MAPPING STUDY SUMMARY: MALAWI

Malawi Mapping Study – Perspectives from Children Youth and Families[1]
Firelight
October 2022

Introduction

Firelight commissioned mapping studies in three countries to assess the current status of children's rights, explore some of the key thematic areas that impact the lives of children and their families and communities, and identify potential opportunities for community-based solutions in the furtherance of children's rights. Particular emphasis was placed on listening to the perspectives of communities themselves, especially children, youth, and families.

The mapping study in Malawi was carried out by Dr. Beatrice Matafwali and Mr. Cosmas Gawani. The first phase (January to May 2022) explored the overall context of children's and youth's rights and wellbeing in Malawi, guided by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and drawing from statistical data, previously documented evidence, and interviews with government and civil society stakeholders at the national level.

The second phase of the study (June to September 2022) focused on the issues facing adolescent girls, from the perspectives of adolescent girls themselves and other key stakeholders at the community level. Methods included interviews and focus group discussions with children/youth, parents, community-based organizations (CBOs), community leaders and other key stakeholders. Below is a summary of some of the key findings from this second phase of the mapping study. Note that this document aims to provide an overview of the findings "as heard" from the communities, without our own interpretation and comment. This is intentional as too often outside actors extract and then repackage the words and perspectives of people experiencing the issues, and it is important to listen to communities directly without the filtering and interpretation of intermediaries.

Methodology

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[1] *NOTE – this summary also includes some data from an additional piece of Firelight research – Baseline Study on Ending Child Marriage in Malawi through Community-Driven Systems Change Final Report by Alfred M. Dzilankhulani 2021. Unless data in this summary is labelled as coming from the Baseline on Ending Child Marriage in Malawi, it should be assumed that is from the Malawi Mapping Study.*

Data were collected using qualitative methods, with specific strategies to engage the participation of CBOs in study development, data collection, analysis, and validation. Strategies such as focus group discussions and community dialogues enabled the research team to capture in-depth data on knowledge, attitudes, and practices on child rights and experiences at the community level. Most importantly, the involvement of adolescents helped to surface issues affecting adolescents through lived experiences. To further strengthen the methodological approach, the research team collaborated with local CBO staff throughout in data collection.

Mapping included four districts: Zomba, Machinga, Mangochi, and Dedza with a sample comprising adolescents, parents/community members, traditional and religious leaders, community-level frontline workers (e.g., Health Surveillance Assistants, school administrators, and officials from relevant Government Departments (Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and Ministry of Health, and officials from local CBOs. The sample was drawn from a total of 14 Traditional Authorities (TAs) across the four districts.

Findings

Girls know about their rights.

For both the in-school and out-of-school adolescent girls, the findings revealed that there was sufficient knowledge among them about child rights. The following are the rights that were identified as the key child rights by the adolescents: Right to education; right to play; right to life; right to privacy; right to go to religion; right to have a name; right to food; right to have a shelter; right to vote; right to associate with friends; right to marry at the right age; right to dressing; right to culture; right to be protected; right to be loved. As can be seen from the comprehensive list of rights that adolescents came up with in the FGDs, they were quite well-informed and sensitized about their rights in various circles of society. The comprehensive knowledge about rights is probably not surprising as most of the adolescents indicated that they were exposed to various sources of information regarding their rights.

The most common avenues of information that adolescents mentioned were: Schools; radio; television; social media (e.g., WhatsApp); youth-friendly clubs; films; community gatherings organized by traditional leaders and NGOs; posters; rights clubs; magazines; books; newspapers; churches; role play about rights; and other sources. Among these listed various sources of information, radio was identified as the most accessible means of communication that most adolescents had access to. In addition to radio, public awareness campaigns organized by NGOs, for example, Youth Net and Counselling, who visit communities and give information on public address systems, were very popular. As a result of the widespread rights awareness, one of the out-of-school male adolescents made a poignant observation, "Because of awareness children know their rights. I was arrested and spent two days in a police cell because I beat my sister who reported me to the police. Now I don't beat her anymore."

