



## MTPDS Program Monthly Newsletter

Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) program is a 3-year USAID project supporting the professional development of teachers in Malawi and implementation of the National Primary Curriculum (NPC). MTPDS is being implemented by Creative Associates International, RTI International and Seward Inc. in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

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"We had a wrong impression of what the teachers are doing in school. It is pleasing to see that the children are able to read comfortably and this shows that they are ready for the next class." Mr. F. Nankuyu the Chief Executive of Zomba City, expressing contentment with early grade learners who read during an open day at Mponda School in Zomba.

### MTPDS introduces 'Tangerine' technology to assess learners



*An assessor conducting a learner assessment using a computer tablet in Salima*

IMPROVING EARLY GRADE literacy in Malawian primary schools is one of the major objectives of the Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) project. This is part of USAID's global commitment to improve reading skills for 100 million primary school children worldwide by 2015. As such, MTPDS is working with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) to adopt assessment instruments and methods which can be utilized to measure primary school learners' reading skills throughout the nation. A recent pilot by MTPDS on the use of tablet computers equipped with assessment software called "Tangerine" introduces the potential of using technology to enhance the conducting of learner assessments in the future for Malawi.

In 2010, MTPDS supported the MoEST in conducting Malawi's first ever national Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). EGRA is an internationally recognized reading assessment instrument which is designed to measure the foundational skills for literacy acquisition in early grade students. The 2010 national EGRA

assessment has provided the MoEST with a baseline study of early grade literacy achievement levels in Malawian primary schools. The baseline report can be found on the MTPDS website at: <http://mtpds.org/resources/baselinerreports>. A second EGRA assessment was conducted near the end of 2011 with the report to be released in the near future. The MoEST plans to continue conducting EGRA assessments on a regular basis in order to monitor progress in early grade literacy acquisition and to inform future policies and practices aimed at improving reading instruction in schools.

The EGRA assessment is conducted by trained assessors who evaluate individual learners through a 15-minute oral test. The results are then recorded on paper for each learner and later captured into a database. For large samples, such as the national assessments conducted in 2010 and 2011, the capturing of this data requires numerous hours and extra resources which can cause delays in timely analysis and reporting of findings. The "Tangerine" software is designed to eliminate the extra step of data capture by using Amazon Kindle Fire computer tablets to record and capture EGRA test results immediately by

## Empowering communities to monitor their schools



*MTPDS is redefining SMCs' roles to help improve literacy in early grade*

MALAWI'S EDUCATION SYSTEM appreciates the notion that schools belong to communities and that community support towards education is vital for schools to succeed.

As such, School Management Committees (SMCs) were established within the education system to ensure a participatory and collaborative environment that encourages ownership at the school level. SMCs now provide a significant grassroots forum for local stakeholders to manage their children's school.

However, the role of SMCs is often viewed as being limited to mobilizing community support towards infrastructural improvement and other fundraising activities. The Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) project is working to transform that perception so that SMCs begin to take a leading role in monitoring of teaching and learning which takes place in their schools.

In May 2012, MTPDS organized a one-day workshop in selected education zones that brought together SMC leaders, school teachers and Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) to be trained on the use of School Report Cards (SRCs) for the monitoring of teaching and learning that takes place in their schools. The training was facilitated by six MTPDS Divisional M&E Officers in their respective divisions. A total of 84 teachers and 81 SMC members were trained from seven zones, one zone from each of the MTPDS literacy

intervention districts, with support from their respective PEAs.

The content of the training has equipped the SMCs with the tools and information necessary to make monthly visits to their schools. Some of the major roles of SMCs in utilizing the SRCs are to consolidate records, monitor teacher and learner attendance, and plan for activities that can respond to diverse and continuously changing needs of learners.

The SRC instrument includes details of the number of lessons conducted against those planned in the scheme of work, teacher absenteeism, learner absenteeism, the availability of learning materials and learner performance in literacy.

It is expected that better-informed SMCs will help in pooling resources and abilities together to enrich school management, with the ultimate goal of improving learner performance, especially in literacy.

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*From Page 1*

the assessors in the field. The tablets are equipped with wireless internet technology so that the data can be instantly uploaded to a central database for immediate data capture and analysis.

