

TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

THE STORY OF HOW PSSP: SFP'S METHODS AND PRACTICES IMPROVED EDUCATION IN DOWA DISTRICT



January 2009

This book was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development Contract No: GS 10F-0112J Order No: 690-M-00-06-00023-00. It was prepared by the Primary School Support Program: A School Fees Pilot, which is implemented by the American Institutes for Research in partnership with Creative Center for Community Mobilization, Malawi Institute of Education, and Miske Witt and Associates Incorporated.

Together for Change
The Story of How PSSP: SFP's Methods and Practices Improved Education in
Dowa District

Printed and published by

American Institutes for Research (AIR) in partnership with Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM), Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) and Miske Witt and Associates, Incorporated (MWAI).

Primary School Support Program: A School Fees Pilot (PSSP: SFP)

PO Box 40

Mponela

Dowa

Malawi

January 2009

Printed and published with funding from United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under contact number No. GS 10F-0112J Order No. 690-M-00-06-00023-00.

PRIMARY SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM:
A SCHOOL FEES PILOT

TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

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January 2009



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primary School Support Program: a School Fees Pilot (PSSP: SFP) would like to thank all the people and organizations that assisted in the drafting, development and publishing of this book. This was truly a team effort, with each Dowa district based PSSP: SFP officer engaged in the writing and many members of the extended team providing essential support. We wish to acknowledge Simeon Mawindo, Cassandra Jessee, Nicholas Shawa, Sophie Mhoni, Odala Banda, Esther Chirombo, Madalo Samati, Geoffrey Miles, Lloyd Kalata, Oscar, Liweye, George Jobe, Shirley Miske, Eve Lemani, Enock Kabuwe, Sinolia Makata Phiri, Nelson Mtchini, Niffer Chikonje, Mary Mabassa Phiri, Stella Banda, John Mwale, Symon Kalima, Speaker Nkhonjera, Kaponda Otaniele, Jenner Namoto, Martha Myava, and Steward Kasudze for writing, initial editing and contributing photographs. We wish to acknowledge Diana Magombo and Angela Minika for typesetting and coordinating the inputs. Finally, we wish to acknowledge Shirley Miske, David Miske, Marc Hequet, Kara Janigan, Sarah Kohler and Jennifer Anderson for copy editing and formatting of the compendium. Without each of you, the story of how Dowa, together with support of PSSP: SFP, changed the face of education, would not have been heard.



PSSP: SFP and the Dowa District Team

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AC	Assistant Coordinator
AEDO	Agriculture Extension Development Officer
AIR	American Institutes for Research
BLP/M	Beginning Literacy Program of Malawi
CBCCC	Community Based Child Care Center
CDA	Community Development Advisor
CL	Cluster Leader
COP	Chief of Party
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRECCOM	Creative Center for Community Mobilization
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DEM	District Education Manager
DOP	District Officer for Primary
FA	Forestry Assistant
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
GVH	Group Village Headman
HSA	Health Surveillance Assistant
HT	Head Teacher
ICLEP	Integrated Child Labor Elimination Project
IGA	Income Generating Activity
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MCM	Mobilization Corps of Malawi
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MK	Malawian Kwacha (\$1USD = 140 MK)
MP	Member of Parliament
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
MTTT	Mobile Teacher Training Troupe
MWAI	Miske Witt & Associates Incorporated
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLS	National Library Service
OVC	Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children
PCAR	Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PSSP: SFP	Primary Schools Support Program: A School Fees Pilot
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SIP	School Incentive Package
SMC	School Management Committee
SWA	Social Welfare Assistant
TA	Traditional Authority
TALULAR	Teaching and Learning Using Locally Using Locally Available Resources
TCC	Teacher Conference Committee
TDC	Teachers Development Centre
TFD	Theatre for Development
TOT	Training of Trainers
TTC	Teachers' Training College
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

VH
ZIP
ZOC

Village Headman
Zonal Incentive Package
Zonal Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Malawi is faced with declining quality of teaching and learning in its primary schools. Since it began its policy of free primary education in 1994, the government has seen enrollment skyrocket from 1.9 million to 3.2 million learners. It has not been possible to provide enough trained teachers for the overcrowded classrooms. As a result, teachers who are not adequately qualified for their jobs now teach many learners. Although the government has tried to provide pre-service and in-service training to teachers, the training has met only a small part of the need. In addition, resources needed for schools are inadequately supplied. This is where Primary School Support Program: A School Fees Pilot (PSSP: SFP) addresses the need.

PSSP: SFP is a three-year initiative funded by USAID/Malawi in collaboration with the Malawi Government. It targets all 226 public primary schools in Dowa district. American Institutes for Research (AIR), in its lead role, is implementing PSSP: SFP in response to the need to improve the quality of education and serve as a pilot under a US Congressional mandate to develop strategies to reduce the cost of schooling that still hinders access, especially for the most vulnerable children. PSSP: SFP is jointly implemented by AIR with Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM), Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), and Miske Witt & Associates Incorporated (MWAI).

The core goal of PSSP: SFP is to achieve equitable access to quality basic education. To reach this goal, the project has the following objectives:

- To increase access to basic education and improve learning with special focus on orphans, vulnerable children, girls and children with special needs.
- To increase resources at the school level.
- To improve teaching and learning outcomes in schools in Dowa.



PSSP: SFP takes a holistic approach to achieving this goal. It works to improve the professional development of teachers as well as mobilize communities to become owners of the schools. This approach has proven successful, as each school in Dowa has shown positive progress in achieving quality education, engaging in a range of initiatives to make the future for their children brighter. Some schools and communities have seen particularly impressive advances in classroom performance, while others have had marked improvements in community involvement. Many schools have seen improvements in both these areas.

This holistic effort translated to improved outcomes for learners. Learners are returning to school and staying in school – 26% more learners are in school since the project started, the largest increase since free primary education was declared in 1994. Even more, the last three years have seen a 43% improvement in pupil attendance. Learners are achieving. Scores on a range of assessments show an increase between 28% and 39% on pupil performance.

This book shares many of the methods and practices that PSSP: SFP deployed during its three-year implementation in Dowa District. It is organized first by the overarching aim that PSSP: SFP strove to achieve in reaching its goal of quality primary education. Under each aim, key methods and practices are shared, including how they were structured and implemented. Finally, following each method or practice, at least one success story is presented that provides qualitative evidence of the impact of that approach. This book complements *Transforming Education One School at a Time*, a selection of school profiles that describes the impact of PSSP: SFP by school.

The district should be proud of its progress. Inside the classrooms there are resources – posters and books for learners, references for teachers, libraries, and teachers who are teaching effectively and learning is taking place. With the implementation of BLP/M, standard I learners can read and write and have developed the joy of reading. Performance of learners is approving across the primary school. The look of schools is transformed with dramatic increases in new or refurbished infrastructure. Communities are finding creative ways to support learners who are most disadvantaged. The MCMs who have successfully finished their terms of service are a resource for development. Word is spreading through media and newsletters that PSSP: SFP has helped Dowa raise quality, access and equity in education. The baton is now Dowa's to take, and PSSP: SFP expects Dowa will continue to achieve.



I. PROMOTING LITERACY

Malawi has seen deteriorating literacy standards in its schools. Pupils sometimes go as far as standard 5 without acquiring basic skills of reading and writing. Learners meanwhile have few opportunities to read books in their mother tongue other than textbooks. New literacy programs have been piloted on a small scale with success, but the programs are too costly to be scaled up or sustainable.

PSSP: SFP recognized the need for a solid, research-based literacy curriculum for young readers, which makes books available to children of all ages and improves teaching and learning outcomes in schools. PSSP: SFP's response has been research-based, low-cost interventions to improve literacy teaching and learning. These four key interventions promote literacy:



- A Beginning Literacy Program for Malawi (BLP/M) targets the youngest learners, those in standard 1 — the level most critical for developing reading and writing skills. Teachers have learned how to use beginning literacy strategies to promote reading comprehension, including posters based on Malawian stories and songs and “big books” — oversized versions of children’s books that allow teacher and class to read together.
- To promote good teaching of reading in standards 1 through 8, PSSP: SFP professional development and training shows teachers how best to teach reading. One key tactic is dividing large classes into small groups.
- Ready access to books is critical to help children learn to read, and to enjoy reading. To build a print-rich environment, the Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCM) has developed after-school academic clubs for children.
- PSSP: SFP helped establish libraries, training community members to run the libraries and encourage their use. Publications available at these libraries not only include externally published books, but also include stories and poems by children and adults from Dowa district, collected by PSSP: SFP as supplementary material to promote literacy.

These efforts have had a significant impact at schools. Before the initiative, Dowa district had only 10 libraries. It now has 174 libraries accessible to schools. Libraries and schools have more than 250,000 new books in English and in Chichewa, Malawi’s national language.

PSSP: SFP pupil-assessment scores for standards 1 and 6 indicate that these interventions have contributed to improved reading in the crucial early ages and at all levels – 39% improvement in Chichewa at standard 1 and 28% improvement in English at standard 6. The effort has also resulted in more family and community participation in reading, and more enthusiasm for reading at all ages.

BEGINNING LITERACY PROGRAM FOR MALAWI (BLP/M)

PSSP: SFP developed the BLP/M, which targets standard I children in all 226 Dowa schools. BLP/M is a thematically based literacy course that includes Chichewa songs and stories for standard I learners. Its basis is the notion that whatever is said can be written and whatever is written can be read.

The initiative helps children acquire basic literacy skills through reading and writing in Chichewa, Malawi's official national language. Expected learning outcomes include learners being able to read short familiar messages with fluency, to write simple sentences and stories, and to love reading and writing.



BLP/M is a balanced approach to literacy instruction that offers instruction in phonics and phonological awareness. Besides songs and stories, it includes learners' own experiences, focusing on essential components of reading and writing to build a strong literacy foundation.

BLP/M assesses learners on reading and writing once every four weeks. It also relies on parents' and community involvement. At the start of the term, parents and community members are invited to attend a meeting on how to

support learners' literacy development. At the end of the term, parents and the community are again invited to a literacy fair where pupils show what they have learned.

BLP/M supplements Malawi's Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform (PCAR) and focuses on acquisition of literacy skills by standard I learners using Chichewa, the language with which they are familiar. BLP/M themes resemble those of PCAR, and these same themes are used in lessons, songs and stories to focus on letters and vocabulary.

PSSP: SFP has also developed BLP/M materials for teachers and learners, including a teacher's guide, song posters, theme-based posters, sound and letter vocabulary cards and "big books" — oversized children's books that allow teachers and groups of students to read together.

BLP/M Development

BLP/M was launched in all schools in Dowa in January 2008, giving curriculum developers time to review lessons. To validate materials, PSSP: SFP conducted meetings with 50 teachers from standard I (31 female, 19 male) across all 13 zones. BLP/M was developed to enrich the existing curriculum. Its validation meetings served these purposes:

- Informing teachers about BLP/M.
- Setting out the vision for a high-quality literacy classroom.
- Getting feedback on BLP/M materials.



The outcome of these meetings did indeed enrich development and revision of BLP/M lessons prior to printing of materials. One good recommendation was to fit activities into the time available on the schedule. At the meetings, teachers also asked for more guidance on implementing learner-centered activities and for more training on the strategies applied in BLP/M. Most teachers, however, were eager to start using the concepts.

Training of Teachers

Development of BLP/M course materials took significant time, requiring curriculum writers, developers and consultants to review units and share their observations with one another.

While BLP/M production was underway, a number of other literacy activities were undertaken, including training teachers on basic principles and approaches for teaching literacy in schools. Nineteen teacher training modules were developed to teach literacy at all levels of primary school.

Sensitization meetings on literacy development took place in all 13 zones to mobilize teachers and communities to support literacy by providing books, magazines and newspapers for young readers as well as serving as local storytellers after school.

BLP/M Implementation

Prior to BLP/M implementation, PSSP: SFP conducted a series of trainings for standard I teachers and head teachers on the techniques used in BLP/M and to advise teachers of resources for the program.



Before the beginning of each subsequent term, PSSP: SFP organized BLP/M teacher training as well as zonal trainings with BLP/M trainers, Primary Educator Advisors (PEAs), Zonal Coordinators (ZOCs), District Assistant Coordinators (DACs), tutors from Teachers' Training Colleges, Ministry of Education officers, Senior Education Methods Advisors, Malawi Institute of Education officers, teachers and head teachers. Furthermore, techniques in BLP/M have been shared among all teachers, regardless of the class they teach, as a way of sustaining the program.

To assist in getting information about the way teaching and learning of BLP/M is conducted, PSSP: SFP developed fidelity tools to be used by teachers, ZOCs, PEAs, ACs and data collectors. Information gathered with these fidelity tools has been used to assess teaching, learning and use of resources and techniques in BLP/M.

During monitoring and supervision, a number of top-performing teachers were identified. These top-performing teachers became mentors for other teachers at cluster level. PSSP: SFP also trained a group of 67 BLP/M troupers¹ to facilitate during school-based in-service teacher trainings, at teacher conferences on literacy, and during BLP/M meetings. These top-performing teachers also monitor and support colleagues in teaching BLP/M, sharing experiences and challenges and helping map the way forward.

Midway through every term, PSSP: SFP sets up BLP/M review meetings with teachers, head teachers, PEAs and ACs to share achievements and challenges and to map out strategies.

¹ "Troupers" are subject area experts who are members of the Malawi Teacher Training Troupe (MTTT).

BLP/M Resources

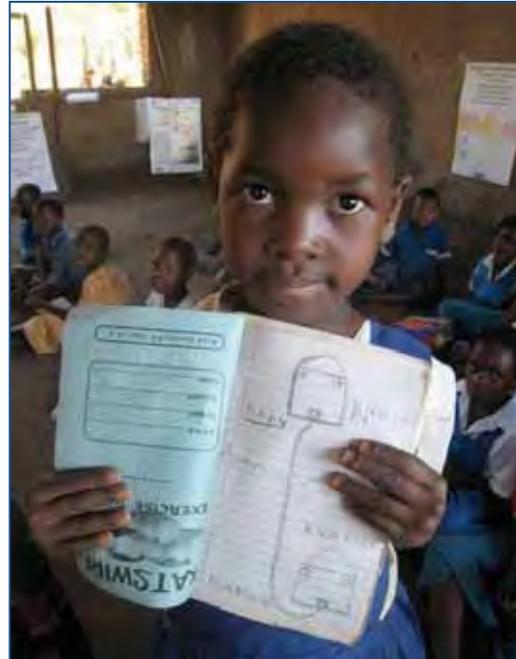
PSSP: SFP has developed teachers' guides with lesson plans, a total of 16 big books and 34 song posters to support implementation of BLP/M. Teachers also prepare their own materials from local resources to simplify concepts and make teaching and learning effective.

Since reading materials in most schools are in short supply, classroom teachers help learners produce their own big books to encourage creativity and promote a reading culture. These big books have helped create a print-rich environment. Learners interact with materials before, during and after classes to practice reading and writing. The community, however, must continue to assist literacy development by providing teaching and learning materials and be an integral part in fostering the love of reading.

Results and Impact

BLP/M has been rolled out to all 226 schools in Dowa and teachers have internalized learner-centered literacy techniques.

The production of BLP/M materials for standard I class has made teaching and learning effective. Teachers and learners confidently use resources such as big books and song posters.



BLP/M resources and techniques have been acquired by all the standard I teachers in the schools in Dowa district. BLP/M troupers trained in the cluster have been enthusiastic in monitoring and supporting teachers.



The project has managed to train key people in the implementation of the program — including teachers, head teachers, ACs, PEAs, ZOCs and the entire district staff as well as officers from the Ministry of Education, the Malawi Institute of Education and Teacher Training Colleges.

Literacy fairs have been conducted in all the zones at all schools with the full participation of teachers, learners and community members. A number of learners have demonstrated their reading and writing skills at these literacy fairs.

All standard I teachers use BLP/M techniques. The youngest learners now can read and write their own names, common words and simple sentences. Teachers at other levels apply the techniques in their own classes as well.

Challenges

While all standard I teachers have been trained in BLP/M, some have not been able to use the materials to best advantage because of their large classes. Absenteeism of both teachers and learners also makes it hard for learners to achieve desired outcomes when some concepts are missed that serve as key

building block for learning future concepts. Understaffing at schools makes it difficult to meet needs of learners.

Another shortcoming is that in many cases BLP/M materials are kept at teachers' houses to protect against vandalism. This sometimes limits learners' access to the materials.

Recommendations

Continued monitoring and training is needed in the years ahead for standard 1 and 2 teachers and for other teachers as well, through Continued Professional Development (CPD).



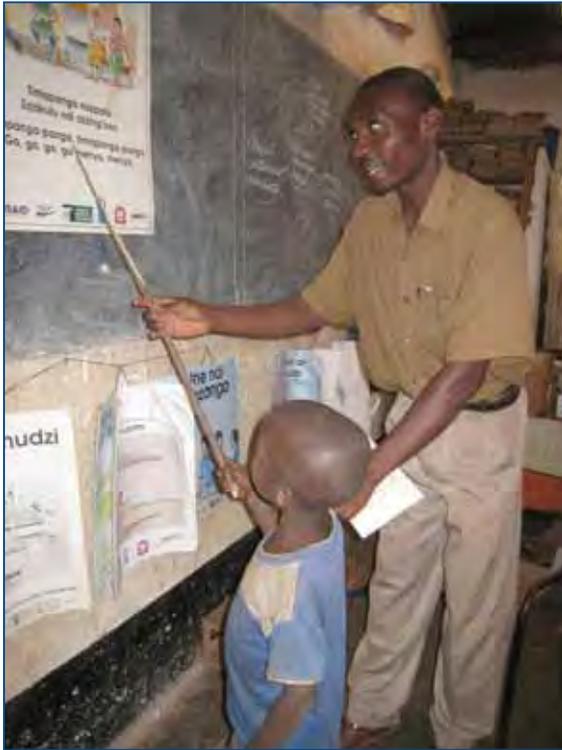
BLP/M has demonstrated improvement in learners' acquisition of literacy skills. Rollout of the program to all schools in Malawi is recommended.

At the same time, there is need for continued involvement and support of BLP/M local troupers in the implementation of the program at each cluster. This has proved to be very helpful in the implementation of the program. With troupers' help, teachers meet to discuss experiences and challenges and to map out the strategies to overcome these challenges.

Mid-term review sessions need to be strengthened through the support of the district management team. These sessions help teachers identify gaps in learners' achievements and provide teachers with activities to help learners with expected outcomes.

Success Story: BLP/M Brings Excitement to Schools

BLP/M, introduced in Dowa district in 2008, started well. In Chimbuli and Mvera zones it brought excitement to all schools. Teachers were trained and received materials, prepared lesson plans, big books and song posters.



Fredrick Nakulenga of Lufe School in Mvera zone appreciated the efforts of the program to help teach basic skills. “Most of us teachers are broadening our understanding of teaching early literacy to young ones,” he said. Lesson plans, big books, song posters and local resources “add variety to teaching and learning,” Nakulenga said, so that “teaching and learning is simplified.”

Lessons are joyful because they are participatory. Learners look at pictures, learn new words, identify letters in a given words, listen to stories, answer questions and sing and dance. This range of activities helps learners to understand concepts more easily. Standard I teacher E. Suluma at Bowe Primary School said, “Lessons are easy to teach because materials to support these lessons are easily available in the community.”

In as little as two weeks, many learners in standard I learn alphabet letters and common words. At Chiwichiwi School, Mvera MDF and Lufe School in Mvera zone, standard I learners quickly learned to write their names.

At Kachulu School, the standard I teacher says this about the school before BLP/M: “In early 2006, Kachulu School in Mponela seemed to lack direction. Although the head teacher had tried his best, teaching and learning didn’t go very well. Most classrooms were bare. Some teachers came to school without lesson plans. Teacher and learner absenteeism was too high, leading to greater student dropout rates and poor performance. BLP/M changed this for standard I classrooms and this rippled throughout the school. Now the classroom walls talk and teachers and learners are more motivated to teach and learn.”

Success Story: BLP/M an Effective Aid to Reading and Writing

When BLP/M strategies were introduced to the teachers in Boma zone, some teachers thought it would be impossible to have newly arrived standard I learners reading and writing letters in the first two weeks of the term.

Two teachers proved it wrong. Kongwe 1's Mrs. Kalongonda and Dowa 2 School's Mrs. R. Kumwenda soon had their standard I learners reading. The two teachers used the methods they learned from BLP/M trainings, including song posters and big books, to teach both reading and writing.



Mrs. Kalongonda introduced the letters B and U through the song “Moni Alesi.” To the words she added, “Uli bwanji?” and “ndili bwino” (“How are you?” and “I am fine”) with an aim of introducing U and B.

It worked. Her learners were soon able to point at the letters in given words such as “bwanji,” “bwino,” “uli” and “ufa.”

Towards the second week of class, 10 percent of learners in the two schools were able to read and copy

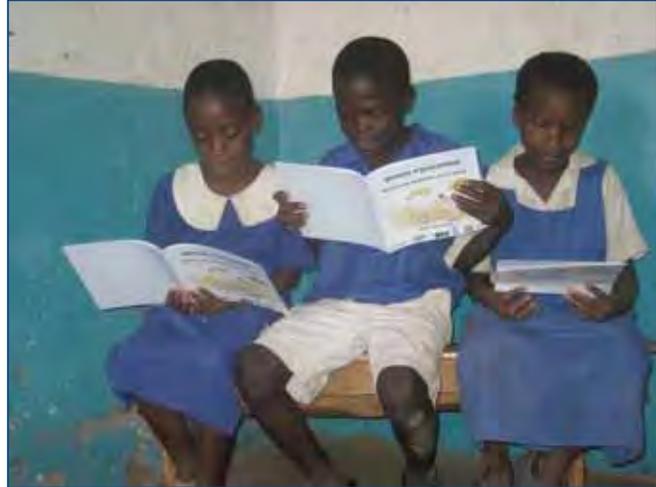
the letters U, K and T from words given them. Mrs. Kalongonda commented, “Teachers who are serious with teaching will like BLP/M because it has simplified teaching and learning.”

Her colleague Mrs. Kumwenda wishes BLP/M had arrived earlier. “Had BLP/M come last year, standard I learners of 2007 would have been reading by now,” says Mrs. Kumwenda. “Teaching is easy now,” she continues — as she proudly shows the Ks and Ts her learners had written that day.

ESTABLISHING LIBRARIES, READING CLUBS, AND A READING CULTURE

In an effort to improve literacy development among learners in school and cultivate a reading culture, PSSP: SFP embarked on sensitization of community members, head teachers, teachers and learners on the need to establish libraries and use books. As a way of involving stakeholders to improve literacy, PSSP: SFP also initiated the writing of stories, poems and riddles to enhance local stocks of reading material, to ensure resources are available for literacy development and to build a reading culture in Dowa's schools.

PSSP: SFP has helped establish libraries in schools as literacy centers for teachers, learners and community members. Reading materials at school libraries include magazines, newspapers, old and new curricular textbooks and donated books. Poems, stories, riddles and jokes were created by the community, teachers and learners. These stories, poems and riddles have been compiled, edited and categorized into beginner, junior and senior sections and printed and distributed to all schools.



Providing Supplementary Books

To help support and expand libraries in Dowa district, PSSP: SFP facilitated a donation of over 42,000 books by the International Book Bank (IBB) and as a ripple effective of its mass communication efforts, garnered several thousand more books from various well wishers. The National Library Services were contracted to process the books to help teachers in accessing and categorizing books.

PSSP: SFP recognizes that all learners should have access to materials and is working to prepare all schools to receive such materials. IBB serves as a repository for donated new books that publishers make available to developing countries. Books were selected based on suitability for primary level in Malawi, on content — English, science, mathematics in particular received priority — and on suitability for professional development of primary teachers.

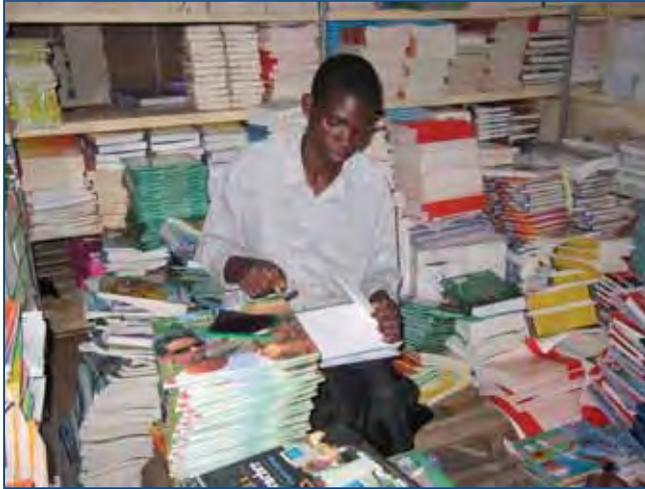
Sensitization Meeting

To prepare for distribution of books to school libraries, PSSP: SFP project officers conducted sensitization meetings covering all 226 schools for teachers, community leaders, SMCs and PTA members to help them establish school library committees, find a local storage facility, and learn to use and care for books. Participants discussed ways of sustaining libraries through lobbying with other organizations or institutions. To increase a school's book stock, community members were encouraged to provide reading materials available in their own homes, such as newspapers, magazines, books, beginning readers and other literature to support literacy development and promote reading culture. Moreover, schools established their own library committees that comprised teachers, learners, community members and MCM representatives. Some community members made shelves and other necessary structures. All the 226 schools developed action plans for establishing libraries and approximately 95% of the schools geared to institute a school library with community support.

