school, the continuous sensitization of community members on attitudes and awareness raising on child related laws and policies, the fact that there is a structure at school supporting community groups that collaborate, and good relationships with district level officers. The importance of role models is also mentioned.

Study results

The training of teachers seems to have positive effects in terms of providing new methodologies for teachers with child centered, inclusive and participatory approaches in the class room. Children and community structures alike claim that more children are in school nowadays as compared to before the project started. Possibly, the new child friendly methodologies are a pull factor making children

wanting to be in school, with songs in the classroom sessions as well as more practical lesson activities, group work and individual work. However, since there is limited follow up on why there are more children in school in the current results framework, this is only an assumption.

Cooperation between stakeholders

The members of the community structures in the visited communities reported that they are very committed. They said that what they have learned will stay with them even after SC has left. "We cannot go back" was expressed in all meetings. One member said: "You don't stop knowing how to read and write because the teacher left". The members of the community structures confirmed that the Child Led Club members are in the frontline for following up on children who stop coming to school, and this was also presented as one of their key achievements in the Annual Report from 2016. The MG was identified as the most important link between the adult community structures and the Child Led Clubs in school. Education and child welfare district officials in Neno district suggested that the Social Accountability Forums arranged by SC made a big difference in creating a shared understanding among stakeholders on how to ensure the welfare of children in school.

However, the links to the police seems to be less established. Some children and adults in the visited communities said that they don't know what happens with perpetrators, and complained about a perpetrator returning to the community soon after having been caught by the police.

External factors influencing outcome

There is insufficient understanding of the concept Positive Discipline among SC staff and partners. This affects the overall understanding of violence and abuse since physical punishment makes children more vulnerable to other forms of violence in the home and elsewhere, including sexual abuse and exploitation. The limited budget resulted in a too shallow learning process since SC underestimated the resources needed for teachers to develop their understanding of Positive Discipline and instead prioritized reaching out to as many participants as possible with training.

Un-expected results

MGs are an important link between the Child Led Clubs and community structures and parents, addressing for instance the attitudes that a girl who has reached her reproductive age is an adult person. They also play an important role within the school to support girls to make sure their needs are met during for instance menstruation periods. District officials mention MGs as an important structure to continue to sustain in the future.

Gender differences

The Annual Report 2016 informed that the main reasons for dropping out are poverty and the need for children (girls) to help out in caring for siblings and doing household chores. Girl marriage is not mentioned at all in the Annual Report, while during the visits it comes up as the most important reason for girls dropping out from school (probably a consequence of awareness raising efforts within the EU-funded early marriage project). As noted above, the MG is described as a general support to girls in school, for instance in relation to the practice of being absent from school during the girl's monthly periods. The Child Led Club members primarily turn to the MG for advice when there is a case of early marriage or pregnancy behind a girl's absenteeism.

Less successful components

When community structures say that in the QLA project they work to keep children in school, they do not say that they protect children from violence and abuse. This creates a difference in perspective that limits the scope of the intervention in relation to violence against children. A reporting mechanism that focuses on making sure that children come back to school might overlook invisible,

harmful underlying causes to why children were dropping out in the first place. These causes may be invisible because they belong to norms and attitudes towards children in general, and girls and children with disabilities in particular. In one of the visited schools, the girls claimed that eight to ten of their friends were married. How many of them have once come back just to drop out again? In focus groups discussions, such cases were reported to have occurred. If violence and abuse in school or at home is not taken note of, the reporting mechanism will not address these issues. When violence or abuse is not considered to be an issue, it is not reported on. The protection against violence is more like a positive side effect of convincing parents that their daughter need education and that marriage should wait.