Girls can articulate what support they need from parents and community leaders.

At the family level, adolescents desired that parents support them, firstly, by ensuring that they provided them with the funds needed for them to go to school without any disturbances. One girl in Machinga stated the following, *"Our families especially our parents do assist us in paying the school funds through the little money which they get from the piece work. But the challenges that we face here at the community is that, it scares us if we shall really achieve our dreams. So, if some interventions can be put in place for girls we can be happy."*

Secondly, parents needed to give their children the needed advice and encouragement for them to keep progressing in school. When adolescents dropped out of school, the adolescent girls felt it was the duty of their parents to encourage them to go back to school and complete their education. For the out-of-school adolescents, participants felt parents needed to give them support to enter technical colleges for them to obtain technical skills.

Here, the adolescent girls felt teachers needed to be role models to inspire girls and should take the lead role in encouraging learners to focus on the key subjects that would enable them to succeed in the career that they desire to pursue.

Parents generally understand that children and youth have rights and they want to protect and provide for their children.

Views for community support were also similar to what the adolescents indicated. The parent felt there was the need to ensure that the vice of marrying off school-going girls was curbed by putting in place strong community measures. One parent from Machinga, for instance, had this to say, "*At the community level we as parents should have strong committees that will be focusing on youth who are in early marriages.*" Another parent added, "*Once in a while, we should be gathering our youth to speak to them about rights and the importance of school and how it is connected to a bright future.*"

In line with what adolescents said, parents suggested that families needed to provide financial and material resources for their children to complete their schooling. In this respect, most parents suggested that families needed to engage in some small-scale business ventures to raise the needed income to support adolescents' education. Family support also included motivational encouragement provided by a family member, including parents.

At the school level, parents also felt there was the need to ensure that qualified teachers were made available to attend to the learners, as one parent indicated, "*Lack of enough teachers is another problem in other schools. Youths do not learn enough hence no motivation of working hard to achieve their goal.*" In addition, parents also emphasized the need to sensitise teachers so that they are not too harsh to the learners. One parent from Machinga observed, "*Teachers should not be too harsh to students, this makes them drop out of school when they recall how badly they were being treated at school.*"

This was backed up by the Malawi Child Marriage Baseline - Parents (Families): Overall and generally, analysis results on knowledge and attitudes among surveyed parents revealed some knowledge strengths and gaps. In terms of knowledge of rights for children and youth, the minimum number of rights mentioned per surveyed parent was 0 while the highest was 7 with the average at 2.3 and 63.9% of surveyed parents mentioned at least 2 rights.

Girls attach significant importance to education as an enabler.

All the adolescent girls who participated in the study attached great importance to education. They noted that with education, they would have good jobs, lead better lives, and take care of their families. Both the in-school and out-of-school adolescent girls shared dreams of pursuing a career of their choice, however, there was a variation in the types of careers that the two categories of adolescents aspired to pursue. The career aspirations of the in-school adolescents tended to be formal where they would perform duties in the government or some other formal sector. The commonly chosen career aspirations by the in-school adolescents included the following: Doctor; teacher; soldier; lawyer; typist; police officer; president; nurse. While similar career patterns emerged among boys, few in-school adolescent boys, however, chose non-white caller jobs namely; truck drivers and mechanics.

For the out-of-school adolescents, their career aspirations tended to be more in line with those jobs which would give them survival skills to better their livelihoods in the communities where they lived. It should be mentioned though that even for the out-of-school adolescents, their initial careers before they dropped out of school, were of a white-collar nature, as explained above. Although data was collected separately for adolescent boys and girls, there were commonalities in career preferences as follows: tailoring; platting hair; brick-laying; motor vehicle mechanic; electrical wiring; business. Here is how some of these out-of-school adolescents expressed their aspirations, "*Am a tailor but am not yet an expert; I need to enhance my skills and be an expert in my tailoring.*" An adolescent boy expressed similar sentiments, "*Am a builder but I want to be an expert and be a supervisor among my fellow builders.*" Even with all these aspirations in the technical fields that out-of-school adolescents had, they seemed to have a nostalgic regret that they did not get educated. One adolescent girl seems to represent this nostalgia for education, "*…we wish we could become educated and get*

certain jobs…education delays you from marrying early and getting pregnant. Education also exposes you to what others are doing and in so doing you become independent."

