



Building Futures in Malawi
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PROJECT REPORT FOR EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

FOR THE PERIOD
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Introduction

With the Ministry of Education directing schools to reopen on 7th September, 2020 starting with examination classes, Building Futures in Malawi (BFM) reopened office to the public on 1st September, 2020. Schools temporarily closed on 23rd March, 2020 as among measures that government put in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. In the Education department, the resumption of office work started with a survey, and then establishment of two projects in schools. We work with Chipasula Community Day Secondary School (CDSS), Mseche CDSS, Chiwamba CDSS, Minga CDSS, SOS Secondary School, KAPs Model Private Secondary School, Falls Baptist Private Secondary School, Mkanthama Nursery and Primary Schools, and new inclusion Malikha CDSS.

Survey

COVID-19 pandemic has revealed inadequacy in our education system, and affected greatly the teaching and learning process. During school closure, there was a call from educators that learning should continue by allowing interaction between teachers and students via remote learning mode. This remote learning occurs when the learner and instructor, or source of information, are separated by time and distance and therefore cannot meet in a traditional classroom setting (trainingindustry.com/glossary/remote-learning/).

In Malawi, however, remote learning failed to be implemented during school closure, affecting scores of learners who are solely dependent on our traditional learning approach. This is due to lack of inclusive-pedagogical remote learning strategies. As such, BFM conducted a survey from 1st – 11th September, 2020 to explore inclusive remote learning strategies that would compensate the learning loss.

The survey found that closure of schools grossly impacted on students' future. It was observed that a number of girls got pregnant whilst others got married during the period. For boys, most got indulged into alcohol and substance abuse. Only one case got registered at Chiwamba Community Day Secondary School about a young boy marrying an old lady.

In the view of BFM and in acknowledging the study findings therefore, we proposed reforms to reinforce the resilience of our education system so that there is no learning compromise when faced by a pandemic. We advised that the reforms should focus on the enhancement of the recommendations given such as extending learning at

home, ensuring robust Parent-Teacher Association, promoting learner self-regulating and selfishly safeguarding the right to education. These recommendations are paramount to achieving and maintaining the national educational standards as well as compensating learning loss. Survey report and Malawi Education Index documents are available on our website: www.buildingfuturesinmalawi.org.

First Aid Training

Realizing the importance of First Aid in the workplace and schools we work with, our colleague in the department of sports organized First Aid training which took place at Red Cross country office in Lilongwe from 22nd – 23rd September, 2020.

School reopening

As indicated in the introduction schools resumed on 7th September 2020 with examination classes. Later, on 12th October 2020, other classes joined under strict COVID-19 measures. Among the measures, large classes are supposed to follow a staggered system, handwashing facilities have to be installed for every class, mandatory masking, one meter apart sitting arrangement and regular disinfection of classes. During our visits to school, especially now when schools are back in full swing, we observed that compliance to such measures is hard in most schools. Though handwashing buckets are available for every class, not all teachers and students are face masking. Staggering system in most secondary schools is hard to implement due to open schools operated by teachers after normal classes. And due to shortage of the teaching staff and classrooms, diving students into small learning groups has failed, resulting into the breach of social distancing rule.

As a key stakeholder, BFM through helped schools with facemasks, handwashing buckets and chlorine. We also asked schools to take COVID-19 prevention measures seriously as they are paramount to avoiding the outbreak of COVID-19 and diarrheal diseases in schools. To help schools adhere to all measures, we also suggest that all of us as stakeholders have to come together to address challenges that have the potential to hinder schools from complying with the guidelines issued to them by government. We also suggest a rigorous monitoring by government so that schools are safe and effective in their purpose.

Teachers' Membership Identification (ID) Cards with JFK American Centre

BFM education department is strategizing for the introduction of “*Boost for Teachers*” programme. This is to promote individual professional development. And in this era, it is also important so that teachers become versed in technology to maximize the use of technology in teaching and learning. Thus, this programme is aimed at increasing usability of technology for professional development, and effectiveness of the selected content and instructional media in the process of teaching and learning.

There is a lot of literature and tutorials available on internet that teachers can use to develop themselves. For this reason, BFM wishes to use JFK American Centre for exposing teachers to computers and print educational literature. So far, 19 teachers from some schools such as Kaps Model and Chiwamba secondary schools have been given their ID cards. Others are still in the process of production. Membership IDs are important for the teachers to be allowed entrance into the facility. Training for teachers will be arranged in due course by JFK American Centre and BFM. Currently the facility is closed to the public due to the pandemic.

Programmes established

1. Hygiene Education

As a way of fostering adherence to safe return of school measures that government has put in place, BFM is promoting *Hygiene Education* in all schools it works with. Schools have been given resources such as a bucket each and chlorine to establish *Environmental Health Clubs*. Through this programme, students are able to discuss, and advocate for good hygiene and keeping social distance, within their schools and communities (when classes are in session). On the same, BFM has provided each school with extra 4 buckets and chlorine for handwashing purpose. For sustainability, schools are encouraged to include hygiene items in their school development fund budgets.

2. *Swimming Together*

This programme is aimed at establishing teachers' discussion forum, encouraging collaborative teaching, increasing utility of instructional materials, and improving knowledge and content pedagogy. It also helps to increase the usability of technology for professional development, and effectiveness of the selected content and instructional media in the process of teaching and learning.

Due to COVID-19, BFM is minimizing physical meetings. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to meet online through WhatsApp and Zoom platforms. BFM is providing K2,500 monthly to each of the 6 teachers at every school for internet bundle. Teachers are encouraged to buy compatible gadgets. However, it is a challenge as most teachers are unable to buy compatible gadgets, and have since asked BFM to look into that including adding on the internet bundle due to high cost of internet in the country. So far, school managements have provided us with teachers to participate in the programme, two each from language, humanity and science departments, up until March 2021.

3. *BFM Newsletter*

From the survey, BFM found that regular electronic and print newsletters are critical for encouraging good practice in schools. As such, education department used the period of September to October for drafting the content which has since been presented to the communications department for publication. Our first electronic and print publications are expected in the first week of November, 2020. This programme will encourage teachers and students to share responsibilities in the learning environment while enhancing the prevention of COVID-19 spread in schools. It will also help stakeholders to understand challenges faced and efforts pursued by different schools.

Conclusion

BFM education department resumed programmes on 1st September, 2020. Though it has not been a busy period as schools are just returning, we have managed to establish two programmes; Hygiene Education and Swimming Together. During this period, we have also had an important survey, helped some teachers to secure membership with JFK American Centre and participated in the First Aid training. So much as we celebrate the return of schools, we need to remember that schools continue to face challenges which need our collaborated efforts as stakeholders. BFM will continue supporting schools through the above programmes, and many other programmes to be introduced later including newsletter publication which will start in November, 2020. In October, 2020, the department was putting the content together.