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The Impact of the Malawi Secondary School Cluster System on the Management of Community Day Secondary Schools: Case of Blantyre District

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**THE IMPACT OF THE MALAWI SECONDARY SCHOOL CLUSTER SYSTEM ON
THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY DAY SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
CASE OF BLANTYRE DISTRICT**

by

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my two lovely children Ekari and Elapo.

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I would like to extend my profound gratitude to all the people who have made this study a great success. I am indebted to the South Western Education Division staff, particularly Mr. F. Kamwendo, who provided me with all the Divisional Data. In addition, I would also like to thank the headteachers of Chichiri, Our Lady of Wisdom, St. Kizito, St. Pius, Manja, Chinamvuu, Matindi, and Limbe Secondary Schools for allowing me to collect data in their schools and the unconditional assistance they accorded me.

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ABSTRACT

The research was conducted in Blantyre district of Malawi in 2004 to investigate the impact of the Malawi Secondary School Cluster system on the management of Community Day Secondary Schools. As a background to the study, the paper discusses the Malawi educational structure, Secondary School mission statement, the Secondary School teaching force, the educational policies that led to the formation of the cluster system, and the objectives of the cluster system. The hypothesis was that the cluster system had resulted in visible and positive changes in the management practices of Community Day Secondary Schools.

Prior to sampling, literature from some Asian and African countries was reviewed. In general, the literature revealed that school clusters are formed to redress any imbalance in the provision of education by encouraging the sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources among schools. In addition, they are formed to improve community participation in school affairs. The literature, among the many cluster challenges cited the lack of financial resources as a major challenge.

The schools and participants were selected using random, purposive, and convenience sampling. The clusters were stratified into: active, semi-active, and passive clusters based on the number of cluster activities held between 2000 and 2003 and the number of school management related activities held. A total of eight CDSSs were sampled for data collection: two schools were sampled from each cluster category and two more schools were added to the active cluster CDSSs for a case study. There were ninety respondents and they comprised Headteachers, Heads of Department, PTA members, and pupils. The data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, and school documentation reviews.

The data were comparatively analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The formulation of mission statements, the formulation and implementation of school development plans, availability of school records and their management, student welfare management, school organization, and communication were best in the active cluster CDSSs followed by semi-active cluster CDSSs and lastly passive cluster CDSSs. These results suggest that the Secondary School cluster system had assisted in improving the management practices of CDSSs.

The case study revealed that the cluster system was encouraging schools to share knowledge, skills, and teaching and learning resources. The number of cluster activities from 2001 was dwindling because of decreasing financial support.

Some of the recommendations made are that the Ministry of Education should increase the material and financial support to clusters, Educational Divisions should be posting experienced, innovative and hard working headteachers to cluster leader schools, and that they should desist from frequent transfers of headteachers to enhance the realization of school mission statements and implementation of school development plans. Finally, it has been suggested that each cluster should have a cluster based cluster coordinator so that cluster activities are given more attention.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BEP	Basic Education Project
CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
CRC	Cluster Resource Center
CSS	Conventional Secondary School
DANIDA	Danish International Development Aid
DEC	Distance Education Center
DFID	Department for International Aid
DSPS	DANIDA Sector Program Support
ESDP	Educational Sector Development Program
FPE	Free Primary Education
GPF	General Purpose Fund
MASHA	Malawi Schools' Headteacher Association
MCDE	Malawi College of Distance Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MSCE	Malawi Certificate of Education
PIF	Policy and Investment Framework
PTA	Parents' Teacher Association
Pvt.	Private
Sch	School
Sec.	Secondary
SSTEP	Secondary School Teacher Education Program
SWED	South Western Education Division
TRF	Textbook Revolving Fund
TUM	Teachers' Association of Malawi
UCE	University Certificate of Education
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Education Fund

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the year 2000, the Malawi Policy and Investment Framework (PIF) put the formation of the secondary school cluster system as one of the strategies for standardizing the operations of the various types of secondary schools (Grant-aided, Conventional, Approved Community Day, Non-approved Community Day and Private) and enhancing the country's educational quality (PIF, 2001, pp. 26 & 27). It was in the same year that the secondary school cluster system was institutionalized to have a unified public education system and as a mechanism for maximizing the use of resources available in secondary schools and facilitating more effective school management, teaching, and learning (PIF, 2001, pp. 26 & 27). In addition, the cluster system was viewed as a way of devolving some of the management functions to individual schools hence the commencement of decentralization (PIF, 2001, p. 26 & MoE, 2000, p1).

The research was conducted to find out the impact of the Malawi Secondary School Cluster System on the management of Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs). It was carried out in June 2004, in the South Western Education Division and particularly in Blantyre district. Prior to data collection, some literature on the subject was reviewed. Six CDSSs were sampled for data collection and were stratified into active, semi-active, and passive cluster CDSSs. In addition to that, one Conventional Secondary School (CSS) and one Private Secondary School were sampled from the active cluster for a case study. The data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, a case study and documentation review. The research findings revealed that the cluster system in some way had assisted CDSSs in formulating mission statements, school development plans, managing records, and

encouraging community participation. The withdrawal of Danish support to the educational sector in 2001, resulted in the decline of cluster activities.

1.1 The educational structure

The Ministry of Education is decentralized into six educational divisions. These are the Northern Education Division that has eight educational district offices, Central Eastern Education Division, Central Western Education Division, Shire Highlands Education Division, South Eastern Education Division, and South Western Education Division. There are thirty-four educational districts and their distribution per division is as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Distribution of educational districts per division

Name of Educational Division	Number of Educational Districts
1.Northern	8
2.Central Western	6
3.Central Eastern	5
4.South Western	6
5.South Eastern	5
6.Shire Highlands	4
Total	34

Mchazime 2001

At primary school level the smallest structural unit is a zone while at secondary school level it is a cluster (Mchazime, 2001, pp. 1 & 2).

1.2 Brief Review of Malawi's educational system

The structure of formal education system in Malawi follows an 8-4-4 pattern. Children enroll in primary schools mostly at the age of six. The primary education is divided into three sections: the infant section which comprises standards 1 and 2, junior section standards 3, 4 and 5 and senior section standards 6, 7 and 8. In standard eight the pupils sit for Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations (PSLCE). These are national examinations and those who pass are selected to go to public Secondary Schools. Primary

schooling is of two types: government (public) and private. Kadzamira (2003) says that in 1997, there were 3,730 public primary schools but the number of private primary schools was not known. In most cases Private School fees are very high and the schools are under no obligation to follow the national curriculum set up by the government (p. 6).

Secondary education lasts four years and includes two cycles each with a two-year duration. Forms one and two constitute junior secondary while forms three and four constitute the senior secondary section. Public secondary schools are divided into three categories: 1) conventional secondary schools (mostly district secondary schools); 2) grant-aided secondary schools (national secondary schools); and 3) Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs). There are also Private Secondary Schools. The schools are further categorized into boarding, day, co-educational, and single sex schools. Pupils write public Junior Secondary Certificate Examinations (JSCE) and those who pass in six subjects including English are eligible to proceed to the senior secondary section. In the fourth form the pupils sit for the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations (MSCE). Those whose total grade aggregate for any six subjects including English is less than 36 points and comprises distinctions or credits but not passes are eligible to write University of Malawi entry examinations (Kadzamira, 2003, p. 6).

Tertiary education follows with an average duration of 2 to 4 years. Tertiary education includes technical and vocational education, primary teacher- training, and university education. Kadzamira (2003) adds that there are 6 primary teacher-training colleges (TTCs) and two public universities in Malawi. These are Mzuzu University and the University of Malawi which has five constituent colleges: The Malawi Polytechnic, College of Medicine, Kamuzu College of Nursing, Bunda College of Agriculture and Chancellor College (p. 7). Professional Secondary School teachers are trained at the Chancellor College, Mzuzu

Universrsity and Domasi College of Education. There are also some private secondary school teacher education universities like the University of Livingstonia.

1.3 Malawi secondary school mission statement

The Malawi Ministry of Education's mission statement, between 2000 and 2015, focuses on the expansion of the secondary school system with a view to accommodating the drastic increase in the number of primary school graduates. The increase is a consequence of the implementation of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in 1994. The mission statement formulation was also influenced by the realization that secondary school education provides the academic basis for gainful employment in the informal, private, and public sectors besides preparing students for tertiary education. The government therefore set, as a priority, the establishment of at least one secondary school in each of the 315 primary school educational zones by the end of 2002 (PIF, 2000, p. 24). Consequently government donor agencies and local school communities started building new Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) all over the country.

Upon realizing that building new secondary schools in all the zones that did not have them would be very expensive and time consuming, Secondary School Education Project (SSTEP) (2000) says in 1998 the government changed all the independent Distance Education Centers (DECs) that were offering secondary school education to Community Day Secondary Schools (para.2). According to DANIDA (1999) in 1997 the total number of public secondary schools, registered private schools, and the total pupil enrolment in Malawi was as shown in the table on the next page (p. 5):

Table 2: Number of Secondary Schools in Malawi and total enrollment in 1997

Type of Institution	Sch. Type Number	Sch. Type Percentage	Enrolment	Enrolment Percentage
Government Boarding Sec. Schools	4	.5%	43,629	24.9%
Government Day Sec. Schools	75	9.8%		
Grant Aided Secondary Schools	24	3.1%		
DECs (later changed to Community Day Secondary Schools in 1998)	525	68.6%	109,846	62.7%
Registered Private Schools	137	17.9%	21,700	12.4%
Grand Total	765	100%	175,175	100%

Source: Danida Malawi, 1999

The above school and enrollment break down show us that more than half of the secondary schools in Malawi are CDSSs and they accounted for more than half of the pupils. In addition, the rest of the public secondary schools accounted for a quarter of the enrollment and registered private secondary schools were accounting for the remaining percentage of pupils.

Nevertheless, by 1999 the objective of having one secondary school per zone was not achieved because not all zones had Distance Education Centers (SSTEP, 2000, para. 2).

According to SSTEP (2000, para. 3), the main policy changes stipulated that:

- all DECs should change their name to CDSSs;
- all the CDSSs should fall under the MoE as did CSSs;
- student selection for CDSSs should be based on the same basis as students to Conventional Secondary Schools (CSSs);
- all CDSSs should be provided with financial assistance to enable them obtain basic instructional materials on the basis of cost-sharing;
- standardized management and financial systems should become mandatory for all CDSSs and CSSs; and

- permission to open a CDSS should to be granted only if the Ministry of Education (MoE) standards are strictly followed.

Hango (2004, para. 17-18) and Kadzamira (2003, p. 6) say that the CDSSs are characterized by the following problems: inadequate teaching and learning resources, in some cases the school buildings are of substandard quality since most of them are built locally, and several of them do not have their own buildings as a result they operate in primary schools. In such CDSSs classes start after the lower primary school pupils have knocked off. These secondary schools are referred to as Non-approved Community Day Secondary Schools. However they are still recognized by the government as centers for secondary school education. In addition, the Community Day Secondary Schools do not receive any monthly funding at all from the government. They depend on the local funds that they collect from the pupils. Most of the teachers and headteachers are under-qualified (primary school teachers).

1.3.1 The Secondary School Teaching Force

Secondary education system in Malawi suffers from a serious shortage of teachers. 2001 statistics show that there were 1367 qualified secondary school teachers; therefore, the Ministry of Education deployed 1958 under-qualified (primary school) teachers. However the system still required 8400 additional teachers (Mchazime, 2001, p. 2).

1.3.1.1 Reasons for the teacher shortage

Mchazime (2001, p. 3) attributes the teacher shortage to: low out put from the teacher training colleges due to limited bed space and the unpopularity of teacher education programs, rapid expansion of secondary education, and increasing attrition rate.

1.3.1.2 Interventions

Realizing the importance of teachers in the learning process, Mchazime (2001, p. 3) says that the government of Malawi introduced a pre-service education program for primary school teachers who after the completion of the course teach at secondary school level. It is

also offering a University Certificate of Education (UCE) course to non-educational graduates who join the teaching profession and upgrading primary school teachers to a Diploma level through a distance mode. In addition to these efforts, the government has introduced pre-service and in-service teacher education programs at the new University of Mzuzu, and has also revitalized in-service teacher education and training programs for teachers to widen and deepen their knowledge and skills in their profession through the formation and institutionalization of school clusters.

1.4 Statement of the problem

1.4.1 The cluster concept

The Malawi Secondary School Cluster System groups together six to fifteen secondary schools of different kinds and sizes depending on their proximity and geographical location to ease mobility and communication. There are ninety-nine secondary school clusters in Malawi and their distribution by division is as follows:

Table 3: Number of clusters and educational districts in each division.

Name of Educational Division	Number of Educational Districts	Number of Secondary School Clusters
1.Northern	8	23
2.Central Western	6	21
3.Central Eastern	5	16
4.South Western	6	15
5.South Eastern	5	15
6.Shire Highlands	4	9
Total	34	99

Source: Divisional Data

The South Western Division has approximately 180 secondary schools and 103 of them are public (see table 4). These secondary schools are grouped into fifteen educational clusters. The number of schools in each cluster ranges from six to fifteen (see appendix 1). The Division has five educational districts. The number of clusters per district varies from

district to district (see table 7). All the clusters have equal opportunity of conducting cluster activities. However, some clusters are more active than others. Most of the clusters have more Community Day Secondary Schools than Conventional Secondary Schools (see table 5).

1.4.2. Objectives of the Cluster System

MoE/DANIDA (2000, p. 1) stipulates that the main objectives of the system are to improve school management, teaching, learning, and students' welfare practices in individual schools. Mchazime (2001, p. 7) and PIF (2001, p. 27) state that the cluster system was also construed as the beginning of the decentralization process that would lead to improved educational quality through the facilitation of: communication between the Educational Division Offices and cluster schools and also between the District Educational Offices and the cluster schools, communication among schools by holding regular cluster meetings, sharing of academic and administrative knowledge between good and poor quality schools, sharing of teaching and learning resources, improvement of student behavior through the formation of student councils, and competition among schools through the organization of academic quizzes and cluster examinations among others.

MoE/DANIDA (2000, pp. 1-15) outlines the four objectives of the cluster component as follows:

1.4.2.1 School Management

Under this cluster component individual schools are encouraged to develop mission statements and school development plans, promote community participation through the formation of Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs), strengthen staff and pupil supervision, enhance communication, delegation and participatory decision-making and practice proper financial and records management practices.

1.4.2.2 Teaching

Through this component schools are encouraged to practice lesson planning and evaluation, team teaching, vary teaching methodologies, identify teachers' subject content needs, and then organize in-service training at cluster level. They are also encouraged to develop training materials related to new subjects and topics.

1.4.2.3 Learning

The activities that this component advocates are the use of peer learning techniques for example, study circles. It also advocates pupils' easy access to school library textbooks, giving pupils assignments regularly for practice, problem solving activities among pupils, and the accessibility of teachers to pupils during free periods.

1.4.2.4 Student Welfare

In this area, the elements of focus are the formation of student bodies, ensuring that the agreed upon code of conduct is in line with the Universal Human Rights Charter, having active extra curricular activities, fair handling of disciplinary cases, provision of pupil guidance and counseling services, and the enhancement of pupil participation in school management

1.4.3 The Cluster Leader School

Each cluster has a cluster leader school. The choice of the cluster leader school, among other factors, was based on its accessibility to other schools. It was the Ministry of Education through the divisional offices that came up with the choices of the cluster leader schools but a cluster had the mandate to change the leadership if it had valid reasons. In most cases Grant-Aided and Conventional Secondary Schools were made cluster leader schools because they had experienced teachers and good teaching and learning materials. However in isolated cases, where there were no Conventional Secondary Schools at the time of inception, Community Day Secondary Schools were made cluster leader schools. By virtue of being

headteacher of a cluster leader school, the headteacher of the cluster leader school automatically became the cluster head. If a school felt that it was far from its cluster leader school but closer to another, it was relocated upon request.

Each cluster has a cluster leader and, according to the Malawi Ministry of Education Cluster Head Guidelines (2000, p. 7), the duties of a cluster head include developing a cluster plan (these are developed as a compilation of all the common cluster schools' development plans). For instance, in some cases the cluster development plan may comprise cluster examinations, cluster sports competitions, and cluster fund raising activities. The leader is also responsible for creating a link between the divisional office and the cluster schools, organizing and chairing cluster meetings that focus on school management, teaching, learning and students' welfare, applying for funds for cluster activities from the divisional office on behalf of the cluster members, writing reports to the divisional office on conducted cluster activities, providing professional advice to cluster schools when demanded, and addressing cluster schools' educational problems. In addition, the cluster leader head also keeps the cluster duplicating machine and is supposed to ensure that the cluster has a database which includes names of cluster schools, their types, names of headteachers of the cluster schools, the number of teachers at each cluster school, the teachers' qualifications, each school's national examinations' results, and major problems of each school.

All the cluster schools were given booklets containing guidelines on duties of the cluster head, school budgeting, the Textbook Revolving Fund (TRF), and the development of School Development Plans (SDPs).

1.4.4 The Danish cluster support

1.4.4.1 Cluster Vehicles

Under the Danish Sector Program Support (DSPS) to the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Danish government gave each of the six educational divisions a four-wheel drive

vehicle to be used for monitoring cluster activities. Fuel for the vehicles was also provided by DSPS on a monthly basis (MoE/ DANIDA, 2000, p. 2). Each division had also a cluster coordinator who was assisted by Secondary School Educational Methods Advisors (SEMAs), Planners, and Desk officers. These officers with an exception of the cluster coordinator (now abolished) were and still are responsible for monitoring the cluster activities.

1.4.4.2 Cluster Newsletter

In the year 2000, courtesy of the Danish government and the editorial assistance from one of the local newspaper publishing companies, Nation Publications, a cluster newsletter was launched. It was a nationwide monthly newsletter and was a supplement to the Weekend Nation newspaper. Most of the articles in the supplement were from teachers, headteachers and students from various clusters. Most of the articles were based on cluster academic and social issues and activities. There were also columns for creative writing and the best three students were given cash prizes. Most of the Clusters were taking advantage of the supplement to announce their activities and to report on the same. Like the vehicles, the Danes withdrew the newsletter's funding in July 2002 following allegations of lack of proper financial accountability by the Malawian government.

