



Civil Society Education Coalition CSEC

Activity Report: Low Cost Classroom Monitoring in Mangochi, Dedza, and Salima – 2024

1. Overview

The Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) conducted a monitoring of infrastructure projects under the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) programme called Malawi Education Reform Programme (MERP) in three sampled districts of Mangochi, Dedza, and Salima. The monitoring exercise highlighted notable achievements and challenges. This CSO monitoring report emphasizes the significance of stakeholder engagement, timely disbursements, construction quality, and sustainability to ensure successful project outcomes.

2. Key Findings

2.1 Timeliness of Disbursements

- **District Level**

All initial disbursements were made as planned, with no major delays. However Salima district reported a significant delay as the District Council expected the disbursement to be made on 10th March, 2024 but funds were disbursed almost two months later on 30th May, 2024.

The monitoring exercise also noted that all disbursed amounts were within the requested amounts.

- **School Level**

Some schools recorded delays in fund disbursements at specific stages (e.g., roofing and finishing works) which caused significant timeline extensions going beyond the expected 90 days.

- **Ministry Level:**

The regular monitoring visits conducted by Ministry of Education officials ensured alignment of disbursements with planned allocations thereby minimizing discrepancies.

2.2 Construction Progress

- **Completion Rates:**

Most projects are 90% complete, however, Dedza reported a slightly lower completion rate at 70%.

The monitored schools had different expected completion dates, falling between 30th November, 2024 to 31st December 2024.

- **Challenges**

The monitoring exercise registered the following key challenges;

- i. Fuel scarcity led to delayed transportation of construction materials such as cement in Mangochi and Salima
- ii. Delays by subcontractors to produce and supply the required cement blocks.

2.3 Quality of Work

- **Materials**

Generally high-quality materials were used, however some compromises were noted in the quality of timber being used.

- **Workmanship**

High-quality workmanship was reported overall, with occasional lapses when supervisors were absent.

2.4 Stakeholder Involvement

- **District Level**

District Executive Committees (DECs) and District CSO forum played active roles in planning and monitoring of the programme activities.

- **School Level:**

School Management Committees (SMCs), PTAs, and additional structures (e.g., Mother Groups, Learners Council) actively participated in mobilization and monitoring.

- **Community Level:**

Communities contributed resources (e.g., sand, water, quarry stones) and participated in maintenance planning. Chiefs provided critical guidance for resource mobilization and long-term infrastructure upkeep.

2.5 Community Feedback and Issues

- **Satisfaction**

Communities and learners expressed high satisfaction with infrastructure quality and its alignment with their needs. However they expressed concerns regarding contractors' delays to finish the school blocks.

- **Issues Raised**

- i. Rising material costs due to Malawi Kwacha devaluation.
- ii. Funds disbursement delays which affect the project timelines.
- iii. Limited community participation in mobilizing materials such as sand, quarry stones and water.

3. Actions Taken

- i. **Procurement and Financial Adjustments**

- Engaged the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA) for VAT waivers on construction materials such as cement and iron sheets.
- Adjusted budgets to account for inflation and currency devaluation.

- ii. **Community Mobilization**
 - Chiefs re-engaged communities to enhance their participation in the project.
 - Communities mobilized funds to hire a vehicle to ferry construction materials such as sand, quarry stones and water.
- iii. **Supervision and Oversight**
 - Increased supervisor presence helped to maintain consistent quality.
 - Subcontractors were held accountable for construction material supply schedules.
- iv. **Sustainability Measures:**
 - Committees will plant trees around the school perimeter to protect the structures from cyclones/storms.
 - Schools plan to use School Improvement Grants (SIG) for infrastructure improvements/maintenance.

4. Recommendations

- i. Address delays in fund disbursements to prevent timeline extensions.
- ii. Ensure consistent supervision to maintain construction standards.
- iii. Encourage active local involvement in material provision and project support.
- iv. Develop contingency plans to counteract cost increases due to currency fluctuations.
- v. Conduct regular updates and meetings between stakeholders to align expectations and address challenges promptly.

5. Conclusion

The infrastructure projects in Mangochi, Dedza, and Salima under the Malawi Education Reform Programme are advancing steadily, with significant community and stakeholder involvement ensuring transparency and quality. Addressing the identified challenges, including financial inefficiencies and delays, will accelerate project completion and ensure sustainable benefits for the education sector.