



# MTPDS Program Monthly Newsletter

The 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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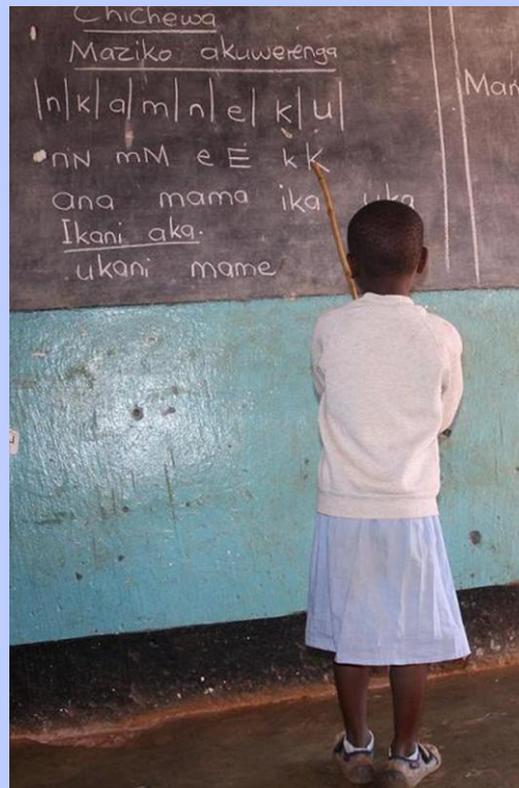
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“My learners are making significant breakthroughs in reading while in the first grade. They are reading syllables, words, basic sentences and short paragraphs.”

*Ms. Mita Kamende, Standard 1 teacher at Chazimbobo Primary School in Ntchisi District*

**International Literacy Day celebration at Kambwiri Primary School in Salima on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2012**

## Grounding teachers in early grade reading instruction



*A Standard 1 learner in Ms. Waneka’s class*

WHEN FORTUNE WANeka left the teacher training college, she was assigned to teach an upper grade class at Ekwendeni CCAP Primary School in Mzimba District. At the time, she felt that her teacher training courses had provided her with a good foundation for teaching because she had no problems handling older learners. This however changed when she was assigned to teach in Standard 1 with a classroom full of mostly five- and six-year-olds at the initial stages of learning. She found it difficult to teach learners who did not yet have the basic skills of reading and who thus seemed unprepared for learning. As Ms. Waneka explains her experience, “Our approach (to teaching early grade reading) meant that learners were introduced to words with alphabetical letters

as the only pre-reading activity. Many struggled with reading except a few who always memorized or did parrot reading.”

Regarding her lack of preparation for teaching the early grades, she states, “The content in college focused mainly on general teaching, which in most cases suits the upper classes. Standard 1 learners are a different group that needs a carefully planned approach. No wonder very few (early grade learners) breakthrough (to reading), and the majority move to upper classes with those difficulties.”

Ms. Waneka is not the only teacher to have had such struggles. But fortunately for her, she is among the 8,000 teachers benefitting from the MTPDS *Maziko a Kuwerenga (Foundations of Reading)* intervention, which is supporting the improvement of early grade reading and teaching. The main aim of the intervention is to promote early grade literacy and lay a strong foundation for learners to be successful throughout their school years and in everyday life.

Some of the following components of the literacy intervention have helped teachers like Ms. Waneka improve their early grade reading instruction:

### Structured lesson plans

Recognizing that early literacy development is a process that involves stages, the intervention is supplementing the training in teaching literacy with structured lesson plans for the entire school year, which guide the teacher through letter introduction, letter sounds, syllable development and reading. The plan ensures that teachers spend enough time on pre-reading instructions before actual reading.

## Significant breakthroughs in reading at Chazimbobo School



*Mita Kamende attributes improved reading to improved literacy teaching*

IN THE LIFE of a teacher, there is nothing more frustrating than the poor performance of learners. For early grade teachers like Mita Kamende, the acquisition of basic reading skills is one of the earliest indicators that children are learning. In her past experiences, the great majority of her Standard 1 learners have typically failed to acquire the basics of reading by the end of the school year. As she explains it in her own words, "I have been handling more than 80 learners every year and over the years I have taught in the early grades, 80 percent did graduate from my hands whilst still struggling with reading." Unfortunately, the experience of this Standard 1 teacher at Chazimbobo, a rural primary school in Ntchisi, is common to many teachers across the country.

