

Supporting Early Childhood Development in Malawi

End of Year Report - September 2025

This is the End of Year Report for the second year of Temwa's Early Childhood Development (ECD) project in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi. This innovative three-year initiative seeks to transform early childhood education in the region by bolstering community-operated pre-schools. The report outlines the achievements and challenges faced over the second half of the school year, covering March to August, as well as a summary of the year's achievements against planned outcomes.

Project overview and aims



The majority of children in Nkhata Bay North lack access to formal education until the age of 6. Temwa's previous Community Literacy Project revealed that this gap results in children entering primary school ill-prepared, with limited literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently, they often struggle to engage with the curriculum, leading to high drop-out rates. This disparity disproportionately affects young girls, whose education is frequently under-prioritised, leading them to abandon school to assist with household chores.

Government investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) is minimal. Privately-owned pre-schools are prohibitively expensive for most community members, the majority of whom live below the poverty line. Additionally, existing community-run pre-schools in the area suffer from inadequate resources and poor management.

Temwa's three-year project aims to support 30 community-led pre-schools. Some of these are newly established with Temwa's support, while others existed but were inactive or struggling to operate effectively. The project aims to ensure that all the pre-schools meet national minimum standards and provide a vital foundation for formal education, addressing the educational gap in these communities.

By the end of the 1st year of the Project, Temwa had supported 26 pre-schools with the enrolment of over 1,000 children, with 146 of these children graduating to primary school in September 2024. In the 2nd year of the Project, Temwa added 4 new schools at Lupilo, New-Salawe, Wisdom, and Galileya – taking the total number of schools supported to 30 by June 2025. The pre-schools cumulative enrolment reached 2,300, of which 346 have graduated to primary school. Our School Readiness Assessment found that 84% of children demonstrated adequate development, with performance of average to good, indicating they are ready to transition to primary school.

Outcome 1: Improved access to pre-school services for children aged between 3-5

In March, the Project conducted a number of engagement meetings. A Bylaw issued by the Siyalimba Area Development Committee required all villages in the area to have a pre-school, leading to the establishment of the Galileya pre-school in Wanyondo Village, overseen by the Wanyondo Village Development Committee. Temwa engaged with the VDC to support the Project's 29th School, orienting the pre-school committee, and raising awareness amongst community members to encourage enrolment.

Temwa also engaged with the Mlenda VDC at Sanga. The meeting aimed at creating a platform for discussion between the VDC, pre-school committees and Temwa on the role of the VDC in promoting ECD services in the area. Discussions revealed that the VDC has not been actively supporting EDC Committees for over a year, with challenges of coordinating members over a large area. During the meeting, it was agreed that each VDC member would make monthly contributions of K2,000 to finance their meetings. It is hoped that this will lead to more proactive efforts to promote quality provision of ECD services, including by planning and demanding development support from the District Council.

Temwa engaged with the Yeppe VDC to develop Sustainability Plans for 3 pre-schools – at Bunga, Kawanda, and Uthuli. Participants discussed possible income generating activities and agreed that fishing and buying/selling agricultural products had better prospects than farming given their lakeshore location, and the lack of suitable agricultural land. The 3 pre-schools came up with business plans for income generating activities and submitted them to the VDC. Their next challenge is to fundraise for financial capital to invest in the businesses.

In April, the team conducted an engagement meeting with stakeholders in the village of New Salawe. The meeting brought together stakeholders (including the Village Headman, VDC Chairperson, and Head Teacher) who agreed on the urgent need to establish a pre-school in the Village. The Village Headman committed to organizing a community-wide meeting to encourage collective support for the initiative, including through an awareness campaign involving film shows at Bua and Sanga. It was also agreed that a School Committee would be elected during the upcoming community meeting. This committee will oversee the planning and implementation of the pre-school and will later receive training and support from Temwa. The Community Meeting subsequently took place on 3rd May (called by Chief Kabenu) and confirmed the commitment to establish the pre-school. A committee of 10 people was elected and One Church (CCAP) offered their premises to host the pre-school.



Temwa facilitated further meetings at the Galileya and Lupiro pre-schools, helping to clarify roles and orientating key stakeholders.