All the public schools were receiving the newsletters free of charge. The newsletters were always put in the school library for students and teachers to read. In so doing, the pupils' writing and reading skills were getting developed. The prizes that were given out to authors of best short stories were a great motivation factor for pupils.

1.4.4.3 Cluster Duplicating Machine

The Community Day Secondary Schools in the cluster, like in any other cluster, are characterized by inadequate teaching and learning materials. Cognizant of such problems, the Danish government bought all cluster leader schools a cluster-duplicating machine. The cluster leader is the custodian of the machine. The cluster members are responsible for its

maintenance thereby necessitating the charging of a small maintenance fee. The fee varies from cluster to cluster. Nevertheless not all schools benefit from the cluster duplicating machine as was planned. For instance private schools do not have access to the cluster machine.

DANIDA funded the clusters' activities through the cluster account. In Chichiri cluster for example, the signatories to the account were the cluster leader school headteacher and a headteacher of one of the CDSSs and Private Secondary Schools.

However, in July 2002, when the Danes withdrew their vehicles and financial assistance because of the bilateral misunderstandings the Malawi government through the Ministry of Education, took over the funding of the cluster activities. Since then the financial assistance to clusters has been erratic.

1.4.5 Purpose of the study

So far no studies have been conducted to evaluate the Malawi secondary school cluster system. Therefore this study focused on the management cluster component to investigate its impact on the management of Community Day Secondary Schools in Blantyre district.

1.4.6 Research Questions

The broad research question that the study addressed was:

- Did cluster activities lead to visible and positive changes in the management practices of CDSSs?

The following specific research questions were posed at the beginning of the study:

- Do the schools have mission statements and development plans as a result of the cluster system?
- How has the cluster system helped the schools in managing school records?
- What school financial management practices could be attributed to the cluster system?

- What supervisory skills have the headteachers, deputy headteachers, and heads of department acquired from cluster activities?
- How have the schools incorporated the cluster notion of community participation in school management?
- What school organizational and communication systems have been put in place to encourage participatory decision-making following the knowledge acquired from the cluster meetings?
- How has the cluster system helped in the management of pupils' welfare?

1.4.7 Specific objectives

Given the above research questions, the specific objectives of this research were to investigate if the cluster system had helped CDSSs in formulating mission statements as well as developing and implementing action plans. It was also carried out to investigate if the system had provided CDSSs with knowledge and skills in school supervision, organization, communication, student welfare management, financial management, record keeping, and the enhancement of community participation.

1.5 Hypothesis

My hypothesis was that the formation of the cluster system among Malawian secondary schools had resulted in visible and positive changes in the management practices of Community Day Secondary Schools through the sharing of administrative knowledge and skills among the cluster school members.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study was conducted in the South Western Education Division which, as of August, 2004, had the following distribution of public secondary schools, 81% of which were Community Day Secondary Schools:

Table 4: Number of each category of public Secondary schools in South Western Education Division

Educational District	Conventional and Grant-aided Secondary Schools.	Approved CDSSs	Non-approved CDSSs	Total Number of Public Secondary Schools
Blantyre City	9	1	19	29
Blantyre Rural	2	13	14	29
Chikwawa	4	14	2	20
Mwanza	2	7	0	9
Nsanje	3	8	5	16
Total	20	43	40	103
%	19%	42%	39%	
		81%		

Source: Divisional Data (2003)

Blantyre district, in which the study was conducted, is divided into two educational offices: rural and urban. The district has a total of eleven Conventional Secondary Schools two of which are grant-aided, fourteen approved CDSSs and thirty-three non-approved CDSSs. The district consists of nine clusters and each with varying number of schools as shown in the following table:

Table 5: Names of clusters and their cluster schools in Blantyre District

Cluster Name	Names of Cluster schools	
I. Lirangwe	1. Lirangwe CDSS 2. Chinamvuu CDSS 3. Chivumbe CDSS 4. Namikasi Sec. School	5. Matindi CDSS 6. Mdeka CDSS 7. Mlomba CDSS
II. Lunzu	1. Lunzu Sec. School 2. Ntenjera CDSS 3. Amazing Grace Pvt. Sec. School 4. Kaphuka Pvt. Sec. School 5. Matindi Pvt. Sec. School 6. Namwanje CDSS 7. Mapazi CDSS	8. Ngongomwa CDSS 9. Chilangoma CDSS 10. Mpumbe CDSS 11. Mudi CDSS
III. Ngumbe	1. Ngumbe CDSS 2. Chigumukire CDSS 3. Chikuli CDSS 4. Maliya CDSS 5. Dziwe CDSS 6. Nkula CDSS 7. Army Secondary school	8. Chimbale Pvt. Sec. School 9. Machinjiri Pvt. Sec. School 10. Michiru View Pvt. Sec. School 11. Sunny Side Pvt. Sec. School 12. Chilaweni CDSS 13. Khombwe CDSS
IV. South Lunzu	1. South Lunzu CDSS 2. Bangwe CDSS 3. Mpingwe CDSS 4. Mzamba CDSS 5. Naizi CDSS	6. Plato Pvt. Sec. School 7. Namiyango Pvt. Sec. School 8. Nazarene Pvt. Sec. School 9. Chigumula CDSS 10. Bangwe Pvt. Sec. School
V. Blantyre	1. Blantyre Sec. School 2. Chirimba CDSS 3. Mulunguzi CDSS 4. Namalimwe CDSS 5. Namiwawa CDSS 6. Ndirande CDSS 7. Ndirande Hill Sec. School	8. Nyambadwe CDSS 9. Denis Pvt. Sec. School 10. Flamingo Pvt. Sec. School 11. G & K Pvt. Sec. School 12. Kingdom Foundation Pvt. Sec. School 13. St Jude Pvt. Sec. School 14. Shirehighlands Pvt. Sec. School
VI. Chichiri	1. Chichiri Sec. School 2. Limbe CDSS 3. Soche Hill Sec. School 4. St Kizito CDSS 5. Bic Chichiri Pvt. 6. Jamia Islamia Pvt. Sec. School.	7. Khungulu Pvt. Sec. School 8. Limbe Pvt. Sec. School 9. Our Lady of Wisdom Pvt. Sec. School 10. Radson Boys Pvt. Sec. School 11. St Louis Pvt. Sec. School 12. St Phillips Pvt. Sec. School 13. Soche Progressive Pvt. Sec. School
VII. Njamba	1. Njamba Sec. School	8. Naperi Pvt. Sec. School

	2. Manja CDSS 3. Namame CDSS 4. Nanjiri CDSS 5. St Pius CDSS 6. Joyce Banda Pvt. Sec. School 7. Madalo Pvt. Sec. School	9. Ntonya Pvt. Sec. School 10. West End Pvt. Sec. School 11. Wings of Eagle Pvt. Sec. School
VIII. Zingwangwa	1. Zingwangwa Sec. 2. Stella Maris Secondary School 3. Chimwankhunda CDSS 4. Madziabango CDSS 5. Mitsidi CDSS 6. Mpapa CDSS 7. Mpemba CDSS 8. Nankumba CDSS 9. Bethel Pvt. Sec. School	10. Nchokera CDSS 11. Blantyre Islamic Pvt. Sec. School 12. Mlauli Pvt. Sec. School 13. Mount Olive Pvt. School 14. Radson Girls Pvt. Sec. School 15. Thandizo Pvt. Sec. School
IX. Henry Henderson Institute (H.H.I)	1. H.H.I 2. Lumbira CDSS 3. Johnstone Pvt. Sec. School 4. Caesar Pvt. Sec. School 5. Debora Pvt. Sec. School 6. Genius Pvt. Sec. School 7. Kabula Pvt. Sec. School	8. Kamacha Pvt. Sec. School 9. Nyambadwe Pvt. Sec. School 10. Rose Garden Pvt. Sec. School 11. St. Patricks Pvt. Sec. School 12. Umodzi Pvt. Sec. School 13. Wilberforce Pvt. Sec. School

Source: MoE

1.7 Significance of the study

The study investigated the extent to which the formation of clusters has led to the improvement of the management of CDSSs. First and foremost, the study will act as an assessment of the management component of the cluster system since no evaluation of the Malawi secondary school cluster system has ever been made. The successes and challenges raised will help educational divisions and the Ministry of Education, at large, when designing teacher development programs apart from making them aware of the areas that need their intervention for the effectiveness of the cluster system.

Having discussed Malawi's educational history and structure, secondary school system mission statement, research problem, scope, and significance of the research, the next chapter discusses the literature review findings done in some African and Asian countries.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter discusses the meaning of a school cluster and the theory on which the concept is based. It also presents the findings of the literature that was reviewed which comprised literature from Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, Nepal, Cambodia, South Africa, Namibia and Ethiopia. The major focus will be on cluster objectives, impact, challenges, and organization.

2.1 Cluster definition

The definition of clusters identified in the literature can be summarized as a group of schools organized for a variety of objectives which can include facilitation or comparison of school performance, collaboration in curriculum improvement programs for staff development, administrative and educational purposes (Craig, 1998, p. 137; Assefa, 2001, p. 33).

The cluster system is grounded in Lunt's (1994) theory which postulates that clustering in education has been noted as beneficial in rural, urban, economically disadvantaged, and economically affluent settings (p. 17). According to Lunt (1994, p. 17), clusters are formed to fulfill economic purposes, like sharing of facilities and staff, encouraging bulk order of materials, and fostering community financial support. Secondly, he says that clusters have pedagogic purposes which include allowing schools to gain access to extra resources, encouraging teacher development, promoting curriculum development, providing an environment for innovation, encouraging co-operation in school projects, encouraging pupil competition, and integrating different levels and forms of education like formal and non-formal education. He adds that clusters are also formed for administrative purposes, for

example, acting as centers for collecting information on enrolments or staffing, local decision-making on teacher posting and leave arrangements for improved planning, and providing a better framework for teacher inspections. Lastly, the author says clusters are sometimes formed for political reasons, for instance, raising consciousness about the causes of under-development and of the actions that can be taken by individuals and communities besides increasing community participation in decision making and reducing regional and social inequalities.

The first official documentation on this practice in the UK was published in 1985. It was a report based upon the findings of the Fish committee which had been set up to look into the benefits and possibilities for clusters in meeting the nation's educational needs (Lunt, 1994, p. 6).

Local educational authorities or national policies can initiate cluster formation (Ribchester & Edwards, p. 281). Whatever the purpose, the main objective behind the formation of clusters is to improve educational standards.

2.2 Review

The following are some of the cluster system examples from different parts of the world:

2.2.1 Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka and Nepal

Assefa (2001, pp. 26-27) says that in Bangladesh the cluster system started in 1993 with the objective of developing staff capacity and creating harmonious relationships with the community. Part of the cluster training included training the school management committees. There were supervisors who monitored the implementation of the skills.

According to Assefa (2001, p. 28) and Craig (1998, p. 139), in Sri-Lanka the cluster system was developed as a pilot project. Each cluster covered primary and secondary schools under one principal (coordinator).

2.2.1.1 Objectives

Assefa (2001, p. 28) and Khaniya (1997, p. 139) say that the objectives of the cluster system were as follows:

- a. administrative and teachers' professional development;
- b. strengthening weak schools;
- c. encouraging the sharing of resources within clusters; and
- d. increasing community participation.

2.2.1.2 Impact

According to Assefa (2001, pp. 26-30) and Khaniya (1997, p. 45) the system in Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka had the following impact:

- a. improved school management and interaction among headteachers and teachers;
- b. strengthened participatory decision making for example on school budgets, staff promotion and transferring;
- c. schools were working together in the administration of examinations and there was uniformity in the way the schools were administered;
- d. schools started developing annual plans that had also facilitated the school/community contact;
- e. improved teaching and learning because teachers were able to use teaching and learning materials and that they started sharing ideas and views; and
- f. created open discussion in teacher training and teacher-student relationships.

2.2.1.3 Challenges

The challenges of the system were:

- a. there was poor planning and lack of teaching materials, stationery, transport, furniture, community involvement, refreshments, and trainers (Craig, 1998, p. 138);
and
- b. some small schools could not join the cluster system for fear of getting a disproportionate share of resources (Khaniya, p. 45).

2.2.2 Cambodia

Dystrakucita, says that the cluster system was introduced in Cambodia in 1993 by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS). The clusters were established in four provinces as pilot projects (1997, para. 8).

2.2.2.1 Objectives

The main objectives of the cluster system were to:

- a. redress any imbalance in education by grouping together schools that were located near each other (para. 9);
- b. mix strong and weak schools so that the latter could benefit from the former through the sharing of teaching materials and staff (para. 9);
- c. encourage professional development through the use of resource centers that were located within the cluster schools (para. 11);
- d. improve school administration and communication between cluster schools and the ministry headquarters (para. 11);
- e. improve teacher supervision since inspectors would be staying at the cluster resource centers (para. 11); and
- f. encourage community participation by involving Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in monitoring school services and mobilizing children to enroll at the right age (p. 12).

2.2.2.2 Impact

Dystraskucita (1997, p. 49) states that the cluster system resulted in:

- a. the improvement of school efficiency because school headteachers were trained in school management and that teachers were receiving on-going training in methods and content that were matching with the new curriculum and textbooks; and
- b. strengthened community/school relationships and increased schools' accountability to the community.

2.2.2.3 Challenges

Some challenges were encountered in the implementation of the cluster system. The challenges were:

- a. it was very expensive to make people aware of the cluster concept, accept and implement it;
- b. the process of cluster formulation was not easily visible nor measurable especially at the early stages; and
- c. a lot of time, resources and commitment were needed by all the stakeholders for the system to succeed.

2.2.3 South Africa (Kwazulu-Natal)

In South Africa, specifically Kwazulu-Natal, according to the 1993 statistics 70% of the primary school teachers were either unqualified or under-qualified and most of them had not attended school beyond the equivalent of O-Level. Not only that but also the province was falling short of 1500 classrooms besides the pupil:teacher ratio being 100:1 (Hlope, 2002, para. 1). Consequently, between 1993 and 2002 the Department for International Aid (DFID) launched a Zisize Project with the objective of developing a teaching and learning

unit within KwaZulu Gqikazi College which would have an impact in 72 primary schools within Nongona district (Hlope, 2002, para. 1).

2.2.3.1 Objective

Hlope (2002) says that following the formation of the Zisize project, clusters were formed for easy dissemination of knowledge and skills, acquired from the learning unit to the untrained and under-qualified teachers (para. 2).

2.2.3.2 Cluster Organization

From the 72 schools, a total of eighteen clusters were formed. The project used a cascade model to train the cluster teachers: A team of college teachers trained a group of leader teachers who in turn supported the under-qualified teachers in cluster centers near their schools (Hlope, 2002, para. 17).

2.2.3.3 Impact

Hlope (2002, para. 4-6) writes that the cluster system had the following impact:

- a. pupils began to learn in schools where very little learning had ever taken place ;
- b. pupils developed critical thinking and learning; and
- c. teachers developed confidence in themselves due to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

2.2.3.4 Challenges

According to Hlope (2002) the following challenges were experienced:

- a. some teachers had problems with transferring what they learned at cluster workshops in their over-crowded and under-resourced classrooms (para. 10);
- b. it was difficult to find suitable local key project workers to work with a team of lecturers in the establishment of an in-service training unit in KwaGqikazi College (para. 15); and

- c. resistance by educational officers because they felt that some of their roles were being taken away (para. 26).

After seeing the positive impact of the project, the Link Community Development project started assisting school communities in school development, planning, and community-based fund raising so that the project would be sustainable (para. 25).

2.2.4 Namibia

The idea of clusters has been existent in Namibia for some years. They were comprehensively introduced by the Basic Education Project (BEP) to solve school problems resulting from “school isolation, the small size of the great majority of schools and organizational problems” (Dittmar & Medelson, 2002, p. 8).

Dittmar and Medelson (2002) say that Namibia has a population of about 1.9 million and most Namibians are dispersed in rural areas therefore many schools are far apart from each other (p. 8). They further say that schools that are close to each other have students from different socio-economic background and language groups and that, though the schools may be close together, they are of different levels. Worse still, most schools are small and have few and isolated qualified teachers. This isolation means that the schools are rarely supervised. The problem is compounded by the shortage of inspectors, travel expenses for the inspectors and poor road network (p. 8).

2.2.4.1 Cluster organization

In Namibia each educational region is divided into 5 to 10 circuits of 25 to 50 schools. Each circuit has an inspector who supervises the schools. The schools are further divided into groups of 5 to 7 schools called clusters to overcome the problems of isolation, management, lack of qualified teachers and lack of frequent supervision (Dittmar & Medelson, 2002, p. 9).

Dittmar and Medelson (2002) add that one central, easily accessible and well-equipped school is selected among the schools to be the cluster center. The principal of the

cluster school is supposed to be a strong manager who sets good examples for school management and teaching practices. The cluster system is supported by a number of management structures (p. 9). Therefore the objectives of the cluster system were as follows:

2.2.4.2 Objectives

- a. encouraging the sharing of knowledge and skills among teachers as most of them were unqualified;
- b. encouraging the interaction of teachers and pupils from different socio-economic, cultural and linguistic background; and
- c. facilitating and intensifying teacher supervision.

There are about 260 clusters in Namibia and they are grouped into inspection circuits that usually have 5 to 7 clusters. Hence every school belongs to a cluster and a circuit. School inspectors are therefore able to deal with a manageable number of schools because of the cluster system (Dittmar & Medelson, 2002, p. 8). The authors further say that to enhance the inspection of schools, offices for inspectors have been moved away from regional education offices to clusters (p. 9).

2.2.4.3 Impact

The authors assert that, owing to the formation of the cluster system, school improvement has been achieved through the following:

- a. teachers and supervisors meeting and discussing curricular issues regularly which results in the increase of teacher morale and confidence (p. 16);
- a. group setting, typing, duplication and moderation of test papers which results in better and broad range of questions and exposing of teachers to similar levels of testing (p. 16);
- c. participatory decision making through the decentralization (p. 17);
- d. sharing and resolving problems through the cluster committees (p. 17);

- e. less involvement of inspectors in cluster and circuit management issues which results in their great focus on teaching and learning (p. 17);
- f. the building of competitive spirit among schools (p. 17);
- g. high community involvement because parents are included in cluster-based activities (p. 21);
- h. reduced teacher absenteeism because the principal plays a supervisory role (p. 17);
- i. improved communication and distribution of teaching and learning materials (p. 19);
- j. facilitated educational planning due to improved collection of educational statistics (p. 20); and
- k. encouragement of the cascade model of teacher professional development (p. 20).