Distribution of Books

The National Library Service sorted and distributed books to the original 13 Teacher Development Centers (TDCs) and some schools. Schools where libraries were not yet established could access books from the nearby cluster center or TDC. Schools that did not initially receive books were motivated by

those who had and worked to establish a viable place for these books and subsequently received books. In order to ensure proper use of books by both the teachers and learners in schools as well as the community, PSSP: SFP monitored and supported establishment of libraries and distribution and usage of



the donated books, and promoted ideas such as library periods, reading clubs, reading games and use of incentives to encourage reading. PSSP: SFP distributed more books to schools to support reading clubs and promote a reading culture among learners, teachers and community members. Moreover, PSSP: SFP mass communication efforts were heard far and near. For example, Dowa schools received a donation of 1,900 library books from schools in Bismarck, North Dakota, U.S.A., from which 100 books were distributed to the school with the best reading club in each of the 19 zones. Similarly, PSSP: SFP lobbied for a donation of more than 1,500 books from National Library Services, with the books going to 19 TDCs, 3

Community Day Secondary Schools and 20 primary schools in Dowa. To see to it that schools are utilizing the books, the project has continuously monitored and supported care and use of books as well as encouraging the reading clubs.

Library Training

In order to equip teachers with skills and knowledge of managing school libraries and books, PSSP: SFP facilitated librarian training for 20 primary school teachers from the 19 zones in Dowa. This training was conducted by the National Library Services. At the training, teachers discussed different ways of making libraries effective in school and ways of promoting a reading culture. PSSP: SFP also facilitated the training of teachers on care and use of textbooks and offered a resource-center guide on establishing a library and caring for books during cycle trainings as well as at teachers conferences and during school-based CPDs.

Impact and Results

As a result of the sensitization meetings, the teachers and the community members worked together on arranging facilities for library books and instituting a library committee to manage the books. PSSP: SFP has distributed approximately 250,000 books to 19 TDCs and 155 schools across the 19 zones, with some resources like the Dowa stories going to all schools. Some schools that have not established libraries are accessing them through either the TDC or cluster schools. Those schools that have received books are now using them in teaching and learning processes and in reading clubs under the charge of MCMs and teachers. Many schools have established library periods, selected librarians and established borrowing and accession registers. More and more library facilities have been put in place by community members with the support of teachers.



More and more library facilities have been put in place by community members with the support of teachers.

A culture of reading has emerged among teachers, learners and community members. More and more reading clubs have been established, as well as debate, quiz and story-writing competitions among learners. Learners in standards 6, 7 and 8 have improved their skills as shown by the assessment results and term tests and by selection of more learners to secondary schools. Teachers have also benefited from the content of books and in particular from books on pedagogical skills. By the start of 2008, 25% more teachers held their MSCE, and many cited the resources distributed by PSSP: SFP for their passing of the exams.

Challenges

Many schools do not have facilities for storing and using library books, considering that some schools do not even have adequate space for classrooms. At schools that are using libraries, the level of language of books may be higher than learners' reading levels. Large class sizes mean not all learners can access books. Most schools in Dowa are not fully staffed making it difficult to provide teacher supervision to monitor, support and assist learners in reading within the school day. In some cases, learners or teachers do not return books to the school when they transfer to other schools. Although schools receive donated books or supplementary readers, there are often not enough books to meet the needs of the readers in the school and the community.

Recommendations

Lobbying for still more books is needed so that teachers and learners have access to materials to improve their literacy skills. While PSSP: SFP tried to ensure all school libraries registered with the National Library Services, not all garnered the MK500 to sign up. All registered libraries would receive additional support from the National Library as they received book donations or funds to conduct



trainings. The district officials should ensure that all existing and new libraries are registered. To ensure the long-term success of the initiative there is need for consistent monitoring and support of the schools that have library structures. Finally, more teachers need to be trained more intensively on how to establish and manage libraries for best use as information, education and communication centers.

Success Story: Library Books Ignite Reading Culture at Chimungu

“Indeed books are a source of knowledge,” said Masauli Mbonekera, the MCM for Chimungu cluster. “Before the coming of PSSP: SFP, teachers and learners were not good at using library books because they had no books at the school. Teachers rarely prepared lesson plans. Community participation towards school was poor. This contributed to low teacher motivation and in turn to poor lesson delivery, low learner achievement, high dropouts and absenteeism, especially of girls and other OVCs.”

As a result of sensitization meetings, communities realized the importance of having a library. In response to their new-found understanding, they built a library to stock with donated books provided through PSSP: SFP. Now learners enjoy reading these books, contributing to their greater involvement in reading clubs and other clubs at school. Even community members come to borrow books from the school library.



Masautso Chitedze, who has just written his standard 8 examinations, said, “I will pass the examinations with flying colors.” He and his friends have been frequently reading books from the library. One community member, Alfred Mponda from Kapondo village, said, “Now I have a chance to remember what my teacher told me while I was at school.” To concur with Mponda, the head teacher, Mr. Meharey Bandawe, said, “Teachers, parents and community members are contributing to build on good work started at Chimungu School. This library has planted a spirit of reading different books in most learners.” During a

delivery of library books, the group village head thanked the ZOC, PEA, teachers and MCM “for what you are doing for our children. PSSP, you are the father of quality education. Keep on supporting us so that our children could have quality education.”

Success Story: Children Have Got to Read

A bitter reality of schooling in Malawi is that although schools exist to promote reading and learning, a majority of primary schools in rural areas — and even a good number in the urban and semi-urban areas — have no school libraries. As a consequence, children are greatly limited in their process of knowledge acquisition. First, without libraries, children do not develop a habit of reading that would help them widen their knowledge and increase their interest in education. Second, rather than spending some of their time in the library after classes, children may get involved in unproductive and dangerous behaviors.



However, the problem of unavailability of libraries in primary schools in Dowa district is becoming history as PSSP: SFP has successfully mobilized community members to establish school libraries throughout Dowa. As of the end of 2007, about 20 schools in the district have constructed their own libraries. Some of these schools benefited from the PSSP: SFP's small-grant initiative enabling them to buy iron sheets, cement, doors, window frames, and other sturdy materials required to build long-lasting structures.

One such school is Mtsilo Primary School in Chimungu Zone. The school rehabilitated a dilapidated building without a roof that used to be a classroom. (The roof had been blown off about six years ago.) This building had been abandoned when new classroom blocks were constructed. When people saw the need for a library, they amassed bricks, bought eight bags of cement, and deployed local artisans to rehabilitate the old classroom block. The refurbished building was divided into three compartments: a library, a head teacher's office, and a staff room. These efforts merited a small grant from PSSP: SFP amounting to K90,000 (\$644). This money was used to buy doors, windows, iron sheets, paint and other materials for vocational skills training (sewing machine, tinsmith and carpentry materials). The school, like many other schools, has already received a donation of books through PSSP: SFP.



“The library will make a big difference to both the children and teachers. They are both enjoying reading as never before. We thank PSSP: SFP for this kind of support,” said the deputy head teacher of the school, Mr. R.E. Kamlomo.

TEACHING READING IN SMALL GROUPS

PSSP: SFP recognizes that large classes in Dowa schools make it difficult for teachers to work with individual learners. Consequently, learners have been able to speak and write minimal English or even Chichewa. Learning resources are inadequate. Teachers need more training. Reading materials are only somewhat available and underused. Large classes, however, are the key challenge. To improve interaction between teacher and learners small groups can be created in class. This approach enables teachers to work closely with learners as individuals with a small group. This kind of support helps to build learners' confidence in reading with comprehension.

Reading in small groups requires teacher creativity to make teaching and learning resources available and to ensure their best use. Materials required include reading cards, drawings, materials with spelling or grammar deliberately wrong, jumbled sentences and learners' books for English. Resource manuals are also required to help teachers understand and apply strategies to help learners develop their literacy skills. Teachers must have a strong understanding of the subject matter and know how to use teaching methods that help learners effectively learn concepts. Methods that promote active learner participation include brainstorming, demonstration, group work, question-and-answer and pair work. Schools, however, face acute shortages of reading and supplementary materials. This poses a challenge to learners' language-skills development and hampers implementation of small-group techniques for teaching literacy. Even when schools have materials on hand, proper storage may be lacking.

PSSP: SFP addressed these problems through a variety of strategies. First, teachers were trained in using and developing TALULAR (Teaching and Learning Using Local Area Resources) materials to enable learners to read and write. Communities have supported teaching and learning by donating old books, magazines, newspapers, calendars and even printed cartons. PSSP: SFP also provided resource books to all teachers in Dowa to help them teach certain concepts and skills.



The plans for BLP/M included a significant infusion of classroom resources focused on literacy. To overcome lack of proper storage for teaching and learning materials, some schools constructed school libraries, which bring the added advantage of better access to reading materials for all learners. Some schools used donated cabinets to set up reading corners in existing classrooms. Some communities identified available space outside the school compound for learners to read. Some schools started to develop mobile TALULAR banks to share resources and keep them safe.

Process

Teaching reading in small groups was adapted from the USAID-funded Malawi Teacher Training Activity (MTTA) intervention of Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTT) and from other projects' interventions. MTTT troupers taught teachers in the schools they visited how to work with small groups. By providing group work to small groups of students the teacher is better able to give more individualized attention to learners. Since most classes have many learners, each small group may have 10-15 learners.

To maximize resources and draw on the strengths of previous USAID projects, PSSP: SFP has reprinted several teacher resources for teaching in small groups and for teaching other subjects that were developed by similar USAID projects. These were distributed to all teachers during cycle trainings as support material for the topics being introduced. A series of 10 learner books written by Dowa community members, teachers, and learners were distributed to all schools for use in reading groups.

During implementation, PEAs, ACs, ZOCs and project staff monitored and supported implementation of the teaching reading in small groups approach to help teachers use these resource materials effectively. Subsequent trainings also focused on these resources to encourage teachers to use them.

Impact and Results

Teachers' ability to teach reading in small groups has improved and they have learned how to better manage the use and storage of resources to meet needs of individual learners. Teachers are more resourceful in making sure that small-group learning is effective. Teachers are also better able to assess learners who have difficulties and provide them with remedial work as needed. Mastery of content by teachers has improved. Learners' performance has improved as well.

With more opportunities to practice using English, learners' have noticeably improved their ability to speak, read and write English. Most learners now are members of reading clubs at their schools. Learners have improved in terms of their test scores and standard 8 examinations results. More learners are going on to secondary school. Repetition rates have been reduced as fewer students are repeating classes than in the past. Completion rates are higher. Fewer learners drop out of school. With availability of library books, the reading culture among teachers and learners has greatly improved.



Academic clubs have been strengthened and school and interschool debate and quiz competitions provide exciting opportunities to keep learners coming to school. Improved teaching helps learners enjoy classroom activities. This also improves learners' attendance, which has improved by 43% in three years.

Zones such as Madisi, Chimbuli, Mvera, Chimungu, Katalima and Senga now have designated library periods for learners, with systematic monitoring at school level by teachers. Introduction of zonal and interzonal schools' quiz competitions in Madisi, Kanyenje and elsewhere enhances use of libraries and academic clubs for reading. Learners at schools such as Mvera MDF, Kawangwi, Kapita, Mkhlanjoka and Mbira speak English in senior classes, familiarizing learners with words they may meet in a reading. Use of more books and libraries in Chakhaza, Mtiti, Simbi, Malunje, Kabwinja and Mtanila schools helps learners to improve their reading skills. MCM has formed drama, quiz and debate clubs that provide more opportunities for learners to sharpen their mastery of English. For example, learners at Nauchi School in the drama and quiz clubs are particularly good at English.

PSSP: SFP has trained 1,882 teachers (546 female and 1,336 male) in techniques for teaching literacy, including how to teach English more effectively. PSSP: SFP supports and monitors implementation of standard 6 PCAR in all the zones, with ZOCs assisting teachers who have implementation challenges.

Through teacher conferences, PSSP: SFP helps teachers engage in critical self-reflection to identify topics difficult to teach. Forty percent of the difficult topics that have been identified involve some aspect of teaching English. PSSP: SFP has supported activities by MCMs, who assist teachers in drilling learners in English through different clubs. MCMs are helping standard 6 – 8 learners by running reading clubs as well as debate, quiz and story-writing competitions that bring together learners from different schools.

PSSP: SFP has continuously supported teachers by helping them to improve their skills, knowledge and methods to help learners acquire mastery in reading and writing English. PSSP: SFP has also promoted reading cultures in schools by distributing donated books to improve literacy skills. PSSP: SFP has also encouraged learners, teachers and community members to create stories, poems, riddles and puzzles as a way of promoting reading and writing skills community-wide.

These approaches help learners in small groups as they share ideas and discuss texts. Learners have improved a wide range of literacy skills, including reading, listening, speaking, writing, comprehension, grammar and critical thinking. In particular, this has helped learners in PSSP: SFP assessment class standard 6 who have demonstrated a 28% improvement in their English skills.

Challenges

The lack of a reading culture within some schools is one challenge to the effective use of reading resources. Teachers at the start of PSSP: SFP were not accustomed to using reading resources and still may not use them fully. PSSP: SFP has incorporated training sessions on the use of reading resources at cluster trainings and in-service teacher training. Teachers have been reminded of the value of reading



resources in the instructional process during supervision visits and in service trainings. Teacher conferences have been instrumental in overcoming this challenge and showing the teachers and especially the conference facilitators the value and information in these resources.

Another challenge has been the level of Dowa teachers' English reading skills since two-thirds of teachers are only JCE (Junior Certificate of Education) holders. This means they have only completed half of the secondary-school cycle. Some teachers find reading levels of some of the resources too challenging not only for

learners but also for themselves. Consequently, PSSP: SFP has encouraged teacher-level study circles so that teachers can work together to improve their own English language skills and to help prepare them to take the MSCE (Malawi School Certificate of Education) exams that mark the completion of the secondary school cycle. This has met significant success with 25% more teachers having earned their MSCE since PSSP: SFP began.

Improving English skills in teacher trainings has become a focus in zones such as Madisi, Chimbuli, Senga, Mvera, Kayembe and others, where teachers discuss problems and develop strategies to address those problems. Through school-based in-service trainings, this approach is spreading across the district.

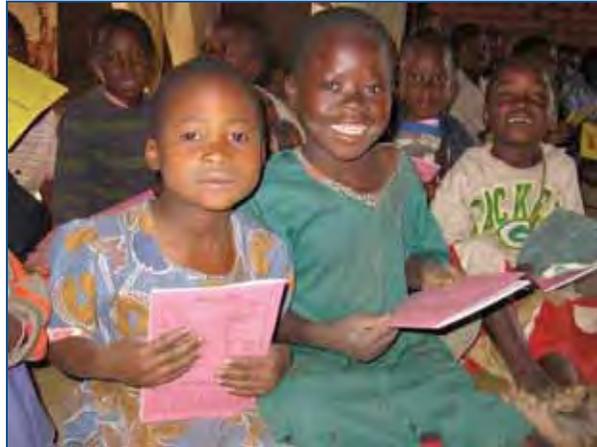
Meanwhile, some teachers still have negative attitudes towards these new teaching techniques: Some teachers believe that new techniques are time-consuming and require more work scouting for resources

to use in the classroom. Large class sizes pose another challenge for teaching using the small-group approach. Given this challenge, teachers need to be creative, adjusting lesson plans to suit specific techniques and needs of their learners.

Recommendations

Efforts need to be strengthened to ensure that all teachers use available materials and apply strategies for the benefit of the learners, particularly from the district and division leadership. One possibility would be to introduce a quiz program requiring research by teachers. To encourage use of resource materials, teachers have been advised to refer to these modules for further information and for clarity of concepts. During meetings and other forums with teachers, PEAs, ACs, the DEM and the EDM should also remind teachers of these resources and encourage their use.

For these interventions to succeed, consistent monitoring and support for teachers is required. In most cases teachers need encouragement and guidance. Continued professional development of teachers in new teaching techniques is vital for improvement of education quality. Both teachers and learners need encouragement to participate in reading clubs for students and book clubs for teachers. Book clubs provide the opportunity for teachers to share knowledge, skills and ideas on how to grow academically and professionally.



Finally, as most schools still do not have adequate resources, the district as well as the Ministry should help schools obtain required resources to support effective teaching and learning. This includes encouraging schools to use the lobbying and fundraising skills PSSP: SFP has instilled in them

Success Story: Early Literacy Techniques in Senga Zone

Before PSSP: SFP initiated activities in Dowa, Senga was one of the least advanced zones. Teachers weren't able to write lesson plans or use local resources. Learners in standard 6 couldn't read or write Chichewa or understand English.

After implementation of six cycles of teacher training, teachers were using varied teaching methods including preparing and using TALULAR (Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources). As a result, learners' performance sharply improved. Learners in standard 1 and other classes now can read short sentences such as, "*Amayi atenga dengu*" (*Mom carries a basket*), "*Moni, mwana wanga*" (*Hello, my child*) at Kaputalambwe, Funsani and Manondo.

Inclusion of continuous assessment in teacher training has assisted teachers in identifying and supporting both gifted and slow learners. This has resulted in low repetition rates at Kaputalambwe, Funsani and Senga schools. By the end of their first year of school, learners can read from newspapers and posters.

Teachers including Mr. Mtonya from Kaputalambwe School, Mrs. E. Sefa and Mrs. Chibwana from Funsani School and Mr. E. Mwale from Senga School have introduced reading in small groups. In these small groups, learners see a variety of teaching and learning materials such as reading passages, sentence strips, word cards, word boxes, word trees, newspaper cuttings and books. Learners practice reading and writing in small groups using these materials.



Learners not only read in class. They also read after class in reading clubs. Learners receive homework such as reading comprehension passages and answering questions, writing compositions and making words from given sets of letters and syllables both in English and Chichewa, such as "*sa se si so su*," "*ba be bi bo bu*," "*ma me mi mo mu*."

Senga zone has also appreciated the teaching of reading in small groups brought about by MTTT intervention. Teachers liked the technique and said that this would assist them implement PCAR. Mr. Mbonongo, the head teacher of Senga, said, "I have never come across such training of good strategies which would assist learners' literacy acquisition."

Some teachers in fact recommended including all teachers in the training for better delivery of literacy lessons. GVH Silino from Chinyimbo School was impressed with his child's performance and went to ask the head teacher what strategies were used to make his child able to read and write after only two weeks. The answer was teaching reading in small groups.

Mr. E. Mkandawire from Mbalame School said, "I am now enjoying teaching literacy because learners are able to follow my instruction and can write letters even during the first week. This technique is supporting PCAR to make learners acquire literacy skills."

2. ENHANCING SUPERVISION

In day-to-day work, teachers meet challenges from inadequate knowledge of the subjects they teach or insufficient pedagogical skills to help them transfer knowledge to learners. These challenges prevent teachers from performing as well as they should and impede knowledge transfer to learners. This creates a need to monitor teacher performance and support their work.

The district office in collaboration with PSSP: SFP has put in place a structure to maintain quality of education in Dowa schools through supporting and monitoring teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers received training in content knowledge and pedagogical skills to help them teach and deal with emerging issues. Trainers, Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), Zonal Coordinators (ZOCs) and Assistant Coordinators (ACs) in each zone conducted the initial trainings at cluster level and mentored cluster trainers and Teacher Conference Committees (TCCs) to conduct further trainings on challenges identified during teacher supervision in the schools.

After the initial trainings, teachers are supervised to ensure adherence to the curriculum and effective transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes to learners and to identify need for further professional development. To provide adequate and timely support to teachers, PSSP: SFP and the district education office supplemented supervision at school level by eliciting the services of Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTTs), selected top-performing teachers for each cluster of schools. MTTTs supervise teachers in coordination with existing supervisors —PEAs, ZOCs and ACs.



PSSP: SFP and the District Education Manager (DEM) instituted local MTTTs, whose members include star performers in teaching English, Chichewa, mathematics, science, Beginning Literacy Program/Malawi (BLP/M), Teaching And Learning Using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR) as well as the supervisory head teacher in each cluster. These supervisors set up supervision schedules, which they share with zonal supervisors and TCCs. Initially, cluster supervision schedules always included zonal supervisors, who mentored local MTTTs and TCCs. Now, however, zonal supervisors come only from time to time to monitor and support cluster support teams. Local MTTTs mentor teachers in all cluster schools in MTTTs' specialized area of skill, so that teachers get better acquainted with content knowledge and pedagogical skills, how to use TALULAR and how head teachers can improve as instructional leaders and school managers.



Local MTTTs mentor teachers in all cluster schools in MTTTs' specialized area of skill, so that teachers get better acquainted with content knowledge and pedagogical skills, how to use TALULAR and how head teachers can improve as instructional leaders and school managers.

The ultimate goal of this effort is to develop reflective teachers who can systematically go back through their lessons and ask what they did well, what went wrong, what should be done to improve the lesson and what they should do next. Teachers now can ask for assistance through formal school-based continuing professional development (CPD) training or classroom mentoring. It is also the aim

of this effort to create an effective school where teachers, learners and the community work together to for quality education.

Head teachers organize stakeholders, make sure teachers know the curriculum, see to it that teachers assist each other in using effective pedagogy, supervise and mentor section heads in supporting other teachers, and responsibly delegate duties. Head teachers also work closely with School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to promote learner attendance and performance.



PSSP: SFP and the district office have seen quality transformation in teachers who are motivated in their work. With the involvement of local MTTTs, it is possible to support about 80% of the teachers in the district monthly. This helps teachers deal with challenges as they arise. When MTTTs discover a common problem in the cluster, they recommend that TCCs mount a cluster-wide training to address the challenge.

Deployment of MTTT and TCC as peer observers has created confidence among teachers, helping teachers support one another in lesson preparation and delivery.

Teachers have developed mutual understanding of situations. A healthy competitive spirit has emerged as mentors and mentees seek to influence each other. This relationship has brought out quality supervision findings that have informed the system about what is happening in classrooms and has also helped identify gaps in content knowledge, pedagogy and TALULAR, with suggestions for training to cover the gaps.

Zonal and cluster supervisors have readily been accepted by fellow teachers as role models. A culture of reading and professional development is emerging among teachers, who are motivated by the recognition they get from others. Teachers have been empowered to model in their own classes what they know is best and want to see in other teachers' classes. We strongly recommend that the Ministry of Education, through the DEM's office and PEAs, strengthen this structure of enhancing supervision by maintaining the active participation of the MTTT.



MOBILE TEACHER TRAINING TROUPES AND TEACHER CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

Two professional-development decentralization structures for teachers put in place in Dowa by PSSP: SFP and District Education Management are Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTT) and Teacher Conference Committees (TCC) — interdependent, influencing each other strongly, reinforcing each other's inputs.

Each of Dowa district's 19 zones has a controlling officer, the Primary Education Advisor (PEA), whose responsibility is quality assurance. PEAs identify gaps in teachers' lesson preparation and delivery, learner assessment, content knowledge, pedagogical skills and attitude towards learners' performance. Teachers' quality of work is established through supervision, which helps teachers reflect on their lessons. Supervision helps teachers identify strengths they can amplify and challenges for which they need assistance.

PSSP: SFP realized that PEAs alone fell far short of zones' needs for helping teachers to develop professionally. The project elicited the assistance of the Assistant Coordinator (AC), Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTT) and Teacher Conference Committees (TCC). These, together with the PEA and Zonal Coordinator (ZOC), formed a structure to strengthen supervision. Under the structure, cluster supervisors are able to work with every teacher at least monthly in every school in the cluster. Teachers are at the crown of this structure: Good teaching means improved pupil learning.



There are seven MTTTs in each cluster, each trouper responsible for a specific subject area: science; mathematics; Beginning Literacy Program of Malawi (BLP/M) for standard 1; production and use of TALULAR (Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources); English; Chichewa; and a supervisor for the head teacher. When troupers go to a school, they concentrate on their specialty. Before teams started working in the schools, they received training in peer observation and were taken on a mentorship session with the PEA, ZOC and AC, who also received training.

TCCs, for their part, organize and supervise training sessions at cluster level and also monitor school-based continuing professional development (CPD) to determine whether it is functional and to check quality of facilitation and training. TCCs also identify remedial measures to correct emerging issues.

Teachers at every skill level encounter skill gaps as a result of ongoing developments in curriculum, content knowledge and pedagogy. To keep abreast of the changes, teachers need continued professional-development training at school level for school-specific challenges and at cluster level for challenges common to all cluster schools.

Supervisors, ACs, MTTTs, PEAs and ZOCs watch for such gaps and TCCs organize subsequent training — assigning facilitators, helping facilitators develop training modules and monitoring training sessions for quality.

At this point in the cycle of supervision, support, gap identification and training starts again for challenges common to the whole cluster. Meanwhile, individual teachers continue to monitor for emerging issues and ask for specific remediation measures to correct the situation.