Parents and community leaders also say that education is important.

In all the FGDs that were conducted with parents and community leaders, there was consensus among participants in all areas that the aspirations of parents for their children were that they should complete their education and get a job to enable them to support their families.

This is backed up by the Malawi Child Marriage Baseline - The most commonly mentioned goals among surveyed adolescents related to education. However, education completion rates among surveyed adolescents were generally low, more so for girls (65.8%) than boys (69.3%) for primary education. In GASO impact area, secondary education completion rates were worse than for primary education, more so for girls (11.7%) than boys (13.6%). The most commonly mentioned (known) rights for children and youth were education related and 97.2% of the surveyed parents found education for sons to be very important while 98.5% found education for daughters to be very important. Overall, the majority of surveyed parents wished for their sons (79.4%) and/or daughters (76.4%) to complete secondary education as well as pursue post-secondary education in the following few years (5-7 years). Only a minority had "*get married in next few years*" as one of their goals for their sons (1.2%) and daughters (0.8%).

Girls are able to access SRHR information easily.

The findings from FGDs with girls revealed that SRH services were readily available in the communities through CBOs, youth clubs, and health facilities. One female school participant observed, *"Currently, we have PLAN Malawi which comes monthly to provide us with sexual reproductive materials."* An out-of-school female adolescent also asserted, "*Yes, we do get sexual information, so mostly like us girls we get this information from the CBO which is so friendly and is open to us. While at home it is our grandparents who advise us… it is helping especially at CBO where we come to get some preventive measures like condoms. So far SRH services, we do not face any problems, we access it easily. So in our area, we are supported by GO Malawi and PLAN Malawi, and PSI. These organizations come almost every week*."

Yet another in school female adolescent pointed out, "*We as girls we do share sexual reproductive issues in the groups where we meet. Sometimes we get this information from the youth clubs and also at church. We encourage one another to use these services so that we prevent ourselves from early pregnancies which will affect our studies, hence destroying our future life. At home it is our grandmothers who advise us to abstain from sex…*" More was shared about the availability of the SRH facilities as exemplified in this excerpt, "*… at the CBO where we come to get some preventing measures like condoms and also some monthly pills, currently, we are not facing challenges in accessing these SRH services, NGOs come like PLAN Malawi and UNICEF to provide these materials in the centres. So, everyday these materials are available, we do not experience any shortage, it's up to us to use it or not…*"

BUT…

Many parents and girls are not comfortable with SRHR.

However, some girls reported that they were not comfortable utilizing reproductive health services in their community for fear of ridicule. One schoolgirl in Machinga vehemently observed, "*We are not comfortable going to the hospital because when they see you at the hospital, they will tell your parents and the whole village will know about it.*"

Issues of SRH also triggered mixed reactions among parents. All the male parents who participated in the FGDs were reluctant to discuss issues of SRH with their girl children. They felt it was awkward and against the cultural norms for them to engage in such topics with their children. While some female parents equally expressed reservations, others, especially those in Dedza felt that there was nothing wrong with parents discussing SRH with the girls at home.

Sexual abuse is present in the community and amongst peers.

Although there was a decline in cases of child abuse, isolated incidences of child abuse were reported. In one of the FGDs in Mangochi, girls reported they had experiences where boys sometimes made sexual advances on them, especially on their way from school. One adolescent girl recounted, *"You know in this community, boys are exposed to drugs, they take marijuana (Indian hemp) …..and they take advantage of girls."* Regrettably, this community had the highest number of teen mothers out of school; in a single FGD, out of the nine participants, seven of them had babies who they were raising as single mothers because none of the boys who impregnated them did want to take responsibility.