The MTR revealed that the understanding of psychosocial support is limited among teachers and SC staff and that they felt that too little time was spent on this topic during the training. No such comments were made in relation to positive discipline, although this topic was also only included as one among many topics in the training. On the contrary, the MTR demonstrated good scoring on sub indicator 1.3¹. (Mwanza 100% and Neno 78%). According to the MTR, low scoring was generally due to corporal punishment still happening in some schools (which means in some 20% of the school sample in Neno district only). In the visited schools, all focus groups with community structures, children, and teachers as well as individual interviews with head teachers, confirmed that there is no more corporal punishment. Instead, they explained, misbehaving children are given tasks like sweeping the yard, watering plants, collecting water and other forms of manual labor. However, this is not equal to Positive Discipline. There is a profound misunderstanding of the difference between Positive Discipline and corporal punishment, demonstrated by a deputy head master who said that "a learner may be punished with sweeping the yard if he fails a subject".

Punishment is a negative form of discipline communicating that you do wrong. This form of discipline does not become less humiliating if the punishment is changed from being physical to being psychological. It still communicates that you do wrong, without telling you how to do right (the learner will not learn the subject better by sweeping the yard). Positive Discipline on the other hand, is about guidance. It is about non-violent and respectful teaching of the child. Positive Discipline helps children succeed, by giving them information, and supports their growth. The starting point is the respect for the child as a full human being. As such, the learner is a competent individual who develops in interaction with the teacher, who has the responsibility to guide the child in its learning process in school. Positive Discipline requires a change of attitudes in contexts where punishment is the traditional way to raise the child.

Thus, in reality there is as much need for more training on positive discipline as there is on psychosocial support, among teachers as well as SC staff. According to SC staff, the problem is that positive discipline is only one out of many topics within a training module that is only offered once a year. Funding was too limited in the former program frame and this will be addressed in the coming Norad proposal.

3.5 Sustainability

The informal and traditional structures at community level are acknowledged by SC staff as key in creating change in beliefs, attitudes and behavior towards children, and for a child protection system to function also at the local level. The groups that are engaged in the QLA project are part of a

¹ 1.3: Learning environments are free of discrimination violence, intimidation bullying and harassment.

traditional structure that was there before SC came, as one CPC member points out. They will remain a structure because they are all from the same area. The officer at the District Education Management Office especially mentions the MGs as an important group to be strengthened in the community education structure.

The only component that is not part of the traditional structure is the Child Led Club that was established by SC in every school. Across the country, there is variety of school based children's groups established by different INGOs. This could weaken the sustainability after SC has left since these school based groups do not always strengthen the child as a rights holder in school. In a discussion with a representative from MoEST, it was acknowledged that there is need for a coherent governance system for children's participation in school under the umbrella of the Ministry. This would contribute to sustaining Child Led Clubs as important hubs for children's participation and the voicing of violations of their rights in the education system.

The QLA project is after three years of implementation still in an early stage with regards to the creation of a violence free school. SC staff emphasize the importance of investing in the traditional structures in order to create sustainability. Child Centered Social Accountability Forums have been organized to identify challenges and action plans as part of the QLA project and can be further used for dialogues focusing on violence against children in schools and communities, which would strengthen a joint approach by stakeholders to address violence against children. Within the thematic area of CRG work is ongoing to strengthen child protection structures in the same district where QLA is implemented, aiming at strengthening the Child Protection System between national, district and community level, specifically targeting child marriage (within a EU-funded project focusing on child marriage). The linkages between the projects will contribute to a strengthened focus on violence against children within the child protection system.

All stakeholders testify that attitudes, beliefs and discriminatory norms need to change for violence against children to end in school and in the community. Thus, the challenge for QLA project is to establish violence against children as a major topic for attitude and behavioral change of all the stakeholders involved. Learning about what the community structures already do to change attitudes among their neighbors is key to long term outcomes and sustainable results, not only for a violence free school but for a functional child protection system in Malawi. An important question to look deeper into is therefore what exactly happens in the community after trainings, sensitization sessions and awareness raising activities that lead to the good scoring in the MTR - and if the scoring relies on a proper understanding of violence against children.