2.2.4.4 Challenges

Dittmar and Medelson (2002, p. 18) say that the Namibian cluster system faces the following problems:

- a. lack of adequate teaching and learning materials by the cluster centers (p. 9);
- b. the cluster principals become overloaded. However this problem is off-set by the delegation of their duties (p. 18);
- c. unwillingness of senior educational managers to relinquish some of their authority, for example supervisory roles, to lower officers like headteachers (p. 26); and
- d. lack of commitment and support from the head office (p. 26).

Lastly, the Namibian cluster system advocates the Education For All policy through its encouragement of access and quality education provision since the teachers acquire better teaching knowledge and skills from the cluster activities. Thus all pupils have higher

opportunities of attending higher education. Furthermore the system has eased the planning for the provision of teaching and learning resources (Dittmar & Medelson, 2002, p. 35). All this means that equity, efficiency, and the provision of quality education are encouraged.

2.2.5 Ethiopia

Kamaluddin (2002) says that the cluster system was introduced in Ethiopia by the Educational Sector Development Programme (ESDP) to off-set problems of high enrollment, high drop outs, and low achievement. These problems were worsened by the unattractive classrooms, old-fashioned teaching and learning methods, inadequate teaching and learning materials, and the absence of teacher support systems (p. 1).

2.2.5 Cluster Organization

Four to seven schools were grouped together and a Cluster Resource Center (CRC) was established within each cluster as a teacher support system (p. 2). Kamaluddin (2002, p. 1) adds that CRC trainers were identified based on their performance and enthusiasm and that the core trainers were trained to train other teachers in their respective clusters.

2.2.5.1 Objectives

The objectives of the cluster system were to:

- a. provide teacher in-service training;
- b. create teacher resource centers; and
- c. intensify teacher supervision.

2.2.5.2 Impact

Kamaluddin (2002, p. 1) says that the successes of the cluster system in Ethiopia included the following:

- a. greater community involvement and active participation in school management;
- b. increased pupil attendance and punctuality;

- c. increased pupil responsiveness and participation during lessons;
- d. improved pupil self esteem;
- e. increased teachers' motivation and positive attitude towards their work and pupils;
- f. increased teacher capacity for classroom management; and
- g. encouragement of local innovations.

2.2.5.3 Challenges

According to Kamaluddin (2002, p. 1), the following challenges were encountered:

- a. difficult to identify good and talented teachers to act as trainers;
- b. difficult to give frequent support to cluster schools that were in isolated areas; and
- c. expensive to improve physical facilities in poor schools and sustain the improvements so that the schools could stimulate teaching and learning.

Kamaluddin (2002) asserts that generally, there was educational quality improvement because the cluster system facilitated a continuous program of professional development through the sharing of experiences among the teachers of different qualifications. Not only that but also through participatory decision making by all local stakeholders (p. 1).

2.3 Literature review summary

The examples discussed above suggest that clusters are important in school management. Foster, Smith and Thurlow (1997) assert that clusters are not only implementers of national policies and programs but also a unit of policy-making, planning, and management in their own right. They also suggest that good headteachers, besides being innovative and accountable to the community, should ensure that their schools give the community a sense of ownership. The authors add that well organized clusters can greatly contribute towards the facilitation of school management thereby, overcoming disparities among schools (pp. 223-224).

The literature review findings can be summarized as shown in the table below:

Table 6: Summary of objectives, impact, and challenges.

	Objectives							Impact							Challenges					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi
Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri-Lanka	*	*	*		*			*		*	*	*	*	*	*					
Cambodia	*	*	*	*			*	*						*	*	*				
South Africa (KwaZulu-Natal)	*								*					*			*			*
Namibia				*		*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	
Ethiopia	*			*	*			*	*					*	*					*

Objectives

Key

1. administrative and teacher support
2. strengthening weak schools
3. increasing community participation
4. improving teacher supervision
5. encouraging sharing of resources
6. encouraging pupil interaction.
7. encouraging knowledge sharing

Impact

Key

- a. increased community participation
- b. improved pupil discipline
- c. encouraged teachers' team work
- d. improved communication
- e. competitive spirit among school pupils
- f. participatory decision-making enhanced
- g. increased teacher motivation

Challenges

Key

- i. expensive in terms of required resources
- ii. difficult to measure impact at the very beginning
- iii. difficult to implement some cluster ideas due to over-crowded classrooms
- iv. resistance by educational officers for fear of losing some of their roles
- v. cluster leaders over-loaded
- vi. difficult to identify local trainers

Most of the above objectives were similar to those of the Malawi Secondary School Cluster System. In addition, some of the impacts and challenges were similar to the research findings that have been discussed in chapter four. For example, increased community participation, teacher motivation, and the challenge of acquiring the financial resources to run the system effectively. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used in the research.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the sampling process and research methodology. Stratified, purposive, random, and convenience sampling methods were used. A total of six CDSSs were sampled and two of the sampled CDSSs were sampled again for a case study which was conducted in four schools. The other two case study schools included a Conventional Secondary School and a Private Secondary School. The study population was sampled from these schools. The following data collection methods were used: structured interviews, questionnaires, a case study, documentation review, and focus group discussions.

3.1 Sampling

The clusters were stratified into three categories. The categorization was based on the total number of cluster meetings held between 2000 and 2003 and the number of management related meetings organized by each cluster. The data on the number of cluster activities held by each cluster for each of the four cluster components were as per table 7 below:

Table 7: Number of cluster schools and cluster activities by district

District and Secondary School Cluster		Number of schools per cluster including Private ones	Number of Cluster Component Activities Per Year																	
			Management				Teaching				Learning				Student Welfare				Total	
Blantyre District Clusters			2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2		2
			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	0
1	Blantyre	14	2	3	2	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
2	H.H.I	14	2	3	-	-	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	11
3	Ngumbe	13	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
4	Njamba	11	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
5	South Lunzu	10	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
6	Zingwangwa	15	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
7	Lunzu	11	2	3	-	-	1	2	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	13
8	Lirangwe	7	3	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	10
9	Chichiri	13	3	3	3	1	1	3	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
Mwanza District Cluster																				
10	Mwanza	12	1	-	2		1	1	2		-	1	2	-					4	14
Nsanje District Clusters																				
11	Nsanje	8	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
12	Bangula	5	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Chikwawa District Clusters																				
13	Chikwawa	13	2	1	1	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	10
14	Livunzu	5	2	2	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	11
15	Ngabu	9	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	7

Source: Cluster leader schools and divisional data

Based on this analysis, the clusters were categorized as active, semi-active and passive clusters as shown in the next table:

Table 8: Categorization of clusters by number of cluster activities

	Number of schools per cluster including Private ones	Number of Cluster Component Activities Per Year																
		Management				Teaching				Learning				Student Welfare				
Year of cluster Activity		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	Total
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	
Cluster category																		
1 Active Clusters																		
Chichiri	13	3	3	3	1	1	3	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	17***
Mwanza	12	1	-	2		1	1	2		-	1	2	-					4
Lunzu	11	2	3	-	-	1	2	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	13
2 Semi-active Clusters																		
Livunzu	5	2	2	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	11
H.H.I	14	2	3	-	-	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	11
Blantyre	14	2	3	2	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
Lirangwe	7	3	2	-	-		1	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	10**
Chikwawa	13	2	1	1	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	10
Ngabu	9	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	7
3 Inactive clusters																		
Nsanje	8	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Zingwangwa	15	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Bangula	5	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
South Lunzu	10	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Ngumbe	13	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Njamba	11	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2*

Source: Cluster leader schools and divisional data

Key

- *** Sampled active cluster
- ** Sampled semi-active cluster
- * Sampled passive cluster

A cluster was sampled from each cluster category then two Community Day

Secondary Schools were randomly sampled from each of the sampled active, semi-active, and passive clusters. Two additional secondary schools (one public and one private) were added

to the active cluster as case studies. This brought the number of schools involved in the research to six and those involved in the case studies to four.

Following the data in table 8, **Chichiri Cluster** turned out to be a cluster with the highest number of cluster activities (active cluster). Through random sampling, the research included St. Kizito and Limbe CDSSs. It were also these two schools that were used in the case studies.

Lirangwe cluster was picked to represent semi-active clusters because its number of management cluster meetings were half of the Chichiri Cluster. Not only that but it was also purposively sampled to represent clusters from Blantyre rural clusters. Matindi and Chinamvuu CDSSs were randomly sampled from this cluster for the research.

Njamba cluster emerged as one of the passive clusters. It was sampled for the study due to easy accessibility of its cluster schools. Manja CDSS and St. Pius CDSS were randomly selected for the research.

The cluster sampling was varied to solve problems of accessibility and to ensure that the sample was representative of Blantyre district clusters. In order to find the relationship between the time when a cluster activity had been held and its impact on current school management practices, a table was drawn to record the type and number of school management related activities and also the dates when the meetings had been held in the sampled clusters (see appendix 1).

3.2 Sampled Schools' brief profiles

3.2.1 Cluster Leader Schools

3.2.1.1 Chichiri Secondary School

Chichiri secondary school is found in Blantyre city. It is close to the high way that connects Blantyre city center and Limbe town. It is about two kilometers away from the civic center. It is one of the biggest and oldest public schools in Malawi. It was opened in 1961.

The school, like all conventional secondary schools receives monthly funding and some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office. It also depends on some of the fees collected from its pupils for its running. The school became a cluster leader in the year 2000, at the inception of the cluster system. The cluster has 13 cluster schools (see table 5). It is worth noting that the number of cluster schools fluctuates because of private schools which open and close at any time.

The school has a lot of buildings like laboratories, technical subjects' workshops, a computer laboratory, a language laboratory, physical science and biology laboratories, a fine art room, a technical drawing room, a single story administration block, a spacious staff room, entertainment hall, and teachers' offices. The school has 24 single story classrooms and each class has six streams. Classes start at half past seven in the morning and end at half past three in the afternoon.

The August 2003 South Western Education Division data showed that the school had one thousand and sixty-two pupils and fifty teachers. Twenty-seven of the teachers were female and twenty-three were male. Twenty-four of them had a Diploma and twenty-six a Bachelors' degree (p. 7). The headteacher had served at the school for over four years. Furthermore, four hundred seventy-seven of the pupils were girls and the remaining five hundred eighty-five boys (p. 1). Some of the pupils are from high- income families but the majority of pupils are from middle-income families. Other pupils are from low- income families.

3.2.1.2 Njamba Secondary School

The school is found in Blantyre city. It is located two to three kilometers away from Chichiri Secondary School. The cluster has eleven schools (see table 5). It is easily accessible to all its cluster schools because it is along another tarmac main road that connects Blantyre city center and Limbe town. The school has its own premises and apart from the library and

an administration block that includes a staff-room, there are eight classes. It is a double-streamed school. It used to be a DEC but it was upgraded to a coeducational double shift Conventional Secondary School in 2001 after increasing the number of classrooms at the school. Some pupils learn from half past seven in the morning to noon and others with another set of teachers use the same classrooms from noon to five o'clock in the afternoon.

The August 2003 South Western Education Division staff and pupil returns showed that at the school there were four hundred forty-four pupils and twenty-two teachers. Nine of the teachers had a diploma and twelve a bachelor's degree (p. 1). Almost fifty percent of the pupils are from middle-income families and the rest are from low-income families (p. 1).

The headteacher of the school had been managing the school for two years. The school receives monthly funding and at times teaching and learning materials from the divisional office. It also depends on some of the fees contributed by its pupils for its running.

3.2.1.3 Lirangwe secondary school

The school is located in Blantyre rural and it is almost twenty kilometers away from the city center. The school was established in 1981. It is strategically located close to a main road and trading center. The cluster has seven schools (see table 5). Being a rural school some of its cluster schools are very far from it.

The school has an administration block, a staffroom and a library. It is a double-streamed school and there are eight classes. It used to be a DEC and was transformed to a CDSS in 1999. It receives monthly funding from the divisional offices and sometimes teaching and learning materials. Some of the fees that are collected from pupils are also used at the school.

The August 2003, South Western Education Division data showed that the school had two hundred and fifty pupils and seventeen teachers. Four of the teachers were female and thirteen male. Three of the teachers had a diploma, one of them had a bachelor's degree and

the remaining thirteen teachers had primary school teaching certificates (p. 19). The headteacher had been heading the school for almost four years. Additionally, ninety-three of the pupils were girls and the remaining one hundred and fifty-seven boys (p. 1). Being a rural school most of the pupils are from poor families.

3.2.2 Cluster schools

3.2.2.1 St. Kizito CDSS

St. Kizito CDSSs is found in Blantyre city. It is located five kilometers to the east of the cluster leader school and there is a very good main road that connects the two schools. The CDSS is within the compound of a catholic primary school. There are two newly built blocks at the school and each of them has two classrooms. In addition, there is a staffroom, a mini-library and a headteacher's house. It was established in 1981.

Until 2001, the CDSS was operating in some of the primary school classrooms after the primary school pupils had knocked off. The school, like many CDSSs, does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the CDSS depends on the fees collected from the pupils but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education. Once in while, the CDSS receives some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office.

According to the South Western Education Divisional office data, in August 2003, the school had one hundred eighty-seven pupils, eighty-seven of whom were girls and the remaining one hundred and two were boys (p. 1). The majority of the pupils are from low-income families despite that the school is in the city particularly because it is close to a location where most low-income families who work in the city live. The school had twenty-one teachers seven of whom were female and fourteen male. All the teachers' highest professional qualification was a certificate in primary school teaching (p. 34). The headteacher had been heading the school for over 3 years.

3.2.2.2 Limbe CDSS

Limbe CDSSs is located in one of the towns of Blantyre city called Limbe. It is four kilometers to the south east of Blantyre city centre and there are two good tarmac main roads that lead to the cluster leader school. The CDSS has its own premises but until May 2004, the CDSS was operating in some of Limbe primary school classrooms when the primary pupils had knocked off. The school, like St. Kizito CDSS, does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the CDSS depends on the fees collected from the pupils but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education. The CDSS receives some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office once in a while.

The South Western Education Divisional office data showed that in August 2003, the school had one hundred eighty-seven pupils and twenty-one teachers. Eleven of the teachers were female and ten were male (p. 35). The teachers' highest professional qualification was a certificate in primary school teaching. The headteacher of the school had been serving at the school for less than half a year. Additionally, sixty-five of the pupils were girls and the remaining one hundred and twenty-two pupils were boys (p. 1). Most of the pupils who learn at this school are from low-income families because most of the high and medium-income parents opt to send their children to private schools if they have not been selected to a CSS. The parents believe that the children get better education at the private schools than any CDSS.

3.2.2.3 St. Pius CDSS

St. Pius CDSSs is located in Blantyre city and serves about five major locations of Blantyre city. The school is four kilometers away from the cluster leader school and there are several tarmac roads that lead to the cluster leader school. The CDSS operates at a catholic primary school and classes start at one o'clock when the majority of primary school pupils

have knocked off and they end at five o'clock. It was established in 1981 and is one of the schools that were changed from DECs to CDSSs in 1998/99. The CDSS, does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the CDSS entirely depends on the fees collected from the pupils but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education. Once in a while, the CDSS receives some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office.

The August 2003 divisional data showed that the school had one hundred ninety-two pupils and twenty-five teachers. Eighteen of the teachers were female and seven were male. All the teachers had a primary school teaching certificate as the highest professional qualification (p. 42). The headteacher of the school had been serving at the school for about two years. Sixty-five of the pupils were girls and the remaining one hundred and twenty-two pupils boys (p. 1). Most of the pupils come from low-income families because like at Limbe CDSS many high and medium-income parents opt to send their children to private schools if they are not selected to a CSS.

3.2.2.4 Manja CDSS

The CDSSs is found in one of the locations of Blantyre city. It is located three kilometers to the south east of the cluster leader school and there is a very good main road that connects the two schools. It was established in 1981. The CDSS operates at a primary school therefore, classes start at one o'clock after some of the primary school pupils have knocked off. The CDSS, does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the CDSS depends on the fees collected from the pupils but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education. Like all CDSSs, the CDSS receives some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office once in a while.

The South Western Education Division staff and pupil returns for August 2003 indicated that the school had one hundred eighty-one pupils and twenty-four teachers.

Thirteen of the teachers were female and eleven were male. All the teachers' highest professional qualification was a certificate in primary school teaching (p. 41). The headteacher had been heading the school for about a year. Seventy-six of the pupils were girls and the remaining one hundred and five were boys (p. 1). As characteristic of all city CDSSs, the majority of the pupils come from low-income families as most of the high and middle-income families opt to send their children to private schools.

3.2.2.5 Chinamvuu

The school is one of the sampled Blantyre rural CDSSs. It is isolated and located 10 kilometers to the north-east of the cluster leader school and there is an earth main road that connects the two schools but the road becomes impassable during the rainy season. The CDSS was established in 1981 and is located five hundred meters away from the public primary school where it used to operate. It is approximately thirty kilometers away from Blantyre city center. There are two newly built blocks at the school and each of them has two classrooms. At the time of data collection, they were in the course of building an administration block that will also house a staff-room. The school does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the CDSS, like most of the CDSSs, depends on the fees collected from the pupils but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education. The CDSS receives some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office once in a while.

The August, 2003 South Western Education Divisional office data indicated that the school had one hundred and eighty-eight pupils and six male teachers. All the teachers' highest professional qualification was a certificate in primary school teaching (p. 44). The headteacher had been heading the school for three years. Twenty-nine of the pupils were female and fifty-nine male (p. 1). The pupils who go to the school are generally from low-income families.

3.2.2.6 Matindi CDSS

Matindi CDSSs is also found in Blantyre rural and it is five kilometers to the south of the cluster leader school, Lirangwe. There is a very good tarmac road that connects the two schools and both schools are along the road. The CDSS is two hundred meters away from the public primary school where it was operating before its own premises were built. It is one of the CDSSs that were transformed from DEC's in 1999. There are two newly built blocks and a head teacher's house at the school. Each of the school blocks has two classrooms. The school, like many CDSSs, does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the CDSS depends on the fees collected from the pupils but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education. The school receives some teaching and learning materials from the divisional office once in a while. It was opened in 1996.

