

Temwa's Community Literacy Project Final Report- September 2023

We are pleased to share with you the final update from Temwa's Community Literacy project implemented in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi. Over the project's three years (2020-2023), we have achieved huge successes in improving literacy levels in Nkhata Bay North. The project proved to be more vital than ever, as Covid-19 caused severe disruptions to educational provision in Malawi. This report provides an update on the final months of the project, between February and September 2023. Our team in Malawi is also in the process of undertaking a final project evaluation, the results of which we will be delighted to share with you when they are finalised.

Project overview and aims

One in three adults in Malawi are illiterate (countrymeters.info). In the Nkhata Bay district, only 7% of women have completed primary education and only 3% of women and 6% of men have gone on to graduate from secondary school (Malawi Demographic and Health Survey 2015-6). Malawi's education system is hugely underfunded, leading to large class sizes, high teacher-student ratios, and inadequate resourcing. This has resulted in high levels of illiteracy and school dropouts, while extreme poverty means education is often not prioritised. A lack of quality education is a major development barrier, limiting opportunities later in life and limiting the ability to shape one's future.



Temwa's Community Literacy project provided education opportunities for children and the wider community in Nkhata Bay North by creating an enabling and inclusive environment for literacy; improving reading and writing skills; and improving library services. During the project, we have seen a huge increase in community-led initiatives and parent's involvement in their children's education. Primary school enrollment increased, community education events have been well-attended, local governance has supported plans to improve education provision, and we have seen an increase in literacy skills and confidence from children attending Reading Camps.

Community Education Achievements

We are proud to report that, in the final five months, the project has helped strengthen community literacy through the following achievements.

Outcome 1: An enabling and inclusive environment for literacy created

Since 2020, the project has made huge progress on increasing community involvement in education initiatives. Historically, interest in education has been low as income generation has been a priority for families living in extreme poverty. However, Temwa has been engaging the community through meetings and events to promote the importance of education in order to break cyclical poverty.

Over the project period, community attendance at literacy events has exceeded expectations, radio programmes have increased school attendance, and community by-laws have been developed to reduce school drop-outs.

Spelling Bees: Throughout this final project year, Temwa has supported teachers and 48 Reading Camp mentors to organise local spelling bee competitions across the schools. Following the very successful spelling bees in December, where 264 Reading Camp learners demonstrated their improved literacy skills and 2,130 people attended, more competitions were held in May across 6 schools in the Uplands and Lakeshore.

Of the 132 students who participated, 105 were able to confidently express themselves in front of their peers and community members. While some participants found expressing themselves in English more challenging, 80% of the learners demonstrated brilliant skills in terms of spellings, letter naming, and word identification in Chichewa.



In June, competitions were held in Mbuyapi, Mazinga, and Chikwina. Of the 120 children participating, 76% of participants were able to express themselves in public and demonstrate a variety of literacy skills such as spellings and comprehension. These events were also very well supported by the community, with approximately 1,200 members of the general public in attendance. Attendance numbers at all the spelling bee events far exceeded expectations, with approximately 3,330 people reached this project year alone, suggesting the project has successfully helped increase community engagement with education initiatives.

Literacy Fairs: In March, we supported three literacy fair events in Chikwina, Usisya, and Bula, involving all of the 10 schools involved in the project. 160 learners were able to showcase their improved literacy skills, such as letter naming, comprehension, and spellings. At least 60% of the participants were able to express themselves confidently in public, and the best performers were rewarded with prizes including bags and notebooks. The events were well supported, with approximately 2,500 members of the general public in attendance.

Radio Shows: Throughout the project period, Temwa has used radio shows and jingles to disseminate information about education provision to the wider community. At the start of this academic year, Temwa used a radio jingle, targeting approximately **21,000 listeners**, to remind parents to enrol their children in schools; support their children with basic learning materials; and encourage children to attend Reading Camps. This led to increased enrolment and improved attendance in schools and Reading Camps compared to previous years.

In February, Temwa's Country Director, Kondwani Botha, joined a Usisya community radio programme to discuss issues affecting children's academic performance and school attendance in Nkhata Bay North, and ways to improve it. Community members who phoned in noted lack of parental guidance due to parents emigrating to find work, and young boys dropping out to make money by fishing.

Engagement meetings and By-laws: An integral part of this project has been facilitating community engagement meetings with local governance structures, school governance structures, and community members to ensure that the project remains in line with Temwa’s community-driven approach.

In many cases, these meetings have led to the formation of initiatives and by-laws aimed at increasing enrollment, controlling school dropout levels, and improving performance. 80% of the schools Temwa works with have now adopted initiatives aimed at improving retention and enrollment rates in their schools. For example, in March, Temwa facilitated the development of a written document of by-laws under Chigwere VDC aiming to improve school enrolment, retention, and performance.

