

REACHING AND TEACHING MARGINALISED CHILDREN IN MALAWI AND LESOTHO: THE IMPORTANCE OF STAKEHOLDERS SHARING COMMON VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Professor Pat Pridmore

Institute of Education, University of London

p.pridmore@ioe.ac.uk

Abstract

This chapter reports on a study in Malawi and Lesotho that aimed to improve student retention and progression rates by intervening to complement conventional schooling with self-study learner-guides and additional support for learning and for life and to change exclusionary school policies and practices. The findings showed that there can be problems when stakeholders do not share common values, attitudes and purposes towards education. National education policy on inclusive education was being undermined by the actions of some head-teachers and teachers who excluded children who could not afford uniform or shoes, who arrived late or who attended irregularly. When a child dropped out they considered the child to be the problem rather than the school. Although attitudes and values of family members in Malawi were generally positive towards primary schooling, grade repetition significantly increased the likelihood of a child dropping out. In Lesotho many secondary school-aged children and their families did not value schooling due to perceived low quality. Implementing a more open, flexible and holistic model of schooling and helping to align the values, attitudes and purposes of all stakeholders towards inclusive education was found to help reduce school drop-out and produce additional benefits for the students.

Keywords

School drop-out ; Open distance and flexible learning; vulnerability

1. Introduction

Access to education has been hard hit by AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) but the need for governments to protect the rights of vulnerable children to schooling is slowly being recognized:

As deaths from HIV and AIDS cause the number of orphaned children to increase drastically, action must be taken to protect their right to schooling and education. It will, therefore be necessary to create alternative pathways to learning that meet needs and requirements of these children. (2005, Government of Malawi, Ministry of Education)

The need to accelerate the educational response was confirmed by conclusion from the 2011 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) that many countries in SSA are not on track to reach the Millennium Development Goal for Education (MDG2) by 2015. This Report called on governments to address problems of retention and progression by improving educational quality and providing 'additional support and learning opportunities for the poorest and most vulnerable learners'

(UNESCO, 2011, p.97). Many of these learners attend school irregularly because they live in high HIV prevalence areas and have to help their families. These children are commonly viewed as a problem by their teachers and head-teachers. (Save the Children Fund, 2008; UNESCO, 2008).

This chapter reports on a study in Malawi and Lesotho known as the SOFIE¹ Project carried out between 2007 and 2010. This study aimed to improve student retention and progression rates by intervening to complement conventional schooling with self-study learner-guides and additional support for learning and for life and to change exclusionary school policies and practices. As Jere (2011) points out, by focusing on flexibility, responsiveness to diversity and reducing barriers to learning this approach has much in common with the concerns of complementary education for social justice and with the principles of best practice to achieve greater inclusiveness in education systems and schools to promote Education for All.

2. Methodology

2.1 Overall approach and methods of data collection

A mixed methods approach was chosen in this study because there was a need to identify the contextual factors that can disrupt schooling, to measure the impact of the intervention on access and attainment and to understand the process by which any change had taken place.

The study was conducted in 4 stages:

1. Literature reviews were carried out to identify factors disrupting schooling of vulnerable children in high HIV-prevalence areas of SSA and interventions to increase their access to education.
2. Qualitative case-studies were developed to contextualise these issues in Malawi and Lesotho.
3. The knowledge gained was used to design a school-based intervention which was further amended after consultation with head-teachers and teachers in the case study schools, the school management committees (SMC), Ministries of Education (MOE), donor agencies and academics.
4. In Malawi, the intervention was implemented in primary school grade 5 classes over one school year (January to November 2009) and in Lesotho, the intervention in secondary school grade 9 classes (class B) from March to November 2009. The interventions were evaluated in a randomised controlled trial.

Sampling was carried out in 4 stages:

1. In each project country, two study sites were selected in rural areas that had high HIV prevalence rates, high student dropout rates, contrasting socio-cultural contexts and low levels of donor intervention.
2. Twenty schools in each of the two study sites in each country were then selected by ranking the schools in quintiles according to their school

¹ Strengthening Open and Flexible Learning to Increase Access to Education (SOFIE)

performance in the School Leaving Certificate results and two matched pairs from each quintile were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group.