Sexual abuse is present at school.

Related to this were isolated cases of potential abuse at the school level. It was reported that some teachers propose to girls. One adolescent girl confirmed that there was an incident at her school where a teacher made advances on her friend who was struggling with schoolwork. The teacher promised to assist her with schoolwork in exchange for sexual favours. Another girl noted that, *"We are told that if you want to do well in school, you should be in a relationship with a teacher. This usually happens when you are not doing well. Sometimes when you refuse to be a in a relationship, they create challenges for you in class."*

Physical abuse is present at school.

One parent from Machinga observed, *"Teachers should not be too harsh to students, this makes them drop out of school when they recall how badly they were being treated at school."*

Cultural/peer/parent pressures to marry are strong.

The Malawi Mapping Study has revealed that a number of adolescent girls were forced into early marriages by their parents. Marriage is a highly respected institution in a number of traditional African societies.

Almost all the adolescent girls, parents, and traditional and religious leaders who participated in the study acknowledged cases of child marriage in their respective communities. For instance, in one FGD in Mangochi in-school adolescent girls drawn from seven communities confirmed at least 20 cases of child marriage. The cultural practice by parents of forcing school-going girls into early marriages was found to be one of the disempowering gender norms against the education of girls. One girl in Machinga explained, *"Some parents prefer marriage to school for the girl child."* Another girl in Machinga noted *"Parents want their children to get married and start childbearing early…. We who are still in school are even mocked that we will not be marketable for marriage because we will be too old by the time we complete school..."*

Gender norms create negative dynamics throughout life.

To this end, among other things, a study by Munsaka observes that adolescent girls who drop out of school often do so due to subtle, insidious pressures that are beyond their capacity to control or avoid. For instance, one school adolescent girl in Machinga noted that "*Sometimes our community feels that school is for boys whereas the girl is expected to get married. This is common in households where there are limited resources with competing demands. A girl is encouraged to get married and start having children so that she can contribute to the next generation.*" Another girl reported, "*The time I was in school, boys could propose to me frequently because I was older than my classmates so this contributed to my dropping out of school so that I could have a peace of mind.*" Another one observed that, "*For the boys, the ball is in their court when it comes to education, but this is not the case when it comes to girls as there were many extenuating factors.*"

In one of the Focus Group Discussions, girls observed gender disparities in the nature of work assigned to them at home. They noted that girls are usually given a lot of household chores when they knock off from school such as cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning dishes whereas boys continue studying. This was echoed by another girl in Machinga noted, "*Gender inequality is visible at community level. There are higher*

expectations for the girl child at home in terms of household chores. A girl is expected to go to the field to work, draw water, cook and clean dishes, etc, while the boy would just be sitted at home. Because of differential treatment, the boy will have more time to study compared to the girl child." Although parents perceive this as the orientation of girls to adult household responsibilities, it deprives the girl child of the much-needed time to focus on school-related activities. Girls also noted gender disparities in activities in children's corners and other youth clubs. They observed that boys are often assigned leadership responsibilities such as chairperson and vice chairperson, while girls are barely committee members in most cases. This was creating a divide early in the girl child's life perpetuating the idea that women should occupy the lower strata when it comes to civil responsibilities.

<u>Malawi Child Marriage Baseline - Adolescents:</u> Overall and generally, there were patterns of higher percentages of adolescent boys than girls having knowledge in various knowledge areas assessed. A higher percentage of boys (100.0%) than girls (99.0%) found child marriages very harmful; a higher percentage of boys (84.2%) than girls (70.2%) mentioned at least two harms of child marriages; a higher percentage of boys (81.6%) than girls (66.1%) mentioned at least two rights of children; and a higher percentage of boys (100.0%) than girls (93.0%) found education very important.