To establish the local MTTT, zone supervisors — including the PEA, ZOC and AC — identify and select star performing teachers in science, mathematics, TALULAR, English, Chichewa, BLP/M and supervising head teachers. The TCC includes the head teacher and deputy head teacher and a training coordinator selected by individual schools. MTTTs and TCCs have undergone specific trainings and mentoring for their specific duties. Each group has a specific role to play, but the goal is the same for both — improved performance for teachers and learners.

Their practices have multiplier effects. Teachers selected for lead roles are intrinsically motivated. Head teachers are more effective as instructional leaders and school managers. All teachers work harder and are more open to accepting advice from peers. Teachers understand that if they perform well they may be asked to facilitate a training session. Teachers who seek recognition do their best to be noticed. The environment of healthy competition offers teachers a chance for job enrichment.



PSSP: SFP recommends that the Ministry of Education maintain this structure so PEAs get enough players to help with teacher training, learning-gap identification and assessment of results. The chief sustaining factor is the selection of trouper and TCCs on merit. The structure has been successful, with MTTT trouper and TCCs feeling a growing responsibility for learners and fellow teachers. Moreover, a reading culture has emerged among teachers as they strive to improve themselves and help others as well.

Success Story: Mr. Fredrick Mwale Improves with Local MTTT Feedback

Mr. Fredrick Mwale, a standard 6 teacher at Mlengwe School, has been a teacher for 15 years. When PSSP: SFP was starting its activities in the zone, he thought that the program would not improve things in the schools. He has been participating in all cycle trainings, teacher conferences and school based CPDs, but all this did not motivate him to the desired level.

When PSSP: SFP with funding from USAID embarked on local MTTT program at Mlengwe School, Fredrick Mwale, who was not even identified as a trouper, observed that the approach motivated him internally in such a way that he was asking the troupers to observe his lessons and hold a post-observation conference with the troupers. "I wish this had come earlier in the project," commented Fredrick openly to his fellow teachers.



On the fourth day of local MTTT activities at the school, Mr. Fredrick Mwale presented a demonstration lesson of mathematics in standard 6 before all teachers. His lesson was well prepared and practiced in advance. The TALULAR and other materials were used effectively. All the observers appreciated the good practices displayed in the lesson such that during post-observation conference he scored more strengths than challenges. He went on to say, "Now I can assist my colleagues in areas which are challenging to them as I have benefited from this intervention." Mr. Mwale continues to be a star teacher at Mlengwe School and an inspiration to teachers in his cluster.

Success Story: Teacher Conferences Promote Teamwork

Teacher Conferences, started after the USAID-funded PSSP: SFP sixth cycle trainings, have prompted a spirit of teamwork among teachers in many zones. The conferences have promoted sharing and learning among teachers, rapidly improving their pedagogical and content knowledge application.

Historically, teachers have worked in isolation. In the past, some teachers would react negatively if someone wanted to assist them on a problem. A common sentiment was that teachers were there to teach and did not need to learn from others.

Teachers from across the district, including Senga Zone, hold these important conferences at cluster level to discuss crucial topics like methods and teaching styles, lesson content, and lesson delivery. These meetings are a helpful forum, which allow teachers to interact and improve on their weaknesses and build on their strengths. Teachers have the opportunity to learn and share new ideas with their friends, as well build their own confidence in given topic areas they facilitate. Teacher Conference Committees (TCC) become a supportive body, ensuring that teachers as facilitators are prepared with lessons and modules for the conference and that all teachers from the cluster attend the conference.

When they go back to their respective schools, teachers are able to carry out their work more effectively than before. Rather than gossip or engage in other idle activities, teachers solve their problems cooperatively. With the support of head teachers, teachers are now able to prepare lesson plans and are encouraged to work as teams, making the teaching experience more fulfilling and enjoyable. This has not only improved the quality of teaching and education, but it has made the teachers' jobs easier. One standard 6 teacher, Mrs. Mwale from Senga Primary School, said that these meetings had really helped. "We discuss topics we find difficult to teach in our schools and from there we learn until we improve. This has largely made our work easier."



THE STRENGTH OF THE ZONAL TEAM

The backbone of the zonal quality-assurance team for education comprises the Primary Education Advisor (PEA), Assistant Coordinator (AC) of the Teacher Development Centre (TDC) and the Zonal Coordinator (ZOC). They harmonize a cycle of development for teachers that includes training in content knowledge, supporting and monitoring lesson delivery and mentoring teachers in best practices to improve teaching and learning.

The PEA and ZOC, charged with this responsibility for the zone, are trained to conduct continuing professional development (CPD) trainings for teachers and to support and monitor implementation of what teachers have learned on the curriculum being implemented. However, when PSSP: SFP came to Dowa it was discovered that in the absence of the ZOC, it would be very difficult for the PEA to manage the zone alone. PEAs are expected to support all 10 to 15 schools in the zone — too many, given the PEA's other duties. So ACs have taken on extra support duty. ACs are readily available in each zone, staffing TDC libraries and collecting zonal data for the DEM.



ACs' new duties include supervision of and support for teachers in the zone. ACs now have received the same training as PEAs and ZOCs during the project period. ACs have gone through cycle trainings as district trainers, training cluster trainers who in turn have trained teachers from the cluster schools. ACs have gone with PEAs and ZOCs on teacher-support activities, monitoring lesson delivery and mentoring teachers on best practices.

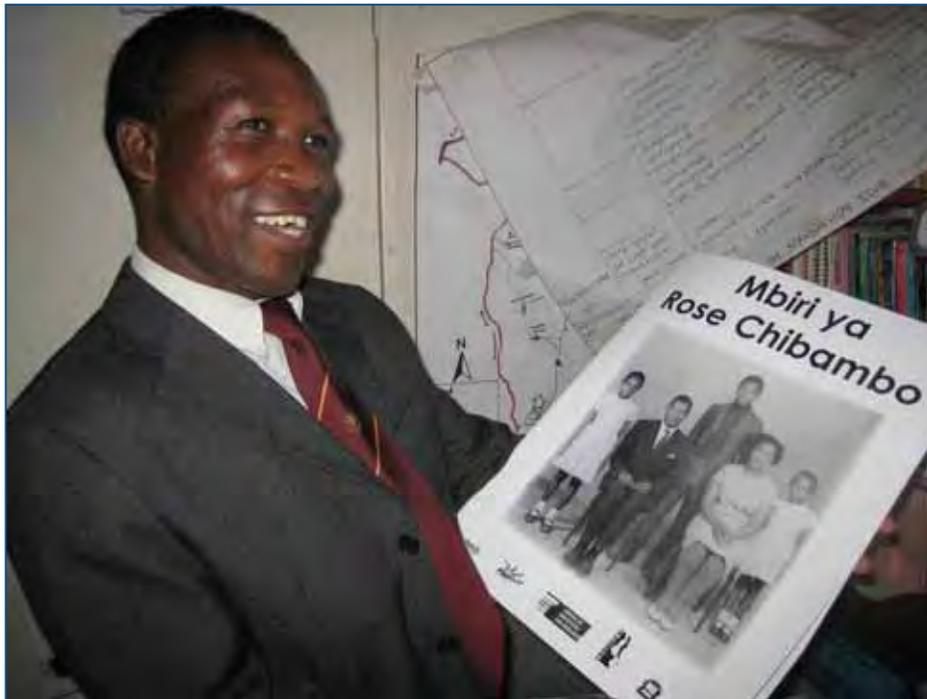
PEAs, ZOCs and ACs work together with head teachers in the clusters to identify and recruit Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTTs) — top-performing teachers — who then are trained to improve lesson plans and delivery and use of TALULAR (Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources). MTTTs support and mentor teachers from schools within their own cluster. Once in a term the PEA, ZOC and AC in each zone are joined by MTTTs to supervise all teachers in the zone. Supervisors write a report on their findings and document challenges teachers face.



This team liaises with the cluster Teacher Conference Committee, a training-management team at cluster level, to organize and conduct trainings for teachers at either school or cluster level. Where challenges are school-specific, training is school-based on a weekly basis. Where the problem is common in all clusters, training is done at cluster level in every

cluster during the holidays. Facilitators for these trainings are star performers among teachers from cluster schools, recommended by supervisors who have observed them teach. Facilitators develop training modules checked by the PEA, ZOC and AC supervision team, to address challenges observed in the classroom. These cluster trainings are also monitored for quality by the supervisors comprising the zonal quality-assurance team.

As a result of this new coordination among quality-assurance supervisors, more teachers are supported on a monthly basis, making it more likely that problems will be rectified promptly and that consistent improvement in learning gains will follow. The PEA can affect this by ensuring that plans are made and implemented jointly, duties effectively delegated to each group and reports received at the end of every activity.



Success Story: Madisi Area in Joint Efforts

A burden shared, is a burden halved. So goes the adage. Teachers benefit greatly when monitored and supported in their delivery of instruction.

However, the Primary Education Advisor (PEA) cannot supervise all teachers alone with enough frequency. Therefore, PSSP: SFP introduced the Zonal Coordinator (ZOC) to work hand-in-hand with the PEA. But just adding a support person does not make a job easier, particularly without proper planning.

In Madisi Area, the ZOCs and PEAs met to discuss how they were operating, and they were looking for ways to be more effective in their support of teachers. All the PEAs and ZOCs resolved that joint efforts in planning and supervision could provide wider coverage of schools in the area. Having discussed the issue at length, they decided to use their monthly float/allocation on a joint operation. Within a month, it was discovered that 68% of schools and teachers had been supervised. For example, six schools were reached in a single day and 31 teachers supervised in one zone. By the end of the month, the responsible zonal PEA and ZOC wrote a consolidated report about the visits made to the schools. The teachers felt supported and took action based on the recommendations of the supervision team.



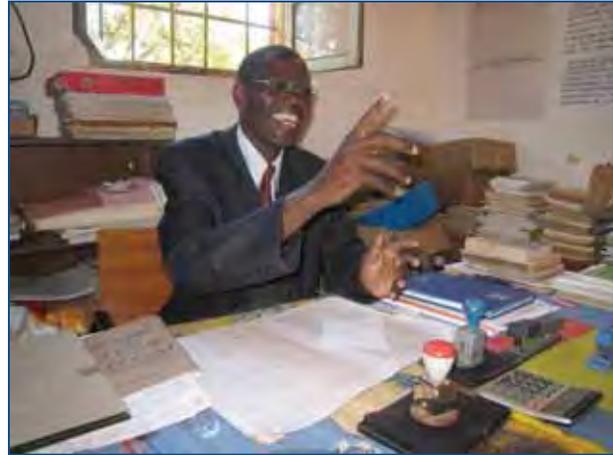
Supervision support does not stop there. Assistant Coordinators (ACs) have also come on board and have proven to be a valuable asset to teacher professional support. PSSP: SFP introduced Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTT), which have strengthened the system. MTTT started with retired teachers with subject expertise doing intensive school-based supervision. To help ensure sustainability, PSSP: SFP introduced local MTTT using teachers identified within the cluster as experts in their subject to serve as supervisory support in school. Head teachers and deputy head teachers were also trained in supervisory skills and instructional leadership. All these players working together will increase frequent visits to schools and provide more support to teachers. This way no teacher is likely to be found without well-drawn schemes of work and adequate lesson plans, and demonstrating good lesson delivery.

“We will remember the days of PSSP: SFP operating in Dowa district and in Madisi Area, as days that brought professional cooperation between stakeholders based on common understanding,” commented Mr. Staphiel Maumkhondo, PEA for Kamphenga Zone.

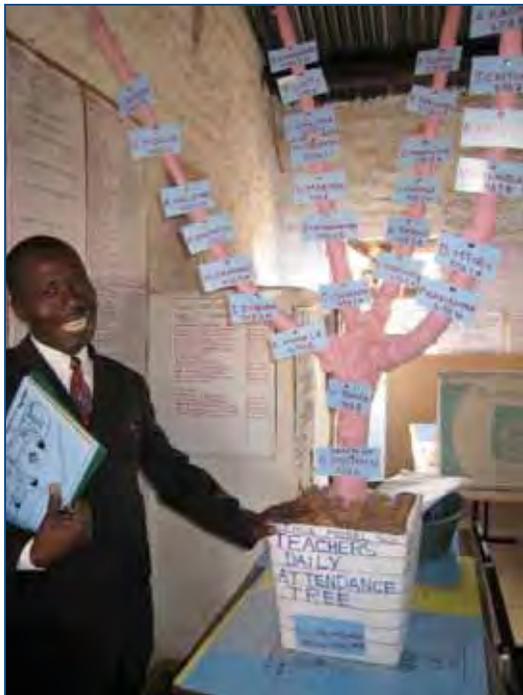
HEAD TEACHER AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

When a curriculum changes, head teachers at each school are among the first to be trained on the new curriculum. They receive orientation even on the smallest changes, because their role is helping other teachers understand the curriculum and implement it effectively. The head teacher is the custodian of the curriculum and the instructional leader of the school.

All head teachers are trained as instructional leaders and school managers to make them aware that it is their duty to help teachers understand and implement the curriculum. Head teachers discuss with teachers the successes and challenges of implementation, and provide feedback to curriculum designers at zonal meetings with the District Education Manager (DEM).



Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) support and monitor head teachers in carrying out their duties. PEAs mentor head teachers on identifying gaps in teachers' delivery of lessons. Head teachers in turn help teachers implement a new curriculum. Head teachers also identify teachers with sufficient expertise who can assist other teachers one-to-one or lead a school-based training to rectify a problem. When a challenge is common to more than one teacher in a cluster's schools, head teachers identify more facilitators from within the cluster schools or from outside to help get every teacher well-versed in curriculum and pedagogy.



At schools where head teachers vigorously strive to help teachers perform better, teachers enjoy their work and learners also do better at meeting learning goals. Teachers welcome supervision and mentoring from PEAs, Zonal Coordinators, Assistant Coordinators, Teacher Conference Committees and local Mobile Teacher Training Troupers. Teachers in such schools are objective when dealing with the curriculum. They readily accept training, making plans and prioritizing their needs. Teacher preparations also improve quickly.

Success Story: Introduction of Supervisory Cluster Head Teachers Improves School Management

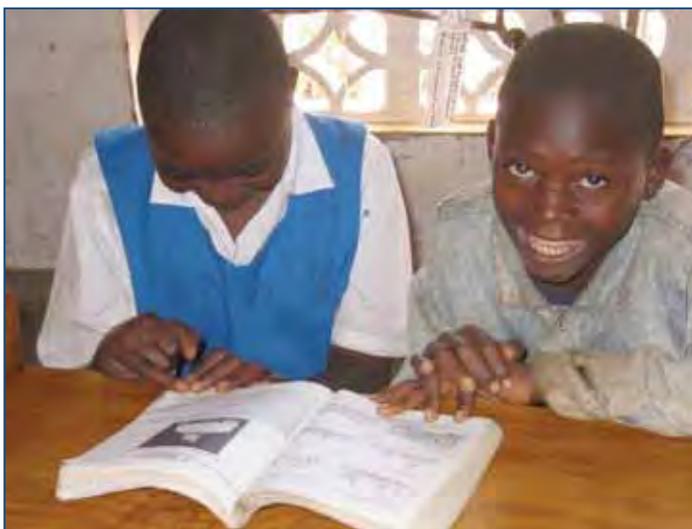
Chimpeni/Mdoku Primary School is located some eight kilometers northeast of the Kamphenga Teacher Development Center. The school belongs to the Catholic Church of Lilongwe Diocese, and it runs under Madisi Parish. The head teacher for the school is Mr. H. Mwale, who has been at the school for over three years.

In the first two years of PSSP: SFP, Chimpeni/Mdoku school was characterized by uncooperative community members, under-motivated and unprepared teaching staff, low enrollment, and poor teacher and student attendance. The problematic infrastructure had no source of clean water; tiny, grass thatched classrooms; and dirty school premises.

In 2008, PSSP: SFP thought of introducing supervising cluster head teachers, who would take the lead in supervising teachers not only in their own schools but also in schools within their clusters. The supervisory cluster head teachers were oriented to supervisory skills, and they were trained on the job by the PEA and ZOC.

Mr. H. Mwale, the head teacher for Chimpeni/Mdoku, was selected to be a supervisory cluster head teacher for the Milore cluster in Kamphenga zone. Like the other supervisory cluster head teachers, he was trained and was allowed to visit schools outside his own cluster (i.e., Chinziri School in Mwaza cluster) for comparison.

When Mr. H. Mwale became a cluster supervisory head, he quickly changed his attitude towards teaching and education activities in general. He became supportive to his fellow staff members and also to the community members around the school. He made sure that all teachers came to classes prepared. He started holding frequent meetings with the teachers at his school and with the school management committee. Within a very short period, Chimpeni/Mdoku school has changed a great deal. Teachers are working hard to help learners, and the learners are also working very hard. Community members now are very busy supporting whatever school development activities are taking place at the school.



Success Story: Effective Instructional Leadership Improves Learning Climate at Longwe School

The Chewa saying “*chonona chifumira mdzira*,” which literally means “all fat originates from an egg” aptly describes the situation of Longwe Primary School. The school is located some 11 kilometers to the west of Kamphenga Teacher Development Centre. The school belongs to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Nkhoma synod and runs standards 1 to 8.

When PSSP: SFP came to Dowa in 2006, the school had a fluctuating enrolment of 211 (98 boys and 113 girls), a staff of five trained male teachers, and seven classrooms – four permanent and three dilapidated classrooms.

In the first year of PSSP: SFP, the school continued to suffer from weak instructional leadership. This in turn resulted in poor school and community relationships, unmotivated and uncooperative teaching staff, and low but fluctuating enrolment, which was related in part to lack of support and encouragement to girls, orphans and other vulnerable children. Teacher and learner attendance was poor. The school premises were unkempt and dirty. Not surprising, the Primary School Learning Certificate Examination results and secondary school selection rate were poor also.



In *The Educational Change*, Michael Fullan calls the school principal or head teacher the “gatekeeper of change” in his or her school. So if the head resists change in the school, surely there is no effective change that can take place. The head teacher at Longwe School would not accommodate the changes PSSP was bringing in 2006. Therefore, the PEA replaced him with a young and enthusiastic headteacher. This headteacher was trained to administer and manage a school through zonal trainings and mentoring. Through cluster- and school-based Continuous Professional Development, Charles Mpinganjira continues to develop as an instructional leader and school manager. As headteacher, he has gained experience, knowledge, skills and strategies for teaching different subjects, which enables him to supervise and support the teachers at Longwe more effectively. The results of the increased effectiveness of the head teacher include improved enrollment from 211 in 2006 to 566 in 2008; improved school community relationships and increased infrastructure; and increased selection of standard 8 students to secondary school from three in 2006 to seven in 2008.

3. DECENTRALIZING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To improve teachers' professional skills in primary schools, PSSP: SFP conducts in-service trainings at zonal, cluster and school levels. The training uses a flattened cascade model and for probably the first time in Dowa, the trainers are directly reaching approximately half the teachers in each school. In addition, PSSP: SFP has used a variety of teacher professional development strategies and activities to reinforce the training. This is helping to ensure that teacher knowledge and skills improve and teacher attitudes change as well.

Until recently, teachers in most schools in Dowa were using teaching and learning strategies ineffectively and making poor use of local resources. A baseline survey in 2006 indicated that only 30% of teachers effectively applied teaching and learning methods. Compounding the problem was lack of proper supervision and too little monitoring by educational officers in the district.

To improve teachers' professional skills in Dowa's schools, PSSP: SFP has been conducting incremental in-service trainings at school, cluster and zonal levels to improve teachers' content knowledge and their pedagogical competencies.

The vision is to improve teaching and learning outcomes in Dowa through improved use of participatory teaching and learning methods and by creating and using effectively relevant teaching and learning materials. This approach supports teachers in applying early literacy teaching techniques in schools in order to help learners achieve mastery of skills in literacy, mathematics and English.



To address the challenge of teacher supervision and support, PSSP: SFP established school clusters within each educational zone. Two to five schools make up a cluster, with four or five clusters per education zone. A total of 59 clusters were developed. However, five zones have clusters in which schools are still too geographically spread out for community interactions, so 69 clusters were created for community-level activities.

In an effort to improve teaching and learning in schools, PSSP: SFP also initiated Malawi Teacher Training Troupes and Teacher Conference Committees in 67 clusters to help teachers learn about best practices as well as to identify problems and strategies to overcome the problems.

As a result, more teachers are using participatory teaching and learning methods effectively. PSSP: SFP conducted a follow-up survey in 2008 that showed 71% of teachers were now using participatory methods. More teachers apply early literacy techniques and more are making and using TALULAR materials. (TALULAR is the acronym for "Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources.") More teachers are also coming up with activities to support learners to achieve mastery in mathematics and English.

CPD: CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

Education keeps changing and new ideas evolve from old as teachers work to help their students learn more effectively. In the teaching profession, curriculum and pedagogy also change in response to the needs of the job market. All this necessitates ongoing teacher development. Continuous professional development (CPD) is a systematic way to ensure that teachers fully know curricula and use the best pedagogy.



Dowa district's professional development structure ensures that teachers share knowledge and skills and mentor one another for better performance. This structure has three levels — school, cluster and zone. At each level, teachers identify their own training needs and appoint facilitators from among themselves. Facilitators develop training modules based on the gaps in skills that teachers have identified. Teachers who will be trained by the facilitators decide when and where to meet. About 80% of all CPD trainings take place within schools.

At the schools, small teams of experts called Mobile Teacher Training Troupes (MTTTs), which have specialists from literacy (Chichewa and English), science, mathematics, and other subjects regularly supervise and mentor teachers in specific areas of subject specialization. MTTTs also hold conferences at schools with teachers, either individually or in groups, to discuss teaching related challenges, their causes and solutions.

These challenges may relate to content knowledge or to pedagogy. When the solution is one-on-one mentoring by another teacher from the same school, MTTT helps make arrangements for this to happen. MTTT explains the assistance required, provides technical assistance to mentors and ensures that it takes place.

Individual schools also suggest training needs. Once every term, teachers identify about five topics from subject areas in which they want help. Schools submit these training topics to the cluster Teacher Conference Committee (TCC). The TCC compiles a topic list from all the schools in the cluster, which is then sent to a zonal committee. The common topics of interest identified by most or all of the clusters within the zone are compiled and the topics that are not commonly identified are sent back to the schools of origin so that those particular topics can be addressed at the school level as needed.



School training teams identify training facilitators at their own schools. If there is no one at the school who can effectively facilitate the training, a cluster training team identifies a suitable facilitator from within the cluster. Facilitators at any level can develop a training module addressing a particular topic with assistance from individual teachers or from the TCC.

The role that individuals and groups play at each level is the most critical element in developing and implementing successful CPD opportunities for teachers. This is what makes the training both possible and effective.

There are CPD coordinators at each level, each of whom plays a very important role within the CPD structure. Every school has a CPD coordinating team, which includes the head teacher and deputy and section heads. At the cluster level, CPD coordinators include head teachers, deputy heads and school-based coordinators from each school in the cluster. Zonal CPD coordinators are representatives selected from the clusters. This three-level chain is called the TCC.

The CPD model for Dowa schools is sustainable. About 80% of annual training topics are suggested by individual teachers. MTTT mentors and mentees identify performance gaps by observing teachers as they teach their pupils. Trainers are top-performing teachers who are as selected by other teachers. This process helps to motivate teachers to improve their teaching practices in order to be recognized by their peers. Any teacher, if able, could facilitate a CPD training session.



The system is designed to build capacity for participants at all levels. Every teacher now knows how to develop a training module on a particular topic. Teachers are more willing to facilitate teacher training because they can develop modules of their choosing. CPD enables changes for the better in the classroom as teachers' content knowledge has improved and participatory methods of teaching and learning are being learned at all levels.

Because school-based CPD helps teachers in their classrooms, it is important to maintain this structure in Dowa and nationally. Training teachers in module development prepares them to facilitate a training. Teachers who facilitate training sessions also have an opportunity to develop their reading and research skills as well as their training and organizational skills. They become more effective in their own classroom as living examples — teachers who help peers recognize, respect and effectively utilize one another's expertise for the benefit of pupils' learning. All the while, this process builds a positive competitive spirit among the teachers.

To ensure continuity and help develop the national CPD structure, support is required from the Ministry of Education, the divisions, the districts and the zonal Primary Education Advisors to monitor and manage CPDs. Exchange visits are arranged from time to time within schools, clusters and zones to see star performing teachers at work.

Limited support for CPDs at different levels poses challenges to this effort. Also, understaffing stretches some schools so much so that teachers fail to hold CPDs on a regular basis. Moreover, preparation sometimes requires materials that are not readily available in rural areas.



However, CPDs are the best way to address teaching and learning gaps in schools. As curricula change, teachers must keep up with organized professional development and CPDs allow them to do this.

Success Story: CPDs Help Make Teaching and Learning Simple

by Patrick Mbulende, Teacher, Nsipe School, Mvera Zone

Welcome to Msipe Junior Primary School, where teaching and learning are now simpler following the introduction of the PSSP: SFP teacher trainings and teacher conferences at both cluster and school levels. These professional development opportunities continue to ease the challenges of teachers in Msipe and other schools who teach pupils in indoor and outdoor classroom environments.

Prior to PSSP: SFP, many teachers, myself included, faced problems in lesson delivery and classroom-management skills. This was mainly because some of us did not utilize what we learned from college, or we lacked the necessary teaching skills. I have directly benefited by using teaching skills from school-based In-Service Trainings (INSETs), now called Continuous Professional Development (CPDs).