3. For the case studies two schools were then selected from each study site where there was a community based organisation (CBO) willing to collaborate. In each case study school vulnerable children at risk of grade repetition or school drop-out or who had recently dropped-out were identified through discussions with teachers, community leaders and local CBO workers. Children from households affected by HIV and AIDS were included in the sample as a sub-group of a wider sample of orphans and other vulnerable children. After the intervention a group of 'vulnerable' children were identified in the control schools similar to those recruited onto the intervention programme. (It would have been unethical to identify these children before the intervention and then not to intervene.)

2.2 Data collection and analysis

For the case studies

Qualitative data were collected in 2008 from the case-study schools to identify factors disrupting schooling. Data were collected during workshops for in-school students and out-of-school youth and follow-on interviews, SSIs with teachers, guardians, and key informants and focus group discussions (FGDs) with members of the school management committee (SMC) and the parent teacher association (PTA).

To evaluate the intervention

Student tracking records were developed to collect data on school attendance and school outcomes (e.g. promotion, drop-out). Additional quantitative data were used to assess the fidelity of the intervention. 'Before and after' Mathematics and English test scores were also collected in intervention and control schools.

Qualitative data were collected on participants' perspectives of the intervention during post-implementation evaluation workshops and post-intervention visits to the case-study' schools through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with district, school-level and community representatives and students and teacher' diary entries.

3. Findings from the literature reviews and case studies

The background literature reviews (Nyabanyaba, 2008; Streuli and Moleni, 2008; Pridmore, 2008) revealed the highly complex and context specific nature of school drop-out in high HIV prevalence areas of SSA. There was evidence that loss of schooling cannot be accounted for solely by poverty (see for example (Ainsworth & Filmer, 2006) and that the following factors interact to constrain school access and retention and can lead to permanent exclusion:

- i. frequent changes in household organisation and child migration leading to loss of social cohesion and increased risk of child abuse and unplanned pregnancy;
- ii. increased poverty and demand for child labour;
- iii. poor quality of educational provision leading to low value placed on schooling schooling;
- iv. intra-household discrimination against orphans;
- v. increased trauma and stress following bereavement causing poor attention in school;
- vi. school policies and practices that do not track student's progress through the school, exclude the poorest and most vulnerable learners and fail to prevent stigma and discrimination.

The findings from the case studies by Moleni (2009) and Nyabanyaba (2009) were remarkably similar to those from the literature reviews but provided a more contextualised and nuanced understanding of the way in which the attitudes and values of the different stakeholders influenced access to education and to learning. They confirmed that although the loss of schooling was not solely due to poverty some children were working to raise money for school costs and child heads of household commonly dropped out of school to find *ganyu* (low-paid, casual work) to support the family. They also showed that although the factors can be clustered as presented below they are all inter-related and have a dynamic and cumulative impact on schooling which is linked to the child's personal circumstances and resilience at that time. In some cases, family crises (and their psychosocial effects) led to periods of absenteeism or temporary withdrawal from school followed by a return to more regular attendance. In other cases multiple shocks and limited recourse to appropriate support and care led to permanent dropout. Even children who attended school regularly were sometimes 'silently excluded' being unable to fully participate due to psychosocial trauma or discrimination.

3.1 Values and attitudes of students, parents and carers that constrain access to schooling and retention

The high value placed on wearing clean clothes

Lack of clean clothes in good condition was a problem especially for girls:

It is not easy for a girl to go to school with a torn uniform or shoes. Boys can go but for girls it's too embarrassing. You cannot concentrate in class and feel others are looking at you and laughing at you. (Lesotho female student)

When we do not have enough clothes or the clothes are dirty and we have no soap to wash clothes, we are absent from school,when we put on dirty clothes our school friends say bad words...(Malawi, female student)

Girls face more problems. Say if a boy and a girl come from a poor family, for the boy, even if he were to wear worn out shorts, it will be

Type here, up to one line long, a short version of your title (use edit header)

OK with him, in contrast to a girl wearing a worn out skirt. (Lesotho Male teacher)

What happens to a girl when at 15 and is not dressed properly, maybe her breasts are exposed; boys begin to touch her. If the clothing is torn they will touch her. (Lesotho female teacher)

The need for child labour

Attitudes and values within the household lead to children, especially girls, missing school to care for sick family members and younger siblings.

