



Temwa Community Literacy Annual Report

June 2022

This report shares the latest developments of Temwa's Community Literacy project implemented in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi. It is a three-year project (2020-2023), and this report covers the second project year. Despite Covid-19 causing severe disruptions to educational provision in Malawi over the last two years, we are delighted to report that the project is on track to achieve its targets and even exceed them in several areas.

Project context and aims

Currently 34% of the adult population in Malawi is illiterate. In the Northern Region, only 7% of women and 12% of men have completed secondary school (Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 2015-6). In Nkhata Bay North where Temwa works, the challenges with illiteracy are caused by very large class sizes, high teacher-student ratios, inadequate resourcing and general under-investment in education. The Covid-19 pandemic has further worsened the situation in Nkhata Bay North: prolonged school closures in 2020 and at the start of 2021 led to an alarming, six-fold increase in teenage pregnancies and child marriages as well as a three-fold increase in school dropout rates.

Temwa's Community Literacy project is working to provide opportunities for these children and the wider community, particularly for girls, by creating an enabling and inclusive environment for literacy; improving reading and writing skills; and improving library services. We achieve this through community awareness activities, reading groups for children and young women, and community and school library services.

Community education achievements

Despite the challenges faced, we are proud to report that, in the past 12 months, the project has helped strengthen community literacy through the following achievements:

Outcome 1: An enabling and inclusive environment for literacy created

In these impoverished communities, family income generation is often prioritised over children's education. Temwa's community engagements and events have reportedly been vital for increasing community awareness of the importance of education and have helped decrease school drop-out rates.

During the past year, we continued to run a **radio awareness campaign** that included six bimonthly radio shows and two jingles broadcast for six months - **reaching an estimated 20,000 people**. We also organised eight Spelling Bee competitions. A total of 970 participants attended these fun events that celebrated literacy. Parents were able to watch their children achieve prizes, which helps develop a sense of pride and helps parents realise the value of their children's education. Reportedly, an **increasing number of parents have become actively involved in their children's schooling**: 43% of learners reported receiving support with their learning at home, and the number of learners who came to school with homework signed by their parents more than tripled, compared to the previous year.

This past year, we organised another six community engagement meetings, targeting over 200 local governance and school representatives. This has led to community-led initiatives that show that the wider community is increasingly valuing, and actively willing to improve educational provision in the area. For example, **local education bylaws** – that resulted from Temwa's engagements in the first project year – have been upheld, and **are reportedly leading to an increase in children enrolment at school**. School Management Committees and Mothers Groups are independently monitoring attendance, punctuality, and performance at schools. Ten schools now also have volunteer teachers sustained by the community, while two primary schools secured additional teachers by lobbying the District Education Manager.

Outcome 2: Improved reading and writing skills in Chichewa, Tumbuka and English

In the Nkhata Bay District in Malawi, significant under-investment in education means that school class sizes tend to be very large and teacher-student ratios are high, often 1:90. As a result, children often do not learn to read and write properly in their early schooling years, impacting their academic progress and opportunities later on. Temwa's reading groups offer low-cost but effective after-school education that boost learners' ability to read and write. **24 weekly Reading Camps were attended by up to 1,356 primary school-aged children** per week (52% girls) in the past year – **more than double the number of students the project target aimed to reach**. Four Village Reading Groups have also provided literacy education and broader mentoring support to 47 young women.

We are delighted to see that **95% of children attending Reading Camps are passing their school exams**. At the end of the academic year in December, all of them passed their final exams, with two Reading Camp learners becoming the top two performers in their primary-school class. One school with a 100% pass rate said that the Reading Camps had played a key role in improving children's literacy and dedication to schoolwork in general.

The Reading Camp and Village Reading Group mentors and available educational materials have been fundamental to the success of this project. **43 voluntary mentors** (46% women) have been running the reading groups on a weekly basis. A total of 50 of the mentors have been **trained in line with the National Reading Programme standard, and in designing and making reading materials using locally available resources**. By the end of the year, the mentors had produced an incredible 567 books that reflect local stories and culture, and have reportedly increased the learners' desire to read.

The Reading Camps also received stationery, books and sports equipment, such as footballs, which help make the lessons more engaging.



Outcome 3: Improved library services

Schools in Nkhata Bay North are generally poorly resourced, and many learners have to share one textbook. The expansion of local library services is significantly increasing community access to learning resources and is increasing reading engagement. **All ten school libraries have been regularly open** during the reporting period, thanks to the active engagement of school governance who were trained in the first project year. The libraries are **visited by an estimated 6,000 pupils**. They have even been borrowing books for their parents and elder siblings to practise their literacy skills, leading to wider literacy improvement within the community.

5,265 visitors (45% women) were recorded at the Usisya Community Library between June 2021-May 2022. This is **the highest number ever recorded of girls and women visiting the library**, compared to only 8% in 2016 and 24% in 2021. The library continues to be a popular place of learning for school-going children who make up 95% of all visitors. They are attracted by the available curriculum books and constructive learning environment. The library also offers computer access and lessons that were attended by 14 students (50% women). While attendance of classes has been low, there are often long waits to use the computers, which shows that they are popular and useful and have helped expand students' employment opportunities.

Community stories

Your support is helping students, including Trinity Tasosa, to read and write

Trinity Tasosa, 8, expressed her joy for being a member of the Chilawa Reading Camp. She shows her dedication to learning by walking 3 kilometres to school every day with her sister. Although Trinity's school is equipped with a library, Trinity could not benefit from it because she could not read. In her class there are 90 students, far exceeding the 1:60 teacher-pupil ratio recommended by the government. Because of the large class sizes, Trinity was not progressing, despite attending school consistently.



*The Reading Camps provided a solution as learners now have the opportunity to receive extra support from mentors. Miss Chimwemwe, the mentor at Chilawa Reading Camp, explained how Trinity used to perform when she had first joined: "When Trinity was registered with our Reading Camp, she could barely point at any vowel, though she was already in an upper junior class. At the camp, we routinely provided extra support and time for learners struggling to read and write, and Trinity was among them." Now Trinity not only reads and writes, but she is also confident enough to express her skills in front of a crowd. Trinity said, **"I cannot stop going to the Reading Camps. Through the Reading Camps I get a chance to practise my reading skills, and last year I won a bag and a pencil in a Spelling Bee competition!"***

Andrew Chimaliro, a primary school teacher told us “Now I am able to operate a computer such that my work as a teacher has been simplified.”

Andrew, 26, grew up with few opportunities and little support. His father passed away when he was young and his mother moved to Tanzania to look for stable work. Despite the challenges, Andrew worked hard and developed a passion for teaching.

However, without any access to a computer, his work was hindered. “I used to have to pay for someone to type for me, because I did not have access to a computer and I did not know how to type.” Andrew was told by his fellow teacher Madam Eliza, who attended Temwa’s computer lessons in 2021, about the improvement she gained from the lessons. Andrew then decided to contact Temwa.



He is now involved in computer classes and is reading IT books at Temwa’s Usisya Community Library. He said that he has acquired basic computer skills which would have cost him a lot. “Now I am able to operate a computer such that my work as a teacher has been simplified. For example I am able to type official documents, organise them in folders, and create records of my work, which was impossible previously.”

Andrew says that he would like to grasp all basic computer skills which Temwa is offering and help the tutor to train others to become computer literate. “I am planning to open a stationery shop

in the future with computers for typing, printing, and photocopying, using the skills which I have acquired from Temwa – because these skills have been so important for me.”