Currently, while teaching at a school that is benefiting from the *Maziko a Kuwerenga (Foundations of Reading)* literacy intervention component of the MTPDS project, Ms. Kamende has found a reason to smile at the end of the academic year. "My learners are making significant breakthroughs in reading while in the first grade. They are reading syllables, words, basic sentences and short paragraphs."

Through the intervention, which is being conducted in seven education districts including Ntchisi, teachers

have been trained in improved reading instruction while also benefitting from in-service coaching by a literacy specialist stationed in their district. Through these efforts MTPDS is helping teachers to improve early grade reading instruction in their classrooms where results are already being seen in their learners.

Today, Ms. Kamende is fired up. "Since I attended the training, I have found teaching an exciting challenge. Through Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA, as the intervention is often called), I am able keep track of reading skills acquisition and offer extra support to underperforming learners through extra classes, giving them books to take home and talking to their parents."

Excitingly, twenty Standard 1 learners in her class of 152 cannot only read basic sentences, but they can also read fluently from any short paragraph. This exceeds the performance of any of her previous classes by a large margin. Mita Kamende and her colleagues have found a magic wand in the *Maziko a Kuwerenga* intervention. Come and see it for yourself at Chazimbobo Primary School in Ntchisi.

*From Page 1*

### Regular learner assessments

One area that is often overlooked is keeping track of learning progress registered in the earliest stages of education. Teachers, like Ms. Waneka, conduct regular learner assessments to evaluate literacy acquisition while offering extra support to underperforming learners. Using an instrument based on the standard Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), teachers administer assessments across all key areas of reading starting with letter identification, syllable reading, word reading, sentence and short paragraph reading and comprehension.

### Extra time on task

It has been found that the current curriculum does not provide enough time on task for learners to sufficiently develop early grade reading skills, especially in large classes with often more than 100 learners per teacher. To make up for this, teachers are adding an extra hour lesson as part of the intervention to accord learners enough time to practice the instruction and enable teachers to adjust their pace to the needs of their learners.

Today, after just one term of intervention (13 weeks) there are early signs of success in many schools including at Ekwendeni CCAP Primary School, where Fortune Waneka teaches. She exclaims, "It is exciting that there is a breakthrough in many of my learners. They can read words like *ana, mame, ika, uka, ikani, mame, ukani* and the basic Chichewa sentence like *mame akamuka.*"



*Mrs Waneka during a literacy class*

## Dissemination of roles & responsibilities of MoEST departments and institutions



*Attendees during the meeting at Crossroads Hotel in Lilongwe*

ON 9<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2012, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) organized a meeting to disseminate the roles and responsibilities of MoEST departments and institutions with respect to the education and management of primary school teachers. The meeting took place in Lilongwe and included senior officers from the various MoEST departments, education division managers and district education managers. The meeting marked the end of a process of clarifying the roles and responsibilities which started in October 2010 with support from MTPDS. The need to have the roles and responsibilities clarified first became apparent in 2007 with the commencement of the implementation of the National Primary Curriculum. Since that time the need had increased particularly since the implementation of:

- The recommendations of the 2005 MoEST Functional Report
- The decentralization of some functions of the Ministry, especially at primary education level
- The continuous Professional Development (CPD) program for primary school teachers

Therefore, since 2010 MTPDS has been working with the Department of Inspection and Advisory Services

(DIAS), the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) and the Department of Teacher Education and Development (DTED) to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry's departments and institutions involved in initial training, continuous professional development and management of primary school teachers. The consultative process involved the development of a paper that was discussed during various stakeholder meetings. The final document of clarified roles and responsibilities was approved by the Ministry in May 2012.

The presentation of the roles and responsibilities of the various departments and institutions was made by the Director of DIAS, Mr. Raphael Agabu. During the presentation Mr. Agabu placed special emphasis on the need for the participants to understand the roles and responsibilities to avoid confusion and duplication of efforts aimed at improving the provision of education and management of primary school teachers. He particularly focused on illustrating how the roles and responsibilities of DIAS, DTED, MIE and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) are complementary to each other. He also took time to clarify the roles of Primary Education Advisers (PEAs) and how they relate to DIAS, DTED and DBE.

