



Monthly Bulletin

Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Assessments Initiated

There is widespread concern in Malawi that early grade learners are not acquiring the skills in literacy and numeracy that form the foundation upon which subsequent learning can be built. Research shows that the gap between children who acquire these foundation skills and those who do not only grows wider as children progress through primary school and that intervention at the earliest point is the most cost-effective strategy. Children who fail to master these skills early are significantly more likely to drop out later as they are unable to meaningfully access the curriculum. TPDS is committed to addressing this issue. A key element of our strategy is to introduce Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) methods which have already proved powerful in other African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Liberia and Ethiopia and indeed in many other countries worldwide.



Dorothy Matiti Administering EGRA

EGRA and EGMA are individualized assessments undertaken one-to-one with children. EGRA focuses on universal component skills of reading such as: letter and syllable recognition, phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, word recognition, decoding words and reading and comprehending sentences. Likewise, EGMA focuses on mathematical fundamentals such as number recognition, counting, number sequences and simple addition and subtraction. Both assessments are timed and so also test the fluency of children in tasks. EGRA and EGMA are powerful diagnostic tools and provide a clear description of the skills of a representative sample of children.

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Assessment results can inform the planning of both teacher development and instruction at school level.

Every country presents unique educational and linguistic environment. For this reason TPDS has invested considerable effort during September in the adaptation of these methods to Malawian context. A five day EGRA/EGMA adaptation workshop took place during at the Riverside Hotel in Lilongwe. It was facilitated by international literacy and numeracy experts Jessica Mejia, Sylvia Thompson and Aarnout

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Brombacher. More than 30 participants included senior staff from the MoEST Departments of: Planning, Inspection and Advisory Services, Basic Education, and Teacher Education, as well MIE, MANEB and a range of tertiary colleges countrywide. It was a hands on affair. Participants developed local instruments to be delivered in Chichewa and based upon its unique letter and word frequency. Instruction protocols were also developed and participants were then trained in administering the tests.

On the fourth day participants took the assessment to the field and piloted at Njewa and Chimutu Schools in Lilongwe. The experience made a deep impression on all participants. Even though each test takes only 15-20 minutes to administer it is rare for anyone to spend such a concentrated period with an individual child, finding out what they do and do not know. This is especially true in the Malawian context where very large class sizes are the norm and children are starved of individual attention. On the final day of the workshop, findings were reviewed and the instrument refined ready for implementation.

During a two week period in late October and early November, TPDS will train additional 'enumerators' and take these instruments to the field and assess a sample of 3,500 children nationwide. The results will be disseminated to all levels of the education system to inform future literacy and numeracy interventions. EGRA and EGMA, if more widely adopted, could also inform future CPD needs analysis and school inspection and support methods.

Continuous Professional Development Materials Piloted in Salima



Salima teachers engage with a CPD module

The development of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) materials has been the main focus of the TPDS CPD team since early August and culminated during September in the piloting testing of materials. TPDS, has worked in conjunction with Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), and other stakeholders, to develop materials to develop the identified pedagogical skills, and to train school leaders in CPD programming. The

piloting in Salima was aimed at assessing the utility of the materials with teachers and school leaders, and eliciting their feedback.

Piloting began on the morning of Monday September 20th. The CPD team spent the week at Kaputu Cluster. A total of 29 teachers (7 male and 22 female), from Standards 1 to 4, and 12 head-teachers (6 male and 6 female, deputy head-teachers and section heads attended the training. They came from 4 schools namely, Kaputu, Simaiwa, Salima LEA, and Chikombola Primary Schools. The Primary Education Adviser (PEA) for the zone, Mr. Bonyonga Mbewe, was also in attendance. We were joined by the MIE editor, Mr Peter Ngunga, Mr Leslie Ndovi from Tikwere, and Ms Dorothy Matiti from Education Methods and Advisory Services (EMAS)

For the Standards 1-4 teachers the piloting focused on the Literacy module, which comprised both Chichewa and English units. For the head-teachers, deputies and section heads, the focus was on the Leadership training module. The Standards 1-4 teachers spent all of Monday morning and afternoon for

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Day One, and returned on Friday September 24th for a second day. The head-teachers, deputies and section heads came on Tuesday and Wednesday, in the afternoons only.

