



## Temwa Community Literacy Annual Report – January 2022

This report shares the latest developments of Temwa’s three-year Community Literacy project implemented in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi. It covers progress during the second project year. Despite Covid-19 causing severe disruptions to educational provision in Malawi, this project is on track to achieve – and in many areas exceed – its targets.

### Project context and aims

In Malawi, one in three adults are illiterate. In the isolated communities where Temwa works, the challenges with illiteracy are exacerbated by the government’s under-investment in education and inadequate resourcing. The Covid-19 pandemic has further worsened the situation in Nkhata Bay North: prolonged school closures in 2020 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 aims to address these challenges by creating an enabling and inclusive environment for literacy; improving reading and writing skills; and improving library services. We do this through community awareness activities, reading groups for children and young women, as well as community and school library services.

### Community education achievements

We are proud to report that, in the last year, the project has helped strengthen community literacy through the following achievements:

#### Outcome 1: Create an enabling and inclusive environment for literacy

Most people in Nkhata Bay North have low levels of education, and the poorest children only attend school intermittently, because helping with family income generation is often prioritised over education. Events and community engagements have been vital to increase community awareness of the importance of education and to decrease school drop-out rates. During the reporting period, **seven Reading Camps participated in a Spelling Bee Competition in Usisya**. A total of 42 community members (57% women) attended this fun event that celebrated literacy. Reportedly, **an increasing number of parents are actively involved in their children's schooling**. In 2021, the number of learners who come to school with homework signed by their parents tripled, compared to the previous year.

**New local education bylaws** have been created as a result of community engagement meetings, supported by Temwa, and **are reportedly leading to an increased enrolment of children at school**. For example, one bylaw states that no child is supposed to be found along the lakeshore fishing, selling, or buying fish during school hours. School Management Committees and Mothers Groups are also independently conducting

regular visits to schools to monitor the progress made by teachers and children regarding attendance and punctuality. These community-led initiatives, alongside awareness campaigns by Temwa, show that the wider community is increasingly valuing, and actively willing to improve, educational provision in their area.

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

Significant under-investment in education means that school class sizes tend to be very large and teacher-student ratios are high. As a result, children may not learn to read and write properly in their early schooling years, impacting their academic progress later on. Temwa's reading groups offer low-cost but effective after-school education that boost learners' ability to read and write. **21 weekly Reading Camps have had a stable level of attendance of 1,200 primary school-aged children per week (57% girls) in the last year – far exceeding the project target of 20 Reading Camps and 660 learners.** Three Village Reading Groups have also provided literacy education and broader mentoring support to 43 young women.

Remarkable progress was celebrated in the reading and writing skills of Reading Camp learners during community review meetings at the end of the academic year in December. **All of the children attending Reading Camps passed their final exams,** with two Reading Camp learners becoming the top two performers in their primary-school class. Many learners who previously struggled to read in English, Chichewa, and Tumbuka have **improved their skills in all these languages.**

The Reading Camp and Village Reading Group mentors and available educational materials have been fundamental to the success of this project. **48 voluntary mentors (45% women) have been running the reading groups on a weekly basis.** 41 of the mentors (43% women) were **trained in line with the National Reading Programme standard, and in designing and making reading materials using locally available resources** which reflect local stories and culture. By the end of the year, the Thete Reading Camp in Chikwina had produced over 60 books, which 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. They have also been equipped with handwashing units and 40 tablets of soap as part of Temwa's Covid-19 response.



### Outcome 3: Improve library services

Schools in Nkhata Bay North are generally poorly resourced, and many learners have to share one textbook. Developing local library services is making a huge difference to community access to learning resources and their engagement in reading. **Ten school libraries have been operating** during the reporting period. The active engagement of school governance, who were trained in the first year of the project, has enhanced community ownership and helps ensure that the school libraries are functioning well.

**2,600 visitors (57% women) were recorded at the Usisya Community Library** between June-December. This is **the highest-ever level of girls and women visiting the library**, compared to only 8% in 2016 and 24% in 2020. The library continues to be a popular place of learning for school-going children who are attracted by the available curriculum books and conducive learning environment. 12 students (42% women) also attended computer classes, which can open up new opportunities for community members. Telwza Sibande, a primary school teacher, now knows how to use the internet, email and word processing, which has been hugely helpful as she has obtained a place to study at university to become a secondary school teacher.

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## Blessings Ngwira, a primary school student: “I come to the library after classes to read books with fish, butterflies, cars and children.”

*Blessings Ngwira is nine years old. He is one of the children from the village of Nthembo who regularly visit the Usisya Community Library and attend the Chigwirizano Reading Camp. He likes to visit the library, established by Temwa in 2007, to further practice his reading skills outside the Reading Camp sessions.*

*In November, Temwa Malawi’s Communications Officer, Luzily Chiponde, met Blessings on his way to the library. Holding up Blessings for a chat was not easy because he said he was in a rush. Blessings explained that he is currently reading a book titled ‘Galeta lodzadza ndi ufulu’, which translates as ‘A freedom chariot,’ that he “can’t wait to finish”.*

*Blessings has big aspirations for when he grows up, as he knows that he could have a positive impact on his community. He is planning to master his literacy skills and become a teacher, or maybe even a lecturer or professor, to support all those that do not have access to education. Through your support, Temwa’s Community Literacy project is helping children like Blessings to dream big. Better access to books and learning facilities encourages creativity, improves reading skills and ultimately will expand life opportunities for children in these remote communities.*



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## Thank you

By working through and with local governance structures, mentors and families, we aim to increase appreciation and prioritisation of education. This can improve life and livelihood opportunities of children and the wider community. During the third and last project year, we will continue to empower the communities to take a leading role in managing education activities locally – creating more educated, equal, and resilient communities who are able to transform their own futures.

**On behalf of the Temwa UK and Malawi teams, thank you again for your very kind support!**