In May, Temwa facilitated engagement meetings between teachers and parents in 2 schools, Mazinga and Chikwina, who were concerned that children’s progress was not improving substantially enough despite interventions. The meeting served as a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences among teachers and parents on ways to support individual learners with their learning in school and at home. An online forum was set up for parents and teachers to continue sharing experiences and support.

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

Temwa’s Reading Camps have formed a focal part of our Improving Community Literacy Project. Education provision in Nkhata Bay North is negatively affected by severe underfunding leading to high teacher-pupil ratios and lack of resources. Temwa planned to support communities to establish 10 Reading Camps, supporting 500 children a year to improve their literacy skills.

We have now supported the establishment of 22 Reading Camps that are being attended by over 1,600 primary school-aged learners, far exceeding the project’s target. In addition there, 3 Village Reading Groups are also being supported to provide literacy and broader mentoring support to 34 young women.

Refresher training: 48 voluntary mentors have been running the camps on a weekly basis. In September, Temwa trained 41 of these mentors from 22 Reading Camps and 3 Reading Groups to improve their management of the camps and address any gaps in literacy teaching knowledge. Training for Reading Camp mentors has focused on equipping mentors with skills for effective reading instructions, using various approaches such as repeated reading, chunking, buddy reading, radio reading and dramatised reading. Mentors have also focused on developing learner’s confidence when reading familiar words, and using learning games to engage learners throughout the sessions.

In April, these refresher trainings focused on making sure mentors were running Reading Camps in line with the national reading program, while developing action plans on operating Reading Camps.

Mentors were trained in basic reading instruction skills which are fundamental for early grade learners to develop and master the art of reading. When the mentors organised mock classes in order to demonstrate

the teaching skills they had acquired during the training, most demonstrated a strong understanding through their good organisation and constructive peer criticism.

Timothy, one of the mentors at Ndengele Reading Camp, says that “the skills obtained from training, especially on a creative approach to teaching using demonstrations, songs and games, is an ideal way of helping early grade learners to easily understand content”.



Material support: Across the three years, Temwa has supported the provision of education and playing materials to all the Reading Camps and Village Reading

Groups, including chalkboards, footballs, notebooks for planning and files for keeping records such as student's attendance and performance. Schools and community members have also mobilised resources for the camps and have provided necessary materials including flipcharts. In review meetings held in February, mentors reported that they had found increased numbers of children attending who were attracted by the playing kits provided by Temwa. They also noted that the chalkboards and chalk made lesson delivery much easier.

Review meetings: While the Reading Camps have been managed and run by the community, Temwa has facilitated review meetings over the three years to ensure they are operating as well as possible. In February, review meetings with local governance representatives, parent-teacher associations, and teachers for Reading Camps across six schools reflected on good practices and challenges facing the camps.

Among the challenges noted was lacking permanent, purpose-built buildings for the Reading Camps. Some camps are currently sharing community spaces, such as halls or churches. Moving forwards, some Reading Camp governance structures are planning to mobilise resources to build these spaces. Mentors also found that the particularly extreme heavy rains this year led to lowered attendance during these periods.



In the final months of the project, Temwa facilitated meetings with key stakeholders to create strategies for continuing the Reading Camps after the project ends. Between May and June, 27 school committee members, 3 Head Teachers, 21 Reading Camp mentors, 9 Village District Council members, and 6 Chiefs met to discuss plans going forward. The representatives fed back their consultations with the community members, who all confirmed they would like to continue running Reading Camps having seen the impact they have had on the children.

Through these meetings, strategies for sustaining the Camps were discussed, and plans to continue engaging community members were formed. At Usisya Primary, it was decided that an elected committee will be responsible for monitoring the continuation of the Camps after the project ends. Parents will raise their school fund contributions to support mentors, while new mentors will be identified to replace those who are now moving on to further education.

Mbuyapi Primary School have also decided to elect a committee to continue running the Camps, and have identified where they will source materials to continue resourcing the Camps. They agreed to temporarily reduce the number of operating camps in the area in order to manage them effectively, and increase the number gradually once this is established.

Support visits and progress review: Throughout the second half of the project year, we have been conducting assessments to track the progress of the children attending Reading Camps. In March, the team conducted an Early Grade Reading Assessment, a government approved tool to measure children's literacy progress, in 10 reading camps who operate under Mazinga and Chikwina Primary Schools.

88 learners (44 infants and 44 juniors) were assessed in 4 categories of literacy skills: letter naming, word reading, fluency, and comprehension.



70% of the infants were able to easily identify letters and read words in both English and the local language. 70% of juniors also demonstrated well developed skills in fluency particularly in Chichewa, although they were less confident in English.

