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some findings are surprising'

by **Andrew Mtewa** — 21/11/2016 in Q & A 4 min read

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Last week Thursday, the Institute of Public Opinion Research (IPOR) presented the second findings of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) focusing on education and Health. Our Reporter **ALBERT SHARRA** caught up with IPOR national investigator Boniface Dulani on the same. Excerpts:

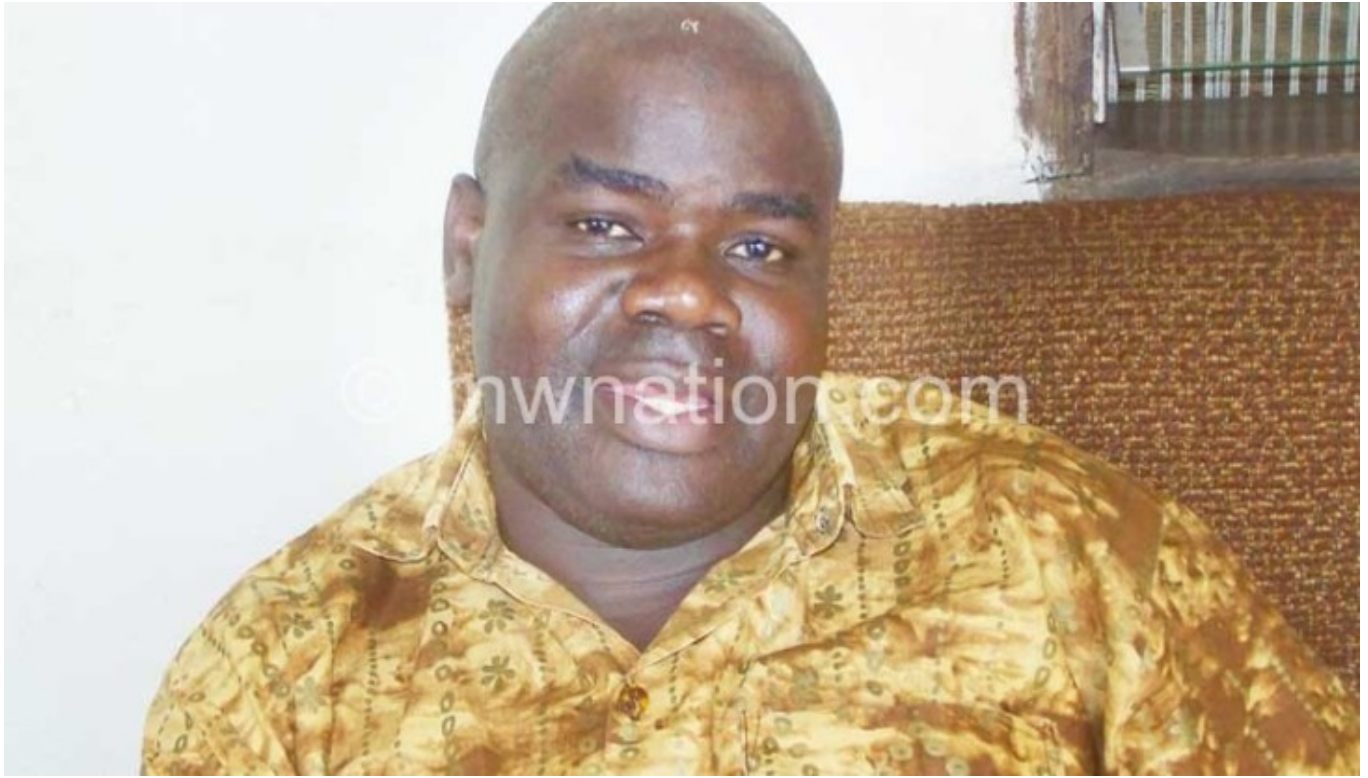
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Bonface Dulani

You presented what you call LGPI at the Malawi Sun Hotel. What is this study about and how relevant is it to Malawi?

LGPI is looking really at a number of issues from a perspective of an ordinary Malawian. We have been looking at issues such as education and health which were core subjects of the second presentation. In the first presentation, we looked at issues about land and livelihood and how Malawians really cope with the challenges that they encounter in their daily life. We made these presentations a month ago in Lilongwe.

We have also asked a lot of questions to do with gender and elections and political participation and these will be presented in the later dissemination events. We have collected this data from 15 districts across the country and our data representation is at national as well as regional, district, traditional and village level.

What is new?

Well, it is difficult for us to make a comparison of this data and other studies because data is collected at one data point, but what the data suggest is that there are important lessons that as a country we need to address. Sometimes we think things are going on well when actually they are not.

Are there any examples that justify this argument?



Yes, for instance, in terms of schooling there are obviously a lot of challenges. We are finding that despite government policy saying that education should be free at primary level, there are number of people that are paying for primary school even those in public schools that are supposedly free.

Issues to do with school uniform: We are finding that there are people dropping out of school because they cannot afford school uniform. So, these are issues of serious concern because policies are telling us something different and the reality on the ground is telling us a completely different story. So, government needs to be aware of this and address these issues.

It is the same thing in health. We see that people are expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of services on offer and there are also districts that are doing very badly and some findings are surprising.

Blantyre, for example, is fairing very badly on the quality of education index and also doing badly on quality of health index contrary to popular belief that urban areas like Blantyre will be doing better in these.

We have also heard from health and education professionals confirming that enrolment rates in schools are very high and that the numbers of students in classrooms in urban areas are exceptionally high. In some cases you are having 200 to 300 students to a classroom. On average, from our survey, we are finding that there are actually 94 students per classroom.

So, there are all these issues and quite a lot of issues that government really needs to be addressing.

What are some of the areas where Malawi is doing well?

Of course, there are positives to tell from the study. One of them is that people are generally satisfied with the quality of the services on offer in health facilities. They think the hospital facilities are really clean compared to before although some expressed dissatisfaction with availability of medical personnel in the hospitals.

So, there are areas where we are doing well and there are others areas where we are not doing well. In education, where we are doing well from the look of things is on educating the younger generation. We found that more younger people have primary education than older people. So, as we always say, the future of this country is in the youth and future leaders are the youth. We are doing at least a good job in educating the leaders of tomorrow.

But the key findings are like in contrast with the public perception especially in health where the study says people are satisfied with the quality of services. Again in education, IPOR



reports that there is high school dropout in Standard One against the known facts that high dropouts are registered along the primary education chain. What do you say?

Sometimes what we think we know is different from what is the reality out there and that is why we do these surveys. You are right that the survey is showing that most dropouts happen in the first year of primary schools. Thus, Standard One is where the majority of school dropping happen. The further people go up with school they tend to stay in school at least at primary level.

We are also saying that not only dropouts, but also absenteeism especially due to illness. These tend to happen in particular in the early years of schooling. So, Standard One to Three, these are years when most kids miss classes because they are home due to illness.

Are there any recommendations to this?

Yes, there are a number of issues we need to look at and some of the recommendations are that we also need to look at the provision of early childhood education. Thus, pre-schooling. We need kids to become more familiar with school environment early before they start Standard One.

We have heard from our colleagues in health sector suggesting the health system has focused more on Under-5 and perhaps we have ignored those within 5 to maybe 15 age groups. Yet we are seeing that these are groups that are missing classes because of illness.

So we need also not to necessarily ignore the Under Five because they are also critical, but the policy should also focus on making health provision for five to 15 year olds if we are going to reduce school absenteeism.

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