Two members of our school, head teacher Mr. Diffred Namadzunda, and deputy head Mr. Dastan Goma, attended a PSSP: SFP cluster-based training. Being that Msipe only has three teachers, I did not have a chance to attend cluster training. However, soon after their training they planned a school-based CPD for me and I saw it as my greatest opportunity. I learned quite a lot during this forum, such as participatory teaching and learning methodologies such as pair work and group work. I began implementing these immediately after the orientation.

I was able to plan effective lesson plans along with teaching objectives. I intensified participatory-teaching methods such as group work, role play, dialogue and use of local resources (Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources, or TALULAR).

Learners in my class are benefiting from the strategies and are participating fully — particularly in group work and dialogue. Slow learners have an opportunity to learn from fast learners and 80% of the learners are able to read, write and count compared with 50% in the past. To make sure that these

pupils are doing what they have been instructed, I monitor each group to see what is happening.



The subsequent PSSP: SFP cycle trainings injected me with more knowledge and skills. I learned how to assess pupils using continuous assessment and I have established a good relationship with the learners, enabling them to communicate their difficulties openly. Eventually, this will give me a better sense of my effectiveness on delivering the content. For instance, if I assess that learners are struggling with pair work in a lesson, I will change strategies until I find one that works.

Further professional development and teacher resources have imparted teachers with even more techniques to improve learners' progress. These include, among other things, TALULAR production and utilization, remediation, and enrichment.

To ensure constant availability of TALULAR, I involve pupils in the collection of materials. Word cards, reading boards, toys and place-value boxes are some of the resources that we have developed. Place-value boxes are used together with counters for modeling numbers.



Teaching is indeed being simplified and even learners are expressing their appreciation. “I enjoy word cards,” said Zion Phiri, a learner. “Our vocabulary and spelling skills are improving each day as we read them in the word tree.”

Finally, my message to fellow teachers is this: Be friendly with learners. Always remediate those falling behind in every subject. Create an environment conducive to learning. Use appropriate teaching and learning materials. Critically assess strategies that can be varied during the course. And finally, enjoy the noble profession of teaching!

Success Story: Teacher Training Brightens a Deaf Girl's Future

Siyeni Mandala, a 17 year-old standard 7 girl at Kalowilo primary school in Chimungu education zone of Dowa district, Central Malawi is deaf. “She received very little attention in class,” Morious Chiusiwa, her class teacher, admits. Her classmates and school peers avoided her in most school activities. She was often seen walking back home after school alone and looking miserable. “It’s amazing she has remained in school all this while,” said her teacher.

When PSSP: SFP, a three-year USAID-funded project was launched in Dowa, John Mwale, the Zonal Coordinator, decided to debate the issue of physically challenged pupils with the staff of Kalowilo school as a part of the staff sensitization and mobilization process. He aimed to brainstorm the ideas of the staff before sharing his own. The teachers’ concerns revolved around their inability to communicate with Siyeni amid other pupils who required their attention; arguing, in essence, that there was very little that could be done about Siyeni. When John shared ideas around pupil-centered teaching, everyone sighed with disbelief. In PSSP: SFP cycle of trainings, a couple of modules emphasized support and training for disabled learners. These helped the teachers gradually realize and accept that Siyeni’s future relied entirely on individualized and small group activity-based teaching and that this needed to be reinforced by a change of attitude among all those who interacted with her. Thus a consensus was reached and a battle to change Siyeni’s future was launched.



About nine months later Siyeni’s teacher Morious Chiusiwa reports, “I am proud I have done things that were considered impossible at first. Siyeni is doing very well in class now.” Siyeni herself has this to say, “There is peace and joy in my heart now. I aspire to attain a secondary school education.” Morious uses a great deal of group work during which pupils are issued with various teaching/learning resources depending on the tasks assigned to them. He then ensures that he has time to guide Siyeni before letting her proceed with her assignment as he moves on to other groups. Sometimes he uses more able group leaders to guide Siyeni’s group or Siyeni alone when another group or groups need his assistance.

Dowa schools have a lot to learn from Kalowilo as they strive to get orphans and vulnerable children and girls to access school and to achieve through PSSP: SFP so that their futures shine like Siyeni’s.

Success Story: Now I am a True Head Teacher

By Meharey Bandawe — Head Teacher, Chimungu School—Chimungu Zone

I was appointed Head Teacher of Chimungu Primary School in December, 1997, but I struggled to properly and effectively discharge my duties as a head, that is until PSSP:SFP came. .

Before 2006, I never had an opportunity learn about managerial skills, and it was an area in which I struggled to succeed. Very often I would argue with my teachers on matters that could be solved amicably. I lacked communication skills! As a head teacher, I was expected to organize school-based Continuous Professional Development (CPDs) sessions but I did not out of laziness and feeling like I did not know how to do it. Writing training modules was a thing I could not dream about. I even failed to supervise my teachers, thus I was unable to identify their strengths and weaknesses and help ensure that learning was happening at the school. I did not maintain records for my school, apart from those I inherited from the previous head teacher. Furthermore, I failed to mobilize community to support the school and the education of their children. I hated to be visited by any professional, fearing they would discover my weaknesses and remove me from the post.

When PSSP started their teacher trainings, I was taken to be a zonal facilitator for cycle I. This is the time when my professional blindness started to be removed. I still remember the first day of my facilitation at Mtsiro cluster for three days. I rated myself as a failure but my ZOC, John Mwale, aired out my strong points and areas for improvement, which encouraged me. He told me to lead by example. When I came back to my school I talked to my fellow teachers warmly and asked them to start working as a team. Encouragingly, unnecessary arguments minimized.

After facilitating several cycles of training, I developed my facilitation skills and would welcome the chance to train anyone at a district, cluster and school level. The quality of my work has improved and I have helped my teachers to improve and be self-starters in many school activities. We now work as a team, which has improved our school academically. Today, 70% of learners in standard 3 and 4 are able to read Chichewa books fluently and 60% of standards 5 to 8 are able to read English. Learners come



to school from Monday to Friday to learn, and Saturday and Sunday they come to read library books. Learners prefer staying at school from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and they enjoy playing sports, on play parks or participating in academic clubs. My school conducted quiz competitions with James, Kabulungo Senga, Kanyangala, Chambidzi and Tchawale where my school, Chimungu School, emerged the winner. And now we are challenging any school to compete with us. The school can be from any zone or district. All this is happening at this school because of managerial and technical skills that PSSP has invested in me.

TEACHER MOTIVATION STRATEGIES

Teachers must know and understand what to teach, how to teach and what tools to use to make teaching and learning more effective and meaningful. However, teachers also require motivation, especially when faced with multiple challenges. A key motivator for teachers is learner outcomes. Providing other motivations as well helps teachers continue to improve their performance, to the benefit of their learners and their communities.

To help teachers perform well, PSSP: SFP embarked on a series of motivational strategies to encourage teachers to perform and to raise the profile of teachers in the communities. One powerful mechanism employed was interschool and inter-zonal exchange visits for teachers to visit colleagues who have been evaluated as top performers. From these visits, underperforming teachers were inspired to raise their teaching standard and employ child-centered methods that PSSP: SFP taught. Teachers that were performing well and visited under these exchanges were also motivated through the recognition provided.

There is a saying, “There is no better teacher than being a teacher.” Some of these excellent teachers were also asked to facilitate CPD for other teachers at school or cluster level, Some were selected to be district facilitators for training other teachers in their area of specialty. Some of the best teachers were also invited to help develop training modules for other teachers. Star performers were also asked to identify special areas of interest they thought should receive more attention. These activities not only reinforced topics for those teachers, it motivated them and their fellow teachers to know that they have the knowledge and ability to train each other and to be owners in their professional development.

To recognize good teaching, certificates were prepared to reward teachers’ performance in different categories. PSSP: SFP started this initiative at zonal level open days during the National Day of Education. Recipients got awards like “Best Teacher in the Zone for Using Participatory Methods” or “Most Improved School for Teacher Attendance.” Awards were also given to community members like “Best Akwinjira for Raising Funds to Support Education.” Recipients were excited and even those who did not receive a reward were motivated to try to attain the award next time. Schools increasingly adopted this practice, whereby they would recognize their star performers, be it community members or teachers, during end of term ceremonies. This system helps both good teachers and those who need to improve to realize that everyone can make a contribution to improve the quality of education in their school. Some underperforming teachers have already begun to improve.



To provide close, careful support and monitoring of teachers in their classroom practices, every PEA, ZOC and PSSP: SFP manager has gone to different schools and classrooms to observe and evaluate lesson delivery and the quality of instruction. Nearly all teachers have been evaluated based on their performance, and specific guidance was provided to teachers on how to improve. In this way, subject specialists as well as those who have mastered a particular pedagogical skill were identified in the zones to help other teachers. Modules for school-based trainings now can be developed by local teachers, which was not the case before the inception of PSSP: SFP.

PSSP: SFP sees these approaches as good strategies to help teachers improve the effectiveness of their teaching and thus help their pupils improve their academic performance not only within Dowa District but also throughout Malawi.

Success Story: Exchange Visits Bearing Fruit in Dowa Schools

Senga School is the host school to the Teacher Development Center located on the M1 road to Mzuzu. Despite being a well-staffed school with 32 teachers (10 male, 22 female) and 1,357 learners (668 boys, 689 girls), Senga was behind in its teachers professional development activities. Soon after PSSP: SFP began its sensitization initiatives, Mr. Mbonongo, the head teacher, called for reelections of the SMC (School Management Committee) and PTA, which had been dormant. However, the situation remained unchanged.

Recognizing the need to do something to improve the situation, the ZOC, Mrs. Mary Phiri, arranged a series of exchange visits for Mr. Mbonongo to learn about and to see what development activities were happening in other schools and outside Senga zone. They visited five schools and heard firsthand the success of other teachers and head teachers. They also attended a fundraising ceremony at two other schools where parents were contributing maize and other resources in support of the school. Mr. Mbonongo was overwhelmed and could not believe his eyes. “I did not know my friends were doing these things.



I was left behind, but no more. On Sunday I will hold a meeting with the Group Village Headmen (GVH). We are last, but we will be number one,” Mr. Mbonongo said.

That Sunday the Group Village Headmen (GVH) met. Upon hearing the accomplishments of their neighbors, they pledged to invest in improving Senga School. The GVHs in turn met with community members. As a result, action was seen within the week. Three classroom shelters were constructed to serve as a windbreak as the *mwera* wind season approached. Fifteen bags of maize were donated to raise funds and 12,000 bricks were molded by each of the 14 village heads to build a teacher’s house. This support from the community has also encouraged the teachers to work harder to improve their pupils’ academic performance. Mr. Mbonongo promises to keep moving at “PSSP speed” to support the learners at Senga School.

REFLECTIVE TEACHING

After each lesson, a good teacher relives it, identifying strong and weak points, challenges encountered in delivery and whether the lesson was successful. Teachers ask self-searching questions such as, “What did I teach? How did I teach it? Was I successful? Is there another way to teach it better? Was the content correct? Did learners respond the way I wanted? What were the gaps in content, pedagogy or use of local resources?”



This practice of reflective teaching points out to teachers what did not go well and helps them improve a lesson. Teachers become aware they do not always perform as well as they wish. They may be deficient in content knowledge or pedagogical skills or may convey the wrong attitude to learners.

Teachers trained in content knowledge and pedagogy now also receive guidance in how to reflect on their teaching to identify gaps in lesson planning and delivery. Teachers now can discuss such gaps knowledgeably and constructively with a supervisor — peer observers

from Mobile Teacher Training Troup, Teacher Conference Committee, a head teacher or section head. Supervisors objectively advise and mentor teachers, who in turn can link learner performance with their own teaching methods.

The result is that teachers are better informed, looking forward to more such assistance to improve their own teaching and help learners do better. Teachers want to understand the curriculum and know the content. They now readily accept coaching and mentoring and welcome observation.

PSSP: SFP recommends that the Ministry of Education through the District Education Manager, Primary Education Advisor and Assistant Coordinators continue training for all teachers in the practice of self-reflective teaching — at the same time emphasizing good, objective coaching and mentoring to assure ready acceptance by teachers.



Success Story: Reflective Teaching at Kayembe Primary School

In the past, the head teacher of Kayembe Primary School in Kayembe zone and his staff did not prepare adequately for their lessons. While they talked from the chalkboard, they paid little attention to how learners were performing. Remediation was not provided and homework was not given. The head teacher rarely supervised teaching and very few teachers received professional support in delivering lessons. The school had no evidence of school-based professional development opportunities such as in-service trainings. Development of teachers' skills was not seen as a priority.

However, after attending PSSP: SFP teacher trainings, the head teacher and teachers embarked on school-based Continuous Professional Development to address learners' needs as well as their own professional needs. Teachers now exchange ideas on how to improve teaching and make learning more enjoyable for learners, with the goal of improving pupil outcomes. In the fourth cycle of training, teachers learned about reflective teaching and how to assess themselves while teaching. In addition, they learned about peer observation. At Kayembe School, teachers have taken the matter to heart.

As a result of the trainings, teachers now prepare, keep full records of work and prepare detailed lesson plans. Teachers are practicing the methods they learned in training. This has meant learners are more excited in school, which in turn motivates teachers to do more. Some teachers are trying to apply continuous assessment in their classes, and this feedback also helps them reflect on their own teaching practice. When the majority of pupils assessed are not grasping concepts, Kayembe teachers now quickly reflect on what they can do to help pupils learn better. PSSP: SFP expects Kayembe's pupils to shine as teachers continue to engage themselves and their pupils.



4. PROMOTING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

School and community work together for one goal: to make sure their school is properly run for the benefit of their children. Children spend nearly all their time in school or the home. At school they learn mathematical and scientific and other principles to help them live and cope with the ever-changing world. At home, they are trained on cultural values, manners and morals to be accepted in the community.

Of late, there has been a misconception about to whom the schools belong. Schools have been associated with the government, and people have mistakenly believed a school belongs to the government, or donor, or missionary, or even to the construction company that built it. That schools belong to the community is a new idea.

Consequently, communities have tended to take little role in schools. If a school does well, nobody is bothered. If things go badly, few people if any take time to ask why or to find solutions. School-development work by communities has been seen as slavery instigated by politicians. *Gule Wamkulu* too, the cultural dance organization, has played a negative part. Its long-standing differences with the religious groups that started many of the schools meant that *Gule Wamkulu* wanted nothing to do with education or church activities. Indeed, *Gule Wamkulu* members sometimes stood on the paths leading to schools to block pupils from going to school.

But now the vision for the schools is to enhance school-community partnerships, to promote community participation and to open windows at school so the community can play a role in school development. To achieve this, Theatre for Development (TFD) has conducted research and given performances in schools to collect data and to gather information on education issues from the community. This work helps establish a basis for discussion in sites selected for more sensitization and training. PSSP: SFP goals and objectives have been the subject of workshops for community leaders, School Management Committees, PTAs, special group leaders, girl mentors, cluster leaders and teachers. Special group leaders are a key part of the community. Wrongly handled, they may react negatively. Therefore, a special selection and training was arranged for them.



The Mobilization Corps of Malawi, a local volunteer youth program that has organized a special initiative for school dropouts, also played a significant role in facilitating and building community partnerships.

As a result, various community members now have made significant contributions in schools. *Gule Wamkulu* special group leaders have raised money for schools to support orphans and children in need. Instead of stopping pupils from going to school, *Gule Wamkulu* now escort children to school and makes sure no child is absent. The group also participates in development work at schools. The community at large has taken part in the infrastructure development at schools and trains pupils in life skills such as



weaving, bakery, tailoring, carpentry and tinsmithing. Community members have been involved in classroom activities such as storytelling. Communities lobby with institutions for school infrastructure development, approaching government, politicians, donor agents and individual community members.

The schools now belong to the community. Communities have a say in what they want at the schools. They know what to prioritize and what their school should be. The community is part of the school and vice-versa.

THE MOBILIZATION CORPS OF MALAWI (MCM)

The Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCM) is a voluntary service-learning program that provides the youth of Malawi with the opportunity to help rural Malawian communities develop practical solutions to complex development problems.

Youth who participate are called MCMs. They help communities to identify local problems and the causes as well as finding ways to deal with issues at the grass-roots level. MCMs live and work within the community they are helping for up to 24 months.

MCMs have mobilized communities to improve the quality of education in their local schools and to build better support services for orphans and vulnerable children, with particular attention given to girls and children with special needs.

As well as helping communities, the MCM program instills in Malawian youth a positive attitude toward volunteer service and provides an opportunity for them to do something for their country.

The MCM program started in 2006 with a pilot phase in three of the 13 zones of Dowa district (Chimungu, Madisi and Mponela zones). In the pilot phase, seven women and eight men were recruited through advertisements on posters in schools, at Teacher Development Centers and in town centers. PSSP: SFP staff interviewed prospective MCMs and asked targeted communities about the candidates. To serve as an MCM, an individual requires a Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). Candidates must be between the ages of 21 and 30 years old. Background checks verified candidates' behavior and conduct.

Recruiting and selecting MCMs involved, but was not limited to, an open application period for 21 days. MCMs with a full MSCE went directly onto a short-list.

Zonal cluster committees used a prepared appraisal form to screen applicants. Project staff conducted the final interviews and selected the MCMs. Lastly, targeted communities had an opportunity to evaluate the candidate MCMs. Communities were at liberty to accept or reject MCMs assigned to them.



MCMs received five days' training from PSSP: SFP officers and external officers, including the Director of Planning and Development, District Youth Officer, District Social Welfare Officer and the PSSP: SFP Program Manager, with external support from Washington, DC.

After training, the MCMs drew up action plans to guide the implementation of activities. They were finally deployed to their working clusters. After orientation, MCMs received bicycles to use to visit schools.

MCMs take on a set of responsibilities. First, they agree to live and work in or near their communities for a 12- to 24-month period. Through the relationships they develop, they establish connections in

communities that they use in a variety of ways to foster community development and to improve the quality of education at the local schools.



In schools, they support classroom teachers and classroom activities by helping develop TALULAR (Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources) for use in class. They also help establish play parks at schools for students and others to use, and they establish youth clubs and facilitate youth activities that encourage both in-school and out-of-school children to meet and discuss issues of concern to youth. They also support community fundraising activities for the schools and encourage community members to help improve schools' physical infrastructure.

On a project level, they maintain regular communication with PSSP: SFP field workers and staff, informing PSSP: SFP staff of problems they are having in the communities. They also produce monthly and quarterly reports for the PSSP staff about their activities, plans of action, successes and challenges and work with all field extension workers and PSSP: SFP staff in community-based activities.

Beyond the school, they link community efforts to external support from government institutions, non-government organizations and donor agencies. They work to enhance communities' existing action plans and they lobby for external assistance from individuals and donor agencies.

In the field, MCMs need technical support from the project staff and other stakeholders, including traditional leaders, field extension workers and the community at large. Implementation of MCM activities must be monitored by project staff, extension workers and traditional leaders to ensure that MCMs are moving in the right direction.

Near the end of the pilot phase, in-service training and review and re-planning meetings were conducted at which MCMs reported achievements and shared challenges.

Near the end of the pilot, preparations for the Phase I of the full MCM program commenced. Preparation activities started with stakeholder sensitization meetings in Malawi's other 10 zones to create awareness about the program.

Based on the pilot phase, a training manual and other training materials were developed and reviewed. Appraisal forms that were developed in the pilot phase provided guidance on how to recruit MCM candidates including how to advertise, short-list and screen potential candidates.



Interviews were conducted and new candidates were selected to help in other targeted communities — though some left for other opportunities and had to be replaced. For example, two female MCMs were accepted into Teachers' Training College.

PSSP: SFP officers and other external trainers intensively trained the group of 69 new MCMs for 15 days. During the training, MCMs who were involved in the pilot project shared their experiences with the new MCMs.

Training included hands-on activities such as games and sports as well as practical field training experiences from five selected schools. Subjects covered included how to conduct focus group discussions, how to build play parks and how to use local resources for teaching.



At the end of the MCM training, plans of action were prepared for four months, from January to April 2007. Afterward a review and re-planning meeting was organized at which successes, challenges and the way forward were discussed.

Based on what was learned in the pilot phase, incremental training ensued on issues such as the formation and roles of community-based organizations and clubs; human rights and gender issues; and training and practical considerations regarding Theatre for Development and participatory action research. Plans of action were also extended to

December 2007, with another 17 days of training scheduled at that time for the second phase of the MCM program.

Finally, a review and re-planning meeting was organized in May 2008. Activities were reviewed and re-planning was done for activities up to September 2008, which was to be the last month of the MCM pilot project.

The MCM program has been a success. As part of PSSP: SFP's holistic school reform effort, MCMs directly contributed to outcomes in pupil performance, improved morale among teachers, improved school community relationships and the rejuvenation of development projects. Nearly every school in Dowa district now has active clubs such as quiz, debate, reading, mathematics, wildlife, drama, HIV/AIDS *Toto* (anti-AIDs awareness clubs), football and netball.



The power of the MCM program lies in its dual capacity to generate positive changes in the community while providing volunteers an opportunity to learn important life skills and gain crucial work experience.

MCM Mark Kapomba put it this way: “I now enjoy working with a cross-section of people. I have come to appreciate differences and accept other peoples’ opinions and advice. I also feel more confident and can handle many situations.”

MCMs have helped change communities’ attitudes toward the schools and cultivated a spirit of volunteerism. Schools have become more interesting places for the children of Dowa district.

Like any initiative the MCM program has challenges. At the beginning of the program, teachers were unsure of the role of MCMs and some teachers viewed them as a threat rather than a resource. Communities were sometime slow to accept that these youth had something to contribute to development. A few of the youth did not behave in ways that supported the vision for this program and were released from service. But overall, attitudes towards youth have transformed and it is hoped that donors or the government will consider supporting the MCM program and consider national scaling.

At a ceremony attended by U.S. Charge d’Affair, Mr. Kevin Sullivan and Malawi’s Director of Basic Education Mr. McKnight Kalanda, 81 MCMs received certificates of participation in the MCM program.



The MCM program, if implemented well, can bring life back to schools. As a result of the MCM program, pupils enjoy going to class. Communities have developed an attitude of owning their own schools and providing local resources for teachers.

Traditional Authority Chakhaza had this to say: “Make sure the young men continue doing the good work in the community and please involve the others who are just staying. Even when the program has ended, our youths should be able to undertake such roles in the development of our areas.”



Success Story: MCMs Turn Mponela Zone Schools into Pupils' Second Home

Many pupils used to absent themselves from school and some dropped out. There was nothing to help pupils enjoy education at school. Schools were very boring places. The days were characterized by solving difficult problems in mathematics, drawing maps and doing science experiments students did not understand. During breaks pupils would just stand by the classroom walls. To some extent, this situation contributed to a low standard of education. In the early years of formal education in Malawi, the great educationists were said to combine education with play to help learners refresh their minds and later enjoy the lessons. Schools competed in football, netball and track and field events. In the 22 schools in the Mponela zone, this was no longer the case.

PSSP: SFP, with funds from USAID, is combating pupil absenteeism and dropout through introduction of MCMs in school clusters. MCMs have been in the forefront of making schools more attractive for pupils, working with teachers to reintroduce games. MCMs also established play parks in all 22 schools of Mponela Zone. Play parks feature draughts (checkers), seesaw, long and high jump, swings and *bawo*, the Malawian version of an ancient African board game. The games and equipment are built by stakeholders including teachers, pupils, community leaders, parents, School Management Committees (SMCs) and PTAs. No sooner had the development of play parks been completed than pupils started using them. "Can you wait a little until we finish fixing the poles," requested the cluster leader Mr. Pasanje, holding pupils away from using the newly introduced play parks. "No, let me have my chance to play," said Grace Mtimaukanena. Play parks became a darling to children. At every break, pupils would be seen playing. When they entered classes after break their eyes would be bright and children would be ready to take on new lessons.

Introduction of these activities in schools has improved pupils' punctuality. Most of them go to school early to play before classes begin. No one would want to be absent, since they knew they would miss a chance to play with the play parks. Teachers join the children to make sure no accidents happen. Children also use the parks during breaks and after classes.



Indeed, most pupils stay at the school until around 4 p.m. The problem is no longer getting pupils to school as it had been in the past. Now the major problem is getting pupils home, since some want to stay until sunset. The head teachers have the task of chasing pupils away to go home. Indeed, schools have turned into second homes for pupils. Pupil attendance has also improved. No child wants to be absent from school. A rule has been put in place barring those who came late to school from using the play park on that day. Some pupils who left school are also coming back to schools when they hear that there is a lot to play with at school these days. Performance of pupils too has improved in class. There is a high degree of participation by pupils in the lesson presentation. Pupils are able to ask questions when they don't understand. As a result, even pupils in standard I are learning to read and write.

Success Story: Community Ensures Pupils Stay in School

Volleyball has been an unseen sport amongst learners in most schools including Chimbuli Primary School. Chimbuli Primary School lies in Sungeni Cluster in Chimbuli zone in the area of Traditional Authority Chakhaza. This new extracurricular activity, volleyball, has won the hearts of many children and, like a magnet, has attracted dropouts to return to school.

