***Paper Title:*** Challenges to school completion among girls in rural primary schools: a quest for local solutions

By Dr. Esther Kunkwenzu2, Professor Sosten Chiotha1 and Mr. Gibson Mphepo1

***Author Affiliations:*** 1Leadership for Environment and Development, Southern and Eastern Africa, P/Bag 7, Zomba, Malawi; 2University of Malawi, Chancellor College, P.O. Box 280, Zomba, Malawi

***Abstract***

This study explored reasons for primary school dropout among disadvantaged girls in 10 rural primary schools of Chiradzulu District in Malawi. The aim of the study was to identify relevant and contextually specific solutions that would improve girls’ primary school completion rates in the primary schools.

The study used a mixed mode research design using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The sample for the study comprised primary school pupils, head teachers, school management committees, parent teacher associations, and households with vulnerable children randomly selected. The methods of the study included consultative meetings with district level stake holders, Key informant interviews (KII), Focus group discussions (FGDs) and household interviews. The study results show that dropout and absenteeism were high in all the schools, but generally higher for girls than boys. The high drop out for girls emanate from multiple causes including high poverty levels, cultural/traditional beliefs, unsupportive parents/home environment, lack of role models and hostile school factors.

The study proposes the use of sustainable social solutions from within the rural communities as interventions to support girls’ education, including: introduction of home grown school feeding programmes; use of biogas instead of firewood for cooking; introduction of income generating activities (IGA); improving school health, water and sanitation facilities, and formation of youth, mother and disability support groups.

***Key words***

School drop-out, girls’ education, Home grown school feeding program, Biogas, IGA, Triangulation