There is great potential in saving both valuable time and resources by using technology such as “Tangerine” for assessing students. Thus MTPDS decided to conduct a pilot activity by using the “Tangerine” equipped computer tablets to administer EGRA assessments with 200 randomly selected Standard 1 students in two of its literacy intervention districts: Salima and Ntchisi.

The students were sampled from five randomly selected “coached” and five randomly selected “uncoached” schools in each district. All schools in the intervention districts have received a set of continuous professional development (CPD) training modules on teaching foundational reading skills with accompanying teachers' guides and student workbooks. A portion of the schools (“coached”) within each district have received extra monitoring, support, and coaching from MTPDS staff while the other schools (“uncoached”) continue to only receive support from the Primary Education Advisor (PEA) of that particular zone. The activity was therefore meant not only to pilot the “Tangerine” software, but also to measure the impact of the different levels of literacy intervention activities being conducted by MTPDS in the intervention districts.

Initial responses from those assessors who used this new technology have been very positive, indicating that the software and computer tablets are easy to use and reduce time and effort while in the field. It is hoped that MTPDS and the MoEST can learn from this pilot on the usefulness of this technology in the future. In addition, the data captured from the activity will allow MTPDS to monitor progress towards learning outcomes from improved reading instruction methods that the project is propagating as well as providing a pragmatic evaluation of coaching literacy teachers in the early grades.

## Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Update

### CPD at a large urban school: The case of Ngwenya Primary School



*Despite challenging conditions, Ngwenya School is becoming a model for CPD*

THE SCHOOL YEAR is drawing to a close and the CPD Literacy Module 2 trainings have successfully taken place throughout the country. Soon school managers, teachers and communities will be planning for the upcoming school year. As the CPD team makes preparations for implementing Literacy Module 3 nationwide during the school holidays, we would like to dedicate this article to an example of one school endeavoring to implement a school-based CPD program under extremely challenging circumstances.

At 8,085 learners, Ngwenya Primary School has the highest enrollment in Lilongwe City, and the second highest in Malawi, after Mbayani Primary School in Blantyre City. The school has 111 teachers, six of them male, and the rest female, with one head teacher and three deputy head teachers. According to the head teacher, Victor Kwacheramwina, the school opened its doors in the year 2000. The first classroom blocks, ablution units and brick fence were built by the British aid agency, Department for International Development (DfID). Currently six more classroom blocks are under construction. Water is a problem at the school with only one tap for the 8,085 learners and 111 teachers. There are 20 pit latrines, giving a ratio of 404 learners per pit latrine.

Classroom space is an enormous challenge with 8,085 learners sharing

18 classrooms, making a ratio of about 450 learners per classroom. This not being possible, the school has a double shift for its Standard 5 and 6 students, who come to school in the afternoon, but it is still not enough. When an MTPDS team visited the school on the morning of May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, many classes were being held outside. Of the 1,084 learners in Standard 1, there are 10 streams which range from 93 to 123 learners per class. Standard 2 has seven streams with a total of 1,147 learners with classes ranging from 129 to 185 learners per class.

With such massive numbers, how does a school like Ngwenya run a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program for its teachers?

During their visit, the MTPDS team discovered that the teachers at Ngwenya Primary displayed great resolve and dedication by moving forward with their CPD activities despite the difficult conditions. Within Ngwenya Primary itself there are 79 teachers in Standards 1 to 4. This means that Ngwenya along with one neighboring school, Msambachiko, make up a cluster all by themselves. In most areas of Malawi a cluster is composed of four or five schools. In order to manage the MTPDS-organized CPD trainings at Ngwenya, the PEA responsible for the cluster, Bester Mphunda, splits the 102

teachers into two groups, and conducts the trainings in two separate sessions.

The school's CPD mentor, Kenneth Sitolo, is new in the role since he took over in January when the previous CPD mentor moved to a different school. Mr. Sitolo has taught Standard 3 since 2009 when he came to Ngwenya School. Despite having a new CPD mentor, the school's CPD program has continued to move forward with little, if any, disruption. Teachers continue to adapt to their circumstances as they attempt to implement the new information and methods they have been trained on.