In addition to volleyball, some other games that have attracted dropouts to come back to school are football and draughts (checkers). Other games that draw dropouts back to school are netball and *bawo*. Still another way to attract dropouts is with play parks, sets of playground equipment including seesaws, swings and obstacles. A number of schools now have play parks as a result of MCM work. For instance, Chimbuli Primary School has four seesaws made through the MCM's initiative. The school also received two *bawo* game boards and one draughts set as part of the School Incentive Package (SIP).

Children, including dropouts, swarm to these games like bees to the beehive. Mwale Faliyeti, who reenrolled after a year of absence, was drawn back to school by the play parks. "I admired my friends playing on the seesaw and I came back to school," says Mwale, an orphan who dropped out of school mainly because of her struggle to meet her basic school needs.



Now that Mwale has returned to school, teachers, SMC members and community leaders are determined that pupils like her who dropped out of school due to lack of support are supported so that they stay in school. The school has introduced a tinsmith club with Lyson Phiri, a volunteer community member in Chimbuli village, training club members in tinsmithing. The club has 23 members (10 boys and 13 girls). Club members have made three watering canes, six small cooking pots and one big cooking pot. The head teacher, Mr. Dan Mtengayumba, contributed three iron sheets to the club. The tinsmith club activities are done every Tuesday and Friday. "We are imparting skills that will

remain with these children and help learners like Mwale to earn a living after completing school," the head teacher said. Moreover, the school sells the products and uses the cash to buy school materials for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs). Mwale has already received school notebooks and pens

Mr. Mtengavumba, praises the introduction of these extracurricular activities, especially the leading role that MCM Martha Chadzunda is playing. "Imagine, by January enrollment was 648 and has risen to 780 within a span of two months. It's amazing. We owe this rise to our MCM. As soon as we welcomed her she briefed us on the need to introduce extracurricular activities at the school. We give her support in all her activities. We support and appreciate the activities," commented the head teacher with a smile.

In addition to play parks, other extracurricular activities that the MCM has introduced at the school are some traditional dances — *chiterera*, *mganda* and *chisamba* — and choral activities. Martha helped pupils to change words in some traditional songs to impart educational messages. The MCM has also been active forming clubs and has revived once active clubs such as the wildlife club.

In a nutshell, school access, retention and regular attendance are no longer problems at Chimbuli School thanks to play parks and extracurricular activities initiated by the MCM, Martha Chazunda.

THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT (TFD)

The PSSP: SFP project ultimately targets children. Yet in its efforts to support the Malawi government in improving access to and equity and quality of education in all Malawi and in particular in Dowa, it is important to acknowledge the role of the community and individuals who have an impact on children's well-being.

One way to enhance community knowledge and engagement in education support has been the use of Theatre for Development (TFD) as a core mobilization strategy.

TFD's participatory performances help people develop awareness in solving their own problems and developing their own lives. TFD facilitates person-to-person and group interaction to foster collective responsibility and self-determination.

The strategy involves several steps: information gathering, information analysis, play creation, performance, and follow-up. TFD's significance and effectiveness in achieving educational goals and objectives of PSSP: SFP cannot be overemphasized.

PSSP: SFP involved two different groups in TFD, Chancellor College students and local drama troupes. Chancellor College students, who themselves were taking TFD as a course in fine arts, received orientation and training from project staff on project goals and objectives. Students then conducted grassroots sensitization performances and trained 34 local drama groups to conduct action research and conduct sensitization performances as well.

The TFD process starts with fact-finding or participatory research with people who are involved in key issues. TFD team members familiarize themselves with ongoing activities and programs related to the project in the school communities.

The work includes discussions and consultations with the community and other collaborating field extension workers, including Primary Education Advisors and the District Community Development Officer. This work is to identify the problems and constraints to education and to the community in general — for example, the plight of orphans and vulnerable children.

Information sharing and analysis goes in tandem with the information-gathering exercise. After each field visit and meetings with individual villagers and other collaborating groups, findings are examined for relevance, for cause-effect relationships and for adaptability to PSSP: SFP's aims and objectives.



The TFD group continues to work on research findings — identifying information gaps and loopholes in interpretation, comparing and contrasting the views of various participants, prioritizing community concerns and identifying how problems are related to one another and to social, political, economic and cultural factors.

Next, a story line and the play itself emerge, followed by rehearsal. The story line and creation of the play clarify and interpret information TFD has gathered. Here, relevant primary educational concerns and issues (infrastructure, teaching and learning resources) come to life through improvisation. The plays try to disseminate messages on education based on the information gathered, and at the same time to solicit the community's own views on education.

The performance includes catchy tunes that the people like to sing or hear, with lyrics changed to carry messages or information about PSSP: SFP's goals and objectives. Songs and dances help the audience relax and encourage subsequent participation.

The dramatic performance follows the singing, with community leaders, village residents, learners and teachers at targeted schools attending to watch and take part.

One extraordinary feature of TFD is the active involvement of the audience. Actors ask the audience to contribute ideas and concerns. During and after the performance, audience members are encouraged to contribute their own views and insights on education of orphans, vulnerable children and girls. This helps audience members to see themselves in the characters of the play. Participants speak about what they actually do, which helps them think about constraints and solutions.



Actors invite the audience to propose plans of action. A good TFD performance ends with plans of action delivered by the audience within the play itself.

Performance is not TFD's final goal. Rather the play forms a basis for the next steps. Subsequent work involves continued contact between TFD players and community members as they follow the action plan.

Since the PSSP: SFP project was implemented in 2006, more than 135 TFD sensitization performances have involved more than 54,000 audience participants,

including men, women, girls and boys. Through these performances, schools and communities responded overwhelmingly to PSSP: SFP project activities by implementing various initiatives to improve equitable access to quality basic education in Dowa. Communities have built 351 teachers' permanent houses and 208 classroom blocks as well as libraries and toilets at many of the 226 schools in the district.

Some schools, however, have not benefited as much as others; they have not implemented the action plans developed at TFD performances. Nevertheless, TFD has proven itself as a powerful means of mobilizing communities. It reaches even the illiterate and creates a forum for community members — village headmen, men's groups and parents — to contribute and participate in development.

Considering TFD's achievements, the use of drama should be considered to support development work in other settings. To ensure sustainability, the strategy should be supported and encouraged at grassroots level by community extension workers, such as community development agents or officers, and by district education managers and chiefs to ensure sustainability.

Success Story: M'bindo School Community Lives Up to its Word

“Come back 12 months from now and see what will have happened then.” This was the reaction of the Group Village Head after watching and participating in PSSP: SFP’s Theatre for Development research verification and sensitization performance at M'bindo Primary School in Kanyenje zone of Dowa district, Central Malawi in February 2006.

TFD research had revealed numerous community-related challenges that held back education standards at the school. There were no toilets for pupils or teachers. One school block still had not been repaired after strong winds had blown its roof off 11 years earlier. The school had no teachers’ houses. Teachers had given up trying for improvement.

Following TFD’s sensitization performance, community members led by Group Village Head Simpha met to plan their way forward. They decided to construct 15 toilets and one teacher’s house, rehabilitate the classroom block, and plant tree seedlings which would eventually serve as a windbreak.

Villagers also formed a Community Education Committee to support the School Management Committee in monitoring pupil attendance to ensure that all school-age youths in the area attend school.



By December 2006, only 10 months after the Group Village Head’s pledge, M'bindo School was transformed. It now has the 15 toilets, each with hand-washing points. The damaged school block has a new roof and construction of the teacher’s house was almost complete. Two thousand tree seedlings beautifully demarcate the school premises. Monitoring of pupil attendance led to increased enrollment — in standard I, the number of pupils increased from 227 to 275.

The community also bought basic necessities, such as notebooks and pencils, to support orphans and vulnerable children. A youth club was created to cater to youths’ needs and interests. “M'bindo School is simply different,” remarked a district education official in a recent visit after recalling the TFD performance. “Yes,” agreed Group Village Head Simpha, “we have been empowered by PSSP: SFP. Before the project, school-related work was seen as the government’s job. Now we want to make Mbindo a model primary school in Dowa. Come back in two years’ time,” the chief said earnestly to the education official.

From what the community demonstrated over only 10 months, one has no reason to take the chief’s invitation lightly. With the support PSSP: SFP, M'bindo School appears to be on the right track.

SENSITIZATION AND TRAINING FOR SMCs AND PTAs

Sensitization and training of School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) was one of the mobilization strategies that PSSP: SFP employed. It was one way of promoting good governance at school. The activities involved passing information about the project to the SMCs and PTAs for all the 226 primary schools in Dowa district. These groups were also trained on community mobilization strategies and on how such mobilization would help schools improve. The essence was to ensure local ownership of schools and school activities.

The activity followed training for Change Agents (government extension workers). The Change Agents had prepared plans of action to implement in their work areas, including sensitizations and training for SMCs and PTAs, and Change Agents facilitated training for SMCs and PTAs. PSSP: SFP staff and Heads of Department at district headquarters monitored and supervised training activities to ascertain that everything was handled properly.



The sensitization and training of SMCs and PTAs was important because these local officials are key stakeholders in school affairs. They serve as the link between community members and teachers and act in effect as owners of the schools. Ensuring that SMCs and PTAs receive information about PSSP: SFP goals and objectives meant that parents, teachers and pupils receive the information.

PSSP: SFP staff developed training materials for the sensitization and training of SMCs and PTAs, based in part on findings of TFD activity. This information was passed on to Change Agents during their training. A series of sensitization meetings was

conducted at school and community levels, followed by focus group discussion. Community-based workshops followed.

Information exchanged included PSSP: SFP goals, objectives and activities as well as participants' roles. Participants also learned the status of education in Dowa from a baseline survey, TFD and stakeholder involvement. Other issues tackled during sensitizations and training of SMCs and PTAs included roles of the SMCs and PTAs, facilitation skills, strategies for mobilizing communities' skills and lobbying skills.

The training helped many in Dowa to access information on PSSP: SFP and helped people develop a sense of ownership in the project. Community members helped to solve issues communities faced, including construction of school blocks and teachers houses, supporting orphans and vulnerable children, and lobbying other stakeholders for more help. The children's learning environment improved, as did academic performance.

The sensitization and training of SMCs and PTAs proved to have a number of advantages. It was community-based and therefore cost-effective, in that no housing was needed for participants. Moreover, the training activities are a sure way of achieving great outreach.

Success Story: SMCs Deal with the Plight of a Girl Child

USAID-funded projects including Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) and the Social Mobilization Campaign for Education Quality have raised the profile of girls and sensitized communities to work at getting girls to attend and remain in school. In fact, enrollment for girls now is greater than that for boys in a number of schools in certain areas. According to the 2006 Ministry of Education statistics, total enrollment for Dowa primary schools was 136,884, including 51% girls. However, poverty, poor condition of school structures and orphanhood (which has increased as a result of HIV and AIDS), continue to threaten the education of individual girls. The major objective of another USAID-funded project, the Primary School Support Project (PSSP: SFP) that came to Dowa district in 2006, is increasing access to basic education with a special focus on orphans, vulnerable children and girls.

Malita Maenje of Kawale Primary School is one such girl. Malita, now 16 years old, dropped out of school and got married in 2005 before PSSP: SFP had come to Dowa. She had been in standard 6. Poverty and lack of basic school needs caused her dropping out. The community, her parents and teachers just looked on. This was not an isolated case. A number of girls in similar situations did the same and got married at tender ages.

PSSP: SFP conducted a series of community sensitization meetings to encourage community leaders — village heads, School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and others — to increase access and quality of basic education, especially for girls and other vulnerable children. Community groups took action. The Kawale School SMC counseled Malita and her parents, urging her return to school. Within weeks in 2007, Malita was back in school. "It is very impressive that since she came back, she exhibits renewed vigor and passion for school such that she is doing very well in class," the head teacher of Kawale School said. Malita is a source of inspiration and motivation to others. Her story inspired other girls who had also dropped out, such as Lusiyati Gomani and Evelesi Maenje, to return to school. "I would like to be a secondary school teacher, and I advise other girls not to drop out of school and get married," Malita commented.



Various communities in Dowa district have come up with strategies to ensure that children, including needy girls, are supported in terms of basic school needs to keep them in school. Such communities engage in a variety of fundraising initiatives, teaching of vocational skills such as carpentry, tinsmithing, tailoring, knitting, sewing and others, and selling products to realize funds for buying school uniforms, writing materials and sometimes food for needy pupils. Some communities have opened up maize gardens and sell the harvest as part of fundraising. Others have started school feeding programs. This has led to increased enrollments by 25%.

Success Story: Teachers' Housing Frustration Turns into Smiles

The problem of teachers' houses haunted Chivutwe primary school for some time. Teachers lived frustrated lives. Of eight teachers, including volunteer teachers, only the head teacher and his wife (who is also a teacher at the school) had a house at the school. The rest operated from their homes, one of them from Mponela trading center about 12 kilometers away. The story is now different and teachers and community members thank PSSP: SFP for the change.

For a long time, inadequate teachers' houses at the school had been a big challenge. Community members molded and baked more than 150,000 bricks in hopes that their effort would bring them external support, but nothing came of it. Teachers continued to ask for houses. Communities blamed government for the inaction. "You are government employees, paid by the government; let the government take care of your problems or change jobs," some community members used to say.

Teacher morale as a result was poor. Teachers reported for duties late, quit early, frequently absented themselves and didn't mark learners' exercises. The learners ultimately felt the consequences of low teacher morale with poor academic performance.

However, peoples' mindset changed after PSSP: SFP's sensitization and mobilization activities were conducted at their school. School Management Committee members, community leaders and other community groups were sensitized and trained to perform their roles more effectively. They developed action plans to improve their school. Construction of teachers' houses was high on their agenda. On their own, community members embarked on the construction of three teachers' houses. PSSP: SFP was impressed with their venture and gave them a grant of K90,000 (\$625 USD) to support their efforts further. The community used the funds to buy iron sheets and cement to roof one of the houses. A teacher occupied the house, and the community continued its building activities.



"It's amazing how the community has responded to our problem," commented one of the teachers who had been living far away from the school. "This is a call to us to work hard so that they can see the fruits of their labor."

One of the village heads said "Today teachers, including those who are still operating from far away, arrive in time and work hard. The children are happy and we are happy too. We hope to see significant improvements in their academic performance."

Chivutwe Primary School lies in Tchawale Cluster in Chimungu Zone in the district. A number of other communities in Dowa district have built school structures, including teachers' houses, as a result of PSSP: SFP sensitization and mobilization activities.

EDUCATION SENSITIZATION FOR SPECIAL GROUPS: GULE WAMKULU

Gule Wamkulu is a cultural group with much influence among the Chewa people, who live in Malawi's central region in the districts of Lilongwe, Dowa, Ntchisi, Kasungu and Mchinji.

The organization known as *Gule Wamkulu* has two different dimensions. Its traditional masked dance entertains people — but *Gule Wamkulu* is also a religious group at odds with some Christian leaders.

Gule Wamkulu has representatives in every village and connections with traditional leaders. Members of *Gule Wamkulu* themselves are community leaders, and work hand-in-hand with other community leaders. The group's influence is so strong that community decisions without its approval have little influence on the people.

Gule Wamkulu's camp in each village, called *dambwe*, is at the graveyard. Its activities are secret, and may involve what in the West is called witchcraft. People believe that those who oppose or even disagree with members of *Gule Wamkulu* place their lives at risk. If such a difference of opinion occurs, it may be best to ask the group member for forgiveness. In the past, the group used violence, but now that is not the case.



In the past *Gule Wamkulu* played no part in education. *Gule Wamkulu* vowed not to go to Christian churches or schools, which in Malawi for the most part were established by Christians. Consequently, many *Gule Wamkulu* members are illiterate, and nobody thought members would ever take part in any school development unless it was to entertain with their traditional dance.

Yet *Gule Wamkulu* now wants to take part in school development. PSSP: SFP invites participation of existing groups to help implement education improvements, and *Gule Wamkulu* took the opportunity. The group's influence in the community is so significant that involving it in project implementation has brought tangible results in project outcomes.



Gule Wamkulu members attended sensitization meetings about PSSP: SFP's goal. This was followed by identification of special group leaders to attend a four-day training workshop for briefings on goals and objectives of the project, for training in mobilization skills and to outline leaders' roles in implementation of the project in the district.

Some of these *Gule Wamkulu* members agreed to take part in development work. They also agreed to escort

children to school to reduce absenteeism, fundraise for schools and help support orphans and vulnerable children.

At the end of the training, group leaders developed a six-month action plan. After that time, they met for a review. They planned to meet again to discuss successes and failures and to learn from each other.

During the implementation of their plans of action, *Gule Wamkulu* leaders and project facilitators are monitoring activities to see how the group's members do with their implementation.

The special group leaders have indeed brought tangible results in PSSP: SFP implementation, helping increase enrollment in schools by escorting pupils to school and making sure no school-age child stays at home. Some have helped to build teachers houses and other construction efforts to improve the schools learning environment



Gule Wamkulu also conducts its festivals to raise funds for schools. Up to MK30,000 (\$200 USD) can be gathered at such functions. In 2008, the district had raised MK700,000 (\$5,000 USD) from such events to provide support for orphans and vulnerable children in the schools.

Meanwhile, absenteeism and dropout numbers are much lower — five dropouts per school, or in some cases none — compared with a high of 36 dropouts at one school in the past.

This is a drastic change of attitude among *Gule Wamkulu* members towards education. In the past they might have blocked roads to stop pupils from going to school. Through PSSP: SFP, members of *Gule Wamkulu* have demonstrated that they will take active part in development work for the benefit of schools and the community. This has shown that participation of the *Gule Wamkulu* and other influential traditional groups can do much to support education, especially when the involvement begins at the inception of project activities.

Success Story: *Shepherding Learners to School at Matsewa*

On a partly cloudy afternoon in central Malawi, a crowd of a few hundred spectators encircled the masked dancers called *Gule Wamkulu*. With clouds rolling by and drums playing, an ancient ritual took place as masked men danced rhythmically to the music and the crowd showered them with cheers and praise.



The *Gule Wamkulu* people are at the heart of the Chewa culture. Induction into the group is highly valued and its customs remain a mystery to outsiders. The *Gule Wamkulu* protect ancient traditions of the Chewa people and pass down mores and norms of the culture for future generations.



In the small village of Matsewa, attendance rates in primary school were dropping and infrastructure at schools was deteriorating. PSSP: SFP soon realized the *Gule Wamkulu* were encouraging children to stop attending school because the group could not see the benefit of education.

There is a long-standing enmity between the *Gule Wamkulu* and Christian religious groups, who often speak ill of the *Gule Wamkulu*. In fact *Gule Wamkulu* members for a long time did not support education and were not happy to see their children going to

church and schools that belong to the religious groups. The tension persisted for decades. As a result, dropout and absenteeism were rampant at Matsewa School.

Officials from PSSP: SFP responded by organizing a training workshop for *Gule Wamkulu* leaders to sensitize them on the goals and objectives of the PSSP: SFP project and the roles these leaders could play as the project is implemented.

Since then, the *Gule Wamkulu* has become a strong supporter of education and has sought ways to encourage students and teachers and to support orphans in the community. The same kids they used to chase and block from attending school now are shepherded to school by these masked dancers each morning. Total enrollment at Matsewa Primary School skyrocketed in just a few months, along with school attendance rates.



In addition, the *Akwanjira*, leaders of the *Gule Wamkulu*, began to hold fundraisers for schools in which the *Gule Wamkulu* pull crowds together with their frenetic dancing and flamboyant costumes. They then receive donations from the crowd in exchange for an afternoon of entertainment. These “Big Dances” raise between MK10,000 and MK70,000 for school improvements, teacher resources or support for OVCs.

Billy Liwonde, Community Development Advisor for Dowa District, states, “The *Gule Wamkulu* has played a big role in getting kids to school, along with fundraising and helping orphans and needy. Every weekend the community goes out to patronize the *Gule* activities. The proceeds from the *Gule Wamkulu* festivals are left at the school to be used to support the orphans at the school.”



5. INCREASING RESOURCES AT SCHOOL LEVEL

In an effective education system, availability of resources constitutes the core of all the activities. Availability of good infrastructure, learning and teaching materials, human resources (people who act as resource persons and drivers of development at the school), and financial resources that enable the school to run its daily activities create a conducive learning environment for both teachers and learners. Where these are inadequate and insufficient, quality of education is compromised and achievement of access and retention of learners is minimal.

In Malawi, despite the government abolishing school fees in primary schools, costs are still a barrier to education, particularly for the most vulnerable children. Poor and inadequate infrastructure, inadequate teaching and learning materials, little or no funds for the school and inadequate or lack of external support have forced individual families to shoulder the responsibility of educating their children. When the school needs funds for infrastructure development, paying for the post office box, buying balls, and paying volunteer teachers, they ask the parents to contribute through their children. Where families are poor or headed by children and cannot afford to contribute, their children are not allowed in class. Due to limited resources, education in Malawi favors the “haves” rather than the “have nots.” For this reason there are more children of school-going age who, given the resources and support, would be in school. Higher percentages among these children are orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and girls.

The inception of PSSP: SFP in Dowa, with an aim of achieving equitable access to quality basic education through (among other things) increasing resources at school level, has invited all stakeholders to look critically at how best the community could assist the most vulnerable children in the society so that they too could access primary education. The communities were made aware that it has a collective responsibility to ensure that all school-age children are able to access primary education regardless of background, economic status or parental unavailability. The project aims not to eliminate any form of parental support, but rather to establish mechanisms to enable communities to support schooling, and thereby reduce the hidden costs of schooling that have hindered other children from accessing primary education.



Since the community is raising the children so that all children can have opportunity regardless of standing, different interventions were put in place to support the communities' efforts. Communities were made to understand that they can support their schools through fund-raising activities. Through this awareness, more people have come up with fund-raising activities like “big walk” and open days. In addition, the people also came up with income generating activities like growing vegetables and fruits, rearing small animals, teaching vocational skills, and introducing other income generating activities

in schools to support the OVC. To enhance and complement the communities' efforts, the project has assisted the communities with a small grant, which acted as a catalyst to development. This was only a seed, which, when planted and well nurtured, performed wonders as the people witnessed change in their schools. The grants were given to schools that had one or more initiatives whose purpose was to improve and increase resources at the school level in order to assist the OVC and create a good learning and teaching environment.

Since more children have been enrolled in school and there is an improvement in school infrastructure, all stakeholders in Dowa district appreciate the steps that the project has taken to ensure equitable access to quality basic education.

Political leaders and district officials, including traditional authorities, have supported the program and continue to support it, thereby rendering the project sustainable.



SMALL-SCALE GRANTS

Small-scale grants help schools and communities address challenges impeding effective teaching and learning. Grants support voluntary initiatives that use community contributions, both in kind and in money. Such initiatives may not be completed without further support, hence the need for the small grant. Efforts to help orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) have fallen short without such external support.

Small grants address community development issues and help make sure schools have sufficient resources so that cost of schooling is no longer a constraint to OVCs. Small-scale grants support schools and communities in accomplishing goals of equitable access, retention and achievement for all children in basic education. The grants were given to schools after they demonstrated their commitment to improving education through the initiation of one or more education-supporting activities. Each school was eligible to receive on average MK90,000 (\$625 USD) per year for three years from January 2006 to December 2008. On average, the grant represented approximately 15% of community need, with the community providing the remaining cost through labor or local resources. The small grant, therefore, is a catalyst to development.

Schools and communities must follow certain steps to qualify for a grant. Sensitizations on small-scale grants were conducted in all schools to make the community aware of grants and to guide communities on how to apply. Government field extension workers in education, community services, forestry and agriculture as well as PSSP: SFP staff and other key stakeholders helped sensitize communities.



Training reminded key stakeholders, including SMCs and PTAs, of their roles in achieving project goals and objectives: sensitize, motivate and mobilize communities to embrace project goals and objectives and initiate school-supporting activities to give more children access to quality basic education. Such activities include school feeding programs; creating conducive learning environments through school infrastructure improvement; providing local materials (TALULAR or Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Materials); and identifying local people to teach

vocational skills in the schools. Key stakeholders were encouraged to seek other support as well, since small grants alone cannot meet school needs. Parental and community support remain crucial. SMCs also receive training in financial management prior to receiving grants. This encourages local ownership of the intervention and ideally results in sustainability. At the same time local communities gain knowledge in applying for more development funds from government and elsewhere.

The process of awarding small grants starts with identification of qualified schools by field extension workers, district team members, ward counselors, mentors, head teachers and group village heads. Field workers responsible for the areas distribute grant application forms.

PSSP: SFP emphasizes that grants involve cost-sharing. The community must offer labor for school projects and provide sand, bricks, stones and perhaps money. Communities must also provide vocational-skills training for learners. This approach encourages community members to exercise their roles and responsibilities.

Various stakeholders evaluate schools' readiness for grants, among them district team members, field extension workers, PSSP: SFP zonal coordinators and other staff, cluster leaders and Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCMs).

An appraisal committee for the grant may include the zonal Primary Education Advisor, Community Development Assistant, Group Village Head, mentors, ward counselors and others involved in the proposed initiative. Other evaluators may include the District Education Manager, Desk Officer, District Community Development Officer, Director of Planning and Development, District Youth Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, a Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) official, PSSP:SFP official and the District Assistant Coordinator (DAC).