<u>Malawi Child Marriage Baseline:</u> There were also differences in skills and capacities between adolescent boys and girls as a higher percentage of adolescent boys than girls reported feeling very confident to adapt to and deal effectively with various demands, challenges and potential and actual violations of their rights. Specifically, a higher percentage of boys (76.3%) than girls (61.1%) felt confident to take action and self-protect from abuse or violence; a higher percentage of boys (81.6%) than girls (77.8%) felt confident to self-protect from early marriage if forced against their will by family members, a higher percentage of boys (76.3%) than girls (65.8%) reported having knowledge and skills to inform other peers to protect themselves and report cases of abuse; and a higher percentage of boys (78.4%) than girls (61.6%) felt confident to speak against harmful practices in their community if they become aware of them. Surveyed adolescents mentioned various goals they wished to achieve in the following few years other than getting married. Notably, low percentage of adolescent girls (1.9%) than boys (2.9%) mentioned "*get married in next few years*" as one of their goals.

Poverty is the overarching challenge.

The adolescents reported that the majority of the households were poor, with subsistence farming, small trading business, and fishing (for areas that are close to the lake) as the major livelihoods. The effects of poverty are far-reaching.

<u>Malawi Child Marriage Baseline:</u> The baseline study assessed the security of family income and results show that income for the majority of surveyed families was not at all secure with only 1.2% reporting their family income to be very secure. Consequently, only 10.7% and 10.6% of surveyed parents reported being able to contribute towards the education of their sons and daughters, respectively.

<u>It leads to lack of education/reduced education opportunities</u>
All the stakeholders that participated in the study noted that girls drop out of school more often than boys and this was pronounced at the secondary school level. Follow-up discussions with out-of-school adolescent girls revealed reasons why they dropped out of school which included among others, failure to pay school fees, long distance to school, lack of support from parents, lack of secondary schools within the community, early marriage, and teen pregnancy. One out-of-school reported that, "*I was sent away from school because of lack of school fees.*" However, most of the out-of-school girls expressed desires to go back to school while others emphasized the need for skills training for survival.

Although various interrelated factors have been highlighted as having a negative influence on the educational pursuits of adolescents, poverty was the underlying root cause identified in all the FGDs among adolescents and those with community stakeholders and parents. Participants indicated that family income was very vital for providing the basic needs for adolescents at the household level including education requirements. Children from low-income households often have limited resources to support their schooling, have lower academic achievement levels, and are more likely to drop out of school. One adolescent girl had this to say, "*Although I*

want to be educated, my parents usually have challenges raising money for school fees, I feel this is a potential barrier to my education progression." Another girl added, "*When you do not have a school uniform, you are sent away from school."*

One adolescent girl in Machinga noted, "*… poverty levels in this community are high and our parents cannot afford to raise money for our school fees… so sometimes we are chased from school for failure to pay the required school fees and we end up discontinuing our education….*" Another out-of-school girl in Mangochi explained *"… I wanted to complete my education but I dropped out in form four because my parents could not pay examination fees…. the local community-based organization that sponsored me only paid my school fees and my parents were supposed to pay examination fees but they failed to raise the required amount. I didn't see the need to continue going to school when I knew that I was not going to sit for my examinations due to non-payment of examination of fees…… it was such a painful experience for me to discontinue my education."*

One parent from Mangochi explained, "*…children cannot go to school with an empty stomach, with poor dressing, with no learning materials like an exercise book, but due to lack of these because of poverty, it leads to school dropout."*

One girl in Machinga stated the following, "*Our families especially our parents they do assist us in paying the school funds through the little money which they get from the piece work. But the challenges that we face here at the community is that, it scares us if we shall really achieve our dreams. So if some interventions can be put in place for girls we can be happy."*

<u>It leads to poor, scarce or inadequate education systems</u>
The study also captured participants' views on the support that was required for the adolescent girls' and youths career aspirations to be realized. Deployment of qualified teachers to various schools across the country was mentioned as a key source of support.