According to the South Western Education Divisional office data, in August 2003, the school had one hundred and eighty-seven pupils and twenty-one teachers. Seven of the teachers were female and fourteen were male. All the teachers' highest professional qualification was a certificate in primary school teaching (p. 30). The headteacher had been heading the school for three years. Furthermore, eighty-seven of the pupils were girls and the remaining one hundred and two pupils were boys (p. 1). The pupils are mostly from low-income families.

3.2.2.7 Our Lady of Wisdom Private secondary school

Our Lady of wisdom is private secondary school for girls only. It is found in Blantyre city. It is located four kilometers to the east of the cluster leader school and there is a very good main road that connects it to the cluster school. It is a school within the compound of a catholic parish. There are two several well looked after buildings and teachers' houses.

The heateacher of the school is signatory to the cluster account. The school does not receive any monthly funding from the divisional office. The financing of the activities of the

school depends on the fees collected from the pupils. Teachers' salaries are paid out of the pupils' schools fees. The school was established in 1921.

In June 2004 the school had about 602 pupils and thirty-two teachers. The majority of the pupils are from high and medium income families. The teachers' highest professional qualification ranges from a diploma to a degree. The headteacher had been heading the school for over 5 years.

Table 9: Cluster leaders' and study CDSSs' profile Summary table

Element	Cluster Leader Schools						Community Day Secondary Schools											
	Chichiri		Lirangwe		Njamba		St. Kizito		Limbe		Manja		St. Pius		Chinamvuu		Matindi	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Teachers	23	27	13	4	7	15	7	14	10	11	11	13	7	18	6	0	9	6
Total	50		17		22		21		21		24		25		6		15	
Pupils	585	477	157	93	249	195	102	87	122	65	105	76	115	77	59	29	43	52
Total	1062		250		444		189		187		181		192		88		95	
Teacher Qualifications	26-Dip. and 24Degrees		3-Dip. 1-Degree 13-PSTC		9-Dip. and 12Degrees		All have PSTC		All have PSTC		All have PSTC		All have PSTC		All have PSTC		All have PSTC	
Appr. Distance From Cluster Leader							5 km		4 km		3 km		4 km		10 km		5 km	
Location	City		Rural		City		City		City		City		City		Rural		Rural	
Years head serving at the school	Over 4		4		about 1		3		½ year		1		2		3		3	

Key

Appr. Approximate
Dip: Diploma
F: Female

M: Male
Km: Kilometers
PSTC: Primary School Teaching Certificate

3.3 Study Population

The study population for the research comprised the Headteachers, Heads of Department, PTA members and pupils of Chichiri Secondary School, Our Lady of Wisdom Private Secondary School, Limbe CDSS, Manja CDSS, St. Kizito CDSS, St. Pius CDSS, Chinamvuu CDSS, and Matindi CDSS. The total number of participants (respondents) was as indicated in tables 10 and 11 below.

3.4 Participants

The table below shows the respondents involved in the research

Table 10: Total number of participants in the research

	Number of Headteachers	Number of Heads of Department	Pupils	PTA	Total
Active	2	6	8	2	18
Semi-active	2	6	8	2	18
Passive	2	6	8	2	18
Total	6	18	24	6	54

Table 11: Total number of participants in the case studies

	Number of Headteachers	Number of Heads of Department	Pupils	PTA	Total
CSS	1	3	4	1	9
Pvt. School	1	3	4	1	9
CDSS A	1	3	4	1	9
CDSS B	1	3	4	1	9
Total	4	12	16	4	36

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Interviews

Interview questions were asked to the following participants:

3.5.1.1 Cluster leaders

To solicit information on the number and types of cluster meetings conducted by the divisional clusters, telephone interviews were conducted in all the fifteen cluster leader schools. In the schools where there were no phones, the data were collected through District Educational Managers.

3.5.1.2 School Administrators

In this category, the respondents to the structured interview questions comprised the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher and the three Heads of Department (Languages, Sciences and Humanities) of the research schools.

3.5.1.3 Pupils

Four pupils were interviewed at each school. The selection of the pupils was purposive and it consisted of student leaders. The pupils were forms one, two, and three class leaders (monitors). Form four students were represented by the head boy or head girl. Some of the interview questions were answered in a focus group discussion and others were administered individually.

3.5.1.4 Parents' Teacher Association members

The initial plan was to interview PTA chairpersons but in some schools the chairpersons were not readily available despite booking appointments well in advance. Consequently, any member of the PTA who was available was interviewed (See tables 10 and 11 for the number of PTA members who had been interviewed).

3.5.2 School documentation Review

The records of the school were checked and they included: administrative records (time book, minute book & fees register), pupils' records (class attendance registers & period registers), and teachers' records (schemes and records of work)

3.5.3 Focus group discussion

Some of the interview questions for pupils were answered in a focus group discussion that was held at each of the eight of the sampled schools. Each group had four student representatives who were the same respondents to the structured interview questions.

3.5.4 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were administered to the headteachers of the case study schools only because most of the questions were looking for specific details.

3.5.5 Case Study

Between 2002 and 2003 Chichiri cluster had held more cluster activities than any other cluster in the division. It was therefore also selected for a case study. The case study was conducted in four schools to have a better understanding of the cluster system and study how successfully the cluster activities were carried out. Two of the schools included those in which interviews were conducted: St. Kizito and Limbe CDSSs. The other two additional schools were purposively selected and included Our Lady Private Secondary School and Chichiri Conventional Secondary School to ensure that conventional and private secondary schools have been represented. The study findings brought to light cluster concepts that work and areas that need improvement for the system to produce best results.

3.5.6 Literature Review

Literature on the cluster system from Africa and Asia was reviewed to find out the objectives, organization, impact, and challenges of the system.

3.6 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Self-reporting questionnaires and structured interview questionnaires were prepared for data collection (see appendix 4). The questions were aimed at collecting data to find out if the system had provided CDSSs with knowledge and skills in school supervision, organization, communication, student welfare management, financial management, record keeping, and the enhancement of community participation. Attitude scales were used to collect the data. The mostly used ones were the Likert and Gutman scales. The indicators in table 12 below were used to formulate the research questions:

Table 12: Indicators, sources and strategies for data collection

INDICATOR	SOURCES	STRATEGY
Availability of mission statement and school development plan	-headteacher -school records	-interview -School documentation review
School organization, Communication systems and delegation	-heads of department -pupils -headteacher -minutes	-interview -records review
Financial management	-school financial records -headteacher -school committee	-school financial records review -interview
Staff supervision	-headteacher -heads of department -supervisory and attendance records	-interview -records' review
Community participation	-PTA member -PTA meetings minutes	-interview -records' review
Participatory decision-making (management and staff meetings)	-headteacher -minutes -departmental heads	-interview -records review
Availability of records and their updateness.	-school records	-records' review
Capacity building (cluster level)	-headteacher -heads of department	-interview -questionnaire
Pupils' welfare (availability of extra curricular activities and guidance and counseling services)	-pupils	-interview

It was through these indicators that the respondents were identified. In addition, the indicators assisted in deciding the best methodology for collecting the data from the respondents.

3.7 Data Management and Analysis

Tables were drawn to record data on each of the research questions the discussion of which has been made in chapter 4. The analysis was made both quantitatively and qualitatively by comparing the responses of the respondents from the active, semi active, and passive clusters and in some cases graphic illustrations were made.

3.8 Research Ethics

Permission to collect data from the schools was sought from both the divisional and district educational offices. Interview dates were booked two weeks in advance. Apart from general questions that required focus group discussions, each member of each category of respondents was interviewed in camera to enhance confidentiality. Oral consent was sought from all the participants. When analyzing the data, names of the specific schools and pupils from which the data were collected were withheld.

3.9 Researchers Role

I work as an Educational Methods Advisor with the South Western Education Division. This job entails going to Secondary Schools and observing lessons as teachers are teaching with a view to identifying their strengths and weakness. The latter are translated into training needs. Apart from supervising teachers I also supervise headteachers and advise them on how best they can manage their schools. Therefore the respondents (teachers) were very responsive during the data collection process. They were viewing the process as part of collaborative problem identification and advisory process.

3.10 Challenges

The following problems were encountered during data collection:

- after comparing some of the data that were in the cluster school leader records with the data that were provided by pupils it was apparent that some cluster leader schools were giving false data that they had conducted more than one cluster meeting for student leaders when in essence they had conducted only one meeting;
- at two of the schools head teachers had delegated the interviews to their deputies because the headteachers were busy. However the answers were cross-checked with the headteachers later;
- it was difficult to book an appointment with some schools because they have no phones. District Education managers were used to book the appointments;
- some randomly sampled cluster schools were not easily accessible. Therefore convenience sampling had to be used in some cases;
- initially the study was designed to cover the entire South Western Education Division but later it was limited to Blantyre district because of limited research funds;
- some PTA members could not speak English therefore the PTA questionnaire had to be interpreted into Chichewa; and
- some PTA chairpersons were not readily available therefore the data were collected from any PTA member who was available.

After collecting the data from the sampled active, semi-active, and passive cluster CDSSs, the data were entered in data tables and an analysis of the findings was made. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This chapter presents and analyzes the research findings of each of the research questions which were set to find out if the cluster system assists the CDSSs in formulating mission statements and school development plans in addition to the improvement of records management, student welfare management, financial management, teacher supervision, community participation, and communication within the school. The findings reveal that the system has indeed assisted in the improvement of the management of CDSSs. However some of the improvements cannot be attributed to the cluster system alone.

4.1 Availability of mission statement and School Development Plans (SDPs)

Through the cluster system schools were encouraged to formulate mission statements and come up with school development plans (MoE, 2000, pp. 1-22). The mission statement is supposed to be formulated in collaboration with the PTA, staff, and pupils while the SDPs are supposed to be formulated by the school management committee in consultation with the afore-mentioned stakeholders (MoE, 2000, pp. 283). Therefore the hypothesis was that the school cluster system had helped CDSSs in developing and having mission statements and SDPs.

After collecting the data, the findings were as presented in the next table:

Table 13: Summary of data on the availability of mission statements and school development plans in CDSSs

	Availability of mission statement		Participants in mission formulation			Knowledge of mission statement by teachers		Mission statement guiding School running		Availability of SDPs		Implemented SDPs since 2000
	Yes	No	Head	Head & staff	Head, staff, pupils & parents	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Active	2	-		2	-	1	1	1	1	2	-	9
Semi-active	2	-	2	-	-		2	-	2	2	-	6
Passive	-	2	N/A	N/A	N/A		2	-	2	2	-	0
%	67	33	-	-	-	17	83	17	83	100	0	

The above data show that all the sampled CDSSs from the active cluster had a mission statement. These schools had attended three cluster meetings on cluster and school development in 2001 and 2002. The mission statements were formulated by the headteachers in collaboration with the rest of the teachers. At one of the schools, the mission statement was not guiding the running of the school and was not known by the teachers. At this school the statement was formulated in the year 2001 and by 2004 the school had changed headship four times. Between January 2002 and July 2003, both CDSSs had a total of nine implemented school development plans which comprised the acquisition of own plot, teacher in-service training, moulding of bricks, building own school blocks, and a teacher's house. The schools had the following pending development plans: building additional teachers' houses, building an administrative block, and sending more teachers for in-service training at cluster level.

Similarly, each of the CDSSs that had been sampled from the semi-active cluster had a school mission statement. Both schools had not attended a cluster nor school improvement cluster activity. The data show that statements were formulated by the headteachers alone. The teachers in both schools did not know the mission statements probably because they were not involved in the formulation of the statements. Neither were the statements communicated

to the teachers. The statements did not guide the running of the schools. The schools had a total of six implemented school development plans which included the maintenance of desks, maintenance of classrooms, building of additional classroom blocks, and in-service teacher training in their respective subjects.

Neither of the sampled CDSSs from the passive cluster had a mission statement nor implemented development plans but both of them had two pending school development plans of acquiring a plot and building own premises. Both schools had never attended any cluster nor school development cluster activity.

These findings suggest that the cluster system led to the increased probability that CDSSs would formulate and implement mission statements and school development plans. For example, the data show that 67% of the sampled schools had mission statements and the schools comprised those that were from active and semi-active cluster CDSSs. On the other hand the remaining 33% that comprised schools sampled from a passive cluster had no mission statements and these were the schools that did not have any cluster meetings on cluster nor school improvement.

The availability of SDPs, even in the passive cluster schools, can also be an indication that the schools had learned something from the cluster system. Nevertheless the positive impact of the cluster system is suggested by the comparatively more implemented SDPs that the active cluster CDSSs had than the semi-active cluster CDSSs. Not only that but also the semi-active cluster CDSSs had more implemented SDPs than the passive cluster CDSSs.

Lastly, despite the cluster system encouraging schools to develop mission statements and school development plans in consultation with all the stakeholders, the findings revealed that pupils, parents, and sometimes teachers were not involved in their formulation which possibly resulted in lack of shared goals. It was therefore not surprising that, although some schools had mission statements, their running was not guided by them. In this respect, it is

desirable that headteachers should consult teachers, pupils, and parents when formulating mission statements and school development plans to gain maximum support as they strive to implement the statements and development plans. Headteachers being central to the development and implementation of school development plans, it is worthwhile that they should stay at one school for many years to enable them achieve their desired goals and development plans.

4.2 Records Availability and Management

Clusters were also formed to ensure that schools are sharing good school management knowledge which comprises record keeping (MoE, 2000, p. 10). Due to time limitations, the research focused on three basic records. These were: admission registers that contain names of all the pupils who attended the school since its opening (MoE, 1982, p.20), fees registers in which columns for all the funds the pupils pay, and general receipt numbers are entered against each name (MoE, 1982, p. 21), and pupil class attendance registers. The attendance registers are supposed to be called everyday to check on total pupil enrolment, absenteeism, and dropouts. They are also supposed to have pupils' particulars and daily totals (MoE, 1982, p. 21).

Therefore with the introduction of the cluster system, it was hoped that the CDSSs had these basic records and that the records were always up to-date. Table 14 below shows the findings of the research.

Table 14: Number of schools in which records were available and up to-date

	Active	Semi-active	Passive
Attendance Registers available	2	2	2
Called daily	2	2	0
All sections completed	2	1	1
Fees registers available	2	2	2
All sections completed	2	1	1
Admission registers available	2	1	2
All sections completed	2	1	0

The data show that all the sampled CDSSs had the basic school records in question. The attendance registers for the active cluster CDSSs were up to date because all the pupils' particulars and daily totals had been filled in but pupils' particulars for one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs had not been filled in. Neither were dates nor daily totals indicated. In the registers of one of the passive cluster CDSSs' particulars for all the pupils had not been recorded.

Despite that all the sampled schools had fees registers, it was only in the registers of active cluster CDSSs where all pupils' names and general receipt numbers had been entered. The fees had also been classified by type. On the contrary, at one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs the columns of the registers were incomplete although the headteacher had said that all the pupils had paid school fees and at one of the passive cluster CDSSs the headteacher justified the incomplete register columns by some pupils' non-payment of fees.

All but one sampled CDSS had pupils' admission registers for all the classes. One of the semi-active cluster CDSSs did not have the registers. The registers of the active cluster CDSSs were up to-date as they contained names of the pupils and their dates of admission into the school. Similarly, in the semi-active cluster CDSS that had them, the registers were up to-date. On the contrary, the registers for the passive clusters were not up to-date. At one of the passive cluster CDSSs, pupils transferred to the school and other schools had not been recorded, and at the other passive school only registers for forms one and three had been completed.

These findings suggest that the cluster system may have assisted in the management of records among CDSSs. The suggestion can be justified by the best updateness of records in all the active cluster CDSSs as compared to the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs. Between the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs, the records were more updated in the former than the latter.

The availability of the records in the schools cannot be solely attributed to the cluster system because almost all the schools had them and that it was one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs that did not have all of them. In addition, it were only semi-active and active cluster CDSSs that had ever attended records management cluster meetings and it was in September and November 2000 respectively. As such the presence of the school records in all the sampled schools can also be attributed to other factors like school inspections, general knowledge, and divisional management meetings.

Regardless of the availability of the basic records in almost all the sampled schools, there are variations in their updateness which can be attributed to negligence, lack of knowledge, and ill motives like embezzlement of funds by deliberately not recording in the fees register the names of pupils who have paid school fees.

4.3 The cluster system and the Management of student welfare

The cluster system advocates good management of student welfare to ensure that pupils' education is not disrupted by suspensions, expulsions or pupil drop-outs (MoE, 2000, pp. 14-15). Consequently it was believed that, through the cluster system, the CDSSs would learn good student welfare management skills like making school rules and regulations known to pupils, consistent enforcement of the school rules and regulations (MoE, 2000, p. 14), and the encouragement of supervised extra curricular activities to minimize pupil indiscipline. The cluster system also advocates the formation of student councils (MoE, 2000, p.15).

Therefore the research was carried out to investigate if cluster activities for pupils were being organized, if the pupils knew school rules and regulations, if offenders were always being punished, if the punishments were consistent with committed offences, if the schools had extra curricular activities, and if guidance and counseling services were being

provided to pupils in their respective schools. The hypothesis was that the school cluster system had resulted in improved student welfare.

The findings of the research regarding the knowledge of the existence of the school cluster system, school rules and regulations, and pupil participation in cluster activities were as presented in the table below:

Table 15: Existence of school clusters and school rules and regulations

	Active	Semi-active	Passive
Heard about the school cluster system	0	2	0
Attended pupil cluster activity	0	0	0
Know school rules and regulations	8	8	8

In the active and passive cluster CDSSs, all the interviewed pupils said that they had never heard about a school cluster system and pupils in all the sampled CDSSs had never attended a students' cluster meeting. Nevertheless the pupils from all the sampled schools said that they knew their school rules and regulations.