Sometimes I am absent, but not much ...only when my mother is sick. I would be looking after her, escorting her to the hospital as there is nobody else to help her. (Malawi, in-school girl)

The sick person will require more people to look after him/her. The children will be given all sorts of chores like 'go and wash this', thus they can't go to school. (Malawi, adult male community member)

Children also missed out on schooling due to intra-household discrimination against orphans and neglect which was found to be common.

Guardians do force children to do the chores or else they beat the children. They tell them to work and not go to school..., others tell you "you should just go and get married....." (Malawi, in-school girl)

How old were you when you got married?' I was 15 years old.

Were you happy to be married at that age? Yes, because I wanted help from the man. (Malawi, female, out-of-school, head-of-household)

However, not all young girls are happy to be married. In Lesotho some families are retaining the practice known as *chobeliso* which forces sometimes very young girls into marriage for the *bohali* (transfer of cash and cattle from the groom's family to the bride's family).

Loss of social cohesion leading to lack of encouragement to stay in school and to abuse

Within these HIV-stressed communities many vulnerable children, especially those in sibling-headed households, were left unsupported and at-risk of abuse.

When mother died ...there was nobody to force us to go to school since we were all children, this is when I dropped out. (Malawi, boy, head of household)

This time the cost of living is high, each one looks after their own family - this extended family is not there. ...There is no more communal living in the village. In the past, orphans could easily be cared for in that way. But this time, it is everywhere - people thinking of money only. (Malawi, District education officer)

Some people who have money to help, instead of helping they take advantage of this to abuse these adolescents. They end up

impregnating them and then leave such girls. (Malawi, Adult male community member)

Negative values and attitudes towards schooling

In Malawi most students, parents and carers expressed positive values and attitudes towards schooling although in both countries schooling was in competition with early marriage for girls. In the mountain areas of Lesotho schooling was also in competition with initiation school for boys and it was accorded low value by students, parents and carers due to its perceived poor quality.

Many families in this community do not take education as their first priority..... their parents do not prefer this school because of its poor performance. (Lesotho, female teacher)

Many girls drop out of school to get married ... they ... what do you call this ho shobela? Oh, to elope! Yes, they elope sometimes a month before they write their final exams. (Lesotho, female teacher)

Corruption: In Lesotho, a key informant reported that it can be difficult for orphans to get the secondary school bursaries they are entitled to:

Support groups and the local councils pocket assistance meant for the orphans ... or they ask for a bribe to write a letter (saying) that he/she is an orphan needing assistance.

3.2 Values and attitudes of head-teachers and teachers that constrain access to schooling and retention in schools

The right to education for all children is clearly enshrined in national education policies and practices in both study countries. Nevertheless, the case study findings showed that non alignment of stakeholder values attitudes and purposes schools had led to schools being slow to respond.

Exclusionary school policies and practices: In both Malawi and Lesotho head-teachers and teachers were commonly found to be implementing exclusionary school policies and practices that directly contributed to high drop-out rates especially for vulnerable learners. Students were commonly excluded for not wearing school uniform, wearing dirty school uniform, not wearing shoes and not attending regularly.

My grandparent was sick so I was not going to school. (My teacher said) "You have missed lessons for a whole week so it is better for you to come back next term". (Out-of school orphan, Malawi)

Whenever they (the siblings) went to school they were being sent back because of (no) uniform and I had no money to buy it They just started herding animals since each time they went to school they would be sent back. (Out-of-school boy, head of household, Malawi)

Failure to combat stigma and support abused children: Despite national policies on inclusive education at the school level policies and practices were leaving students unsupported and contributing to drop-out:

Other students do not mix with orphans whose parents are known to have died of AIDS. They think they themselves have contracted the disease because they often take care of the parents when they are sick. (Lesotho, female school teacher)

There was a case of a girl who dropped out of school because she had lost her parents and was being abused by her aunt. We can't deal with such cases ..., we're too busy and underpaid. (Lesotho, teacher)

Lack of any systematic record keeping to track vulnerable learners or support for their special needs: At the start of the study none of the study schools had any system in place to identify these learners on entry or to monitor their attendance and progress through the school. Nor was there any systematic attempt to provide additional psychosocial support and learning opportunities for vulnerable learners at risk of dropping out due to poor attendance or achievement during periods of emotional distress.