Figure 1 - Committee members at Lupiro discussing their roles

Pre-school Committee responsibilities:

- *Resource Mobilization:* The committee is responsible for securing the necessary resources both financial and material to support the ECD centre
- *Supervision of Caregivers:* The committee oversees the work of caregivers to ensure that they are effectively supporting children's development. This includes monitoring caregiver performance, providing feedback, and offering professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge in early childhood education.
- *Coordinating Key Stakeholders on Day-to-Day Management of ECD:* The committee plays a vital role in coordinating the efforts of all involved parties, including parents, local authorities, and community members. They ensure that the ECD centre runs smoothly, with clear communication between all stakeholders, and that day-to-day operations are aligned with the centres goals.
- *Motivating Caregivers:* The committee is responsible for motivating and encouraging caregivers to maintain high levels of enthusiasm and dedication to their work. This can involve providing emotional support, recognizing and rewarding good performance, and creating a positive working environment that fosters growth and retention among caregivers.



In April, 180 ECD Curriculum books (for maths, English, Chichewa and bedside reading) and 30 Charts (depicted letters, numbers, vegetables and animals) were ordered from the Manemo book shop, to be delivered to new pre-schools in May. The decision to procure books from local suppliers was made to support caregivers with reference materials that are relevant to Malawi's ECD curriculum. By the end of May, the books had been distributed to 7 upland pre-schools. Refresher training for caregivers in these schools helped to orient them on how to use the books effectively to support children with foundation and numerical skills. *Figure 2 - Children at Kabanda ECD center showcasing the books donated by Temwa*

Children were also provided with a nutritious meal every day. Between September and November 2024, 26 pre-schools were able to provide children with maize porridge, provided by the community members, and organised by the pre-school committees. In November, Temwa procured 30 tins (600kg) each of soya beans and groundnuts, to support the feeding programmes. These were distributed to the pre-schools in December 2024, and again in May 2025.

Figure 3 - Children from Kaband Pre-School eating nutritious porridge made from Groundnuts, Nyuwa Beans, and Soya



Temwa worked with the District Social Welfare Office to provide training to members of the ECD management committees in December 2024. Despite being certified and mandated to provide training of ECD committees throughout the District, the Government officials struggle to do so due to under-funding. Temwa's financial support ensured that the pre-school committee members have the skills necessary to

manage the schools. Last April 2024, Temwa conducted field visits with District Educational Officials to assess the status of the Temwa supported pre-schools against government standards, assessing the environment (building structures, sanitation, and safety), teaching methods, management structures, and sustainability plans. 11 of the 13 reviewed met minimum requirements for government registration. This year, all 26 that had been established by December 2024 were successfully registered. It is expected that the remaining 4 (at Wisdom, Lupiro, Galileya, and New-Salawe) will be registered by December 2025.

Despite successfully registering, 4 of the pre-schools previously established became inactive over the course of the school year. Msambia pre-school was temporarily inactive due to the death of a caregiver, whilst Nthendi pre-school suffered caregiver drop-outs (new caregivers are expected to be recruited by the pre-school committees in late September). Kasanganyami and Chiusga pre-schools had issues related to village politics.

Outcome 2: Early year caregivers' skills and knowledge increased to deliver high quality ECD services

Caregiver training was initially expected to take place in March/April but this was delayed to allow for the arrival of Action Aid's donated tablets (which never arrived, possibly due to staff turnover at Action Aid) and also to enable the new caregivers from Galileya and New Salawe pre-schools to participate.

In June, the refresher training was conducted in 5 locations in Ruarwe, Usisya, Thoto, Chikwina, and Bula, and was provided to 54 caregivers. To date, 66 caregivers have been fully trained. Refresher training focused on addressing knowledge gaps in specific ECD concepts and in the way caregivers deliver their lessons.



Figure 4 - Headteacher from Nthembo Primary School orienting caregivers on appropriate methods for teaching literacy and numeracy skills in children

The training covered the following concepts and approaches:

- The concept of Child Growth and Development – the session covered physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual development, the latter focused on distinguishing between right and wrong and guiding children to make morally sound choices
- Appropriate Approaches to support development growth – Caregivers were taken through 4 appropriate approaches for supporting children's development, including play, songs, stories, and hands-on activities
- Appropriate approaches for imparting literacy and numeracy skills – led by Primary School Teachers, this session set out effective methods for imparting literacy and numeracy skills, particularly relevant for caregivers working with 5 year old children preparing to transition into Standard One.

A monitoring over January to April revealed that 65% of pre-schools were using a properly developed lesson plan to support children's learning, with caregivers adopting at least 4 recommended skills and methods, including storytelling, playing, games and songs. Monitoring in May found that caregivers were doing well in fostering cognitive, physical, emotional, and self-help adaptive development, with children progressing from Level One to Level Three. However, language and communication development in older children did not progress as well, and this became a focus of the Caregiver Refresher training in June.