The data collected regarding the frequency of punishing offenders were as recorded in table 16 below:

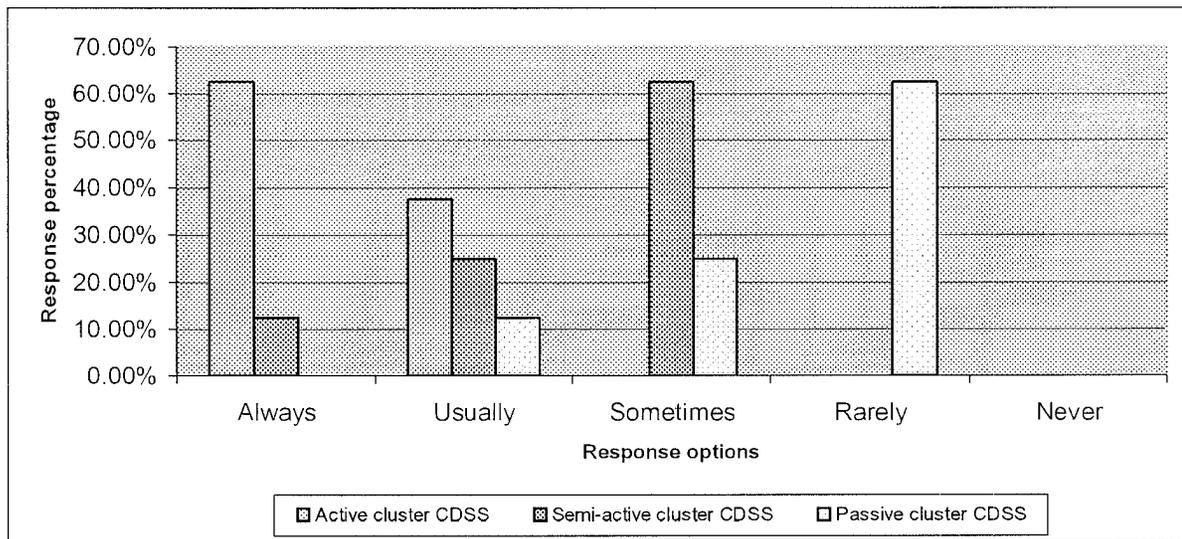
Table 16: Frequency of punishing offenders

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Active	62.5%	37.5%	-	-	-
Semi-active	12.5%	25%	62.5%	-	-
Passive	-	12.5%	25%	62.5%	-

As indicated in the above table, 62.5 % of the interviewed pupils in the active cluster CDSSs had said that they were always punished and the same percentage of pupils in the semi-active cluster CDSSs said they were sometimes punished after committing offences. The same percentage of pupils from the passive cluster CDSSs answered that they were rarely punished. This trend suggests that the teacher/pupil supervision cluster activities

attended by the active and semi-active clusters in November and September 2000 respectively had a positive impact on student welfare management of the CDSSs. It is not surprising that the situation was best in the active cluster schools. These schools in addition to the cluster meeting on teacher/pupil supervision they had also attended three school improvement cluster meetings between January 2001 and February 2002. The figure below shows the graphic representation of these findings:

Figure 1: Graph showing frequency of punishing offenders



These findings were further computed to find the mean of the responses for each category of sampled schools. The ‘always’ option was given the value of 1, ‘usually’ 2, ‘sometimes’ 3, rarely 4, and ‘never’ 5. The average for the active cluster CDSSs was 1.38, for the semi-active cluster CDSSs was 2.5, and for the passive cluster CDSSs was 3.5.

In their response to the consistency of punishments the pupils’ responses were as shown below:

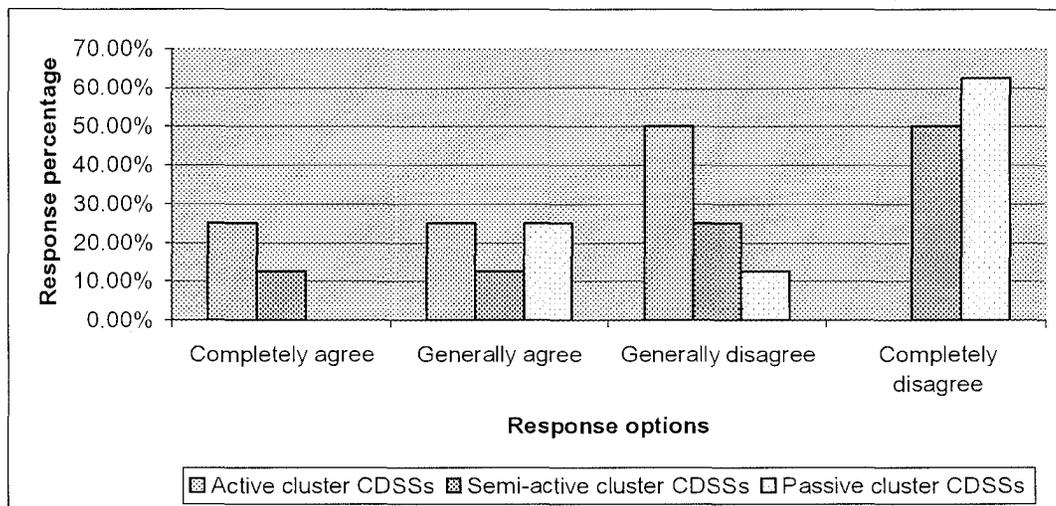
Table 17: Consistency of punishments

	Completely agree	Generally agree	Agree	Generally disagree	Completely disagree
Active	25%	-	-	75%	-
Semi-active	12.5%	12.5%	-	25%	50%
Passive	-	25%	-	12.5%	62.5%

The data show that 25%, 12.5% and 0% of the pupils in the active, semi-active, and passive cluster CDSSs respectively completely agreed that there is consistency in the punishments given to offenders of similar rules and regulations while 0%, 50% and 62.5% of the pupils in the active, semi-active, and passive cluster CDSSs respectively completely disagreed.

Like in the findings of the frequency of punishing offenders this pattern suggests that the teacher/pupil supervision cluster activities attended by the active and semi-active clusters in November and September 2000 respectively had a positive impact on student welfare management. It is not surprising that the situation was best in the active cluster schools. These schools in addition to the cluster meeting on teacher/pupil supervision they had also attended three school improvement cluster meetings between January 2001 and February 2002. The graphic presentation of these findings is as shown below:

Figure 2: Graph showing consistency of punishments for similar offences



The findings were further computed to find the mean of the responses for each category of sampled schools. The 'completely agree' option was given the value of 1, 'generally agree' 2, 'generally disagree' 3, and 'completely disagree' 4. The average for the

active cluster CDSSs was 2.25, for the semi-active cluster was CDSSs was 3.13, and for the passive cluster CDSSs was 3.38.

In respect to the availability of clubs in the sampled schools, the findings were as shown in the following table:

Table 18: Extra-curricular activities

	Active	Semi-active	Passive
Existence of extra curricular activities	8	8	8
Number of clubs	12	15	16
Clubs without patrons	2	0	1
Patrons attending meetings	7	15	10
Presence of social and academic guidance	8	8	4

All the interviewed pupils said that they had extra-curricular activities in the form of clubs. However, in both the active cluster CDSSs, two out of the twelve clubs had no patrons and three out of the ten club patrons were never attending club meetings. The semi-active cluster CDSSs had a total of fifteen clubs and all of them had patrons. All the patrons were attending club meetings. The passive cluster CDSSs had a total of sixteen clubs and all of them but one had patrons. Six club patrons were not attending club meetings.

All the interviewed pupils from the sampled active and semi-active cluster CDSSs said that teachers were providing social and academic guidance and counseling services. On the other hand, at one of the passive cluster CDSSs, social and academic guidance services were not being provided.

The above patterns and findings suggest that the cluster system has resulted in the improvement of the management of student welfare as evidenced by the better off consistency in punishments in the active than semi-active cluster CDSSs and in the semi-active than the passive cluster CDSSs. In addition, offenders are more frequently punished in the active cluster CDSSs followed by semi-active then passive cluster CDSSs. However, the good existence of extra-curricular activities and the knowledge of school rules and

regulations cannot be attributed to the cluster activities alone because there are no very distinct variations in their existence in the three categories of cluster schools. Possibly, school inspections, general knowledge, and divisional management meetings, among others, may have also contributed to the good existence of extra-curricular activities and knowledge of school rules and regulations.

Much as the system might have resulted in improved management of student welfare, the data collected showed that there was lack of student cluster activities like cluster quiz, drama, sports or examinations. Therefore it may be concluded that the clusters that had records indicating that they had organized pupils' cluster activities were not telling the truth.

4.4 School Financial Management Practices

The approved and non-approved CDSSs do not receive any monthly funding from the Ministry of Education. The running of the schools depends on the funds collected from the pupils. The funds include the Text Book Revolving Fund (TRF) which is used for purchasing books, the General Purpose Fund (GPF) for servicing other school needs like buying stationery and school equipment, Tuition fees, and lastly School Development Fund for construction, renovations, and school security. The schools use all the collected funds apart from the Tuition fees that are deposited in the government's account. The schools are advised that all expenses should be those that had been budgeted for (MoE, 1993, pp. 67-68).

It was believed that, through the cluster system, CDSSs would learn good financial management practices like budgeting and banking all the school used funds before expenses are incurred (MoE, 2000, pp. 4-8). To encourage accountability, the schools are advised to keep receipts for all expenses and have a committee for each of the funds used at the school (MoE, 1999, p. 11). For example, the GPF is supposed to have the deputy headteacher as a chairperson, a pupil representative from each form, and a teacher representative. Pupils' parents or any interested local school community members are the ones who are supposed to

be elected development fund members. The headteacher should simply be an overseer and signatory to the development fund account. The committee should comprise the following membership: chairperson, his vice, a secretary and his vice, a treasurer, and at least three committee members (MoE, 1999, p. 11). The TRF committee is supposed to have the Deputy Headteacher as the chairperson, a teacher representative, a bursar, and a parent representative. The schools are advised to account for all the expenses by keeping cash receipts (MoE, 1999, p. 11).

Therefore the hypothesis was that the school cluster system had enabled CDSSs to learn good financial management practices like banking funds before they are used, forming committees with prescribed membership for all the school used funds, spending on budgeted for activities, and receipting of all expenses. The findings were as recorded in the next table:

Table 19: Banking of funds and fund committees

		Active		Semi-active		Passive	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
TRF	banked	2	-	2	-	2	-
	committee available	2	-	2	-	-	2
	parents represented	2	-	1	1	-	2
GPF	banked	2	-	-	2	-	2
	committee available	2	-	2	-	-	2
	pupils represented	2	-	1	1	-	2
Development Fund	banked	2	-	2	-	2	-
	committee available	2	-	2	-	2	-
	pupils represented	2	-	2	-	2	-

The table shows that the sampled active cluster CDSSs were banking all the funds and that all the funds had committees. The TRF committees had parents' representatives. In addition, pupils were being represented on the GPF committee.

The semi-active cluster CDSSs were banking their TRF, School Development Fund, and tuition fees but not GPF. They claimed that it was too minimal to be banked. The CDSSs

had also committees for all the collected funds. At one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs, pupils and parents were not being represented on the GPF and TRF committees respectively.

The CDSSs from the passive cluster were also not banking their GPF. They did not have GPF nor TRF committees. Regarding budgeting and receipting of expenses the data provided by the headteachers were as indicated in the next table:

Table 20: Budgeting and receipting of expenses

		Active		Semi-active		Passive	
		A	B	A	B	A	B
Expenses budgeted for	all	-	-	-	-	-	-
	most	1	1	1	1	1	1
	some	-	-	-	-	-	-
	none	-	-	-	-	-	-
Expenses receipted	completely agree	-	-	-	-	-	-
	generally agree	1	1	-	-	-	-
	agree	-	-	1	1	-	-
	generally disagree	-	-	-	-	1	1
	completely disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-

The data indicate that in all the schools, most of the expenses incurred in the previous academic year had been budgeted for. The headteachers of the active CDSSs generally agreed that all the school expenses were being receipted while the headteachers of the semi-active cluster schools agreed that expenses were being receipted and those of passive cluster schools generally disagreed. Both the active and semi-active cluster schools had attended a records management cluster meeting in November and September 2000 respectively and some of the school records are school finance records.

The data in appendix 2 show that the semi-active cluster schools had attended a financial management cluster activity in June 2000 while the active cluster despite adhering to all the aspects in table 19 did not attend any financial management cluster activity. Neither did the inactive cluster schools attend any such cluster activity. However the data in table 19

show us that the active cluster CDSSs bank the school funds before using them, all the funds have committees, and that the committees have the prescribed membership. It is also observed that the active-cluster CDSSs adhere to these aspects more than the passive cluster CDSSs that did not have attend any school financial management cluster activity.

The pattern of results in table 19 and 20 suggest that the cluster system has assisted in encouraging good financial management practices in CDSSs. The findings reveal that all the schools, regardless of category, adhere to the aspects in table 19 when handling the development fund. This is probably because the fund is run by parents in collaboration with the headteacher. Secondly, the active cluster schools follow all the TRF, GPF, and the development fund regulations despite not having attended any financial management cluster meeting. These findings reveal to us that not all aspects of financial management can be attributed to the cluster system. Therefore part of the schools' financial management practices may be attributed to other variables like auditors' visits, divisional management meetings, and headteachers' experience.

In conclusion, the failure by the semi-active and passive CDSSs to bank the GPF before it is used, the lack of pupil representation in GPF committees, and failure to obtain receipts for some expenses are serious possibilities for financial mismanagement.

4.5 Teacher Supervision

The formation of school clusters was hoped to assist CDSSs in using good teacher supervisory measures. The measures are like those expected of conventional and grant-aided secondary schools. Some of them are the introduction of time books for teachers, observation of lessons by departmental heads, introduction of period registers, and checking of schemes and records of work (MoE, 1982, pp. 20-23). In this regard the hypothesis was that the cluster system had resulted in improved teacher supervision. The following were the findings of the research:

Table 21: Teacher Supervisory measures

Aspects	Active		Semi-active		Passive	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Time Book available	2	-	-	2	1	1
Academic Department Heads available	2	-	2	-	1	1
Lessons Observed	1	1	1	1	-	2
Period register available	1	1	-	2	-	2
Checking of schemes and records of work	2	-	2	-	2	-

In the active cluster two teacher/pupil supervision meetings were conducted in November 2000 and March 2002 (see appendix 2). One of the sampled active cluster schools attended both meetings and the other one attended only one. Both active cluster schools had time books in which teachers were recording their arrival and knocking off times everyday, academic departments were introduced, and heads of department had been appointed to supervise their respective departmental members. The heads of department were checking departmental teachers' schemes and records of work once a fortnight. At one of schools the heads of department were not observing lessons of the teachers under their charge and period registers were not available. This was the school that did not attend the March 2002 cluster meeting and between 2000 and 2004 had changed headship four times.

Both semi-active cluster schools CDSSs had attended one cluster meeting on teacher/pupil supervision in September 2000 (see appendix 2). At one of the sampled semi-active cluster schools, the academic heads of department were never observing lessons of their departmental teachers but they were checking the teachers' schemes and records of work. The schools did not have period registers and time books.

The sampled passive cluster schools had not attended any teacher/pupil supervision cluster activity. One of the CDSSs did not have a time book neither did it have academic departments. Instead of having academic departments, the CDSS had sectional heads. Lessons had never been observed and period registers were not available in the passive

schools. However, in both schools schemes and records of work were available and were being checked by the Deputy headteachers.

The above findings suggest to us that the cluster system has assisted in the improvement of pupil/staff supervision in CDSSs simply because the active cluster CDSS that had attended both teacher/pupil supervisory meetings was practicing all the supervisory measures under question unlike the one that did not attend one of the two meetings. Secondly, the semi-active cluster CDSSs were practicing more staff supervisory measures than the passive cluster CDSSs. This may be attributed to the supervisory cluster meeting that they had attended. However in all the sampled schools, schemes and records of work were being checked (including in the passive cluster CDSSs that did not attend any supervisory cluster meeting). Therefore this might have also been influenced by other factors like school inspections and professional knowledge from Teacher Training College.

Between the semi-active cluster CDSSs, there are some staff supervision variations. The same phenomenon happens between the sampled passive cluster CDSSs. These variations call for more cluster activities and follow-ups so that uniformity in teacher supervision is achieved.

4.6 Encouragement of Community Participation

To drum up support and sense of ownership, headteachers are encouraged to strengthen community participation in school affairs (MoE, 1994, p. 37, MoE, 2001, p. 4 & MoE, 1982, pp. 35-36). Therefore it is expected that the system should encourage the sharing of ideas among schools on how to involve local communities in school activities. The cluster system also advocates the inclusion of parents on the Textbook Revolving Fund committee (MoE, 2000, p. 11). In this regard, the hypothesis was that the cluster system had helped CDSSs in enhancing community participation.

In this perspective, data were collected to find out if the sampled schools had PTAs, to find out the number of accomplished school development plans by the PTAs since the year 2000, and also the PTAs' involvement in pupil discipline. The findings were as presented below:

Table 22: Community participation in school affairs

Aspects	Active	Semi-active	Passive
Number of schools where PTA is available	2	2	2
Number of schools where PTA is carrying out development projects	2	2	0
Number of development projects since 2000	7	4	0
Number of schools where PTA is involved in pupil discipline	2	2	0
Number of schools where the PTA knows TRF expenses	2	1	0

Only the active cluster CDSSs had attended cluster and school improvement cluster activities. Between January 2001 and March 2002 they had attended 3 school improvement meetings each. However all the sampled CDSSs had PTAs. The active cluster CDSSs had carried out a total of seven development projects in their respective schools while the semi-active cluster CDSSs had carried out a total of four development projects. For instance at one of the active cluster CDSSs, the PTA had assisted the school in the acquisition of an own plot from the city assembly, the building and electrification of four classrooms, while at the other CDSS the PTA had assisted in the acquisition of an own plot, moulding of bricks, building four classrooms and an administration block. The projects in one of the semi-active cluster schools comprised the construction of classrooms and an administration block while in the other school they also comprised the construction of classrooms and a teacher's house. The PTAs of the sampled passive cluster CDSSs did not carry out any development projects in their respective schools.

The PTAs of the active and semi-active cluster CDSSs were assisting their schools in disciplining pupils as opposed to the PTAs of the inactive cluster CDSSs that were not taking any part in pupil discipline.

Regarding the TRF, it was only the PTAs for the active cluster CDSSs and one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs that knew the TRF expenses. Since the semi-active cluster CDSSs had not attended any school development meeting the knowledge about the inclusion of telling PTA members TRF expenses by one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs might have been got from the financial management cluster meeting attended in June 2001.