4 The SOFIE intervention package

The findings from the desk studies and the case studies showed the need for a more open and flexible, approach to schooling to promote inclusiveness and mobilise school resources to student learning. There was also a need to mobilise community support for everyday life. These findings were used by the research team to develop a low cost intervention package to help reduce school drop-out and grade repetition that took account of the lack of electricity and limited capacity of school teachers to intervene.

Only students who were identified by the class teacher and school management committee as being at risk of grade repetition or school drop-out were recruited onto the intervention programme. The class teacher wrote their names on the student 'at-risk' register and gave each student

- a 'School-in-a-Bag' (containing self-study learner-guides² written with their literacy levels in mind and designed to 'wrap-around' the class textbooks for Maths and English and some notebooks and pens);
- a school-buddy to provide support and encouragement for learning; and
- an invitation for the students and a class buddy (mentor student) to attend the weekly youth club meetings run by the youth leaders (who were sometimes replaced by class teachers in Lesotho).

The idea was for the class teacher, buddies, youth volunteers and school management committee members (SMC) to form a circle of support around each vulnerable learner with overall leadership and supervision being provided by the school head. (See Figure 1)

² Such learner guides have been used successfully in non-formal approaches to primary schooling, such as the Escuela Nueva programme in Columbia (McEwan & Benveniste, 2001).

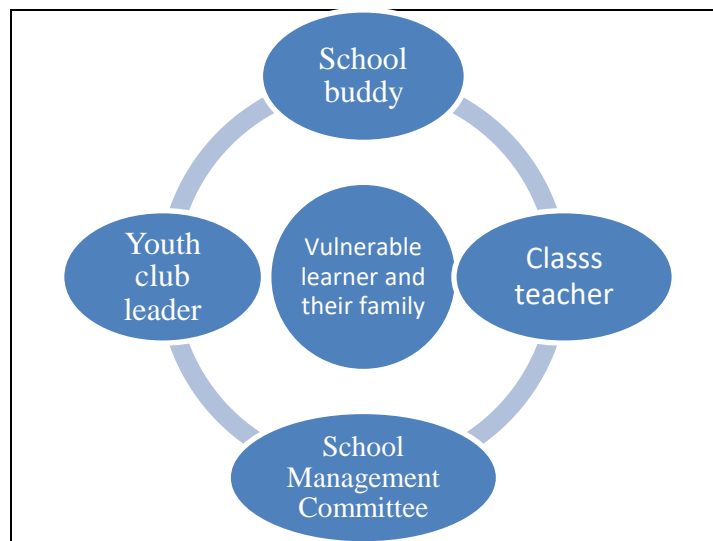


Figure 1: The SOFIE intervention model

The youth leader was trained to make the weekly youth club meetings fun, to listen to the students' problems and counsel them on their concerns, and to provide encouragement and support for learning. This leader was also expected to mark homework tasks. To set up and run these clubs each youth leader was given a 'School-in-a-Box' (or a rucksack) containing self-study learner-guides in Maths and English and related text books, supplementary readers, an HIV game, a football and a wind-up radio; and also a bicycle as an incentive and to transport themselves and the materials to the club venue.

The SMC worked with the Class teacher to identify vulnerable learners for inclusion on the 'at-risk' register. They were also expected to follow up students who were absent from school or the youth club, talk with their families, listen to their problems and concerns and provide encouragement for learning and for life; to mobilise community support for the welfare of the vulnerable learners and identify small practical actions to enable them to return to school (such as helping them to get clothes and shoes); and to advocate for changes to exclusionary school policies or practices.

The intervention package included support and training workshops to capacity build the head-teachers, class-teachers, members of the school management committee and volunteer youth club leaders. Training was given to help them make their schools more inclusive. Several schools subsequently made changes to their school's policies and practices to make them more inclusive but schools where discriminatory policies remained in place continued to view this as unproblematic. Training was also given on maintaining the 'at-risk' register, on monitoring and follow-up of student attendance and achievement, on guidance and counselling, on community support for pupil welfare and on running the SOFIE club.

5. Evaluation of the intervention package

The data analytic plan and statistical analyses and tables produced to evaluate the impact of the intervention in each country have been published elsewhere

(Jere, 2011; Nyabanyaba, 2011 ; Pridmore and Jere, 2011, Jukes et al., under review) A summary of the main findings is given below.

