

Supporting Early Childhood Development in Malawi

End of Year Report – September 2026

This End of Year Report shares progress from the third and final year of Temwa's Early Childhood Development (ECD) project in Nkhata Bay North, Malawi, and reflects the difference your support is helping to make for young children, families and communities. Over the course of this three-year initiative, Temwa has worked alongside communities to strengthen community-run ECD Centres, enabling children aged three to five to access safe, inclusive and play-based early learning before they enter primary school.

Across the final year, Temwa combined service delivery with a structured end-of-project evaluation. The team conducted monitoring and evaluation visits to project sites, held community engagement meetings and distributed ECD information, organised induction meetings for children transitioning into primary school, delivered a radio awareness campaign, and completed final data collection and analysis.

Project overview and aims



Figure 1. The construction in progress of Chisomo ECD in progress, captured September 2025

Many 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 and adapt to a structured learning environment, leading to high drop-out rates, especially for girls, whose education is often under-prioritised.

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.

In response, Temwa implemented a three-year project to support 30 community-led ECD centres. Some centres were newly established by the community with Temwa's support, while others were revitalised after becoming inactive or struggling to operate effectively. The project sought to improve compliance with national minimum standards, expand access to quality early learning and provide children with a stronger foundation for primary education.

Temwa's ECD project has done this by supporting community-run centres to deliver safe, play-based early learning and care for children aged three to five, strengthen caregivers' skills community engagement and improve school readiness and transition to primary. Over this final year, we focused on:

1. Consolidating centre operations, community ownership and sustainability as external support reduced
2. Strengthening caregiver practice and the use of Malawi's ECD syllabus and low-cost teaching and play materials
3. Supporting children's transition to Standard 1 through induction meetings and school-readiness follow-up
4. Conducting monitoring visits, stakeholder engagement, information distribution and final data analysis
5. Extending public awareness of ECD through a community radio campaign

Outcomes and achievements

By project end, the project has made a substantial contribution to expanding access to ECD services in remote communities of Nkhata Bay North. Final monitoring and evaluation combined site visits, engagement meetings, distribution of ECD information, transition induction meetings, radio awareness activities, and analysis of centre and primary-school data. The findings show sustained gains in access, caregiver practice and school readiness, alongside clear lessons on affordability, distance, seasonal migration, feeding and WASH that should inform future programming.



Figure 2. Children and the ECD centre management committee members.

End-of-project monitoring and evaluation approach

The end-of-project evaluation triangulated evidence from monitoring visits to supported ECD centres, engagement meetings with caregivers, committees and community stakeholders, distribution of ECD information, transition induction meetings, primary-school data, the 2026 School Readiness Assessment and final programme records. Quantitative data were analysed alongside stakeholder observations to assess progress, explain variation in results and identify sustainability priorities.

The final evaluation shows that ECD services were strongest where trained caregivers, active centre management committees, regular community engagement, learning materials and locally organised feeding operated together. The same gains remain vulnerable where households cannot sustain contributions, caregiver honoraria are delayed, or centres lack safe water, appropriate sanitation and a permanent learning space.

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



Figure 3. Children at Kabanda ECD Centre enjoying Maize porridge.

In Year 3, the project's focus shifted from expansion to consolidating access and sustaining the community-led ECD network. By the end of the year, 26 of the 30 centres supported during the project remained operational, achieving 87% of the target. Community stakeholders estimated that, within the 12 primary-school catchment areas, access to ECD services had increased from around 60% of eligible children at baseline to between 80% and 100% by the end of Year 3.

Year 3 recorded the project's highest annual enrolment, with 1,198 children attending supported centres, compared with 985 in Year 2. A further 313 children transitioned from ECD centres into primary school during this year, bringing the cumulative number of children transitioned into primary school through supported ECD centres to 685 children.

Community ownership was a central priority in Year 3 as operational support from Temwa reduced. Centre committees continued to mobilise porridge through community farming, parent contributions and small fees, while final site visits and engagement meetings reinforced local responsibilities for centre management, attendance, safeguarding and maintenance. ECD information distributed to caregivers, parents and community leaders aimed to sustain demand for early learning and encourage continued action after project closure.

During Year 3, 16 centres received essential stationery such as flip charts, markers, masking tape, pens, pencils and exercise books, to support planning, record-keeping and low-cost teaching aids. End of Year monitoring also confirmed continued community investment in infrastructure: committees at Chisyombi, Bunga, Kabanda and Galileya were constructing permanent structures, while Chisomo ECD completed a two-block permanent building. These final-year developments demonstrate local ownership, although incomplete or temporary facilities remained a constraint in some locations.

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

In Year 3, Temwa focused on consolidating caregivers' ability to deliver Malawi's ECD syllabus through practical planning, play-based pedagogy, classroom management and the use of low-cost learning and play materials. Final monitoring visits reviewed session delivery, child engagement, registers and record-keeping, while engagement meetings enabled caregivers and committees to assess performance and agree local action on gaps identified before project closure.