The data show us that, since the year 2000, the PTAs of the active cluster CDSSs carried out more school development projects than the semi-active cluster CDSSs while the passive cluster CDSSs, carried out none. Secondly, the PTAs of the active cluster CDSSs knew TRF transactions more than those of the semi-active cluster CDSSs while the passive cluster CDSSs' PTAs did not know any. Consequently, these patterns suggest that the cluster system may have assisted in the improvement of community participation in school affairs. Apart from the cluster system other variables like location of the school may also have played a role in the active participation of the community in school affairs. For example, rural communities are cohesive and eager to participate in community development activities (Miller, 1995, para. 1).

The lack of knowledge on TRF expenses by some of the PTAs may indicate that their inclusion on the TRF committee is just on paper and that they are not invited to meetings where decisions on book purchases are made.

4.7 School organization and communication within the school

The Ministry of Education expects headteachers to delegate their powers and put in place effective means of communicating with their staff (MoE, 1994, p. 27) and the cluster system reemphasizes this notion (MoE, 2000, pp. 8-9). The research was therefore interested

in finding out if really the cluster system had helped in improving school organization and communication within the school. This was done by investigating if schools had academic departments, student leaders, and some committees. The findings were as shown in the table below:

Table 23: School organization and communication

Availability of:	Active		Semi-active		Passive	
	A	B	A	B	A	B
academic departments	3	3	3	3	3	0
departmental meetings last academic year	1	1	1	-	0	0
areas with student leaders	6	5	3	4	2	2
staff meetings in the first term	3	3	2	2	2	2
committees out the selected six	6	5	6	5	3	3

Between 2001 and 2002 the active cluster CDSSs had attended three cluster and school development meetings while the other two school categories had attended none. Both active cluster CDSSs and semi-active cluster CDSSs had attended a teacher/pupil supervision cluster activity in November and December 2000 respectively.

The data show that during the first term of the 2004 academic year, each of the active cluster CDSSs had held three staff meetings while the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs had held two meetings each. In the 2003 academic year, each of the active cluster CDSSs' academic departments and only one of the semi-active cluster CDSSs' academic departments had held departmental meetings. None of the passive cluster CDSSs' academic departments had held departmental meetings. This might probably be because they had never attended either a school development or a teacher/pupil supervision cluster meeting.

All the sampled schools had student leaders. One of the active cluster CDSSs had six student leaders while the other one had five. So too the semi-active cluster CDSSs. The passive cluster CDSSs had two student leaders each.

All the sampled CDSSs had various committees with some delegated powers and responsibilities. The committees in question were the social welfare, disciplinary, entertainment, examination, timetable, and school management. Out of the six listed committees, one of the active and one semi-active cluster CDSSs had all of them, while the remaining active and semi-active CDSSs had five committees each. Each of the passive cluster CDSSs had three out of the six committees. All the committees in the active and semi-active cluster CDSSs had met more than once the previous term.

Since the number of school organization and communication aspects are more and in favor of the active cluster CDSSs (that had attended both school development, teacher/pupil supervision cluster activities) followed by semi-active cluster CDSSs (had attended a teacher/pupil supervision cluster activities) then passive cluster CDSSs (did not attend any), we may conclude that the cluster system has helped in the improvement of school organization and communication within the school. However the lack of distinct variations between the active and semi-active cluster CDSSs indicates that other factors also come into play.

The findings reveal that there were minimal departmental meetings in the schools that had departmental heads which may mean that the heads of department do not fully know their delegated roles or they are simply negligent.

The results of the analysis suggest that the cluster system has assisted in the management of the CDSSs. For example, the findings show that the cluster system might have assisted CDSSs in enhancing community participation, and the development of school development plans. In addition, the pattern of the findings suggest that the system might have assisted CDSSs in records management, student welfare, financial management, staff supervision, school organization and communication within the school.

The findings also suggest that other factors like inspection and supervision and auditing by the divisional staff in addition to divisional management meetings have also helped in improving the management of CDSSs. Nevertheless, in most of the sampled CDSSs there is lack of stakeholder consultation in the formulation of school mission statements.

The next section discusses the case study findings regarding the successes and challenges of the cluster system. The discussion comprises information on Chichiri cluster organization and management, the number of cluster activities organized between 2000 and 2003 and the number of cluster meetings that each of the sampled cluster schools had attended.

CHAPTER FIVE

Case studies

5.1 The Cluster Leader School

5.1.1 Chichiri secondary school case study

The Chichiri cluster is found in Blantyre City and it is one of the biggest and oldest schools in Malawi (see study schools profile). Since the inception of the cluster system in Malawi, in the year 2000, Chichiri secondary school has been the leader school for the cluster. The cluster comprises four public and nine private secondary schools. Two of the private secondary schools were opened after the introduction of the cluster system (see table 5).

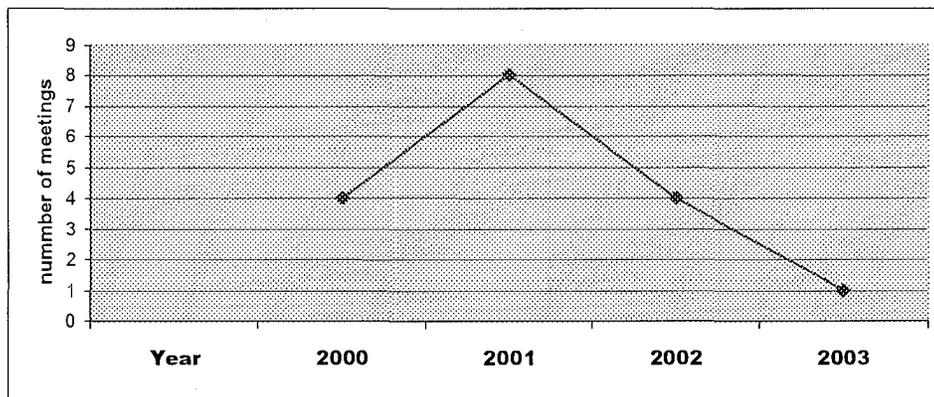
The cluster leader school headteacher, seeing that he had a very challenging task of leading the cluster schools, immediately formed a cluster committee of which he is the chairperson. The committee comprises heads of the cluster schools. The cluster committee upon being selected drew up a constitution (see appendix 3) and came up with a cluster development plan which was subject to review. The latest cluster development plan was drawn on the 23rd of November, 2003. Among others, the plans comprised contributing funds towards cluster activities and the sharing of resources during the 2004 examinations.

He added that the resource persons for the cluster activities were identified by Divisional Education Methods Advisors in collaboration with DANIDA and by the cluster headteachers themselves. The Divisional Education Methods Advisors, Planner, Auditors, and the Desk officer were responsible for following up most of the cluster activities in respect to their areas of specialization.

5.1.2 Funding

The cluster leader said that between 2000 and July 2002 the cluster activities were funded by DANIDA. The funds were disbursed after the submission of a written application form through the divisional office where it was approved before being sent to MoE for funding by DANIDA. The application form was supposed to indicate the agreed upon activities by the cluster heads (cluster committee) and a budget for the activities. The budget for each activity was not supposed to exceed \$364 (K40,000). The money was for buying stationery, refunding transport expenses on production of a bus ticket (excluding private school teachers), and participants' lunch allowances that were pegged at almost \$1 (K120). Accommodation expenses were not entertained except in very special cases. Upon receipt of the application and approval by DANIDA the approved funds were deposited in the cluster account. The head said that the cluster was supposed to account for the previously received funds with supporting documents failing which funding was not provided. The headteacher added that between the years 2000 and 2003, the cluster had held 17 activities (See appendix 2) and they have been graphically shown below:

Figure 3: Annual number of cluster meetings for Chichiri cluster



Upon observing that cluster funding was not forthcoming from the division, the cluster leader convened a meeting during which it was suggested that all the cluster schools should be contributing towards the cluster's activities but the cluster schools were apparently reluctant to contribute towards the activities.

The cluster leader stated that his major success was the organization of in-service teacher training programs for the past three years. However he said that his major challenges were to identify reliable donors to fund cluster activities, have educational division office's commitment to cluster activities, and convince members to be self-reliant.

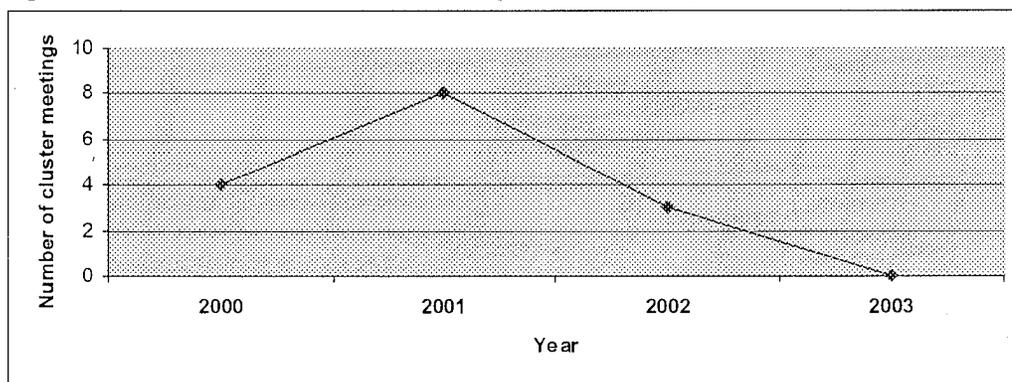
5.2 The Chichiri cluster schools

5.2.1 St. Kizito CDSS case study

St. Kizito CDSS is one of the four active cluster schools that were sampled for a case study. The school is in the Chichiri cluster (see sampled schools profile for more information about the school). The headteacher of the school, is signatory to the cluster account (see appendix 3). As a consequence he said that his role had been processing cluster transactions besides contributing to cluster activities' proposals and implementing cluster agreements.

The headteacher said that since the inception of the system, the school had attended fifteen cluster meetings out of the seventeen that had been organized (see appendix 2). The number of attended meetings per year were as shown in the graph below:

Figure 4: Number of cluster meetings attended by St. Kizito CDSSs



The headteacher said that teachers at the school found thirteen out of the fifteen cluster meetings useful. The two cluster meetings that were not found useful were the teacher librarians' meeting and MASHA (Malawi Schools Headteachers' Association) report to cluster heads meeting. The teachers said that the knowledge and skills that were discussed during the librarians' meeting were not new to them and that the MASHA report was addressing issues that were mostly affecting headteachers who were managing big secondary schools like conventional and grant-aided schools. Of the four cluster components the headteacher and teachers felt that the School Management component needed more meetings followed by teaching, Learning, and lastly student welfare.

According to the data provided, two follow-ups to cluster activities were made at the school by the divisional office methods advisors for inspection and supervision and also by auditors who audited the schools' accounts. These were in form of inspection and supervision and auditing of the school accounts. Oral feedback and advice was given on the same day of the visits and written feedback and advice were sent some days later.

The headteacher and teachers at the school said that since the year 2000, when the clusters were introduced, the school had benefited through attending cluster based in-service teacher training programs, sharing teaching and learning materials with other schools, and sharing subject content knowledge with other cluster teachers. It was indicated that the major challenges that they had experienced with the system were lack of financial resources to fund the activities of the cluster, poor communication between the cluster leader school and the school, and the inaccessibility of the cluster duplicating machine.

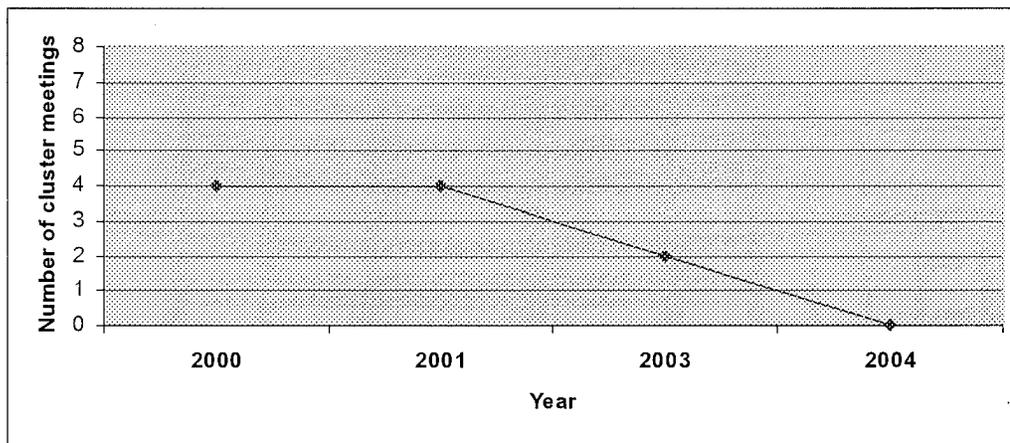
5.2.2 Limbe CDSS Case Study

Limbe CDSS is one of the four active cluster schools that had been sampled for the case study. It is also in the Chichiri cluster. The headteacher of the school, had no responsibility on the cluster committee apart from suggesting possible areas for cluster

activities and ensuring that cluster activities' agreements and outcomes are implemented.

The headteacher said that since the inception of the system, the school had attended ten out of the seventeen cluster meetings that had been organized (see appendix 2). The number of attended meetings per year were as shown in the graph below:

Figure 5: Number of cluster meetings attended by Limbe CDSS



The headteacher and teachers said that the school had found eight out of the ten cluster meetings useful. Like the St. Kizito CDSS teachers, the Limbe CDSS said that the two cluster meetings that were not found useful were the teacher librarians' meeting and MASHA report to cluster heads meeting. The headteacher reported that the previous head had said that he felt that he had nothing to do with most of the MASHA recommendations because they appeared to be addressing CSS and Grant Aided Secondary schools' needs. He added that the head felt that as a primary school teacher, he was more affiliated to the Teachers' Association of Malawi (TUM) than MASHA. Secondly, the teachers who had attended the librarians' meeting felt that the knowledge was not new at all therefore not useful to them. Of the four cluster components the headteacher and teachers felt that the

School Management component needed more meetings followed by teaching, Learning, and lastly student welfare.

Following the analysis of the provided data, two separate follow-ups to cluster activities were made at the school by the divisional office staff. These were: inspection and supervision and auditing of the school accounts. The headteacher said that divisional Methods Advisors were the ones who carried out the inspection and supervision while the auditing of the school accounts was done by Divisional Auditors and Planner. Oral feedback was given on the same day of the visits and written feedback was sent some days later. The visits by the groups were made on different days.

The headteacher and teachers at the school said that until 2003, the school had benefited from the cluster system through attending cluster based in-service teacher training programs, sharing teaching and learning materials with other schools, and sharing subject content knowledge with other cluster teachers. The teachers reported that some of the teachers at the school had never attended any cluster in-service program despite having instructional problems. They also reported that there was poor communication between the cluster leader and the school and that cluster meetings were not frequent.

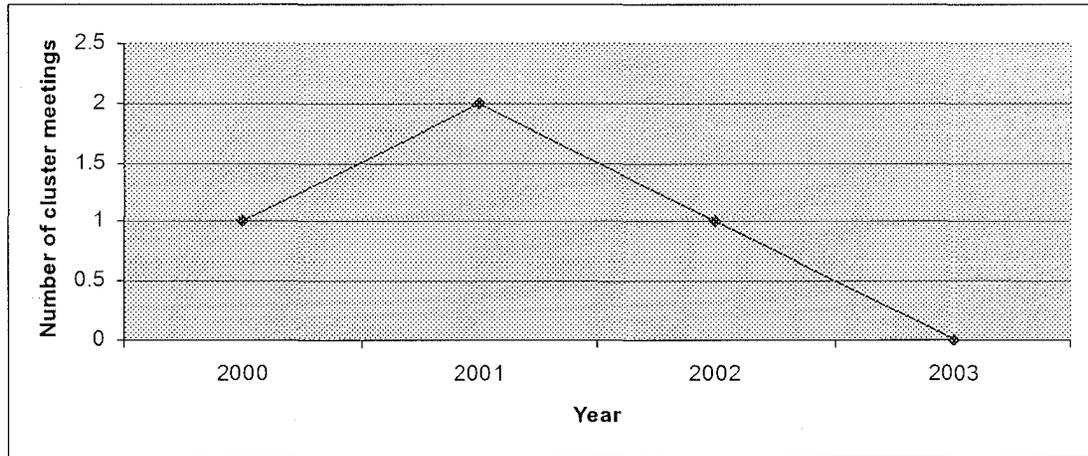
5.2.3 Our Lady of Wisdom Private secondary school case study

Our Lady of Wisdom was the private school that was purposively sampled from the active cluster to represent the views of the rest of the private schools in the case studies. The school is in the Chichiri cluster (see sampled schools profile for more information about the school). The headteacher of the school, is signatory to the cluster account (see appendix 3). In addition, the headteacher's role is processing cluster transactions besides contributing to cluster activities' proposals and implementing cluster agreements.

The headteacher said that since the inception of the system, the school had attended four out of the seventeen cluster meetings that had been organized. In the year 2000 the

school attended one cluster meeting, in 2001 two meetings and in 2002 one meeting (see the graph below):

Figure: 6 Number of cluster meetings attended

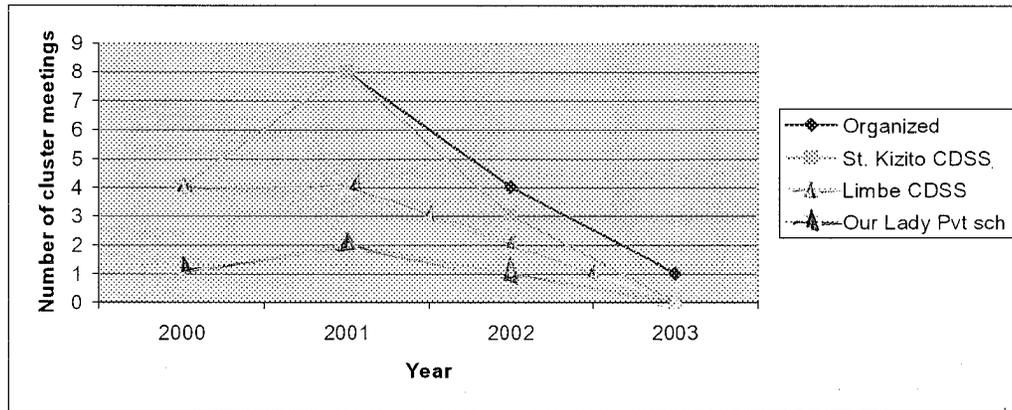


The headteacher said that the four meetings she had attended were useful but none of her teachers had attended any cluster meeting or activity. When the private school teachers were invited, they were requested to foot the expenses from their own pockets while teachers from public schools used public funds to foot their expenses. Usually, private school teachers were not invited to cluster activities.