All the 30 pre-schools have an arrangement of providing honoraria to caregivers ranging between K10,000 to K35,000 per month. Those at the lakeshore are more able to afford paying caregivers as people's incomes are relatively higher and more stable than in the upland thanks to the fishing industry. In some cases in the upland, such as Chikwina and Chisyombi, caregivers are supported not with cash but with help on their farmlands. In the first quarter of 2025, half of schools were consistently providing honoraria to caregivers. By June, this had risen to 70%.

Outcome 3: Pre-school children's academic and personal development increased in preparation for primary school

Pre-school attendance aims to develop children's confidence and basic literacy skills required to perform well in primary school. Previously, the existing pre-schools did not have the capacity to record the development of key skills in order to ascertain if a child was ready for primary school. Now caregivers have been supplied with files to keep records and track children's performances and have begun to properly assess and record the progress of each individual child who attends.

The table below shows a summary findings on children's readiness across different domains by the end of Year 2 of the Project.

Domain	Rate of Children's Performance		
	Full	Partial	Not Developed
i. Physical Development	77%	20%	3.4%
ii. Approaches to learning	34.5%	52.9%	12.6
iii. Cognitive and General knowledge	48.3%	40.3%	11.5
iv. Language, Literacy and Communication	43.7%	40.2%	16.1%
v. Numeracy and Maths concepts	59.8%	35.6%	4.6%
vi. Social and Emotional Development	29.9%	40.2%	29.9%
vii. Spiritual and Moral Development	41.4%	43.7%	14.9%
viii. Environment and Science	33.3%	37.9%	28.7%

Readiness of children entering primary school

- Across all domains, 84% of children demonstrated adequate development, with performance of average to good, indicating they are ready to transition to primary school.
- On average, 44% of the children are fully developed in all the domains while 40% are partially developed in the eight development domains.
- These children are expected to enter primary school with average to good foundational skills to engage academically, socially, and physically.
- Only 14% of the children have not fully developed in the eight areas of child development. These children may face challenges in adapting to primary school routines, classroom expectations and peer interactions.
- The common contributing factor to inadequate 'school readiness' among some of the children is the length of time they had spent at their respective pre-school. Nearly one third of the pre-schools are newly established and children have only had one year of accessing ECD services.

Outcome 4: Improved community participation in the running of targeted pre-schools

In May, the Temwa team, with the support of its M&E Officer, conducted monitoring to assess the following:

- Children's attendance - The monitoring exercise revealed that there was a 24% decrease in attendance across the pre-schools at the beginning of the Second Term in January, primarily due to parental involvement in farming activities and financial constraints. When the farming season ended, most parents returned their children to the community pre-schools.
- Community participation and committee activities - All centres reported some level of parental engagement, but most (94%) reported a lack of consistent and active involvement. Only one pre-school conducted frequent parent engagements. Just over 40% of the centres reported active mobilisation of food support from the general community. 70% reported that their ECD committees were active during the previous academic term.

In late June, Temwa staff were able to re-visit 20 of the 30 established pre-schools. All twenty pre-schools visited remained operational throughout June, though several factors disrupted consistent service delivery. A common challenge reported was the scheduling of under-five clinic services, which coincided with pre-school operational hours. During these clinic days, children often missed school as they accompanied their parents to health facilities. Other factors affecting operations included unforeseen community events, particularly funerals. Additionally, in 4 out of 20 visited preschools, service delivery was disrupted due to inconsistency in preparing porridge. On some days, porridge was not cooked, leading to children being sent home early.

Temwa is working with the VDCs to encourage all pre-schools to host special days for Under-5 Clinics to be held at the pre-school premises (3 are already doing so) to minimise absences and further encourage parents to send their children to the pre-schools. Temwa is also supporting the pre-schools to establish a consistent meal preparation plan and ensure adequate supplies and caregiver support to minimise disruption to meal provision, ensuring the children remain in school for the full day.

The June monitoring found that approximately 70% of committees can be considered fully in control of the management of their respective pre-schools. This is evidenced by their ability to sustain feeding programmes, pay honorarium for caregivers, mobilise resources for teaching materials and long-term investments towards construction of permanent structures for their centres. The less active committees are mostly characterized with disputes related to appointment of caregivers and location of pre-schools. Temwa is prioritising engagement with the Village Development Committees to address these issues.