4. Reflections and recommendations

i) Enhancing knowledge, skills and practice towards positive discipline

The visits to Mwanza and Neno revealed that there exists a lack of understanding of what positive discipline entails. This lack of understanding might go all the way back to the experts within MoEST. A revision of the ToT on Positive Discipline should take place (in addition to the already identified needs in relation to psychosocial support). The experiences from working with positive parenting in a former EU-funded project on violence against children will be useful for strengthening the guiding role of parents and teachers in supporting children's development. It might also be

useful not to spread the teacher training too thinly across districts, if resources thereafter do not allow for enough monitoring and mentoring of individual schools. A smaller scale learning process on what it means to work with positive discipline in school might be useful.

ii) Initiate a learning process on how attitudes and practices change on violence against children

What happens between the training and the scoring of results in QLE? There is need for documentation and monitoring of how beliefs, attitudes and behavior towards violence against children change. What is it that moves individuals from Knowledge to Understanding to changed Attitudes to Changes of practice? What strategies do members of the community structure have (consciously or unconsciously) to reach out with what they have learned from SC and partners? How do they interpret their new knowledge into messages that make sense in the local context? What happens in the interaction with local chiefs in the communities? And, very important, what good practices in the communities are already there to build on?

One way to find out is to initiate an exploratory process in a limited number of communities in Mwanza and Neno to learn from SC's partners and the community structures how they interact with community members and traditional leaders in their respective environments. An exploratory process could reveal how messages around violence against children are received by those who have been trained, and maybe also by those who train. What will be important is to observe, document and analyze *how* they communicate what they learn - what approaches are taken in the interaction with other community members? *What* the different communities do will depend on the local context and is hard to replicate or scale up. It is the answers to *how* they do it that is useful. Such a learning process could contribute to the development of a model guiding the work towards changes in attitudes, beliefs and norms on violence against children across different local traditions.

This kind of exploratory process requires a reversed relationship where the community members are the experts and SC staff the learners. New knowledge may be co-created through observations, regular dialogue sessions and joint analyses with SC staff, partners, and representatives from formal and informal structures, adults and children in the community. The Child Centered Social Accountability method is probably a useful tool. The process itself would create the positive side effect of empowering the communities to identify and take strategic action to prevent and respond to violence against children in and around schools (and, as it is a complex setting, many other related issues).

iii) Enhance an integrated design

The QLA is a project primarily designed to contribute to improved learning outcomes. As established by a number of sub-indicators related to the QLE framework, a violence free school environment is one of the prerequisites for improved learning outcomes. However, the QLA project currently demonstrates a lack of *intentional focus* on violence against children. The design does not offer guidance on process and outcome indicators that would measure the change in behavior, attitudes and practices that contribute to preventing and responding to violence against children in and around schools. While changes in relation to violence against children do occur in the communities, these results largely remain undocumented in the current results framework. Designing process and outcome indicators on violence against children will help to track and measure the changes that occur in and around schools.

A close collaboration between government structures at national and district level with the community structures and schools creates a sustainable framework for the prevention of a response to violence against children in and around schools. The suggested exploratory process could become strategic in strengthening the National Child Protection System, which at the local level relies on the informal systems including traditional structures and local chiefs. The learning would provide important information to the Government on how to best support, strengthen and coordinate the protection of children from violence and abuse at district, regional and national levels, in collaboration with the traditional structures at community level.

5. Lessons learned

Child marriage is one of the most common reasons for dropping out of school for girls. It is an issue at the intersection of education, child protection and child rights governance. However, although being a topic under the theme Child Protection it does not necessarily mean that by addressing early marriage you address violence and abuse. It all depends on the focus of your intervention. When the goal of the intervention is to make sure that girls do not drop out of school, addressing violence and abuse becomes a positive side effect that is not documented and monitored by SC. Two lessons can be learned from this:

- SC ignoring violence against children in its monitoring and reporting structure does not mean that nothing happens in the community that would promote changes in attitudes and behaviors related to violence and abuse. SC needs to find out what it is that promote change and how it is being handled in the local culture.
- Positive Discipline challenges the attitude that "sparing the rod means spoiling the child". It is a key in moving from knowledge and understanding to changed attitudes and behaviors in relation to violence against children. Regarding Positive Discipline, the focus in the results framework need to be on qualitative and not quantitative results of training, monitoring and mentoring of stakeholders. The results framework must depict the causal assumptions leading to change and develop interventions that address these when needed.