Of the four cluster components the headteacher and teachers felt that the School Management component needed more meetings followed by teaching, Learning, and lastly student welfare. The school had never been visited by divisional staff for inspection and supervision. The headteacher and teachers at the school said that since the year 2000, when the clusters were introduced, the school had benefited nothing from the cluster system. It was indicated that the major challenges that they had experienced with the system were the failure to be invited to cluster meetings and poor communication between the cluster leader school and the school.

The number of cluster meetings organized by the cluster leader school and those attended by the cluster schools can be summarized as follows:

Figure: 7 Summary of organized and attended cluster meetings



5.3 Cluster Benefits

The headteachers and teachers of cluster schools said that they had benefited from the cluster system in the following ways:

- sharing of teaching and learning resources with other cluster schools;
- sharing subject knowledge of various academic subjects with teachers of cluster schools;
- strengthened relationship among cluster schools and teachers; and
- sharing library management skills with member schools.

5.4 Challenges

5.4.1 Cluster leader

The cluster leader school said that he had the following challenges:

- lack of funding for cluster activities since the pulling out of DANIDA which has led to the postponement of most planned cluster activities;

- poor attendance at cluster meetings since the pulling out of DANIDA;
- convincing some of the cluster schools to start contributing towards cluster activities;
- and
- declining cluster schools' attendance at meetings since July, 2002.

5.4.2 Cluster Schools

The headteachers and teachers of cluster schools said that:

- sometimes there was communication breakdown between the cluster leader school and cluster schools;
- sometimes some CDSSs were not being invited to some cluster activities;
- the participation of private schools was limited; as a result most of them were not benefiting from teacher in-service training. When invited they were requested to fend for themselves; and
- sometimes training needs of CDSS teachers in their respective subjects were not met because the big schools felt that their problems were not pertinent.

Some of the above findings are similar to the findings of the literature review. For example, the need for money to run the cluster system effectively, strengthened relationship among teachers within the cluster, and the sharing of knowledge, and teaching and learning materials among schools. The findings also reveal that private schools do not entirely benefit from the cluster system. For instance, they do not use the cluster duplicating machine. Unlike in the reviewed literature, the system has not improved communication among cluster schools or between the cluster schools and the divisional education office.

Headteachers and teachers of the sampled case study schools rated the cluster activities useful. Most of the respondents felt that school management activities had to be given priority followed by teaching and learning then student welfare activities.

This discussion of Chichiri cluster activities, Danish support, cluster benefits, cluster school challenges leads us to the next chapter that discusses the conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations that have been made based on the entire study.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

Having discussed the findings of the collected data, this chapter discusses the conclusions that have been drawn regarding the management of CDSSs vis à vis the cluster system. The active cluster CDSSs had more tangible implemented development plans than the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs, the active cluster CDSSs had the best management records, the passive cluster CDSSs were not providing guidance and counseling services to pupils, school organization plus financial management were the best in the active cluster CDSSs, staff supervision was intensive in the active cluster CDSSs, and finally, the PTAs for active and semi-active cluster CDSSs were participating actively in school development activities.

6.1. Conclusions

6.1.1 Mission statement and school development plans

Only the active and semi-active cluster CDSSs had mission statements. However there were variations in the formulation of the statements: in one school the mission statement was formed in consultation with the entire teaching staff and it guided the running of the school. In the rest of the schools where it was formulated, it was only the headteachers alone who formulated them. The statements were not communicated to the members of staff and were not guiding the running of the schools.

Secondly, the active cluster CDSSs had more tangible implemented development plans than the semi-active cluster CDSSs. On the other hand, the passive cluster CDSSs had no any tangible implemented development plans.

6.1.2 Records Management

All the sampled schools had the records in question (the fees register, class attendance registers and admission registers). The active and semi-active cluster CDSSs attributed the knowledge and skills for the upkeep of the records to the cluster meetings and general knowledge. Apart from general knowledge, the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs attributed their knowledge and skills in records management to the divisional management meeting that was held in March 2004. However the impact of the management meeting was not great as evidenced by the lack of updateness of some of the records in the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs. This phenomenon was more serious in the passive clusters.

6.1.3 Student welfare Management

Little attention was given to the holding of cluster pupils' activities as evidenced by the single cluster activity that was held in all the three sampled clusters. However all the pupils knew the school rules and regulations, and offenders were being punished. In the active cluster CDSSs, offenders were more usually punished than in the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs. In the active cluster, more pupils who had committed similar offences were generally given similar punishments than the pupils in the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs.

Clubs and societies were available for pupils in all the sampled CDSSs but in the passive cluster CDSSs club participation by patrons was minimal as compared to the patrons of the active and semi active clusters. Not only that but also the passive cluster CDSSs were generally not providing social and academic guidance and counseling services to their pupils.

6.1.4 School Financial Management Practices

The active cluster schools had bank accounts and committees for the TRF, GPF and the School Development Fund unlike the semi-active and passive cluster CDSSs that were not banking their GPF. The passive cluster CDSSs had passive Development Fund

committees. Both the GPF and TRF committees were non-existent in the passive cluster CDSSs. Nevertheless in all the sampled CDSSs most of the expenses had been budgeted for.

6.1.5 Staff Supervision

Staff supervision was intensive in the active cluster CDSSs. For example Heads of Department were observing lessons of their respective members of staff. In addition, period registers and time books had been introduced and were checked by the headteachers on a daily basis. Every fortnight teachers were submitting schemes and records of work for checking. On the contrary, in the semi-active cluster CDSSs staff supervision was more lax while in the passive cluster CDSSs it was most lax as evidenced by the lack of lesson observations by departmental heads and the unavailability of period registers and time books.

6.1.6 Community Participation

The PTAs for both the active and semi-active cluster CDSSs were meeting more frequently than those of the passive cluster CDSSs. In addition, the PTAs for the passive cluster CDSSs had very minimal participation and initiative in the developmental activities of their schools. Not only that but also the PTAs were not party to the other committees other than being members of the Development committee.

6.1.7 School Organization and communication

All the schools had various committees for members of staff but the passive cluster CDSSs had the least number of committees. Nonetheless they had more meetings than committees of the active and semi-active cluster CDSSs. Delegation of duties was also improper in the semi-active and passive cluster schools as evidenced by the lack of heads of department in one of the passive cluster schools and lack of lesson observations by the heads of department in the semi-active and passive schools that had the heads of department.

In the passive cluster CDSSs, the agenda for staff meetings were mostly not known unlike in the other two categories of CDSSs. Additionally, in the passive cluster CDSSs there

was weak student involvement in the running of the schools because they did not have prefects besides having a head boy and head girl.

6.2 Overall Conclusion

Based on the above findings and conclusions, we may say that the cluster system has improved the management of Community Day Secondary Schools in some ways. The data also suggest that other variables like Divisional Management meetings, school inspection and supervision, school characteristics like location and headteachers' attributes, also played a role in the way the schools were managed.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 To the ministry

The pattern of the results are suggesting that the cluster system has assisted in improving the management of the CDSSs therefore the ministry should:

- encourage the cluster system through material and financial support; and
- allocate cluster facilitators to each cluster for easy organization and monitoring of the activities because the cluster leader school headteachers become very overloaded and do not coordinate cluster activities efficiently.

6.3.2 To the division

The findings are also suggesting that the running of the CDSSs that have unstable leadership is not guided by their preset mission statements and that the headteachers do not effectively implement their school development plans. Secondly, the findings suggest that some CDSSs are victims of weak cluster school headteachers. As a consequence, there are variations in the way the CDSSs are managed and communication problems within the cluster schools. Therefore divisional offices should:

- be posting experienced, innovative and hard working headteachers to cluster leader schools;
- desist from frequent transfers of headteachers to enhance the realization of the school mission statements and implementation of school development plans;
- conduct regular inspection and auditing visits to schools as follow ups to cluster activities to reinforce good school management practices; and
- reassert the position of the cluster leaders by channeling all the communication to schools through them.

6.3.3 To Cluster leaders

The results show that with the withdrawal of DANIDA funding the number of cluster meetings has decreased tremendously. Worse still, the division does not have enough funds to be supporting cluster activities consistently. The results also show that some clusters are not responsive to the needs of the cluster teachers and this may be because some of the cluster leader heads do not consult cluster school headteachers when coming up with cluster activities. It has also been revealed that clusters do not organize pupil cluster activities. The findings also suggest that some heads of department do not know their roles. In this regard, the cluster leaders should:

- sensitize their cluster schools that the sustainability and success of the cluster system depends on cost sharing and this can only be achieved by cluster school contributions;
- be very responsive to the training needs of the cluster schools;
- be organizing cluster activities for pupils regularly where they can be sensitized to their roles in school management among others;
- make use of cluster committees in decision-making other than the cluster leader being the sole decision-maker; and

- organize cluster activities for heads of department to sensitize them on their roles.

6.3.4 To headteachers of cluster Schools

The results show that in most of the schools the mission statements are formulated by headteachers alone. Therefore cluster school headteachers:

- should consult teachers, pupils, and parents when formulating mission statements and school development plans to gain maximum support as they strive to implement the statements and development plans.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

The above findings lead us to some areas in which research can be conducted. For example, finding out if the improvement in the management of CDSSs leads to the improvement in teaching and learning, finding out if the social-economic status of the school, and its location has an impact on school management. Not only that but also finding out if divisional management meetings and the duration headteachers spend in schools result in the improvement of the management of CDSSs.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Dates and types of management related cluster meetings

Cluster Activity	Chichiri	Lirangwe	Njamba
Management	Dates	Dates	Dates
Record Management	-Nov. 10, 2000	-Sept. 21, 2000	
Cluster and School Development	-Jan. 5, 2001 -March 16, 2001 -Feb. 13, 2002 -Nov. 23, 2003		
Planning for cluster activities	-Aug. 30, 2000 -Jan. 16, 2001 -Feb. 01, 2002	-Sept. 7, 2000	May, 2001
Curriculum Change management		-Oct. 5, 2001	
Teacher/Pupil discipline			
Teacher/pupil Supervision	-Nov. 27, 2000 -March 1, 2002	-Sept. 16, 2000	
Financial Management		-June 2, 2001	
Teaching			
Teaching of the New Junior Certificate English Curriculum	-Nov. 6-8, 2001 -Feb. 13, 2002	-Sept. 28, 2000 -July 07, 2001	Aug 2002
Teaching of Chichewa	-March 23, 2001		
Teaching Integrated Science	-Dec. 7, 2000 -March 9, 2001		
Learning			
Library upkeep and use	-Oct. 24, 2001	-Oct. 4 to 5, 2001	
Study circles	-July 5, 2001	-June 6 & May 3, 2001	
Student Welfare			
Prefects discussing their problems		-Sept. 21, 2001	

Source: cluster leader schools and divisional data

Appendix 2: Meetings at which the schools were represented

Type of Meeting	St. Kizito CDSS	Limbe CDSS	St.Pius CDSS	Manja CDSS	Matindi CDSS	Chinamvuu CDSS
Record Management	Nov 2000	Nov 2000			Sept. 2000	Sept. 2000
Cluster Development	Jan. 2001 Mar.2001 Feb. 2002	Jan. 2001 Mar. 2001 Feb. 2002				
Planning for cluster activities	Aug. 2000 Jan. 2001 Feb. 2002	Aug. 2000 Jan. 2001 Feb. 2002	May 2001	May 2001	Sept. 2000	Sept. 2000
Curriculum Change management					Oct. 2001	Oct. 2001
Teacher/Pupil discipline						
Teacher/pupil Supervision	Nov. 2000 Mar. 2002	Nov. 2000			Sept. 2000	Sept. 2000
Financial Management					June 2001	June 2001
Teaching of the New Junior Certificate English Curriculum	Nov. 2001				Sept. 2000	Sept. 2000
Teaching of Chichewa	Mar. 2001					
Teaching Integrated Science	Dec. 2000 Mar. 2001	Dec. 2000				
Library upkeep and use	Oct. 2001	Oct. 2001			Oct. 2001	Oct. 2001
Study circles	July 2001					June 2001
Prefects discussing their problems					Sept. 2001	Sept. 2001

Appendix 3: Chichiri cluster constitution

Constitution

1.0 Interpretation:

“Chichiri Cluster” shall mean all schools within the geographical setting of Chichiri as decided by the South Western Education Division.

“Member” shall mean all schools forming Chichiri cluster.

“Cluster” shall refer to a group of schools as a unit as described by DANIDA.

“Cluster Leader” shall refer to Chichiri Secondary School or a school decided upon by the cluster members to be a leader.

“Cluster Account” shall mean all monies donated or accrued meant for the running of the cluster activities and shall be open for audit.

2.0 Objectives of the cluster:

- i. Disseminate information on educational policy.
- ii. Discuss issues of improving quality education.
- iii. Implement suggestions given by DANIDA
- iv. Teach each other or share experiences on quality education implementation
- v. Implement the requirements of the curriculum from the Ministry of Education
- vi. Discuss problems hampering quality education

3.0 Membership:

The following shall be members of the Chichiri Cluster:

- A. Chichiri Secondary School
- B. Limbe Private
- C. Chichiri Private
- D. Radson Private
- E. Soche Progressive Private
- F. Soche Hill Secondary School
- G. Jamia Islamia Private
- H. St. Kizito Private
- I. St. Phillips Private
- J. Limbe CDSS
- K. Our Lady of Wisdom
- L. St. Louis Private

4.0 Funding:

Chichiri cluster shall be run with funds from DANIDA which will be reviewed from time to time. Members may also be asked to contribute some money for the well being of the cluster and cluster activities.

5.0 Accounting:

There shall be a bank account with the National Bank of Malawi, Churchill Road Branch. The signatories to account shall be:

Chichiri Secondary School headteacher, Our Lady of Wisdom Headteacher, and St. Kizito CDSS Headteacher. Any of the above signatories shall render the account operational.

6.0 Meetings:

Meetings shall be held frequently depending on the need. However, meetings shall be held not less than twice in a term.

All members are asked to attend all the meetings.

The agenda shall be circulated two weeks before the date of the meeting and members shall be free to propose items on the agenda.

7.0 Quorum:

Business of the cluster shall proceed if two thirds of the members are present.

8.0 Amendment:

This constitution shall be amended by the cluster members only subject to their suitability and prevailing conditions necessitating it.

Interview on Cluster School Management

1: Headteacher Interview

All parts to be answered as appropriate

The information provided in this interview will be treated as confidential

Part A: Availability of a mission statement

1. Some schools have mission statements while others do not have. This year does this school have a mission statement? a. Yes b. No
2. If Yes, can I have a copy? If No go to Part B.

3. Where did you learn about the formation of a school mission statement?
a. Cluster Meeting (CM) b. Divisional Management Meeting (DMM)
c. Other (Please Specify) _____

4. When was it formulated? (Indicate year) _____
5. In your recollection, which of the following people were involved in the formulation of the mission statement?
a. The headteacher (HM) b. Teachers (T) c. Pupils (P) d. PTA
e. All of the above (AB)
f. Other (Please specify) _____

Part B: Availability of school development plans

6. It is possible that some heateachers have never heard about a school development plan. In your case have you ever heard about a school development plan?
a. Yes b. No

If No, go to part C.

7. Where did you hear about it?
a. Cluster Meeting b. Divisional Management Meeting
c. Other (Please Specify) _____
8. Some schools have school development plans while others do not have. This year does this school have a development plan? a. Yes b. No

9. If Yes, can I have a copy?

If No go to Part C

10. Which activities on the development plan:

i. have been implemented? _____

ii. are under implementation? _____

iii. will be implemented in the next three months? _____

Part C: Financial Management

11. Last term, what were the sources of funds for running of the school? (tick all those that apply)

a. Divisional funding

b. Funds collected from pupils

c. Donations

d. Other (please specify) _____

12. Can you please list down the funds that the school is collecting from pupils this academic year?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____
- vi. _____

13. Where do you keep each of the funds listed in question number 12 above?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____
- iv. _____

14. This term, who decides the expenditure of each of the funds listed in question number 12?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____
- iv. _____

15. Last term, were the funds that are supposed to be spent by the school spent on what they had been intended for?

i.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
v.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. If No indicate why i.

iv. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

17. Do you have committees for each of the funds that you have listed in question number 13?

i.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
v.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv.	_____	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. If the committees were deciding how the funds listed in question number 13 had to be used, last term, how often were the committees meeting before the funds were used?

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

iv. _____

a. Always (A)

b. Almost Always (AA)

c. Rarely (R)

d. Never (N)

19. It is common for schools to spend funds on an unbudgeted for activities. In your case, last term, how many activities did you carry out and were budgeted for?

a. All of them(AT) b. Most of them (MT) c. Some of them (ST)

d. None (N)

20. If your answer to question 20 is c or d indicate why

(c). _____

(d). _____

21. Some schools include pupils on the General Purpose Fund committee and others do not. At this school are pupils represented on the General Purpose Fund Committee this term? a. Yes b. No
22. This academic year how often are pupils represented when deciding how the General Purpose Fund should be spent? a. Always (A) b. Almost Always (AA)
c. Rarely (R) d. Never (N)
23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
-This academic year all the school expenses are receipted.
a. Completely Agree (CA) b. Generally Agree (GA)
c. Generally Disagree (GD) d. Completely Disagree (CD)
- If your answer to question number 23 is c or b please justify
(c). _____
(d). _____
- This academic year receipts are always put on file for future reference.
a. Completely Agree (CA) b. Generally Agree (GA)
c. Generally Disagree (GD) d. Completely Disagree (CD)
24. Where did you learn most of the above financial management procedures from?
a. Cluster Meeting b. Divisional Management Meeting
c. Other (Please Specify) _____

Part D: Staff Supervision

Through the cluster system this school has learnt staff supervisory measures. For example (Tick the response that applies):

25. Introducing a time book: Yes No
- i. If Yes, does this school have a time book this term? Yes No
- If No go to question number 27
- ii. Can I have a copy of the time book. (to see if all the teachers record the time they arrive at the school and knock off _____ -a. Daily,
b. 4 days a week, c. 3 days a week, d. 2 days a week 1 day a week, e. Not recording). _____
26. Having departmental heads Yes No
- i. If Yes, does this school have academic departments this term?
Yes No
27. If Yes, during the previous term, how often did each Head of Department observe lessons?
Science Languages Humanities
a. Once b. more than once c. not at all

28. i. Checking Schemes and Records of work. Yes No

ii. If Yes, how often were the teachers' Schemes and Records of Work checked last term?