The meeting was presided over by the Director of Basic Education, Mr. McKnight Kalanda, on behalf of the Principal Secretary (PS) for Basic and Secondary Education. Speaking on behalf of the PS, Mr. Kalanda expressed the hope that the clarified roles and responsibilities would reduce confusion and duplication in the operations of the various departments and institutions. He thanked MTPDS for providing the technical support to speed up the process.

In their contributions, participants hailed the efforts of the Ministry and hoped that the clarified roles and responsibilities will indeed help to improve coordination between the various departments and institutions in their operations. However, they also raised concerns, regarding the proposal of the 2005 functional review that Education Division Managers (EDMs) should report to the Director of DIAS instead of the Head of Administration. Mr. Agabu explained that senior management has noted this issue and that discussions are underway in the Ministry to resolve the matter.

**For more details on what was presented at the dissemination meeting, email**

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[zchikwiya@mtpds.rti.org](mailto:zchikwiya@mtpds.rti.org)



*Mr Kalanda of DBE and Mr Agabu interacting with the audience*

## Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Update

## New school year, New CPD literacy module



Teachers during CPD Literacy 3 training in Nkhata Bay

AS THE 2012-2013 school year begins, primary school teachers in Standards 1-4 across Malawi have something to look forward to. In the middle of August, with less than a month to go before the start of the new school year, MTPDS began rolling out the third module in the CPD Literacy series titled *Developing Literacy: The Role of Phonics and Fluency in Learning to Read*. Literacy Module 3 focuses on using

phonics teaching methods to help develop reading fluency in early grade learners. The module was introduced over the school holidays to help prepare all Standard 1-4 primary school teachers for the coming school year. As is the procedure with all MTPDS-supported CPD modules, a core team of master trainers attended a two-day workshop in preparation for the nationwide trainings. The master trainers subsequently traveled across the country to train PEAs in their respective districts. In turn, PEAs fanned out across their zones to train classroom teachers at the cluster level. As of the end of August, nearly all Standards 1-4 teachers in the country had been trained.

Preliminary findings from monitoring visits by MTPDS and MoEST staff show a new level of enthusiasm for the content from teachers. One teacher

from Chombe Zone in Nkhata Bay commented, "The module is well written, with specific detail and a logical format. The sequence starts from letter sounds to syllables, which lays a good foundation for learners." Another teacher expressed enthusiasm for the module which introduces the use of games and songs in teaching reading, while encouraging families to play a role in teaching their children to read, both of which will help to instill a love of reading amongst learners. Other teachers remarked that the module provides teachers with a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge which will help them improve the teaching of early grade literacy in their classrooms.

PEAs also had many good things to say about Literacy Module 3. One PEA in Mzimba North observed that contributions from teachers during the module trainings have been particularly lively, while also noting that there is a good link between Literacy Module 2 and Module 3. Another PEA commented that training materials arrived in good time and that attendance has been very encouraging, which is remarkable considering the trainings are taking place at a time when teachers are on holiday and likely to be away from their schools.

While there continue to be a number of challenges confronting PEAs and teachers as they work to improve early grade reading in Malawian schools, the Literacy Module 3 has been well received as it provides teachers with essential skills and knowledge needed to succeed. MTPDS will continue to work towards addressing some of the major challenges facing teachers as it develops the content for the next module in the CPD Literacy series, Literacy Module 4.

## Events Calendar for September 2012

1. **Policy:**
  - 12-14 Sept.: Orientation of CPEAs and DEMs on TDC questionnaire and registers
  - 20 Sept.: EMIS/TEMIS data utilization seminar
2. **CPD:**
  - Throughout Sept.: Development of Literacy Module 4
3. **Early Grade Literacy Assessment:**
  - 7 Sept.: International Literacy Day celebrations in Salima
  - 19-20 Sept.: Maziko a Kuwerenga Module 3 Training of Trainers
  - 23-24 Sept.: Maziko a Kuwerenga Module 3 Training of Facilitators
  - 27-30 Sept.: Maziko a Kuwerenga Module 3 zonal training
  - 29-30 Sept.: EGRA 2011 dissemination at the EGRA Coordinating Committee meeting (date to be confirmed)
4. **Quality Teaching and Learning Materials:**
  - 5 Sept.: Supplementary readers review workshop at MIE
  - 10-14 Sept.: Field testing of Continuous Assessment Guidelines
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
  - 10-21 Sept.: EGRA-Lite learner assessment at selected schools
  - 19-23 Sept.: Monthly classroom observation at selected schools

**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>