Ngwenya Primary presents a useful case study on how a large school can manage a school-based CPD program. The departure of the previous CPD mentor did not disrupt the CPD program as a new CPD mentor was promptly identified to take over. As transfers are a recurrent feature in schools, PEAs and DEMs need to keep in mind a school's CPD program when facilitating transfers. The outgoing mentor needs to do a proper handover to the incoming mentor, who in turn needs to be trained by cluster and zonal mentors as well as the PEA. The head teacher and PEA need to make sure that the new mentor has copies of all the CPD materials.

The CPD Leadership Module 1 lays out a systematic process for selecting a CPD mentor. As the current school year winds down, and a new school year approaches, this would be a perfect time for PEAs, head teachers, CPD mentors and CPD committees to sit down, look at CPD Leadership Module 1, and make plans for their CPD program for the upcoming year.

## Benefits of CPD highlighted at Mponda School's "Open Day"



A learner reading a Bible during the event

MTPDS'S CPD ACTIVITIES are bringing great impact to classrooms and providing hope to teachers in Zomba district. After a short period of time, the trainings and materials provided through the CPD are beginning to bear fruit where learners are more rapidly learning to read Chichewa. At one school, Mponda Primary School, the benefits have been so appreciated that school management decided to hold an

"Open Day" to highlight the progress of their learners' reading achievement.

At the open day, the community was given the opportunity to appreciate excellent work conducted by teachers' by viewing lesson presentations, the development of TALULAR, the manufacturing of compost manure, implementation of TIKWERE, and the application of CIVITAS which talks about human rights. They also viewed the school's library room which is full of books, the CPD room, and the Read Malawi room while getting a chance to interact with herbal and science displays along with activities involving expressive arts, cooking and knitting.

A well-received activity during the open day was the demonstration lesson in which the learners were able to read most everything that was displayed to the class. Parents were entertained by the way the learners were able to read a variety of materials including flip charts, signs,

posters, and textbooks. They were amazed to see one Standard 1 learner reading directly from the Bible.

The event was well attended and well publicized. It included a panel discussion on the CPD program, a mock press conference by learners, and speeches by the Zomba Rural DEM, Mr. Kumbani, the Chief Executive of Zomba City, Mr. F. Nankuyu, and the MTPDS Divisional Teacher Training Coordinator, Ms. Janet Chiromo. Mr. Nankuyu was so impressed with what he saw that he stated, "We had a wrong impression of what the teachers are doing in school. It is pleasing to see that the children are able to read comfortably and this shows that they are ready for the next class."

The parents went home happy saying it was a day well spent. "Please arrange another one" said one parent, Mrs. Sumaisi, whose daughter is in Standard 2. Yet others plainly stated, "We will bring our children here at Mponda to start learning also."

### Events Calendar for June 2012

1. **Policy:**  
5 July: Meet stakeholders on CPD for PEAs and senior primary school teachers.
2. **CPD:**  
22-28 July: Conduct Training of Trainers for Literacy Module 3
3. **Early Grade Literacy Assessment:**  
2-6 July: Follow up on SMC/PTA action plans  
9-13 July: Monitor literacy fairs in intervention districts
4. **Quality Teaching and Learning Materials:**  
2-13 July: Standard 3 Textbook Refinement workshop at MIE
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:**  
2-13 July: Conduct EGRA Lite learner assessment  
16-27 July: Monitor implementation of School Report Cards (SRC) by SMC/PTAs

### Welcome



Chris Dzimadzi

MTPDS welcomes to its team two new members. Chris Dzimadzi (*above*) joins as Senior Teacher Training Advisor to lead a team facilitating nationwide CPD while Hendreck Kathumba (*below*) will oversee monitoring and evaluation activities in the Shire Highlands Education Division



Hendreck Kathumba

**Note from the Editor:** MTPDS Program Monthly Newsletter intends to provide insights on activities, achievements and success stories from the field. We are therefore inviting comments, contributions and tips for teacher professional development. Please send your contributions to the Editor, MTPDS Program, Area 10/612, Tsoka Road, Private bag B481, Lilongwe, Tel: (+265) 1 794 977. E-mail: [info@mtpds.rti.org](mailto:info@mtpds.rti.org), Web: [www.mtpds.org](http://www.mtpds.org). For useful downloadable resources: <http://www.mtpds.org/resources/CPD-manuals>