- a. Once every week b. Once every two weeks
c. Once every month
d. None e. Other (please specify) _____

29. Introducing period registers. Yes No

30. If No, go to question number 32

31. If Yes, can I see them (to check if the teachers always, sometimes, rarely or never sign in them). _____

32. If one said that this term teachers are punctual for lessons, would you say this statement is:

- a. Completely true (CT) b. Generally true (GT)
c. Generally untrue (GU) d. Completely untrue (CU)

33. Which of the following supervisory skills do you implement as an outcome of the school cluster system? (tick all that apply)

- i. Checking period registers a. Yes b. No
ii. Checking class registers a. Yes b. No
iii. Supervising pupils' punishments a. Yes b. No
iv. Supervising heads of department a. Yes b. No
v. Supervising the librarian a. Yes c. No
vi. Observing lessons a. Yes b. No

vi. Other (please specify) _____

Part E: Records Management

Was the cluster system advocating the availability of the following records in this school?

34. a. Attendance Registers a. Yes b. No If No go to question 34b

i. Does this school have them this academic year? a. Yes b. No

ii. If Yes, may I have them please (to check if all the columns are completed, if they are called every day and if they are for all the classes).

b. Library accession register a. Yes b. No If No go to question 34c

i. Sometimes it is common to find schools without a library accession register due to lack of full time librarians. Does this school have one? a. Yes b. No

ii. If **Yes**, may I have it please (to check if the contents include dates when the books were entered, if the books are for all the subjects that the school offers).

c. Fees Register a. Yes b. No **If No go to question 34d**

i. Most Community Day Secondary Schools do not have accounts clerks and it is headteachers or teachers who collect school fees. Consequently, they do not have enough time to keep a fees register. This term does this school have a fees register? Yes No

ii. If **Yes**, may I have it please? (to check if the fees are classified by form, term and their various types)

d. Admission register a. Yes b. No **If No go to Part G.**

i. Some schools do not have admission registers because they feel that the information that is supposed to be recorded in the admission registers is similar to the one that is recorded in attendance registers. Does this school have admission registers? a. Yes b. No

ii. If **Yes**, may I have them please (to check if last academic year's admissions were classified by form, if against each student there is a date of admission and if students leaving the school -through transfers, drop outs or death-are recorded).

e. Other Records (please specify)

Part F. School organization

35. Was the cluster system providing you with some knowledge regarding the following committees?

- i. social welfare a. Yes b. No
- ii. disciplinary a. Yes b. No
- iii. entertainment a. Yes b. No
- iv. general purpose fund a. Yes b. No
- v. examination a. Yes b. No
- vi. time table a. Yes b. No
- vii. financial a. Yes b. No

viii. School Management Committee a. Yes b. No _____
ix. Other (please specify) _____

36. Do you have each of the committees in your school? a. Yes b. No

37. How often was each of the committees that you have mentioned in question number 35 above meeting last term?

Once/term More than once/term Never

End of this Questionnaire

Interview on Cluster School Management

2: Heads of Department/Teachers' Interview

All questions to be answered as appropriate

The information provided in this interview will be treated as confidential

Part A. Departmental activities

1. Does the school have a mission statement? a. Yes b. No

2. If No go to question number 8

3. Were you encouraged to formulate it by the cluster system? Yes No

4. What does it say? _____

5. Were you involved in its development? a. Yes b. No

6. If Yes, in what way were you involved? _____

7. Who else was involved in the formulation of the mission statement?

8. The cluster system advocates the holding of departmental meetings but due to unforeseen circumstances, in most schools departmental meetings are not held. Are they held in your department? a. Yes b. No

If No go to question number 11

9. How many departmental meetings were held last term?

	Languages	Sciences	Humanities	Other
More than one	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	a. <input type="checkbox"/>
One	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>
None	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>

10. Despite the cluster system encouraging consultation, in some schools it is common for headteachers to buy teaching and learning materials without consulting departmental heads. Considering the departmental purchases made last academic year

to what extent would this be true or untrue to this school?

- a. **Completely True (CT)** b. **Generally True (GT)**
c. **Generally Untrue(GU)** d. **Completely Untrue(CU)**

11. Last academic year, how often were departmental meetings held prior to staff

- meetings? a. **Very often (VO)** b. **Fairly often (FO)** c. **Occasionally(O)**
d. **Rarely (R)** d. **Never (N)**

Part B: Staff participation in decision-making

12. The cluster system encourages participatory decision-making but due to unforeseen circumstances in some schools, staff meetings are not held. At this school, are staff meetings held? a. **Yes** b. **No**

If No go to question 16

13. How many staff meetings were held last term?

- a. **None** b. **One** c. **Two** d. **Three** e. **More than three**

14. During which period of the term were they held?

- First a. **Beginning** b. **Middle** c. **End** d. **Other (please specify)**
Second a. **Beginning** b. **Middle** c. **End** d. **Other (please specify)**
Third a. **Beginning** b. **Middle** c. **End** d. **Other (please specify)**
Fourth a. **Beginning** b. **Middle** c. **End** d. **Other (please specify)**

15. To what extent would you agree with the statement that the headteacher ensures that the agenda of the meeting is known prior to the meeting?

- a. **Completely Agree (CA)** b. **Generally Agree (GA)**
c. **Generally Disagree (GD)** d. **Completely Disagree**

16. How free do you feel to express your views during staff meetings?

- a. **Completely free (CF)** b. **Generally free(GF)**
c. **Generally not free (GF)** d. **completely not free (CNF)**

End of this Questionnaire

Interview on Cluster School Management

3: Pupil Interview

All parts to be answered as appropriate

The information provided in this interview will be treated as confidential

Part A: Existence of cluster system?

1. Have you ever heard of the school cluster system? a. Yes b. No
2. Have the pupils of this school ever participated in any cluster activity?
a. Yes b. No
3. List down the cluster activities that pupils of this school have been involved in.
(Include month and year please)
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____
 - iv. _____

Part B: Pupil discipline

4. a. Do you know your class timetable? a. Yes b. No

Form							
I		II		III		IV	
A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B

- a. Yes b. No
- b. The cluster system encourages that pupils should know school regulations .Do you know the school regulations? a. Yes b. No
5. What does the school do to pupils who break school rules?
 - a. They are always punished (AP)
 - b. They are usually punished (UP)
 - c. They are sometimes punished (SP)
 - d. They are rarely punished (RP)
 - e. They are never punished (NP)

6. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the statement that this term offenders receive similar punishments for same offences?

- a. **Completely Agree (CA)** b. **Generally Agree (GA)**
c. **Generally Disagree (GD)** d. **Completely Disagree (CD)**

7. Pupil supervision is another element of student welfare. Last academic year, how often were pupils supervised during study (prep) periods?

- a. **Always (A)** b. **Usually (U)** c. **Sometimes (S)**
d. **Rarely (R)** e. **Never (N)**

8. Some headteachers provide standing-in teachers when a subject teacher is absent and others do not. How often were standing-in teachers provided last academic year?

- a. **Always (A)** b. **Usually (U)** c. **Sometimes (S)**
d. **Rarely (R)** e. **Never (N)**

Part C: Student welfare

9. Do you have clubs? a. **Yes** b. **No**

10. List down the clubs that you have at this school this term.

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| i. _____ | vi. _____ |
| ii. _____ | vii. _____ |
| iii. _____ | viii. _____ |
| iv. _____ | ix. _____ |
| v. _____ | x. _____ |

11. In which clubs that you have listed above do you have patrons?

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| i. _____ | vi. _____ |
| ii. _____ | vii. _____ |
| iii. _____ | viii. _____ |
| iv. _____ | ix. _____ |
| v. _____ | x. _____ |

12. a. How often do you hold club meetings?

- i. **Every meeting** ii. **Once every 2 meetings** iii. **Once every three meetings**
iv. **Other** (specify) _____

b. How often do the patrons attend club meetings this term?

- i. **Every meeting** ii. **Almost Every meeting** iii. **Once in a while** iv. **Never**

Interview on Cluster School Management

4: PTA Interview

All questions to be answered as appropriate
The information provided in this interview will be treated as confidential

Community participation in school affairs

1. At present, does the school PTA have the following membership?

Chairperson a. Yes b. No

Vice chairperson a. Yes b. No

Secretary a. Yes b. No

Vice Secretary a. Yes b. No

Treasurer, a. Yes b. No

Committee members a. Yes b. No

Other _____

2. On average, how often per term has the PTA been meeting this academic year?

a. **More than twice/term** b. **Twice /term** c. **Once/term**
d. **Never**

3. Has the PTA carried out any development projects at the school? a. Yes b. No

4. How else has the PTA assisted the school?

5. If your answer to question number 3 is **Yes**, how many school development projects has the PTA carried out since the year 2000?

a. **More than two** b. **Two** c. **One** d. **None**

6. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the statements that at this school last academic year:

i. The PTA was helping in disciplining pupils.

ii. The PTA was helping in disciplining teachers

iii. The school was always telling the PTA members the total amount of Text Book

Revolving Funds that had been collected?

iv. The school was seeking PTA views regularly on some issues pertaining to the running of the school.

- a. **Completely Agree (CA)** b. **Generally Agree (GA)**
c. **Generally Disagree (GD)** d. **Completely Disagree (CD)**

7. From the year 2000 how often do members of the school committee know the Text Book Revolving Fund expenses?

- a. **Always (A)** b. **Rarely (R)** c. **Never (N)**

End of this Questionnaire

Questionnaire on Cluster School Management

5: Headteachers of Cluster Schools Questionnaire (Case study schools)

All questions to be answered as appropriate

The information provided in this questionnaire will be treated as confidential

1. Some of the cluster meetings held by Chichiri cluster are as indicated below. May you tick the cluster meetings during which the school was represented (tick the activities you attended using the provided boxes).

30th Aug 2000: Heads discussing cluster project

10th Nov 2000: Custer Schools management meeting

27th Nov 2000: Cluster HODs meeting

7th Dec 2000: Integrated Science Workshop

5th Jan 2001: Cluster heads meeting discussing Cluster contributions

16th Jan 2001: Planning for 2001 activities

9th Mar 2001: Integrated Science Workshop

16th Mar 2001: Cluster Headteachers Management meeting

23rd Mar 2001: Chichewa Workshop

5th July 2001: Study Circle Workshop

6th Aug 2001: J.S English Training

24th Oct 2001: Librarians meeting

1st Feb 2002: Planning for 2002 activities

13th Feb 2002: Orientation to the new JSCE curriculum

13th Feb. 2002: Sharing with heads cluster information

1st Mar 2002: MASHA report to cluster heads

Other _____

(If the school did not attend any of the above cluster meetings, state the reasons in the provided line under each meeting's date)

2. How would you rate the usefulness of each of the cluster meetings, you attended above?(indicate your rating against each meeting/training -see the rating scale below)

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____
- vi. _____
- vii. _____
- viii. _____
- ix. _____
- x. _____

a. **Very Useful** b. **Useful** c. **Not Useful**

3. Were the knowledge and skills learnt in the cluster meetings you have indicated above implemented?

- i. _____ a. **Yes** b. **No**
- ii. _____ a. **Yes** b. **No**
- iii. _____ a. **Yes** b. **No**
- iv. _____ a. **Yes** b. **No**
- v. _____ a. **Yes** b. **No**

- vi. _____ a. Yes b. No
- vii. _____ a. Yes b. No
- viii. _____ a. Yes b. No
- ix. _____ a. Yes b. No
- x. _____ a. Yes b. No

4. Since 2001 how many times was the school visited by the divisional staff as a follow up to cluster activities (inspections + auditing + TRF Checking)?

- a. More than thrice
- b. Thrice
- c. Twice
- d. Once
- e. Not at all

5. Which cluster activities were followed up? (indicate month and year)

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____
- vi. _____

6. Which divisional staff visited the school for each of the follow-ups? (tick all that apply)

- a. Desk officer
- b. Divisional Planner
- c. Desk officer and Divisional Planner
- d. Methods Advisors
- e. Accounts personnel
- f. Other (Please Specify) _____

7. What have been your roles regarding the identification of cluster activities?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

8. May you arrange the four cluster components (teaching, learning, student welfare and

school management) in order of their need for more cluster meetings (**Starting with the one that needs more cluster meetings**).

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____

9. It is common for schools not to receive divisional staff follow-up visits feed back. Was any feedback given after each of the visits indicated in question number 5?

- i. _____ a. Yes b. No
- ii. _____ a. Yes b. No
- iii. _____ a. Yes b. No
- iv. _____ a. Yes b. No
- v. _____ a. Yes b. No

10. Last academic year was the cluster sharing any resources? a. Yes b. No

11. If Yes, may you please list down the resources

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____

12. If the resources included a cluster duplicating machine how would you rate its accessibility? (**Tick the repose below**)

- a. Very accessible (VA)
- b. Mostly accessible (MA)
- c. Rarely accessible (RA)
- d. Not accessible (NA)

13. Who was paying for the maintenance of the machine?

14. As a member of the cluster, how happy were you with the way the cluster leader had been running the cluster between 2000 and 2002?

- a. Very happy (VH)
- b. Happy (H)
- c. Somehow happy (SH)
- d. Unhappy (UH)

15. If your answer is c or d may you indicate the reasons for your answer.

16. Have you benefited from the cluster system?

Yes No

If No go to question number 18

17. What have you benefited from the cluster system since its inception in 2000?

- a. attended in-service teacher training
- b. sharing of teaching and learning resources with other schools
- c. sharing subject content knowledge with other schools
- d. strengthened relationship with cluster teachers
- e. acquired knowledge in school management
- e. Other (please specify) _____

18. To what extent would you agree with the following: The cluster system has improved communication (tick the options below and indicate in the provided box):

- i. Among the cluster schools
- ii. Between the schools and the divisional office
- iii. Between the schools and the district office

a. Completely Agree (CA) b. Generally Agree (GA) c. Generally Disagree (GD),
d. Completely Disagree (CD)

19. What are the major problems of the cluster system?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

20. If you were a cluster leader what would you do to improve the running of the cluster?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____

Thank you for your responses

End of Questionnaire

Questionnaire on Cluster Management

6: Cluster Leader

All questions to be answered as appropriate

The information provided in this questionnaire will be treated as confidential as possible

1. a. Since when have you been heading this school? (indicate year only)
- b. Since when has the school been a cluster leader? (indicate year only)
2. Have you ever heard of a cluster development plan (cluster plan of activities)?
- a. Yes b. No
3. If Yes, Does this cluster have one this academic year? a. Yes b. No

If No go to question number 8

4. If Yes, may you attach a copy to this questionnaire please?
5. If available, who were involved in the formulation of the cluster development plan?
(tick your answer below)
- a. all headteachers including the cluster leader.
- b. some headteachers and the cluster leader
- c. the cluster leader alone
- c. other (please specify)
- _____
- _____
- _____

6. Sometimes clusters do not have cluster committees. Does this cluster have a cluster committee?
- a. Yes b. No

7.a. If Yes, may you state its roles below.

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____
- vi. _____
- vii. _____

8. What did you put in place to ensure smooth running of the cluster?

9. May you list down the cluster meetings that have been held since 2000 in this cluster? (Indicate year and month please) **Already done but you may add activities that have been left out**

- 30th Aug 2000: Heads discussing cluster project
- 10th Nov 2000: School management meeting
- 27th Nov 2000: Cluster HODs meeting
- 7th Dec 2000: Integrated Science Workshop
- 5th Jan 2001: Cluster heads meeting discussing Cluster contributions
- 16th Jan 2001: Planning for 2001 activities
- 9th Mar 2001: Integrated Science Workshop
- 16th Mar 2001: Cluster Headteachers Management meeting
- 23rd Mar 2001: Chichewa Workshop
- 5th July 2001: Study Circle Workshop
- 6th Aug 2001: J.S English Training
- 24th Oct 2001: Librarians meeting
- 1st Feb 2002: Planning for 2002 activities
- 13th Feb 2002: Orientation to the new JSCE curriculum
- 13th Feb. 2002: Sharing with heads cluster information
- 1st Mar 2002: MASHA report to cluster heads

Other _____

10. Who were the resource persons for each of the above cluster activities? (indicate your answer by inserting the option letter in the provided box against each cluster activity that has been indicated in question number 8 above)

- a. Divisional office staff
- b. Teachers within the cluster
- c. District Educational office staff
- d. District Health office staff
- e. Malawi Institute of Education staff
- f. Other (please specify) _____

11. How were the resource persons that you have indicated above identified?

- a. Divisional office staff _____
- b. Teachers within the cluster _____
- c. District Educational office staff _____

- d. District Health office staff _____
- e. Malawi Institute of Education staff _____
- f. Other (please specify) _____

12. Which of the following sources of financial support have you been using to fund cluster activities? (tick all that apply).

- a. Divisional office
- b. Cluster contributions
- c. Donor organizations
- d. Danida
- e. Other (please specify) _____

13. Of the sources that you have indicated above, which source did you use most frequently in :

- a. 2000 _____
- b. 2001 _____
- c. 2002 _____
- d. 2003 _____

14. If you were changing financiers, indicate why.

15. Describe the procedure that was being followed to source the funds from your sources:

- a. Divisional office _____

- b. Danida _____

- c. Donor Organizations _____

- d. Other (please specify) _____

16. Who was responsible for monitoring the cluster activities at divisional level (tick all that apply)?

a. The Educational Methods Advisors (EMAS)

b. The Divisional Planner (DP)

c. Other (please specify). _____

17. How were you giving feed back to the financiers?

18. How were you sharing ideas with other clusters?

19. What are your major challenges as a cluster leader?

20. What do you think has to be done to improve the cluster system?

**Thank you for your responses
End of Questionnaire**

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