

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS, PARTICIPATION AND
PARTNERSHIP BUILDING IN BASIC EDUCATION IN MALAWI**

BY

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DECLARATION

I certify that I am the sole author and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Jonathan J. Makuwira

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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of the study was to critically examine the extent to which three Malawian NGOs facilitate the participation of their beneficiaries and their current partnerships with other stakeholders in the provision of basic education programmes in local communities in Malawi. The ascendancy of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in education and development has been attributed to their perceived comparative advantage over the state. These comparative advantages include, inter alia, facilitating participation and partnership building among beneficiaries, reaching the poor, and cost-effectiveness in the delivery of development programmes.

The conceptual framework for this research was derived from the literature on the concepts of 'participation' and 'partnerships', in particular, the work of Allan Fowler (1997, 2000a, b, c); Brohman (1996); Friedman (1996) and Escobar (1995). The theoretical position of these development theorists is based on the premise that the effectiveness of NGOs' development endeavours are enhanced if they empower their beneficiaries through local decision-making and enhance collaboration based on trust, mutuality, common agenda and understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The methodological approach to the study involved a critical analysis of three cases (NGOs) comprising one International NGO, a Local, Established NGO, and an Emerging NGO. A qualitative research approach was preferred as the study sought to understand the dynamics of participation and partnership building in NGOs in basic education. Data was collected through interviews and documentary evidence. Data analysis went beyond looking for patterns and included a critical examination of tensions, contradictions, divergences and ambivalence in the data.

The findings of the study indicate that the three NGOs' facilitation of participation by their beneficiaries is narrow and basically instrumental or representative, rather than transformative. Because of the limited involvement in decision-making by the beneficiaries, the critical aspects of participation in the identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of basic education programmes is mostly dominated by a few influential local community members and, to a larger extent, by the NGO staff. In addition, the participation by beneficiaries is more likely to be present in NGOs where staff have theoretical and practical knowledge of participatory development, adequate resources, and experience in development programme implementation.

Similarly, the degree of partnership between and among NGOs is limited. Where these partnerships are present, they are rather informal. As regards NGO-Government partnerships, the findings indicate a limited collaboration basically because of the government's slowness in acting on matters of urgency which leads to the NGOs going it alone with very little consultation with government departments at the district level. Because of the significantly top-down development approach exhibited by the three cases, partnerships between the NGOs and their beneficiaries is generally poor. Most of the basic education programmes have suffered due to the fact that the beneficiaries have little or no influence or ownership of the projects.