SMCs, PTAs, group village heads and village, community cluster leaders, MCMs and government extension workers receive training in financial management skills. Skills include accountability, transparency and how to lobby with other funding sources. Orientation also focuses on procurement procedures and record-keeping. From key stakeholders, procurement committee members are selected including a chairperson, treasurer, secretary from both SMC and PTA, and one group village head.

The procurement committee's main role is to administer the PSSP: SFP grant. Committees are trained to be systematic, transparent, prudent and accountable in administering and implementing grants. After the appraisal of schools receiving grants, a budget is drawn up for each school. Some promising schools may receive two or more grants at once. Quotes are ascertained from various suppliers and the most cost effective are selected. Goods are purchased and accurate reconciliations are completed.

Previously, schools received grants in the form of cash, allowing communities to purchase items on their own and later reconcile the money. Communities, however, were slow to implement their activities because of lack of transport to carry items from the purchasing point to schools. Low literacy levels among SMCs led to low understanding of the reconciliation form and missed deadlines. Other problems were poor coordination among stakeholders in terms of agreed-upon time to purchase, and purchasing items useful to the school but not in the grant budget.



Consequently, grant disbursement was modified for effective and timely implementation. Approved schools purchase items together under the guidance of a PSSP: SFP procurement officer. Schools were assisted with transport of materials to cluster centers or Teacher Development Centers. Reconciliation forms have been modified for easier understanding. Reconciliation of grants is done when communities finish purchasing items.

Small-scale grants have tangibly benefited key target groups — orphans, vulnerable children, girls, and children with special needs with school resources and basic needs, training in vocational skills and improved learning environments. Communities have focused extensively on construction and renovation of school infrastructure with all 226 schools in Dowa engaged. This had included building or roofing classroom blocks, teachers' houses, administration blocks, libraries and pit latrines. Approximately 70% engaged in vocational skills training including tailoring, carpentry, tinsmithing, weaving and knitting.



Grants have been used to support to schools with Income Generating Activities (IGA). Help with maize cultivation went to 112 schools that produced more than 170 metric tons of maize. Other schools received support on mushroom, soya bean, vegetable or groundnut growing, bakery production raising pigs, goats, rabbits and other animal husbandry endeavors. Still other schools have established OVC support structures like school feedings and providing essential school supplies.

As a result of grant-related training, community members have also gained skills in lobbying for more funding. For example, at Kanyenje School in Kanyenje zone, the community successfully lobbied for help building a school block from the Catholic parish at Chezi. The parish is constructing the block for the community. Others involved in the training have approached community members who have assisted schools with transport, construction materials and help for OVCs and girls with schooling and basic needs. Schools have lobbied Members of Parliament (MPs), all of whom have assisted schools with support like cement, iron sheets and timber.

Though communities have benefited from the grants, challenges remain. Construction of school facilities is an overwhelming priority — school rooms, teachers' houses, latrines, offices, staff rooms, storage rooms and libraries are lacking. Dowa district still faces a critical shortage of donors to support schools that need these infrastructural improvements.



PSSP: SFP's small-scale grants are by definition less than what communities need. Significant needs remain unmet. Efforts are underway to complete grant-funded activities with other means. Communities seek support from other sources. Schools have already benefited from Malawi's Constituency Development Fund through local MPs, thanks to SMCs trained in lobbying by the small-grant process.

Vocational-skills training supported by small grants faces challenges because community volunteers are too busy in the gardens to train pupils, especially if they are not intrinsically motivated by the community. By focusing more on motivation of the volunteers and using star learners who have mastered a given skill, they may help train other pupils and more learners will be reached. Transport of materials to rural schools also remains a challenge, especially given high fuel costs and poor road conditions in some areas.

Meanwhile, of 226 schools in Dowa district, only one case of small-grant mismanagement has been confirmed — involving three bags of cement, at Chigwere School in Kanyenje zone. The value of the three bags was recovered. To complete the project, another three bags were donated by the MP for the area.

Funds raised through initiatives supported by small grants for IGAs, vocational life skills and school community gardens support construction, renovation and pay for volunteer teachers. It is through this cycle that the grant proves it is truly just a seed to start development that can be sustained by well-mobilized communities.



Success Story: Malambo's Heart is Big

It is not the size of the school but its heart that determines how quickly the school will develop. One way to notice the heart of a school is in the enthusiasm of the surrounding community towards the school's development. Many schools started long ago but have not developed because of communities that are not responsive to development needs. The result is that those schools remain the same, while others take challenges head-on — such as Malambo School of Mponela zone. This school serves as a feeder to Mponela I Primary School. It was established so the youngest children would not have to cross the Mponela-Ntchisi road or walk two or three kilometers to Mponela I — a distance that resulted in absenteeism and dropouts.

The community erected grass shelters to house its Malambo School. Once it was established, Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) also constructed a two-room school block to add to the grass shelters.



However, the temporary classroom shelters were inadequate. When it rained, pupils left school. The community was concerned, but constructing a school block seemed beyond its ability and no donor stepped forward. The school continued, but with low levels of learning during bad weather.

It was the inception of PSSP: SFP that kindled a renewed zeal among the village heads and their constituents. Community members started to discuss in-depth issues of ensuring access and quality of basic education. “We all agreed and appreciated that the temporary classroom structures seriously compromised quality,” said Group Village Head Chikamphula.

Community members led by the Malambo School Management Committee (SMC) and their village heads agreed on a plan to construct a school block on their own. “We had about 200,000 bricks molded by villages and we started ferrying them to school,” said the group village head. Through voluntary contribution, the community raised K50,000 (\$350 USD) and employed four builders to construct the school block.



When mobilized, communities do want to address the needs of their children so their future can be brighter.

Success Story: Invigorated Community Benefits from Small Grant

Phereni Full Primary School, under the care of Group Village Head (GVH) Chimangamsasa, is 2.5 kilometers from Dowa Boma turnoff on the Lilongwe-Salima road. Only one of the seven teachers lives at the school. Others come from Chezi trading center, 8 kilometers from the school.

Teacher absence has long been a problem because of the distances teachers must travel. Moreover, nearby communities' willingness to participate in development work at the school has been marred by wrangles among local leaders. The school is located under one Traditional Authority but some villages that send children to the school are under another Traditional Authority. Participating in development work at the school was perceived as developing another man's land. Local politicians aggravated this situation with statements such as "*chitukuko ndi thangata*" – "doing development under an oppressor."

During political campaigns, politicians have made unfulfilled promises. For instance, during the 2004 parliamentary elections, one aspiring Member of Parliament promised to provide iron sheets for a head teacher's office, but only half were provided, the rest were to be supplied upon being voted into office. The candidate lost, the iron sheets were not supplied and the office still remains half roofed and unoccupied.

It took PSSP: SFP sensitization for the group village head and his community to realize that they had to do something in order to cope with these challenges. "Look here, all along these years politicians have been politicizing development activities. They have been discouraging us to do self-help projects. When they want our votes, they come and make a lot of promises that they never fulfill. This has left us confused and lazy as well. Besides that, the village heads are not willing to send their subjects for development at the school. They think that they are developing my area," lamented GVH Chimangamsasa.

After being sensitized on PSSP: SFP and the opportunity for a grant that would benefit the community, the GVH mobilized his village headmen and their constituents to start constructing new teachers' houses. Two villages were assigned work together to construct one house and through voluntary contributions by the mobilized communities of a variety of items such as tobacco, extra maize and voluntary cash contributions, they realized K48,000 (\$340 USD) that they used to buy cement and pay builders and carpenters.



After seeing community contributions, PSSP: SFP assisted with a grant of K89,823 (\$600 USD) to complete the two teachers' houses. Today, three teachers operate from the school. These teachers now are on time for school and provide additional support to pupils through remediation classes and extracurricular activities.

"We are very happy that the community through the PSSP: SFP has realized that problems affecting the school could be solved by themselves and no one else. As they are planning to construct three more houses by next year, we hope that a good number of teachers will be operating from within,

and that will assure the effectiveness of our duties," said the head teacher for the school, Mr. P.S.A.C. Muleso.

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES (IGA)

The concept of income generation is not strange at the household level, since most people have seen these words when they seek short-term loans from micro-finance lending institutions. People engage in income generating activities (IGAs) to improve the social and economic status of families, and in order that individuals might gain recognition in the society. For a long time, people have been engaged in such IGAs as small scale businesses, raising animals, vegetable and fruit growing and many others. However, it has taken the community a long time to realize that in the same ways and using the same means by which they strive to improve their socio-economic status at the household level, they can also devise similar means for education. They can use IGAs to improve teaching and learning conditions in their schools—in addition to supporting the most disadvantaged children who fail to attend school because of some hidden costs of schooling, which many people do not recognize since primary education in Malawi is free.



It took PSSP: SFP sensitizations for the people to realize that through IGAs they can increase resources at the school level and decrease the burden of schooling among the most disadvantaged families. With this realization, the communities have taken on the bold idea of assisting orphans and vulnerable children



in their schools. The community has been engaged in activities that would generate funds for the school, such as raising pigs, goats, rabbits, and poultry; vegetable and fruit gardening; and provision of vocational skills with IGAs at school.

At Namwiri School in Mponela zone, 12 girls and 13 boys have benefited from the raising of rabbits after each one of them was given the opportunity to raise the rabbits. These children are now attending classes frequently, because they have something that generates money for them to buy some basic necessities.

There are coordinated efforts among the community and community leaders to make sure that all vulnerable children are able to go to school. With this, the sustainability of such activities will go a long way as the communities themselves are able to identify the children, see their needs and provide necessary support.



Success Story: Manondo School is Proud of its Achievements

All was not well with Manondo School before PSSP: SFP. The teachers' houses were in bad condition and the roof of one of the school blocks had blown away. Teaching morale was poor. Learners and their parents took little interest in school. Enrollment was low. Several orphans had dropped out due to lack of support.

However, when PSSP: SFP sensitized the communities about the need for improvement, the changes that followed were quite amazing. Village heads and community leaders carried out enrollment campaigns in the villages, which led to a dramatic increase in enrollment from 732 learners in 2005 to 874 learners in 2006 and 967 learners in 2007. By 2007, enrollment of girls was more than that of boys (526 girls and 441 boys). "We have received so many pupils who dropped out of school, including a boy who got married but has returned to school," said the head teacher of the school.

With so many children returning to school, it became a challenge for the teachers to handle the large classes. Through teacher professional development, teachers at Manondo learned skills to effectively teach large classes. These skills included how to use a variety of teaching resources and learner-centered teaching methods that make teaching more effective and learning more interesting.



The school also introduced the teaching of vocational skills such as tailoring, sewing and tinsmithing. Products made by students are sold with proceeds used to buy school uniforms, notebooks and writing materials. Community members also planted a one-acre maize garden and contributed maize seeds. Through maize production the community raised K21,000 (\$150 USD) which they used to purchase school uniforms and pay a monthly honorarium for a volunteer teacher.

In response to the community's enthusiasm and efforts, they received a PSSP: SFP grant of K90,000 (\$625 USD). They used the grant money to rebuild the missing roof of the school block and renovate two teachers' houses. The grant also allowed Manondo to purchase a sewing machine so that learners could be taught vocational skills. By selling the items created by learners, money was raised to support local orphans and other vulnerable children.



Today, Manondo School is so successful that teachers, community leaders and School Management Committee members from the Integrated Child Labor Elimination Project in Kasungu district have visited Manondo School to learn from it. Teachers and community members now take pride in their school. They work together to make sure that Manondo

School is a place where children can learn and thrive. According to Group Village Head Chilundu, “We are very proud that our achievements are not only known in our zone and district, but even in other districts as well.”

FUNDRAISING

For a long time people have been raising money for various activities in their communities to support weddings, funerals, and other social activities. Fundraising is not a new idea among communities and has been used for a number of years in community mobilization to enhance development and foster learning in schools. The call for the community to raise funds on its own for development work is to ensure sustainability of the activities. For this reason communities are taught that the proceeds from fundraising activities will enhance development activities and learning in their schools and they are taught various sustainability strategies. These include the organization of open days at school with fundraising activities, voluntary contributions, organizing competitions and giving out incentives to hard-working individuals and learners to ensure that there is continued support of school activities and of learning itself.

When the PSSP: SFP project came to Dowa district, communities did not just stand idle, but found ways and strategies to sustain the activities that they initiated. Equipped with various fundraising strategies like mock weddings, open days, School Incentive Package (SIP) and Zonal Improvement Package (ZIP) fundraising, big walk, special group (e.g., Gule Wamkulu) festivals, and many others, communities have applied the same strategies to generate funds for both infrastructure development at school and also to assist orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and girls. Communities have mobilized themselves to contribute voluntarily towards fundraising activities in the form of money, cash crops, exercise books, pens, clothes, soap, and teaching materials in the schools. The materials contributed are used in various ways, such as assisting OVC and infrastructure construction in schools.



Through various fundraising activities the community has managed to secure funds for supporting OVC and construction of infrastructure. Thanks to these activities, there have been an increase in resources at the school level, and hidden costs of schooling are no longer a burden to OVC and girls.

Successful sensitization and mobilization at village and traditional authority levels have seen the community embrace the two project objectives of increasing resources at the school level and of reducing the cost of schooling to the most disadvantaged group of children.

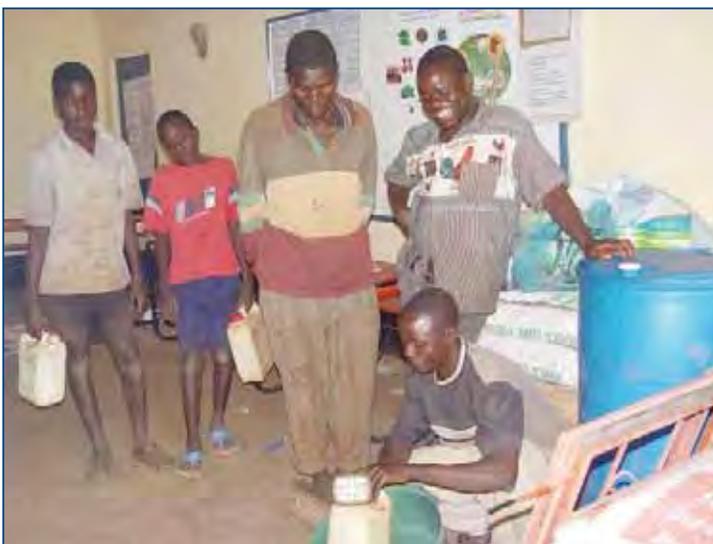
Success Story: Towards Financial Independence

Chambidzi Primary School lies within Chimungu Education Zone about 20 kilometers from Mponela Trading Center in the village of Chidothi, Group Village Headman Vikumbu and Traditional Authority Chakhadza. Like most other schools in the district, a persistent lack of funds meant Chambidzi School was unable to solve problems that required funding. One of the outstanding problems was unequal access to education for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) from the villages the school serves. Eighty-six of the learners (37 boys and 49 girls) registered at the school in the 2007 school year were orphans and/or considered vulnerable children. Though enrolled in school, these children rarely attended their classes due to lack of basic needs such as clothing, including school uniforms, as well as food, notebooks and writing materials. “We had the desire to help but had no idea where and how to find money towards the support of these children until PSSP: SFP came to our rescue,” said the chairperson of the school committee.

PSSP: SFP’s sensitization and mobilization activities emphasized the need for communities to participate in ensuring equitable access to quality basic education. The project also mobilized communities to come up with ways to fundraise and mobilize resources to support the education of all children.

The Chambidzi community responded favorably. They vowed to introduce a mechanism to generate funds and ensure support for OVCs’ basic needs. The community initiated the teaching of vocational skills to learners. Learners, most whom were OVCs, were taught carpentry, tailoring and tinsmithing skills. Community members offered their time and used their own equipment to teach these learners. Besides equipping the children with locally useful skills that could be their source of income in the future, products of the learners’ work were sold to generate funds for supporting OVCs. From the money earned by the sales of the products, five learners were given school uniforms; another 20 learners received notebooks and pens from community members.

PSSP: SFP staff members were greatly impressed with the community efforts. Through the project, the school received a small grant of MK110,000 (\$800 USD) with which they purchased a sewing machine, carpentry and tailoring materials for the school and construction materials to repair two teachers’ houses.



As part of income generation, the School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members bought two goats. “When they multiply, we will be selling some to generate income purely for the support of OVCs,” the PTA committee chairperson explained. Besides that, they are selling hurricane-lamp fuel (paraffin). “We bought paraffin worth K18, 000 (\$130 USD) but so far we have already made K12,000 (\$87 USD) through sales. We are remaining with enough paraffin to make us another K20,000 (\$144 USD),” the PTA chairperson added.

The community has also cultivated a two-acre maize garden and has used part of the money given to them by PSSP: SFP to purchase four bags of fertilizer and maize seed. The purpose of these efforts is to provide the neediest learners, especially those in the lowest grades, with porridge.

PSSP: SFP has also trained teachers in creative teaching methods, which has attracted more learners to enroll in school. Enrollment has increased from 657 learners in September 2006 to 723 learners in September 2007.



“We are on the right track towards financial independence,” commented the SMC Chairperson of the school.

SCHOOL INCENTIVE PACKAGES/ZONAL INCENTIVE PACKAGES (SIP/ZIP)

A SIP or School Incentive Package is a box with items to be given to students who perform well, or to stakeholders within the school community to thank them for supporting education. Items contributed to the box may be school supplies, financial or agricultural produce such as maize, nuts, soya, potatoes or beans. Eggs or meat may be donated as well.

Some teachers remember what used to happen at school years ago: Teachers gave gifts to pupils who excelled at class work, cleanliness, coming early, good behavior or good manners. Teachers wanted to return to this practice and gave money to do so. They bought items such as writing materials, soap, shirts and uniforms to give to pupils at the end of the school term to encourage both pupils and parents who come to see closing ceremonies.

The process is this: A box is prepared with items such as pens, notebooks, rulers, balls, and other items. These boxes go to all schools in the implementation area. Community members are invited to add more items to the box. Later community members take part in giving items in the box to students who perform well. SIP items are to encourage pupils to do their best. Those who do well may get something from the box.

The ZIP or Zonal Incentive Package follows the same idea, but carries items in larger quantities to cover initiatives of a zone, which includes 11-18 schools. Items from ZIP boxes may reward a greater number of learners who have performed well at interschool competitions.

The best way to involve communities in SIP and ZIP efforts is to introduce the idea at the first sensitization meeting for stakeholders as facilitators describe the goals and objectives of PSSP: SFP and to emphasize the importance of encouraging students to do their best at school. Facilitators also must make sure community members understand the importance of gathering materials for the SIP box.

Communities also elect a SIP committee. Members of the committee should come from all groups of stakeholders in the community — community leaders, teachers, pupils, religious leaders, parents and other trusted individuals. Ten members make a committee. From among the 10 an executive committee is elected — individuals who are particularly respected. Immediately thereafter, the committee asks the community to offer contributions to the SIP.



Formal launch of the SIP follows later, another very important occasion to which everyone is invited. To gain the greatest attendance, influential personalities may be guests of honor. Activities could include traditional dances, poems and songs, all to encourage contributions to the SIP. The master of ceremonies is someone with the drive to motivate people to give as much as they can to the SIP box.

At the end of the formal launch event, those who have contributed to the SIP box are invited to speak. This adds to their recognition in the community and may cause them to give more to the school.

The SIP committee must be creative in finding ways to fill the SIP box — inviting whole families to contribute or asking them to give based on how many children the family has in school. A school garden

may be one source of produce for SIP boxes. With produce, timing is important to collect crops as they ripen.

School fundraisers may provide money for SIP and ZIP boxes. Not only do these include open days, but more creative fundraisers like mock weddings, big dances (e.g., *Gule Wamkulu*) and other events. The most successful fundraising zone is Senga, which has collected more than a half million kwacha (\$3,500 USD) for its ZIP. Chimbuli zone raised K350,000 (\$2,400 USD) for its ZIP and Mbalame School raised K53,000 (\$370 USD) for its SIP.



Items collected for SIP/ZIP boxes could be sold and the money used to buy gifts for pupils who are doing well at school. Gifts can also go to community members who take time to support school development. For the sake of transparency, such gifts should be made on opening days or closing days in the presence of all stakeholders. The emphasis is on ensuring pupils are supported either because they are disadvantaged or deserve recognition. However, in some schools, like Mbalame School, the money from SIPs is being used to construct a school block.

SIP has produced tremendous results in schools of the district — increased financial resources at school level, more support for orphans and vulnerable children, greater incentives for learners and other stakeholders, more competition among learners. Another important result has been a greater sense of community ownership of the school and its development.

The SIP/ZIP effort nevertheless requires zonal facilitators to be strong and creative in motivating community members to accept ownership of the initiative. Many zones have not yet reached a level of great success.

Financial management is another challenge. People are not accustomed to managing sums of the size that result from successful fundraising. Many communities are more comfortable replenishing SIPs with agricultural produce rather than money, and are better able to do so.

The number of people who attend SIP functions shows that communities are proud of taking part in SIP activities. With full community involvement, SIP/ZIP can be an important way to support schools and can be a joyful part of community entertainment at festivals and weddings.

“This is what used to happen at school during our days,” said the cluster leader of Sungeni cluster in Chimbuli zone at a SIP replenishing function. “We used to receive a lot of gifts when closing schools. Pens, notebooks, clothes, soap and many other items were given to pupils for having done well.”

It is recommended SIP become part of a community annual event, so that replenishing begins as the community starts its harvest. Another recommendation is that the District Assembly find ways to strengthen SIPs at each school to help sustain the financial capacity in schools in the district

In conclusion, clearly the SIP/ZIP initiative is one way to increase financial status and performance of schools.

Success Story: Motivating Motivators

Chimwendo Primary School in Katalima Zone in Dowa District serves 11 villages. Community members once felt that the school belonged to the government and the teachers. The community waited for the government to provide everything for the school. A School Management Committee (SMC) was not in existence. The PTA was too old to tick. The community played no role at the school. Enrollment went down as few children were interested in what was going on at the school.

The school's ebbing self-help spirit was rejuvenated when PSSP: SFP conducted community sensitization and mobilization activities in the area. This left people feeling empowered. To show their renewed vigor for school-development activities, they embarked on an exercise to mold bricks to help them build more school blocks. All 11 village heads committed their communities to providing at least 10,000 bricks.

The work started at a good pace, but as it progressed some villages started to lose steam. That's when the School Incentive Package (SIP) Committee came onto the scene. The SIP committee contributed funds amounting to K1,000 (\$7 USD) and bought shirts to reward village heads. The committee also organized an award ceremony. All the villages were honored and received awards.

The villages of Kamutu, Kantendere and Khomo molded 35,000, 10,000 and 9,000 bricks respectively. This prompted other villages to pick up the pace, and today the school has more than 195,000 bricks molded and baked for development projects. "The gesture shown by the SIP Committees was really a great motivation, as such a thing has never happened to me in the past," said Group Village Head Chimutu.

Besides that, Chimwendo School introduced the teaching of tinsmithing and tailoring to pupils and won a small grant from PSSP: SFP to buy iron sheets for roofs, uniform cloth to sew school uniforms and a sewing machine. The school sells the products to raise funds to support orphans and vulnerable children and also for development initiatives. Already the school has realized K34,000 (\$240 USD) Part of the money went to buy uniforms for three needy pupils who dropped out but had returned to school. The proceeds also bought brick molders, four bags of cement and boxes of chalk and paid brick layers and a builder. "With PSSP: SFP, we have learnt that development of our school is in our hands, not the government and other donors," said Group Village Head Chimutu.

Today, Chimwendo school has changed its face. The community is proud of its school. The SMC and PTA are active and in the forefront of development work at the school. There is life at the school.



Success Story: SIP at Kabulungo Encourages Children to Work Hard in School

At Kabulungo School in Chimungu zone, the spirit of hard work once was nonexistent. The community had little to do with the school. Whether pupils failed or did well seemed to be immaterial.

The turning point came when the school received its School Incentive Package (SIP) from the PSSP: SFP project. This is a box containing various items to give to students who do well and to those who support education in the district — teachers, pupils, parents, community leaders or anybody else.

SIP rejuvenates a healthy spirit of competition among all stakeholders. SIP prizes motivate those who receive the prizes. Those who don't receive prizes have a chance next time. SIP kindles a spirit of competition among pupils. Communities take seriously the need to replenish SIP boxes through community contributions.

“When we first were given the SIP boxes we were told that the items in the boxes were only there as a starter pack. For this reason we organized ourselves and discussed how we could be replenishing the box. We have put in place a strategy where we meet once a month to fundraise through voluntary contributions. This has assisted us a lot, as our box is always full,” said the SMC chairman.

Indeed, the SIP box at Kabulungo School is replenished regularly and the items have encouraged pupils to work hard at school. Before the introduction of SIP, many students did their studies casually and there was less effort by teachers or parents to ensure that pupils progressed.

Now, parents of Kabulungo School students have left no stone unturned to ensure competition among pupils in school. “Through the SIP we have learnt that pupils can work hard if they are encouraged not only by words but also through something that they may take home and shine among their fellow students. We thank the PSSP: SFP project for introducing the SIPs in our schools. They are very helpful, as our kids are now working extra hard,” commented one parent during a presentation ceremony for SIP awards.