Another barrier which is related to the problem of long distances was limited access to secondary schools. Participants indicated that at the secondary school level, school places were limited, which forced many adolescent girls to drop out of school. One traditional leader from Zomba painted the picture quite vividly, *"For example, only one adolescent girl would qualify to secondary school in a class of 50 learners based on academic performance and this discourages learners because they know very few will be selected to secondary school. In some schools, there is no selection at all."*

Girls acknowledged that although there were primary schools in their respective communities, they covered long distances to access secondary education. One adolescent girl in Mangochi noted, *"The secondary school was about 7kms away from our community and we become vulnerable on our way to school…. There are instances when a girl will be given a ride on a bicycle, and the same cycler starts proposing love on the way… it makes us very insecure and some girls are forced to drop out of school."*

As was the case with FGDs in adolescents, long distances from schools were cited as a major challenge for learners to attend school. Another parent from Mangochi indicated, "*So the main problem out of the problems mentioned is long distances to reach school, schools are far and so children are forced to travel long distances and also some girls face some challenging problems along the way like proposals from boys. So due to this, it demotivates them to continue with studies…"* A traditional leader from Zomba observed, *"There is no girls' boarding school, and the few girls who are in secondary school travel long distances to school."* Yet another parent added her voice, *"Access to secondary schools is among the barriers, now with poverty levels among parents, children go long distances to school on foot, where in some cases some children are discouraged to continue with school."*

<u>It leads to inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities at school level</u>
The study further revealed inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities at the school level. Some girls reported having inadequate clean and safe toilets as well as lack of access to water at school which perpetuated the risk of shame. For instance, a girl in Machinga reported that the school where she was attending had no water points thus, creating a challenge during menstruation periods. She lamented that "Our school does not have

water points, so it is a challenge when one is having menstruation periods. Another girl noted " ..at my school, there is no female teacher so it is difficult to share your menstrual challenges with male teachers. Sometimes we fail to go to school and we are punished for that." Related to inadequate sanitary facilities, is menstrual poverty. Girls indicated a lack of menstrual products due to a lack of money to purchase menstrual products. For instance, one girl observed, "sanitary pads are a problem. In the past, we used to buy pads but now things have become expensive so we sometimes use pieces of clothes. Imagine sometimes you may not have mastered the dates for your menstrual cycle, and you have to carry those pieces of blankets and if a boy sees them, they start laughing at you in class it is quite embarrassing."

It leads to adolescent pregnancy (and then marriage)
Peer pressure was also a key factor, especially among girls. The following excerpt from an adolescents' FGD in Zomba accurately represents the views of the adolescents on how peer pressure lures girls out of school, *"Girls drop out of school because of peer pressure… our friends who are married dress well… so sometimes girls start having boyfriends so that they are given money to buy clothes and in the process end up getting pregnant.."*

The girls reported that some parents opt to marry off their daughters instead of sending them to school so that they can make money through *lobola* (bride price). Sometimes when parents feel the girl child is grown up, they force her into marriage. For instance, it is common for some parents when confronted with competing economic demands, they tend to prioritise sending the boy child to school and keep the girl child at home in readiness for marriage. This is usually the case when there are limited resources at household level.

One out-of-school adolescent girl who is married confirmed this when she noted, "S*ometimes it is out of peer pressure to get basic needs. I got married because I wanted to look good and I was admiring my friends who were already married."*

In all the focus group discussions with community stakeholders and parents, teen pregnancy was mentioned as one of the major barriers that prevented adolescent girls from completing their education. For instance, one parent from the Machinga community observed, "*Teen pregnancies are also major problems in this community. Due to poverty, our children get money from boyfriends and at the end of it all they get pregnant and drop out of school."*

It leads to child labor
Adolescents also observed that young people tended to fail to continue with their schooling because they were involved in hard labour activities to supplement the limited family income. There is an interface between child labour and poverty. Children engaged in forms of child labour usually come from low-income households. Lack of knowledge of child rights may also perpetuate child labour at the household level. For some parents, engaging children in household chores is the form of the orientation of children into adult life. In one FGD in Machinga, girls reported that they are sometimes asked to go to the field instead of going to school. The boys reported being sent to herd cattle and /or goats instead of going to school.