In Malawi overall differences were estimated between the class students in the intervention and control groups. Random school effects were included to account for clustering of outcomes at the school level. Multilevel logistic regression was conducted to determine the impact of the intervention on school drop-out, grade-repetition and progression to Standard 7. The results showed that implementing the intervention over one school year (January to November 2009) reduced overall drop-out by 42% and that this was greater among 'at-risk' students than those not 'at-risk'. There was no significant interaction between 'at-risk' status and the intervention suggesting that it was equally effective for the both the 'at risk' students and the rest of the children in Standard 6. There was some improvement in Mathematics but not English scores. A history of grade repetition was found to be a better predictor of future drop-out than orphanhood In Lesotho, the evaluation also suggested that the intervention had significantly improved drop-out rates and also improved Mathematics scores.

Process analysis of the qualitative data was conducted to explain the quantitative findings. In Malawi drop-out was found to be lowest among the 13 schools in which the teachers had been trained and then kept at risk registers. Analysis of the data collected from the post-intervention workshops suggested that the intervention may have led to additional benefits for the at-risk students including improved motivation and capacity for students' independent learning, an improved reading culture and stronger social networks leading to higher self-esteem.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The findings reported here confirm that in high HIV prevalence areas of Malawi and Lesotho the schooling of vulnerable students is being disrupted by factors operating at the school and family level despite having inclusive national education policies in place. Many of these factors reflect differences in the values, attitudes and purposes of education held by stakeholders at different levels.

The findings show that there can be problems when stakeholders do not share common values, attitudes and purposes. In carrying on 'business as usual' schools in high HIV prevalence areas are eroding the right of every child to have an education, especially those who cannot attend school regularly.

By sending children home who come late or not wearing clean school uniform and shoes they perceive the child as the problem rather than the school and lack accountability for poor educational outcomes.

The findings also show that educational outcomes can be improved when stakeholders share common values, attitudes and purposes. The low-cost SOFIE intervention was able to significantly reduce school drop-out by systematically tracking their attendance and progress, providing additional support for learning and for life and changing exclusionary school policies and practices. These findings demonstrate the need for school-based educational interventions to be embedded within a wider enabling environment that incorporates supportive

national policies, capacity-building for schools and communities and active promotion of a more open, inclusive and democratic ethos within schools.

They also have important implications for policy development, practice and professional capacity building to integrate conventional and distance forms of schooling to integrate and include marginalised children. The time is now right to address this policy gap in Malawi where the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is actively seeking ways to support children to 'catch-up and keep up' in readiness to introduce automatic grade promotion in primary schools, and in Lesotho where the Ministry of Education has recently strengthened policy support for more open and flexible models of curriculum delivery. To institutionalise the new more open and flexible model of schooling the capacity of teacher educators and their students needs to be built to implement inclusive school level policies and develop and use self-study student guides in all core curriculum subjects.

It is to be hoped that some of the issues and concerns raised in this chapter might inform strategies to help governments in high HIV prevalence countries to reach out more effectively to marginalised children and get back on track to reach their Millennium Development Goal for Education.

References

- Ainsworth, M. And Filmer, D. (2006) Inequalities in children's schooling: AIDS, orphanhood, poverty, and gender. *World Development*, 34, 1099-1128.
- Bennell, P. (2005) The Impact of the AIDS Epidemic on the Schooling of Orphans and Other Directly Affected Children in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of International Development Studies*, 41, 467-488.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage, Second edition.
- Government of Malawi (2005) *Combating HIV and AIDS in the Education Sector in Malawi: Strategic Plan 2005-2008*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Education, Government of Malawi.
- Guarcello, L., Lyon, S., Rosati, F.C., 2006. Child Labour and Education for All: An Issue Paper. Rome : *ILO/UNICEF/World Bank, Understanding Children's Work (Working Paper Series)*
- Harber, C., Davies, L., 1998. *School Management and Effectiveness in Developing Countries: the Post-Bureaucratic school*. London: Continuum.
- Jere, C. M. (2011) Improving educational access of vulnerable children in high HIV prevalence communities of Malawi: the potential of open and flexible learning strategies. *International Journal of Educational Development*. In press.
- Jere, C.M. (2011) *Developing, implementing and evaluating the SOFIE model: Supporting increased educational access for vulnerable pupils in rural Malawi*. London : *Institute of Education, University of London*. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/MoleniReviewPaper.pdf>
- Jukes, M., Jere, C.M., Pridmore, P.,. Evaluating the provision of flexible learning for children at risk of primary school drop-out in areas of high HIV prevalence. Under review.