Under SMC leadership, teachers and parents have introduced fortnightly tests in all classes. Pupils who do well receive incentives — pens, notebooks, soap and pencils. This has encouraged pupils to work extra hard in class. Parents have not stopped at SIP. They also make their own arrangements to reward children if they have done well.

“We are not just looking at the SIP for the awards given to best pupils. We have also encouraged each parent to bring a gift for his or her child during these ceremonies. This has assisted a lot, as students are proud if they are given something by their parents,” said the cluster leader for the area.

SIP has assisted learners. Those who were lagging behind have pulled up their socks to catch up with their friends.

6. INCREASING SUPPORT TO OVCs

According to Ministry of Education statistics (2007), total primary school enrollment in Malawi is 3,306,926 pupils, of which 49.99 percent are girls. Dowa district in 2007 had a total enrollment of 149,726, of which 51.2% were girls. This is a remarkable achievement for girls in comparison with much lower enrollment rates a decade ago.

But do these data reflect the true situation of girls' education in Malawi? Fewer girls stay in school than boys and retention rates are lower for girls in the upper standards. Retention rates for girls are 50.7% in standard 5 but only 26.1% in standard 8, while rates for boys are 53.6% in standard 5 and 34.9% in standard 8. The statistics indicate that more must be done to improve education especially for girls and for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Malawi and in Dowa district in particular.

Unfortunately, traditional culture in Malawi has placed little value on education, especially for girls. Education has hidden costs in that it takes children away from doing other work. Communities may lack role models who show the importance of education. HIV/AIDS certainly can have the effect of keeping children out of school with illness or to care for sick family members. Finally, lack of a conducive school environment has contributed to lower attendance.

PSSP: SFP was therefore mandated to rectify these problems in Dowa district with a goal of achieving equitable access to quality primary education for all children. By the end of three years, PSSP: SFP had taken these steps, among others:

- School communities and teachers were sensitized and mobilized to increase support for OVCs, including girls, at their schools.
- Finances, materials, skills and human resources were mobilized in support for OVCs and girls at every corner of the district's school communities.
- Mentoring for girls and OVCs was instituted, with teachers and community volunteers receiving training and motivation to act as mentors.
- Community-based child-care centers, home-based care activities and school feeding programs were initiated by communities as solutions to constraints to education the communities identified.
- Vocational skills were imparted to learners to enable development of life skills, increase resources at individual level and discourage risky behaviors.
- Education visits and tours for children were organized by communities to show children their opportunities in higher education and how it could change their lives.



The following section describes how school communities, amidst myriad challenges, managed and excelled at increasing support for OVCs, and how these activities have been instituted in the local system. The section also covers challenges and lessons learnt in the process.

MENTORS FOR OVCs AND GIRLS

“A child who has lost one or both parents or is in a household situation where all basic needs are not met” is Malawi’s definition of “Orphans and Vulnerable Children” (OVC). Approximately 15% of Malawi’s children are considered OVCs.

A majority of the children who do not attend school are OVCs. Among OVCs, research reveals a lack of moral and material support for their education, lack of role models and lack of essentials such as food and clothes as reasons for not attending school.

Orphans often must face the impact of HIV/AIDS, drug and substance abuse, peer pressure and, in the case of girls, gender-based violence. OVCs undergo tremendous emotional stress due to deaths of and separation from loved ones and insufficient care by guardians.

Material support to OVCs is essential, and in combination with mentoring is powerful and effective. Guardians generally care more about material support for OVCs than about other care guardians provide, according to research conducted jointly by Save the Children-Malawi, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s Farm Management and Production Economic Service (AGSP) and by Malawi’s Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM). The AGSP annual report for 2005 indicates that 6% of OVCs receiving scholarship support dropped out of school and some had to repeat.

This is why mentoring plays a vital role in helping orphans develop a positive attitude and remain in school. In PSSP: SFP, during sensitization and mobilization meetings, community members surfaced issues affecting girls’ and OVCs’ education attainment. Communities also identified solutions to the problems, which included mentoring and providing materials.



Mentoring means a more experienced person acting as advisor and helper. In PSSP, female community members and female teachers became mentors for girls.

The purpose of mentoring is to provide a cushion and support for girls undergoing emotional stress and low self-esteem to help them develop goals and confidence. The mentor’s role is complex and requires somebody who is mature, dedicated and motivated.

The following qualities suit a PSSP: SFP mentor. They are knowledgeable about project goals and objectives,

approachable, a good communicator, of exemplary character, and nonjudgmental. They are dedicated and committed, ready to work on voluntary basis, and able to give advice. They take a keen interest in girls’ and/or orphans’ welfare, are able to instill hope and keep secrets, and they are readily available. It is advised that mentors be of the same sex as those whom they mentor (i.e., mentees).

The process begins with sensitization and motivation of communities on the project goal and objectives, specifically on OVCs’ plight. The communities select mentors based on the above criteria. Every school

community in Dowa has identified a mentor. A needs assessment is conducted to ensure that proper materials are developed for training. Mentors are then trained on mentoring skills, HIV/AIDS and other issues. Mentors' training workshops end with a plan of action.

A mentor helps the most vulnerable girls with one-to-one mentoring while reaching other girls through group mentoring activities. The criterion for selecting the most vulnerable girls for one-to-one mentoring is extreme poverty, indicated by tattered clothes or no shoes. She must work for food and live in a dilapidated house.

A mentor visits girls four times per month at school or home. At least once in one month, group mentoring is conducted, for instance at community-based retreats. Such retreats bring together a range of 20 to 400 girls for one to three days. The retreats create an environment of sharing knowledge and life skills regarding HIV/AIDS and the importance of education.



Mentors take girls to see women in career jobs in inspiring places such as towns or cities, places most girls have never visited. Mentors take children to the airport, Zodiac Broadcasting Corporation, Capital Hill government offices, university colleges and the Natural Resources College.

On a regular basis, mentors monitor girls' social and educational status. Participatory monitoring is conducted by mentors and Primary Education Advisors (PEAs). A zonal committee ensures monthly meetings for mentors at the Teacher Development Center where they share information on activities completed, successes achieved and challenges encountered. This enhances teamwork and sharing of good practices.

Mentors are so determined to do well that they have conducted exchange visits to learn from fellow mentors in other areas and districts.

The results of girl and OVC mentoring have been overwhelming. Mentors have gained confidence and respect in the community because of their good work.

Mentors have established income-generating activities to run their activities without project support. For instance, mentors in Kayembe and Kamphenga zones contributed money to establish two bakeries. Since then, funds raised by sale of bakery products support girl orphans with food, school uniforms and writing materials. More than 500 girls have re-enrolled in school through mentors' work. Children who had dropped out of school were motivated to re-enroll by friends who described the interesting experiences with mentors.

As a result, girls in these Dowa communities have changed their perceptions and are working harder in school. Girls' performance has improved with better attendance and lower dropout rates.

Lessons learned and recommendations include the following: Communities recognize and respect mentors' commitment. Mentoring is enhanced as mobility of mentors visiting girls becomes frequent and regular. This works well when mentors are at every school instead of at cluster level.



Establishment of zonal committees builds in efficient self-monitoring and evaluation that ably functions without any external support — a sure way of sustainability. Mentoring skills imparted to local people who work on voluntary basis is a sure way of sustaining activities. Mentoring supports an individual girl's life on a personal level. It enables long-lasting transformation of the mind, reorganizing perceptions, attitudes and practices. Frequent monitoring at the initial stage of implementation of mentors' plans is crucial as it shapes their work for the better.

Village heads should incorporate mentoring at village level. The district assembly should recognize trained and skilled mentors in schools for their continued good work. District assemblies should also coordinate with other partners to support the work of mentors who help with income-generating activities in the district.

The large numbers of orphans and girls that need mentoring is more than the number of mentors trained. There are more than 75,000 girls in school compared with 207 mentors trained. This is a challenge, but as demonstrated, the benefits are clear.

Success Story: A Mentoring Retreat for Girls Provides Effective Support

Previously girls and orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) had little chance of getting guidance and counseling on education by specialists from the school and communities. After the introduction of PSSP: SFP in Dowa district, however, some women from the community and women teachers were identified to serve as girl and OVC mentors to help these children. These women were trained and they produced action plans which they are implementing.

“We realized that most of the girls and OVCs lacked mentoring. As a result, dropping out of school was inevitable,” reports a mentor.

The women mentors and PSSP: SFP have taken ownership in this effort to help these children who need assistance. This is evident in mentors’ motivation and in the organization’s support for girls. “For example, we managed to conduct a retreat for this vulnerable group on 19th July, 2008. This was done at zonal level. In attendance were 168 orphans and vulnerable children, 10 mentors, one PEA (Primary Education Advisor) and the ZOC (Zonal Coordinator),” proudly states the secretary of the executive committee of mentors in Senga zone. Girls invited to the retreat were selected based on the degree of their vulnerability.

The PEA and the ZOC, who are females, were role models and they inspired the girls through sharing their life and career experiences. Each of them discouraged the girls from rushing into things that would destroy their lives or future. To encourage active participation, focus-group discussions allowed the girls to discuss issues and problems they faced and to talk about solutions. The retreat went very well. Three girls from Malambo, Dzoole and Aimalandiwo schools said that it had been a very good experience for them as they got what they were lacking — advice, encouragement and solutions to certain problems. They also expressed a wish for such a retreat each term.

The idea for this retreat was a result of monthly meetings of all 10 zonal mentors when mentors review their action plans and share experiences. This retreat was conducted with no extra support from external sources — a sure way to ensure sustainability. On their own, the mentors contributed money and food items worth MK7,000 (USD\$50) and they also received donations from well wishers MK3,000 (USD\$21).



The two-day function went very well. The food was enough for everybody. The mentors continue to follow up with the girls after the retreat. “It’s nice to report that as mentors we have been tracking these girls who attended the retreat. They are still in school, working hard and performing well,” states the secretary with satisfaction.

Indeed, joint efforts can really improve the lives of the girls and OVCs!

Success Story: Elisha Finds a New Family

It is now more than four years since young Elisha last felt the love and goodness of his own family. They used to laugh, eat together, and share stories. Elisha used to go to Mkwichi Primary School in Kayembe zone. He used to wake up early, prompted to school by his loving parents. When he would return he would find that his mother had prepared him some food. His father used to share warm sentiments with his family when he returned from work. Little did Elisha know that this situation would be short-lived.

Fate struck. Darkness fell on the family. Quarrels and fighting became the order of the day for Elisha's parents. Sometimes Elisha would wake up in the middle of the night, eyes glaring into the darkness, and tears running down his cheeks as he heard shouting and screaming as his mother and father fought. Elisha's parents divorced. Elisha's father went to Mzimba, a faraway district, leaving the children with the mother. Unable to take care of the children on her own, Elisha's mother remarried and went away with her new husband, leaving the children alone. Food and other basic needs became hard for the children to find. Elisha dropped out of school and started working in people's gardens to get food. His young brothers and sisters sought refuge at their relative's homes. In an attempt to survive the hardships of a broken family, Elisha migrated to Lilongwe, more than 200 kilometers away, to look for a job. His woes became even worse. The only work he could find was piece work in markets. He helped people carry luggage. He eventually returned home and stayed alone in his father's house. Relatives and well wishers helped him with food and other needs.

When the PSSP: SFP came to Dowa, community members and teachers were mobilized to support the education of children – all children. For the first time in his life, Elisha was visited at home by a head teacher, Mr. A.K. Fulawo, who encouraged him to return to school. Elisha was delighted to enroll again and became a standard 8 student boarding at Mkwichi Primary School in 2008. "I am happy to be back in school. I spend most of my time with friends and it feels like everyone around me, including teachers, are my relatives," Elisha said. "We share smiles and it's good to be back in school." Community members plan to teach learners life skills such as carpentry and tinsmithing so that Elisha and children like him can support themselves in the future.

"The boy is serious and working hard. I am sure he stands a chance to get selected to secondary school if he maintains this spirit. We are closely monitoring him in collaboration with the School Management Committee members," said the Mkwichi Primary School head teacher.

COMMUNITY BASED CHILD CARE (CBCC), HOME BASED CARE (HBC) AND SCHOOL FEEDING (SF)

As PSSP: SFP continues to improve the quality of education in Dowa district, some supporting activities have been introduced to help involve communities in the general welfare of children as a whole. As the saying goes “*mwana wa mzako ndi wako yemwe ukachenjera manja udyo naye*” meaning “The love you would give to your friend’s child would benefit you as well in the long run.” Community members in Dowa have reached the point where they feel education is the foundation of their children’s future success. This has led to the birth of Community Based Child Care centers (CBCCs) where children between the ages of three and five go for pre-school activities to prepare them for primary education. Besides learning, the children are also privileged to have porridge. In supporting the children with food, the community has also paid much attention to the younger learners in the schools.

In Dowa the communities are not only looking at supporting the children but also other vulnerable groups like the sick and the elderly in the community. This has led to the establishment of home-based care centers, where sick parents of the children or other people in the village are looked after by volunteers. These communities, who were sensitized, are fully charged and feel that the responsibility for starting the CBCCs, HBCs and SF is theirs; and they are responsible for the activities. Usually caregivers are identified from within the communities and trained by social welfare officers in the area. They will then establish CBCC within their villages.



Due to the AIDs pandemic, there are some female- and children-headed households where learners have dropped out of school due to such needs as a lack of school uniforms and learning materials. The HBC has come in to support these circumstances. Some community members have come up to assist OVCs in different areas (e.g., the Village Head of Msadelera school community who gave out 15 school uniforms to

orphans, and Hon A. Ntodwa Mwale who gave exercise books and pens to orphans from Kongwe I Primary School). Community members have gone so far as teaching OVCs some vocational skills so that funds from the sales can assist them in getting materials for their schooling.

The School Feeding program is also being carried out in some primary schools in Dowa. This was initially started by GTZ and UNICEF in some pilot districts in the country, including some zones in Dowa. Some communities really got motivated and embarked on farming maize, which is now being sustained after the donors pulled out. Other schools are now under a new project by Mary Meals, an institution that is constructing kitchens and storerooms and is providing fortified flour, sugar and salt. The community members are contributing by cooking the porridge for their children.

The outcome of such initiatives are outstanding, such as the increase in the number of OVCs now in schools and a bigger number of OVCs being supported by the HBCs with school uniforms and learning

materials. It is encouraging to note that all these activities are being done with a sense of ownership by the communities and reflect the sustainability where some communities already are cultivating maize for their schools.

Though everything seems in order, it was thought that some members expected a form of payment for preparing the porridge. In other instances they required external support, which is not readily available. Some natural causes – like hunger or drought – also made it difficult for the schools to be able to harvest sufficient maize for making the porridge. Erratic donor support also created some sustainability challenges, as did a general lack of skills among the caregivers.

The best approach to the success of such an initiative is to empower the community to share the monetary expenses of such initiatives. It will be important to train the already established CBCCs and to follow up with other government Ministries such as Agriculture, Health, Community Development, Social Welfare and Education, so that all stakeholders participate in the work.



Success Story: Longwani School Community Supports OVCs

“The plight of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) has been in our communities for some time. Many OVCs have never had a chance of going to school. Those that had a chance were doing so at the mercy of their guardians, and seldom could they continue with their education. The coming in of PSSP: SFP has rescued these children,” said the cluster leader in Tchawale cluster.

After being sensitized, the communities around Longwani School in Chimungu zone saw the need to assist not only the orphans in the area but girls who have also been victims of social injustices.

Under the leadership of the cluster leader, Longwani School organized various activities to support OVCs. The Longwani OVCs care group embarked on fundraising activities, including maintaining a vegetable garden and seeking voluntary contributions. So far, the group has assisted 25 of the most vulnerable children with notebooks, pencils, pens and 60 bars of soap. The group also provides food for younger orphans and continues to seek more assistance from various stakeholders.

“We are very proud that we have been able to organize ourselves and come up with strategies on how we can assist the OVCs. We thank the PSSP: SFP project for opening our eyes. At first we thought that the responsibility of making sure that these OVCs are going to school solely rests in the hands of their guardians. Now we have identified 25 OVCs and we are assisting



them with various basic needs to make sure that they also have a chance of going to school. I am very proud to say that some of these children that we are supporting are doing very well in class,” said the OVCs care group chairperson.

Jane is one of the orphans who has benefited. “I am very happy that I am now able to go to school, thanks to the PSSP project and the commendable job that our parents are doing by making sure that all of us that have been unable to go to school can start doing so. I am also very proud that I am able to learn some life skills that will assist me in my future,” said Jane.

According to her standard 8 class teacher, in the past Jane did not do well in class as she was regularly absent. “But now with the support that she is being given she is one of the best children in the class and I hope she will make it to secondary school. Last term she was at position number five out of 21 students that wrote the exams,” commented the class teacher.

VOCATIONAL-SKILLS TRAINING

Vocational training prepares learners for self-reliance or employment, to the benefit of themselves, their households and their communities. In Malawi, where white-collar jobs are not easily available to all, the significance of vocational skills cannot be overemphasized.

For a long time, primary graduates who failed to make it to secondary schools were left with few options. Girls tended to marry and boys became cattle herders.



There was need to equip these young people with skills to give them more choices for self-employment. In line with Malawi's vision to provide these skills to as many as possible, PSSP: SFP introduced vocational-skills training in all the schools in the 13 zones of Dowa district, with funding from the small-grants initiative within the same project. These skills include tailoring, tinsmithing, carpentry, weaving and baking. Now schools make concerted efforts to teach learners such skills.

The initiative calls for coordination with the community. Community members such as SMCs, teachers, chiefs and parents were

sensitized on the significance of vocational skills and were mobilized to participate in various capacities, including acting as local trainers. People within these local communities who have special skills were identified to train learners in the schools. This identification is usually done in consultation with the Group Village Heads and other community leaders.

Trainees are picked from all classes. Sometimes lower or junior classes are preferred in the hope that younger learners will master the skill and be able to teach others in subsequent school terms. Boys and girls are both trained. Materials for tinsmithing, tailoring and knitting are purchased with the small-grants funds and distributed in the respective schools.

As a result of vocational training, many schools in the district now are able to produce school uniforms and to operate small bakeries and raise money by selling products. For example, learners at Nyagra School in Nalunga zone, St. Matias School in Kanyenje zone and Ntengenji School in Nalunga are benefiting greatly from the tailoring courses offered at these schools. Kanyere School in Mvera zone is training learners in weaving. Baking is offered at Mvera MDF in Mvera zone. Other schools such as Mphimbi School in Mponela zone



offer training in carpentry while Chimbuli School in Chimbuli zone is famous for training learners in tinsmithing.

Learners are now able to make very good products using the skills gained in schools. Others have mastered the skills to the extent that they are able to train other learners in their schools.

Orphans, vulnerable children (OVC) and girls are also benefiting greatly from this initiative. For example, some OVC who have acquired such skills are able to make their own school uniforms and raise money by making and selling uniforms to others. Proceeds from these sales go to pay for basic items such as soap, salt, pens, pencils, notebooks and food for these OVC.

While the vocational-skills initiative has had great positive impact, challenges remain. Community experts entrusted with responsibility for training learners in schools expected financial benefits, but received none. Many of them have quit. Some schools fail to find replacements for trainers who have moved out, halting training in that skill at the school. And while the initiative is registering successes, it is failing to reach out to as many trainees as it might because of inadequate funding. In many schools, only about 10 learners get vocational-skills training at a time among 300 or more learners in the school.



Nevertheless, the initiative has sustainability. Vocational training prepares learners for self-employment. Beneficiaries use the skills to advance their own education by producing their own school uniforms and other goods. Some students, once trained, are able to train others.



Community leaders including SMCs, teachers, chiefs and parents should be encouraged to support such initiatives for the benefit of the learners and sustainability of the initiatives. As mentioned, this has proved to be a useful way of increasing resources for individuals in terms of school uniforms and other basic requirements, including for the OVC.

However, more sustainability is needed — for example, finding a way for skills trainers to gain benefits from their efforts. This would provide an incentive for skilled community members and for learners who have mastered skills to stay with schools as trainers.

Success Story: Vocational Skills at Mndanjiri School

About 10 kilometers northwest of Kamphenga TDC is Mndanjiri Junior Primary School. To woo NGOs (Non-governmental organizations), donors and the government to support the school, the community around Mndanjiri has been molding bricks — more than 150,000 in the past two years.

“We thought that development has only to do with construction,” said Village Head Mafunthe. “But since PSSP: SFP sensitized us to its goals and objectives, our minds have taken another dimension. We have now embarked on making sure that all dropouts are now back in school.”

Indeed, community leaders have worked tirelessly to make sure that all children in their area go to school. Among the beneficiaries of the communities’ efforts is a standard 5 boy who dropped out of school two years ago because of a lack of financial and material support.

“Since I am an orphan and due to lack of support, I was forced to drop out of school and started doing *ganyu* (piecework) in other people’s gardens,” said the boy, named Samson. “However, I have been rescued by the coming of PSSP after being encouraged by our village headman to go back to school.”

The head teacher for the school explained: “Looking at the number of school children that have enrolled back in school, we sat down with the School Management Committee and the community leaders to map out the way forward on how we can keep them at school and how we could assist the needy pupils. Realizing that there is small-grant component under PSSP: SFP, we agreed to start teaching the pupils some vocational skills. We opened up a vegetable garden for each class that would support the needy as well as teach agriculture to the pupils.”

These initiatives helped 33 dropouts return to school and assisted 11 needy pupils with basics such as school uniforms, soap, notebooks and pens. Seeing the drive of this community to improve education, PSSP: SFP granted MK30,000 (USD\$200) to support training in tailoring and the vegetable gardens.

Samson is one child who has benefited from the grant. He quickly mastered tailoring skills and now teaches other pupils. This has also encouraged him academically. “I thought my future had been doomed but now I am very much willing to remain in school,” said Samson. “I was behind but I have been able to catch up with my colleagues, and during the second term I was on position seven and this term I was on position one.”

PSSP: SFP hopes other can emulate the actions of Mndanjiri for the benefit of their children.



EDUCATION TOURS AND EXCHANGE VISITS

Education tours and exchange visits are vital as they give people an opportunity to see and learn from each other. The pace at which a person undertakes an activity differs from one person to another. Some people can do an activity much better and faster than others. This is because talent differs from person to person. Some people or communities can do an activity easily while others find it very difficult to complete. Those who find it difficult can learn from those who do it well. The best way to teach people is to let them visit others who are undertaking an activity successfully to see what they are doing and how they are doing it.

Through the PSSP: SFP project, education tours and exchange visits have been arranged for community members as well as for school children. For community members, exchange visits can help those who are trailing behind to see and learn from the others so that they too can improve their pace in development projects, income-generating activities, activities to support orphans, and community-based initiatives such as rearing of domestic animals for the school. For school children, exchange visits can cultivate learners' interest in education. The experience can motivate learners to stay longer in school, improve their academic achievement and complete their education so that they can be productive citizens who play a positive role in the world, and live a better life.

Proper planning is vital for a successful exchange visit. The following questions have to be considered to plan and implement an exchange visit: Where do we want to visit? Who should go? How many people should go? What is it that we want our delegates to see and learn? When should we visit? What resources will the visit require, and in what quantity? Financial, material, human and transport arrangements all have to be planned and be available. For the children, how many elders should accompany them, and who? Also, do the people who are to be visited know what the learners, teachers or community members are hoping to learn? If all these issues are properly addressed, then the visit will be successful.



During the visit, visitors need to learn as much as possible about how to improve their own school and community. After the visit, members of the visiting team should convene a meeting to brief the rest of the community on what they saw on the trip, what they learnt, how other communities are doing things and what practices will work in their community or school. Community members then must discuss strategies for implementing the most promising practices learnt during the exchange visit.

The PSSP: SFP project has provided transport for successful education tours. The most visited place has been Lufe school in Mvera Zone, where many community members, teachers and ZOCs (Zonal Coordinators) have gone to see the development of TALULAR (Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources). Other places that have been visited frequently have been the city of Lilongwe, where pupils visited Capital Hill to see the seat of government; the Kamuzu Mausoleum; the Lilongwe estuary; the Zodiac broadcasting station; Kamuzu International Airport and Kasungu National Park. In these places learners interacted with young men and women who raised learners' interest in education and encouraged pupils to remain in school, complete their education and live a better life.

Cluster leaders who visited Senga zone to learn more about its successful SIP (School Incentive Package) initiative now have their own SIP initiatives and are doing well. *Gule Wamkulu* festivals that started in Chimbuli zone are now performed in other zones. Mbalame School has raised as much as K53,000 (\$370 USD) by conducting a festival dance. The TALULAR initiative developed in Lufe School is now commonly found in every school in the district such that no teacher feels comfortable teaching without their TALULAR materials. Above all, fewer learners are absent from school and the number of learners dropping out has been reduced as a result of the visits learners have made to places of educational interest. Communities grow excited when children report what they have learnt during their visits. Parents are more likely to exempt children from morning domestic chores and to tell children to go to school on a daily basis, again reducing absenteeism and dropout numbers.

There are a few challenges related to the education tours. Only a limited number of learners get the opportunity to go on visits, due to limited transport facilities. The transportation of learners requires donor or well-wisher support or concerted fundraising efforts by the school communities, otherwise visits may be done only once a year. Visiting the National Park involves a long process and there are times in the year that one may not be able to see the animals.