It leads to a lack of capacity to enforce child protection laws
While participants acknowledged the existence of laws and policy frameworks as well as law enforcement structures that have been put in place, inadequate enforcement mechanisms were a major barrier impeding the realization of child rights. The lack of knowledge among community members on issues of child rights weakens enforcement as cases of abuse are usually under-reported.

It leads to dependency on others
Since payment of school fees was one of the most challenging barriers to education in rural communities of Malawi, participants felt that the provision of bursaries to learners from poor communities would alleviate the burden. Although girls reported that the availability of bursary schemes from the Government and International organisations such as CAMFED, they bemoaned that not all eligible girls benefitted from such forms of support. Other girls in Zomba noted that there was favouristim in the award of bursary scheme where preference is given to some girls while disadvantaging others.

<u>Which can also lead to gender inequity</u>
Additionally, all the stakeholders were of the view that the bursary scheme should be extended to boys from vulnerable households. For example, one in-school adolescent from Dedza observed, "some government policies are contributing to gender inequality in a way that bursaries are for girls, while boys are not considered. In the ideal world, adolescent girls wish that there should be no differences in the boys and girls are treated by the government and other organizations. According to them, boys are often neglected by many organizations. Girls wish that boys should be treated the same as girls when it comes to bursaries and other opportunities that are given to girls only." Out-of-school boys that participated in the study reported that they dropped out of school due to a lack of school fees. If this situation is not addressed, there is a likelihood of cyclic effects where the boys who have dropped out of school will be potential perpetrators of child marriage and teen pregnancy. Thus, addressing social inequalities may require a comprehensive approach that can address the possible bottlenecks holistically.

Climate change affects poverty and education.

Climate change constrained the social sector (education and health) and negatively impacted the already overburdened household income. The study revealed that certain regions of Malawi were prone to floods and droughts. In particular, the 2021/2022 farming season was characterized by drought and floods particularly associated with cyclone IDAI which swept through some parts of Southern Africa, of which Malawi was not spared. Malawi being an agriculture-dependent economy, effects of climate change adversely impacted the agricultural outputs. It was reported that some of the areas were flood-prone, making the roads impassable, especially during the rainy season. One adolescent girl in Mangochi, for instance, noted, *"… this year was even worse because of the effects of the cyclone, the roads were impassable resulting into premature closure of schools for many months…. Unfortunately, some girls never returned to school after the cyclone.*" Climate change was also seen as a contributing factor to poverty. An adolescent girl in Machinga observed, "C*limate change has affected us so badly…You know we rely on agriculture in this area for our parents to raise money for our school fees and other school requisites. Rains started late this farming season and when we planted cyclone came in, and all our rice fields were flooded affecting the yields. Our parents do not have other sources of income… Some children have even stopped school because their parents cannot raise the required school fees as well as provide school requisites.*" Another adolescent girl in Mangochi added the following, "*In the last farming season, we experience floods that destroyed our crops… our maize fields were damaged ….our houses were destroyed…. We even lost life in our community.*" Thus, although the issue of climate change may be infrequent, it negatively impacts the education sector and economic livelihoods.

Closing remarks

This document aimed to provide an overview of the findings "as heard" from the communities, without our own interpretation and comment. This was intentional as too often outside actors extract and then repackage the words and perspectives of people experiencing the issues, and it is important to listen to communities directly without the filtering and interpretation of intermediaries. It is also critical to not jump to judgement, conclusion, or action right away – but rather to work hand-in-hand with communities and grassroots organizations in each country and each district to understand issues from their perspective, support them to analyze and interpret their own data, and then apply the findings in community-driven ways to improve environments, systems, and outcomes for their children and youth.

The full reports for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Malawi Mapping Study can be found on Firelight's website.