- Kendall, N. & O'Gara, C. (2007) Vulnerable Children, Communities and Schools: Lessons from Three HIV/AIDS Affected Areas. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*, 37, 5-21.
- McEwan, P.J., Benveniste, L., 2001. The politics of rural school reform: Escuela Nueva in Colombia. *Journal of Education Policy* 16(6), 547-559.
- Mhlanga, E. (2008) Review of innovation in interventions to increase access to education and attainment. SOFIE: Opening Up Access series No 2. London, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Moleni, C. (2009) Factors influencing access and retention in primary schooling for children and young people affected by HIV and AIDS: Case studies from rural Malawi. *SOFIE Opening Up Access Series no.6*. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/MalawiCaseStudyReport.pdf>
- Molteno, M., Ogadhoh, K, Cain, E and Crumpton, B 2000. *Towards Responsive Schools: Supporting better schooling for disadvantaged children*. London : UK government, Department for International Development.
- Nyabanyaba, T. (2011) Developing, implementing and evaluating the SOFIE intervention package to support educational access for vulnerable students *Lesotho Final Report. The SOFIE Project*. London: Institute of Education, University of London. London. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/LesothoFinalReport.pdf>
- Nyabanyaba, T. (2009) Factors influencing access and retention in secondary schooling for orphaned and vulnerable children and young people: Case studies from high HIV and AIDS prevalence contexts in Lesotho. *SOFIE Opening Up Access Series no.7* London : Institute of Education, University of London. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/LesothoCaseStudyReport.pdf>
- Nyabanyaba, T. (2008) The use of Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) initiatives to open up access to education in the context of high HIV and AIDS prevalence rates: the case of Lesotho. *SOFIE: Opening Up Access series No 4*. London : Institute of Education, University of London. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/NyabanyabaReviewPaper.pdf>
- Perraton, H. (ed.) (1982) *Alternative Routes to Formal Education: Distance Teaching for School Equivalency*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Pridmore, P. (2008) Access to conventional schooling for children and young people affected by HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: A cross-national review of recent research evidence. SOFIE: Opening Up Access Series No 1. London, Institute of Education, University of London. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/PridmoreReviewPaper.pdf>
- Pridmore, P. and Jere, C.M. (2011) Disrupting Patterns of Educational Inequality and Disadvantage in Malawi. *Compare: a Journal of Comparative and International Education* 41(4), 513-531.

- Pridmore, P. & Yates, C. (2005) Combating AIDS in South Africa and Mozambique: The Role of Open, Distance, and Flexible Learning (ODFL) *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 49,490-512.
- Rumble, G. (1989) Distance Learning and the Misuse of Language. *Open Learning* 4, no. 2: 32–40.
- Save the Children Fund, 2008. Making Schools Inclusive: How change can happen, Save the Children's experience. London Save the Children Fund.
- Streuli, N. and Moleni, C.M. (2007) Education, HIV and AIDS in Malawi: the role of open, distance and flexible learning. SOFIE: Opening Up Access series No 5 London, Institute of Education, University of London. Available at <http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications/MoleniReviewPaper.pdf>
- UNESCO (2010) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 'Reaching the Marginalised'*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO, 2008. Equity and Inclusion in Education: tools to support education sector planning and evaluation. UNESCO, Paris.

Acknowledgement

The research team was directed by Prof. Pat Pridmore in collaboration with her colleague Mr. Chris Yates who led the development of the self-study learner guides. The case studies were carried out and the intervention implemented and evaluated by Mrs. Kate Jere (formerly Moleni from the Centre for Educational Research and Training, University of Malawi) and Dr. Thabiso Nyabanyaba from the National University of Lesotho. Dr. Ephraim Mhalanga from the South African Institute for Distance Education provided expertise on distance learning initiatives in the African Region and Dr. Matthew Jukes from the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, USA, designed the evaluation and guided the statistical analyses. The study was funded by the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID) and the UK Economics and Social Research Council (ESRC).