Year 3 findings show that adoption of local teaching aids and maintenance of child enrolment registers was high with both at approximately 63%, followed by daily attendance registers at 54%. This indicates meaningful application of some practical and administrative practices. All centres reported monthly caregiver honoraria of approximately seven GBP to 15 GBP (MWK 15,000 to MWK 35,000). However,

delayed payments and competing seasonal farming demands continued to affect motivation and retention. The Year 3 radio campaign reinforced centre-level work by promoting the value of ECD and encouraging parents and community leaders to support enrolment, regular attendance and recognition of caregivers.

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

In Year 3, 313 children transitioned from supported ECD centres into primary school. Temwa held induction meetings for these children and their caregivers to explain the expectations of Standard 1 and support a confident transition into formal education. Across primary schools serving the project area, 76% of new entrants in Year 3 had prior ECD exposure or foundational learning, compared with 57% at baseline, an improvement of 18.8 percentage points.

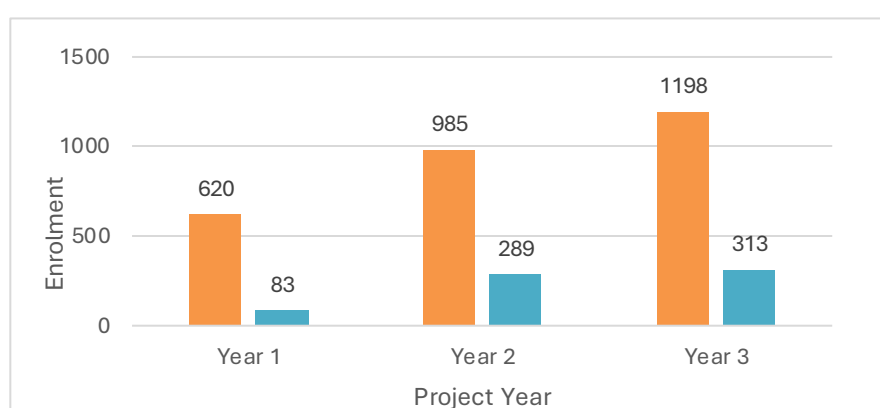


Figure 4. Trend in ECD enrolment (orange) and transition to primary school (blue) across the three years of project implementation.

The 2026 School Readiness Assessment adds detail to the Year 3 transition results. Of the 83 children assessed from the 313 who transitioned, 55 (66%) demonstrated sufficient readiness for primary school, 26 (31%) demonstrated partial readiness and would benefit from continued transition support, and two (2%) were not yet ready. This Year 3 cohort was the first to have had the opportunity to benefit from the project's full three-year ECD cycle. The findings, alongside the increased proportion of new primary-school entrants with prior ECD exposure or foundational learning, indicate a positive contribution to school readiness.

Project challenges

Despite strong progress, the final evaluation identified challenges that affected both delivery and sustainability. Household poverty limited some families' ability to contribute to centre costs; seasonal farming and migration reduced attendance and caregiver availability; and distance, difficult terrain and river crossings constrained access for some children. Community-led nutrition support remained vulnerable to poor harvests, while several centres continued to face shortages in safe water, latrines, permanent learning spaces and teaching materials. These findings underline the need for differentiated support to the most remote and economically vulnerable communities.

Community Success Story

From Closed Doors to New Beginnings



For five years, children in Uthuli had no access to a local ECD centre. Established in 2017, the centre closed just one year later due to weak leadership and limited caregiver capacity, leaving young children without a safe space to learn and play.

In 2023, Temwa worked with community members to understand why the centre had failed and how it could be revived. Through community engagement and collective action, local leaders, parents and committee members rebuilt trust and took ownership of the centre's future. As a result, Uthuli ECD Centre reopened in 2023. Temwa supported its revival through caregiver and committee training, start-up materials and nutrition. Today, the management committee meets twice monthly to oversee centre operations, support caregivers and maintain the facility, while children once again benefit from regular early learning opportunities.

What comes next?

As the three-year project closes, Temwa is sharing findings with communities and relevant government stakeholders; agreeing centre-level sustainability plans for caregiver honoraria, nutrition, maintenance and safeguarding; following up children assessed as partially or not yet ready for primary school; and targeting future assistance to centres facing the greatest WASH, infrastructure, access and staffing constraints. Phase 2 monitoring will establish clear baselines, use unique beneficiary identifiers to avoid double counting, disaggregate results by sex, age, disability and location, and document both outputs and longer-term transition outcomes.

Temwa's ECD Phase 2 programme (SEED) will build directly on this success. Over three years, SEED will expand access to quality early learning by establishing 30 new ECD Centres in Nkhata Bay West, while strengthening 16 existing centres in Nkhata Bay North through stronger School Management Committees in community-led income-generating activities. Through this next phase, Temwa aims to reach around 5,500 children aged three to five, train 90 caregivers and support 300 School Management Committee members, helping more children start primary school ready to learn, thrive and fulfil their potential.

Thank you

Thank you to our supporters, community partners, ECD Centre committee members, caregivers, parents, traditional leaders, primary schools and local government stakeholders for their commitment to this initiative. Temwa will carry the evidence and learning into the next phase of work to improve equitable access to quality early childhood development in Malawi.

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