Literacy Units are formatted in a similar fashion to lesson plans, starting with the topic, a brief introduction, outcomes, and activities, followed by self-reflection. The accompanying facilitators' manuals contain more detailed content, while the participants' manual guides participants in group activities, with space for them to write in their thoughts, contributions, group suggestions, and self-reflections. The content was developed from several needs assessment activities involving school visits by the TPDS CPD team, subject specialists from the MIE, methods advisers from the MoEST, primary school teachers, and specialists from the Tikwere project. The training content covers topics that have been identified as presenting particular challenges of PCAR to for teachers in Standards 1 to 4. The topics include the teaching of pre-reading activities and introducing the alphabet to Standard learners, consonant-vowel combinations, and teaching reading and writing by using sentence of the day in Standards 2 to 4.

The Leadership module focuses on empowering school leaders to support the CPD process in their own schools. Particularly significant is the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including learners and community members, in introducing a CPD program at school, and cluster levels. Activities in the Leadership module familiarized participants with tools for processes such as convening first meetings, conducting CPD needs analysis, and observing classroom teachers.

All piloting activities gave a real-time opportunity to test how the materials have been structured and how relevant they are for teachers and school leaders in facilitating the New Primary Curriculum. It also provided a mechanism for obtaining feedback from the participants, to be used in revising the materials before producing them for nationwide training later in the year. It was a worthwhile activity, and it generated meaningful data for the way forward with the CPD in the TPDS project. The Piloting workshop was filmed an experienced videographer from the USA (Jonathan Stratman). This material has been edited into a DVD which will be made available to all master trainers in order to ensure the fidelity and consistency of delivery through the training cascade.

TPDS Work Underway on Developing the Evaluation Framework for the New Primary Curriculum (NPC)

Effective Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) are fundamental to managing the successful implementation of any project. So it is with the implementation of the outcomes based New Primary Curriculum (NPC) in Malawi – frequently referred to using the acronym PCAR which stands for Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform. The MoEST and MIE have already developed a M&E framework for NPC implementation, but recognize that this requires further development. TPDS is committed to supporting MoEST in the development and documentation of this framework following agree principles:

- Produce information to serve policy, planning and management needs at national and decentralized level (DEM)
- Rely on objective, measureable data
- Make the framework applicable within the current institutional constraints
- Do not over-rely on PEAs to do all information gathering
- Fit within ministry's emerging overarching NESP/ESIP monitoring and evaluation strategy

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Following extensive research conducted by TPDS team-members Nick Shawa and Joe DeStefano, on September 29th a workshop was held in Lilongwe, chaired by the Inspection and Advisory Services (IAS), which brought together a wide range of MoEST staff and development partners in order to identify key evaluation questions in the implementation of PCAR. Among the questions generated by participants were the following:

- Are the instructional practices associated with OBE curriculum being applied in classrooms?
- What problems are teachers facing in implementing the new curriculum?
- Have teachers had any/enough orientation and training?
- How successful have PEAs adequately trained in the new curriculum?
- How do teachers handle the learner centered approach in large classroom?
- Are TTCs preparing teachers to implementing the new curriculum?
- Are ODL modules appropriately based on the new curriculum?
- Are teacher trainee exams evaluating teacher knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum?
- How useful/effective is the Std 1 introduction to school life curriculum?
- Are books making it to schools in adequate numbers to achieve the target ratio of 1:1?
- Do teachers and learners find books easy to use and understand them?
- Do teachers understand Continuous Assessment and able to correctly apply it in their classrooms?
- Is implementing of PCAR leading to improved teaching and learning?

With these questions in mind the group began the work of generating a framework of indicators to be applied to curriculum evaluation from inputs and processes through to outputs, outcomes and impact. Through the development of this framework and associated instrumentation: (i) the MoEST will be able make informed decisions regarding resource allocation, (ii) teacher training – both pre and inservice – can be informed by the real needs of teachers and students (iii) school monitoring and support methods can be developed that exactly match the demands of the new curriculum (iv) schools can be empowered to conduct self-assessment against explicit clearly defined standards.

TPDS Welcomes New Team Members As Team Approaches Full Strength

During September the TPDS team approached full strength through the following appointments:

- Sheila Sumaili began work on 20th Sept as Office Manager
- Zondiwe Kayisi began work as Accounts Assistant on 20 Sept.
- During Sept. the following appointments were made for the posts of Divisional Teacher Training Coordinator (DTTC) : Shire Highlands - Mary Mamba; South West - Niffa Chikonje; South East - Janet Chiromo; Central West - Chrissie Mukhori Phiri, Central East - Peter Jinazali; North, Spencer Nkhonjera. These members will begin work on October 4th.
- Advertisements were also placed for the post of District Literacy and Numeracy Coordinator in Ntchisi and Salima Districts. These staff will be responsible for developing and implementing and evaluating the TPDS's intensive interventions in these districts.