Awareness events were initially planned to take place in December 2024. However, due to lack of access to funding, the activity was shifted to March 2025. A programme review in March led to the decision to undertake awareness raising efforts after the June monitoring was completed, so that awareness raising efforts could focus on addressing gaps identified through monitoring.

Radio programmes were not conducted throughout 2024 and 2025 due to non-operation of Usisya community Radio, the only Radio station that airs in lakeshore areas of Nkhata-bay North.

Other forms of awareness-raising were conducted in late June and early July 2025, at Luwarwe, and Usisya, with a Football Bonanza and Evening film shows reaching over 4000 community members. Through films, football commentary, speeches and IEC materials (including T-shirts), messages on the importance of ECD were disseminated to the general public. During the events, there was positive



feedback from community members, with many asking questions on how best community members can be involved.

Figure 5 - Football team entering the football pitch (Kanyama ground in Usisya) during the Football Bonanza

Project Challenges

Enrolment rates, attendance and caregiver commitment levels between October and January 2025 were less than expected, partly due to resource constraints. Overall, enrolment was less than targeted in Year 2 (1,300 against a planned 1,900), partly due to lack of resources for awareness raising at the beginning of the year. As predicted in the mid-year report, food and cash contributions from parents increased significantly post-harvest, with attendance levels at 85% by the end of the school year.

The fluctuations in attendance across the year also highlighted the importance of each school developing and implementing sustainability plans. Temwa will continue to work with pre-school committees to implement sustainability plans that promote good quality caregiving and high attendance rates throughout the school year, regardless of the agricultural season. Attendance levels overall were also affected by 4 schools becoming inactive – Temwa will be working closely with the relevant Village Development Committees to help re-establish these schools.

Temwa's budget was constrained this year, partly due to cash flow issues, which hopefully will not affect Year 3 thanks to agreements on disbursement schedules with our existing donors. We also continue to fundraise to meet our target budget.

Community Stories

The story so far for Kabanda Pre-school



Kabanda Pre-school is located in Yeppe VDC, under Siyalimba ADC. It opened in 2020 and closed in 2022 due to lack of coordination among community members in the area. When Temwa started to implement the ECD project in 2023, engagement meetings established that key development stakeholders in the VDC and ADC did not see the provision of ECD as a priority and most community members were not aware of its importance.

Figure 7 – Children at Kabanda Pre-School

After a series of engagement meetings, the VDC, Chiefs and other development stakeholders understood the need to improve ECD services in their community. In late 2023, A 10-member committee and 2 caregivers were appointed to manage the pre-school. Temwa oriented the Committee on its responsibilities, provided intensive training for caregivers, and provided books, teaching materials and furniture. Awareness raising in 2024, including through drama performances, helped the community understand the importance of enrolling their young children in the pre-school.

Today, Kabanda is well organised, supported, and well-attended. The community is contributing food for feeding programme, paying honoraria to caregivers, and providing the school with playing materials. As of the July 2025, the pre-school has 42 young children attending.

New Salawe gets a Pre-school for the first time

New Salawe is located in the area of group village headman Kabenu, (Kabenu VDC). The area is surrounded by 7 villages with one primary school. According to the head teacher of the primary school, less than 20% of the children who enrol at the school have been able to complete their primary education. The school reports the highest level of poor performance and class transition in the Luwarwe Education Zone. The head teacher and child protection worker for the area saw what Temwa was doing with the establishment of other pre-schools in Luwarwe, and engaged Temwa to work with them to establish a new pre-school at New Salawe.



Figure 7 - Engagement meeting in progress at New at Salawe

Temwa held meetings with key stakeholders (the VDC, school committees, teachers and chiefs) who confirmed their commitment to set up a new pre-school. By the end of May, a pre-school committee was appointed, and caregivers were selected and trained. The school opened on 1st June with the enrolment of 25 children.

According to Chief Kabenu, *'The area of new Salawe has had no ECD centre for almost a decade, this has contributed to poor performance and class transition at New Salawe primary school. Less than 20% of children who start primary school have been able to transition to secondary school in the last 8 years. The opening of a new ECD centre in the area is most likely to improve the quality of enrolment, performance and class transition in primary school.'*

Thank you

We would like to send a heartfelt thank you for your generous support towards the ECD Project. All 30 pre-schools have now been established. The third year of the Project will focus on strengthening the sustainable management of the schools to ensure that they maintain high enrolment and attendance rates and that children receive a good quality of consistent caregiving, learning and access to nutritious food.



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