In June, we conducted further Early Grade Reading Assessments for 179 frequent attendees from 8 Reading Camps. Compared to the EGRA conducted in June 2022, the assessed infants demonstrated a 10% increased ability to correctly identify letters. Likewise, the Standard 2 students demonstrated a 9% increase in ability to properly identify syllables compared to last year. In Standard 4, an impressive 97% of children surpassed the national benchmark for oral reading fluency, while 69% of Standard 3 learners managed to do so.

Outcome 3: Improved library services

Through this project, Temwa has supported 10 school libraries, as well as the Usisya Community Library, so that the wider community have access to learning materials and conducive spaces to read and study. We have supported the provision of reading materials, including newspapers, non-fiction and fiction books. We have seen a steady increase in library attendance. Our monitoring has also demonstrated a huge improvement in the management of the community library, as Temwa has helped improve systems to continue attracting visitors throughout the year.



Committee formation: Earlier in this year, Temwa facilitated the establishment and orientation of the Usisya Community Library Committee, formed of teachers, school librarians, youth representatives, and other members of the general public, who will support library management, increase community awareness on library services and help with mobilisation of resources (for example, materials and money to support library services).

IT Supplies: In May and June we also supplied the Usisya Community Library with two desktop computers, as well as a printer and internet services. Originally, we had planned to provide more furniture for the library, but the community members decided this would be difficult to store and find space for, and that there was greater need for computers.

Attendance: Since January, there have been 3,336 recorded visits to the Usisya Community Library (38% women). Of these, 1,492 of these visits were made by primary school aged children, and the predominant purpose of these visits was to use the resources and quiet space to study. 91 visits across the year were made for using the computers, and 6 people were trained in computer literacy. We are hoping this number will increase even more with the arrival of the new desktops.

Book delivery: Deliveries of 8,200 books from the UK have been sent to Malawi, some of which are currently being distributed to the primary and secondary schools we work with, along with the Usisya Community Library so all community members will have access to new resources. These books primarily focus on primary-level educational books, as well as some secondary-level educational books and novels, and dictionaries and encyclopaedias.



Community stories

Families supporting success

Nolia, aged 9, lives in Chikwina with her parents and sister. Nolia's parents have always understood the importance of education, as both her parents were able to finish secondary school. They encourage Nolia to attend her closest Reading Camp at least twice a week, and they make time to support her with her homework.

Nolia used to find it difficult to retain her learning, but by attending a Reading Camp, Nolia has been able to practise her literacy skills. She says, "now that I have more time to practise what I am learning, I am doing well in reading both English and Chichewa I have been able to polish up my literacy skills."

*Nolia is now one of the top three highest performers in her class. She has exciting plans for her future: **"I would like to keep on practising my literacy skills until I am able to read and spell even the hard words. In the future when I finish my school, I want to be a doctor."***

The Community Literacy project has encouraged parents like Nolia's to support their children's educational development, while enabling children to fulfil their potential.



Reading Camp mentor Linda is inspiring the next generation of female students



Linda lives in Mzizimu with her family. Growing up, she had a difficult home life. She lived with her grandparents after her parents divorced, and they struggled to afford resources for her and her sibling's education. Linda used to visit the Usisya Community Library when she was still at school, so when she heard about the Community Literacy project, she volunteered her support to help other children access a better education and better life opportunities.

As a Reading Camp mentor, she now helps children to read and write, while developing her mentorship skills. Linda has become a shining example for the young girls she mentors, encouraging as many girls to attend Reading Camps as possible. Ever since she started mentoring the children, the population of girls attending her Reading Camp has increased by 15%. She believes community members are starting to understand the importance of girl's education.

She has also been able to help her Reading Camp attendees improve their literacy skills. When she started mentoring the learners, only 2 out of 10 learners were able to read fluently. Now, at least 6 out of 10 learners are able to read fluently.

"I have learnt how to handle young children which will help me to be a responsible parent in the future and a good teacher as my career aspiration". Linda would like to inspire other young women in the community to volunteer at Reading Camps, to help other children improve their literacy skills. She also plans to pursue a career in teaching, and will soon apply to a teacher training programme to become fully qualified

Precious is benefitting from the resources at the Usisya Community Library

Precious lives in Chipuwali Village in Usisya with his family, who depend on small-scale farming and piece-work to earn a living. In the past, his performance in school was poor, as the family could not afford books or stationary for Precious to study with.

Now, Precious regularly attends the Usisya Community Library, supported by Temwa, where he has space to study and resources to learn from. He sees the benefit in his school achievements, as he is now one of the top learners in his class.

“My performance will keep on improving since I have also become a library member. This is enabling me to borrow books and study at home.”

This year, Precious has also been enrolled onto Temwa’s bursary scheme, meaning he can attend secondary school without worrying about affording school fees and uniform. He is already thinking about his plans after finishing his schooling.

“After completing my studies, my plan is to work with Temwa to continue improving our community”