It is recommended that patrons provide additional support for education tours so that as many learners as possible have the opportunity for this type of experiential learning. It is also recommended that a summary of each trip be made soon after returning back to school and shared with the rest of the school so that the others are motivated as well. Community moral and material support for learners who go on these visits is also important.

The district must be ready to provide technical, financial and transportation support wherever schools fall short in meeting their requirements. Visits should be part of the district's annual plan of activities for schools.



In conclusion, education tours and exchange visits are an effective way of increasing learners' interest in learning about the world outside their local community as well as motivating learners to complete their education. Visits appear to help reduce dropout and absenteeism to minimal levels, and even to get learners who have dropped out to re-enroll in school. It is for these many reasons that yearly visits should be encouraged at each school.

Success Story: Education Visit Contributes to Transformation of Kachulu School

In the early months of 2006, Kachulu School seemed to lack direction. Although the headteacher had tried his best to run the school using the knowledge and skills he had, still teaching and learning did not meet the desired standard. Most classrooms were bare; some teachers came to school without lesson plans; both teacher and learner absenteeism was high leading to high learner drop out and poor performance.

To address these problems, PSSP: SFP, among other things, trained all the teachers including those of Kachulu School. These were trained in both content knowledge and pedagogical skills. With these trainings, only slight changes were noted. Later on, the PEA and the ZOC initiated and organized an education visit for teachers to go and learn what other teachers in other areas were doing. Each teacher contributed MK100 for refreshments. PSSP:SFP management was cordially asked to support the zone with transport to Chinkhoma and Lisasadzi schools in Kasungu where the teachers observed lessons in the classrooms and shared experiences with their fellow teachers from those schools.



As a result of this visit, most teachers were motivated and started to implement what they observed at Chinkhoma and Lisasadzi. When one visits their classrooms today, one will see the transformation. There are locally-made and PSSP-provided materials used in their classroom, even when there are no walls. Teachers are practicing participatory methods effectively, which is making learners come to class and perform.

'It is my sincere hope that the other teachers too are going to emulate what the these teachers have done' commented the ZOC for the area. Indeed, an education visit is another powerful tool that can assist in transformation of school setting. Soon or later Kachulu will be the model school in Mponela zone.

7. USING INFORMATION

Statistics show that PSSP: SFP makes a difference. PSSP: SFP was designed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and USAID as a holistic program reaching not only formal education actors such as teachers, Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), Assistant Coordinators (ACs) and School Management Committees (SMCs), but members of the community as well. To understand the impact of PSSP: SFP in Dowa, the project collected various data sets. The results show that PSSP: SFP has brought positive change to teachers, pupils, and communities.

The results also show a significant increase in pupil achievement, an indication that learning is truly taking place in all Dowa schools. More teachers are now able to use active teaching methods to improve teaching and learning. Follow-up surveys show a significant improvement in the use of the active teaching method (from 30.3% of teachers in 2006 to 73.0% in 2008). This means that the majority of the teachers in Dowa now fully involve learners in their lessons by using creative, participatory methods of teaching. Communities have also benefited a great deal in terms of Income Generating Activities (IGAs) to support schools; lobbying for funds from outside sources such as Ministers of Parliament, other well-wishers and other sources; and the improvement of buildings. At the start of PSSP: SFP, only 52% of schools had IGAs; to date (2008) 76% of the schools have them. Only 41% were lobbying for funds from other sources, while now (2008) 64% are able to lobby from other sources. Also, 100% of schools are now involved in physical rehabilitation.

PSSP: SFP shares these lessons with the MOE, USAID, other donors and the grassroots to continue to support access to basic education for all Dowa children.



THE ROLE OF PUPIL ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

To measure the impact of its interventions on learning outcomes, PSSP: SFP designed and developed robust annual pupil assessments for standard 1 in Chichewa and for standard 6 in mathematics and English.

As a supplement to PCAR (Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform), PSSP: SFP developed BLP/M (Beginning Literacy Program/Malawi) and selected standard 1 to measure the outcomes, with the view of supplementing approaches that enable learners to read and write. Similarly, standard 6 was targeted to track learner outcomes after one year of using English as a medium of instruction. (In the lower primary standards, children are taught in vernacular, with the exception of English as a subject.)

The baseline assessment was conducted in 2006 and the first follow-up assessment in 2007 with the final assessment in 2008. In addition to being conducted in Dowa, the PSSP: SFP implementation district, the assessments were also given to a sample of comparison schools in Dedza.

Instrument Design and Development

The PSSP: SFP pupil assessment used a rigorous development process. The development of both standard 1 and standard 6 assessments began with a thorough review of relevant textbooks, teachers' guides and syllabi. Test blueprints were developed to identify content areas and cognitive skills to be assessed, and the number of items deemed necessary to address the breadth of content and to achieve the desired level of reliability.



The standard 1 Chichewa instrument included several subsets: phonemic awareness, word naming, letter sounds and word recognition. Several U.S. domestic literacy assessments that have been psychometrically established were reviewed to identify an early literacy assessment that would be an appropriate model for the standard 1 early literacy assessment in Malawi.

The standard 6 English instrument includes two content domains, reading and language structure. Performance in each has three degrees of complexity: basic, moderate and high. Items classified as basic ask pupils to respond

with factual knowledge about language structure or, when reading a text, to locate information in the text. Items classified as moderate ask pupils to identify appropriate verb tenses for given sentences or to make straightforward inferences based on what they have read in the text. Items classified as high ask pupils to apply knowledge of conjunctions to form sentences, to judge the correctness of sentences or to integrate or connect ideas across a text.

The standard 6 mathematics instrument consists of four content domains and three cognitive categories. The numbers and operations domain is divided into two sub-domains, whole number and fraction/decimal/ratio. The two sub-domains include test items that require pupils to do pure computation and to solve a word problem involving computation with different operations. The

geometry and data domain includes test items that require pupils to identify shapes, compare angles and read pictographs. The measurement domain consists of test items asking pupils to compute units of mass, volume and time. Additionally, cognitive levels of test items for the mathematics instrument were classified as knowledge, comprehension or application.

After development, test items were refined and pilot-tested. PSSP: SFP then trained assessors and sent them to schools to collect performance data.

PSSP: SFP Pupil Assessment

The pupil assessment results are grouped into four categories for standard 6: minimal, needs improvement, satisfactory, and advanced. For Chichewa, there are three categories: minimal, passing, and advanced. In September 2006, at the start of the third term, PSSP: SFP collected pupil performance data to establish a baseline on pupil performance in Chichewa, mathematics and English in all the selected 59 schools of Dowa District and 40 schools in Dedza, the comparison district. The first follow-up assessment occurred in September 2007.

Results show significant gains in pupil performance in Chichewa, English in Dowa, and significantly higher than that of Dedza.

Standard I Chichewa Assessment Results

After the one-year program implementation, the intervention group improved substantially compared to the comparison group. For instance, in standard I Chichewa literacy assessment, Dowa pupils showed a 19% improvement against 17.5% drop in Dedza, with girls surpassing boys in Dowa. By the end of PSSP:SFP, Dowa pupils showed a 39% improvement.

What factors contributed to this improvement? Over the year 2006, a new curriculum, the Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform (PCAR) was rolled out nationwide and all standard I teachers were oriented to its implementation methodologies. In Dowa, however, teachers received further in-depth training from the project, and the ongoing PSSP: SFP literacy campaign helped maintain the focus on literacy in standard I. In 2008, PSSP: SFP literacy program, the Beginning Literacy Program of Malawi (BLP/M) was launched. Also, pupils received resources such as notebooks and pens from the project, and PSSP: SFP greatly encouraged teachers' use of local resources (TALULAR).



Standard 6 English and Mathematics Assessment Results

Similarly in standard 6 pupils also improved in Dowa, significantly more than the comparison district. Dowa showed a 22% improvement in English and 31% in mathematics, after the first year and 28% in English and 33% in mathematics. In this case, however, boys surpassed girls in both categories.

PSSP: SFP is working to improve the entire education system. Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCMs) have supported older pupils significantly through academic clubs, particularly in reading and mathematics.

PSSP: SFP has worked to support Teacher Development Centers and has donated books to school libraries, increasing resources available to children.



Community mobilization campaigns are fostering a sense of importance for education. This in turn improves attendance, enrollment and time for learning and helps parents support their children in school. Teachers have been trained in various concepts in English and mathematics, strengthening teachers' own content knowledge and improving delivery of their lessons.

PSSP: SFP has engaged all levels of society from MOE headquarters to grassroots communities in the feedback process of sharing assessment data, revealing the power of data to mobilize action and

encourage continued success. In addition, feedback has helped to improve and shape PSSP: SFP teacher professional trainings and other components of the project in order to support teachers, communities and learners better.

This is clear testimony that PSSP: SFP interventions work. The assessment could serve as a model for both PCAR and teachers to be able to assess learners nationwide. Results of the follow-up assessment show that PSSP: SFP has already made an important impact on pupil learning by training teachers in content knowledge and pedagogy; expanding teaching and learning resources available to teachers and pupils; mobilizing communities to take ownership and responsibility in education; making small grants to school-management committees to improve school infrastructure; establishing life-skills training for students; and setting up income-generating activities to support the needs of orphans and vulnerable children.

Success Story: Power of Sharing Pupil Assessment Results

Mduku school — serving 462 learners (244 girls, 218 boys) — experienced a decline in enrollment before PSSP: SFP in part because the community wasn't seeing any learners who had gone on to noteworthy success — there was no role model from the school at all. Examining the school assessment results over time, teachers determined that the majority of unsuccessful learners were performing below the acceptable level compared with the baseline information that PSSP: SFP provided to all teachers and communities at Mduku School. Both teachers and communities learned that a comparison district was scoring higher than Dowa learners, and they wished to understand why Dowa learners were failing to perform. Teachers and the community focused on moving learners to an acceptable level. Using the PSSP: SFP assessment results and their own classroom data, they identified individual learners who needed the most help. They provided the necessary interventions that the teachers needed during the teacher professional incremental training, such as use of participatory teaching in order to engage learners in the lessons. Teachers also continued to monitor attendance patterns and discussed how they could encourage learners to attend school more regularly. Teachers together with the communities determined the number of learners coming late to school, which can have a great impact on learners' success.

To encourage students to attend school, teachers introduced a number of incentives. Learners who achieved a specified percentage on their classroom assessments and were present most of school calendar year received a variety of teaching and learning materials. This initiative proved successful, as many learners worked hard to achieve and receive the rewards at the end of the school calendar year.



Teachers started and continued to hold joint planning sessions at which they developed sample questions for the classroom. They consistently incorporated PSSP: SFP type of questions into daily practice. Teachers also used good older learners to assist others. Sharing of pupil assessment has helped Mduku School to achieve its goal. For example, during the closing ceremony in November 2008, the results showed that less than 10% of learners would repeat a class in the next school session, unlike before PSSP: SFP when approximately 35% would repeat a class at Mduku. Communities gave even more gifts to learners who passed and they believed that 2008 Primary School Certificate of Education (PSLCE) exam results will be better than any other year before.

The head teacher, Mr. Steven Foleriano, during this year's closing ceremony said, "thanks to PSSP: SFP for sharing the pupil assessment results, as they made us engage an extra gear."

SHARING DATA WITH GRASSROOTS-LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS

PSSP: SFP has engaged all levels of society — from the Ministry of Education headquarters to communities at the grassroots level — in sharing its findings to mobilize people to action and to encourage continued success.

For effective communication, PSSP: SFP uses both print and electronic media to share information. Every four months PSSP: SFP produces newsletters and summary reports that are distributed and shared with stakeholders at all levels. In addition, PSSP: SFP shares its findings through sensitization meetings, trainings and other forums.

Stakeholders have come to appreciate the importance of such information sharing. As a result, good practices have been replicated in areas not served by PSSP: SFP. For example, community members have toured classrooms to see firsthand what parts of the building may need to be fixed or improved. Such activities act as a catalyst for the community to contribute money and labor to upgrade or build new classroom blocks.

Community members have also begun taking part in lessons to understand how best to assist both teachers and learners. Such participating community members play an important role in bringing local resources to the classroom.

As a result of information-sharing, teachers have begun reflecting more systematically about their own professional growth. They continue to discuss conditions for better quality learning, lesson planning, peer observation and learner evaluation. For example, teachers have built a spirit of competition among themselves such that many teachers request to be observed while teaching. In addition, teachers have started focusing on areas in which learners are not performing well, in an effort to improve learner performance.



Reflective teaching methods to improve pupil performance are widely used by most of the teachers in Dowa District. These methods help teachers think about and critically analyze how they teach so that they can improve their teaching practices.

Information-sharing has meant that each stakeholder can make specific contributions to improving learner outcomes. For example, for community members, concrete action comes in the form of school infrastructure improvements. Community members contributed various items for the schools and have begun to get involved in the academic life of their children's education.

One of the goals of PSSP: SFP is to bring teachers, communities and learners together so that they can harness their collective energies towards improving access to basic education, increasing resources for schools and improving teaching and learning outcomes in Dowa schools.

Success Story: The Power of Data in Chimungu Zone

Data is a word that once didn't exist in the minds of most of the teachers in Chimungu Zone and Dowa district as a whole. Little did they know that data was an important part of improving teaching and learning.

It was not until PSSP: SFP opened the minds of Chimungu Zone teachers about the importance of school data on work schemes, weekly and end-of-term test results and outcomes from lesson evaluation that teachers realized what a powerful tool data could be to improve learner outcomes.

Teachers from Chimungu zone now have discovered interesting ways to assess their learners, to interpret learners' and teachers' attendance results, and to track achievements in extracurricular activities.



After PSSP: SFP shared its data and helped teachers to interpret results, Mr. Mehavey Bandawe, head teacher of Chimungu School, took a keen interest and looked at all Chimungu school records. "I took the monthly returns, for example, as just routine and district education requirement for planning. The training which PSSP: SFP conducted on how to interpret results has changed my meaning of the term data," Mr. Bandawe said.

He mobilized his fellow teachers and shared what he learnt from the monthly returns — data showing high dropout numbers, low selection to secondary school and high teacher absenteeism.

Now he and his fellow teachers are able to analyze school data to identify possible reasons for such challenges, and to propose solutions. Misunderstandings between teachers and learners and between teachers and communities now are a story of the past, because everyone feels real ownership in and responsibility for their school.

Almost everybody has developed a positive sense of competition. Any irregularity is soon noticed and proper action is taken. At Chimungu School, various academic clubs have emerged and teachers have started afternoon classes. Assistance to orphans and vulnerable children, exchange-school visits and use of library books have become common. Chimungu School enrollment has increased from 984 in 2006 to 1,123 in 2008. Dropout rate has gone down from approximately 30% to 12%. Secondary selection has improved from 35 students in 2006 to 42 in 2007. Learners at Chimungu School are now self-starters.



Head Teacher Bandawe at Chimungu School now is very active as a result of PSSP: SFP's sharing of data. He relates his success to PSSP: SFP for training him on how to collect and interpret data of his own.

MASS COMMUNICATION

Mass communication efforts have cut across activities of all PSSP: SFP components. These efforts have shown the project has had an important impact beyond its primary place of implementation. In simple terms, mass communication refers to those interventions that ensure the conveying of information concerning project activities through various media channels. In this context, the target audiences refer to (among others) those who make policy by means of the use of print and electronic media. The main objective of mass communication is to inform others of the successes being achieved by the project, the challenges it faces, and the identification of possible solutions to these challenges.

These objectives target other communities besides the policy makers on issues that pertain to policy changes or interpretation. Some individuals in the communities may not have had a chance to visit project impact areas, but they are made aware of project activities and achievements through print and electronic media. Communities located outside the districts of the Dowa project that face similar constraints, have a chance to learn from and perhaps replicate project interventions from the Dowa residents. Thus, communication interventions made PSSP: SFP popular to many people not only in the impact district but in other districts as well.



It was not always easy to document the impact of the project throughout the nation. Indeed, many of those who benefited from the project lacked a mechanism to offer feedback. However, some cases were captured. For instance, mass media featured the resourcefulness of communities, to the extent of using *Gule Wamkulu* (traditional masked dancers believed to be spirits of the dead). After PSSP's sensitization, motivation and mobilization, which included training, the *Gule Wamkulu* sect was transformed from being anti- to pro-education. The sect eventually mobilised children going from their homes to school—instead of harassing them, as they had done before. The initiative became

common among almost 25% of Dowa residents just after the *Gule Wamkulu* leader, Mr. Jelisoni Kasuzi, from Matsewa School area in the Chimbuli education zone, challenged *Gule Wamukulu* directly. Mr. Jelisoni Kasuzi shared his innovations with his superiors and colleagues. His ideas were positively received. The *Gule Wamkulu* took an active role in seeing that children around the area were attending school instead of loitering around the village or fishing in the nearby streams.

The project has now been fully implemented and has raised the enrolment to 420, up from approximately 200; the daily school attendance has grown to between 309 and 400. The project has also helped to improve pupils' punctuality and reduce dropouts.

The initiative was featured by radio stations, newspapers and television. Other education zones grasped the innovation and started making use of the *Gule Wamkulu*. The education zones that adopted the idea in Dowa were Boma, Kayembe, Mponela, Chimungu, Katalima and Madisi. Plan Malawi's radio program series, 'Timvereni' also carried two similar stories from Kasungu and Lilongwe (its impact areas) on the use of *Gule Wamkulu*. Some districts (e.g., Karonga, Rumphu and Mzimba) in northern Malawi got acquainted with the PSSP: SFP project through the overall semi-annual newsletter, which is distributed nationwide.

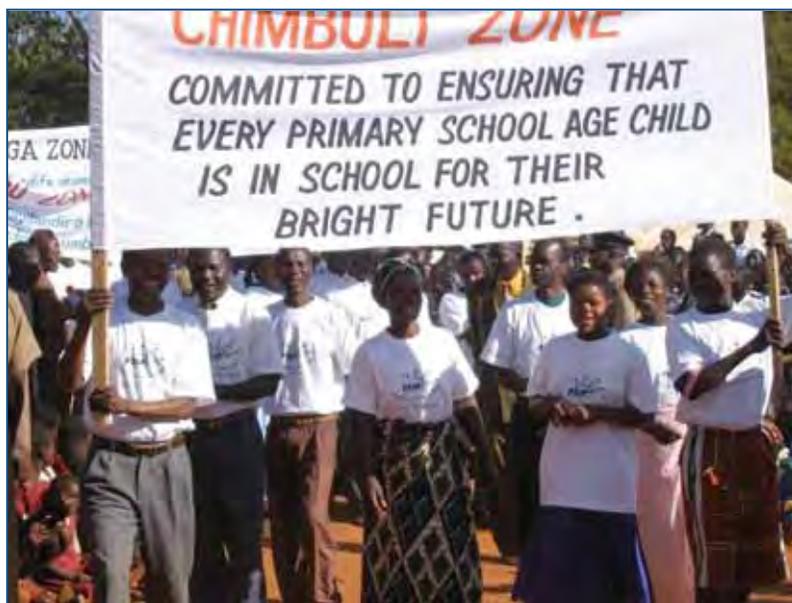
8. CAPITALIZING ON LOCAL RESOURCES

Few communities in Malawi took active roles in ensuring quality education in the schools before multiparty democracy. Most community members believed that government had all the responsibility for schools. Unfortunately, government could not furnish all schools with the necessary resources (enough classroom blocks, teachers' houses, toilets, libraries or teachers' staff rooms) for effective teaching and learning. Most schools therefore lacked resources essential for a favorable learning environment.

The advent of multiparty democracy in the mid-1960s somewhat altered this perception. Schools began to realize their roles in community development. In some areas, community leaders became involved in making bricks, collecting sand for construction and building temporary shelters for learning.

While multiparty democracy changed the perception of some communities about participating in community development, it also brought with it a number of challenges to quality education. For example, community leaders including chiefs and parents began seeing teachers as rivals — educated people who may know more than traditional leaders and parents. Community members therefore were less likely to take part in school management (monitoring pupil performance and teacher conduct, providing teaching and learning materials or helping to teach life skills to learners). Consequently, again as before, little material and human-resource support was available for quality teaching and learning.

Against this background emerged more recent efforts to make use of local resources: drama clubs with local members, play parks made from local materials by local builders, and individuals who can help teach and act as role models. Even classroom materials emerged using local resources which have been coined under the heading of Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR).



PSSP: SFP's educational, social and artistic vision has been to provide greater access to basic education and improved learning with specific focus on orphans, vulnerable children and girls. It also seeks to increase resources at school level and to improve teaching and learning outcomes in the schools of Dowa district. This vision addresses the acute problems affecting primary education in Malawi.

Local resources are important in this effort. For example, drama clubs' members are youths who may or may not be in school. Yet

with good training these clubs are instrumental in mobilizing communities to provide learning resources such as play parks and locally available items useful in teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning using locally available resources provides a bedrock for quality teaching. Local resources are cheap and effective. Drama-club members and teachers and community members who

excel in mobilizing local resources have become role models who can help show other communities how to replicate such initiatives elsewhere.

Thanks to local resources and efforts, now nearly all the schools in Dowa district have play parks where children spend time before and after school rather than staying at home. These play parks have been instrumental in reducing pupil absenteeism. Also, 34 local drama clubs have registered great achievements in mobilizing communities. These clubs have been trained to conduct action research and to perform as part of Theatre for Development.



LOCAL DRAMA GROUPS

African culture is full of drama. Role-playing, miming, singing and dancing as well as use of proverbs are key elements in African traditions and norms. Rites of passage, initiation ceremonies, religious cults, rituals in chiefs' courts and nocturnal dances are all full of dramatic elements.

Realizing that communities appreciate the power and significance of drama, and that the first and critical step to sustainable development is awareness-building, PSSP: SFP trained local drama groups to do action research and Theatre for Development (TFD) performances to achieve community-development goals complementing PSSP: SFP's educational and social goals. The drama groups undertake to motivate and empower large numbers of community members to help improve quality education and support services for orphans and vulnerable children. The emphasis is on children with special needs and on girls.

Thirty-four drama groups from 13 zones and 27 clusters in Dowa district were trained to conduct action research using TFD techniques during performances and to involve community members in forming action plans. All told, 601 drama-club members (264 males, 337 females) received training.



Interested groups of in-school and out-of-school youths, already organized as clubs, were identified by teachers or others. Drama group members were trained using project training materials at community-based meetings. Participants learned fact-finding through action research and also learned TFD performance techniques. Under TFD principles, participants learn how to do participant-based research and how to confirm, analyze and dramatize information that helps communities identify constraints to education. The research addresses learner enrollment and retention rates; pass rates; and construction of teachers' houses,

classroom blocks and libraries. Drama groups also develop and implement action plans in their communities. Upon implementation of these plans, project staff members review and lead re-planning meetings with drama club members to report and evaluate successes, identify challenges and seek ways forward. The process ends with follow-up, monitoring and regular contacts among project staff, TFD participants and communities.

PSSP: SFP staff visits to schools to see projects has the benefit of providing data on how projects affect communities. TFD drama groups find this particularly satisfying. Such proof of success motivates drama-group members to engage in more performances. They see for themselves the changes that take place as a result of their work.

Documented changes include girls and boys re-enrolling in school after denouncing marriage or disengaging themselves from child labor, and girls and boys resuming class attendance after changing their priorities and leaving *Gule Wamkulu* festivals that otherwise take them out of school for days or weeks at a time. Communities have been sensitized, motivated and mobilized to participate in development work by building teachers' houses, classroom blocks and school libraries. Teachers take

new pride in seeing their pupils come back to school. Teachers teach with greater zeal after communities have constructed new houses for them.

Construction has included a classroom block at Thonje, a school library at Kawere, two teachers' houses at Chandawe and two toilets at Sidze. "I am happy that I have acquired the skills to mobilize communities to develop our school and improve the standard of education," said a member of the Thonje drama club after spurring the community with a sensitization performance at the school.

Commenting on the activities of the drama groups, one teacher at Sidze School said, "I never thought my learners could mobilize the community with such a great sense of professionalism. It's encouraging being associated with such a group of brilliant and talented youth."

Challenges include the occasional transfer of teachers who are patrons of these drama groups. Such transfers leave gaps, which take time to fill and slow activities of the group. In addition, some trained group members graduate to secondary schools, also creating gaps.

The idea of combining in-school and out-of-school youths in a drama group is very effective. It facilitates exchange of constructive ideas between these two groups of youths. The utilization of local personnel in this way is powerful and transformational, considering their unprecedented successes.



It is imperative for community leaders (teachers, School Management Committees, PTAs, chiefs and parents) to support drama groups to make their initiatives sustainable. It would also be encouraging for government to support such caliber of youth by providing resources for their activities, which can perhaps be replicated elsewhere.

Success Story: Thonje Drama Club Gives Thonje School a New Look

Thonje Primary School lies to the east of Mvera zone. It is surrounded by 12 villages and falls within the sphere of Group Village Head Lufeyo.

For a long time the school has had two permanent classroom blocks and two semi-permanent ones for eight classes, which forces some classes to use the shade of trees for classrooms with adverse effects on education. “During the rainy season, classes that learn under shades of trees are canceled, sometimes for five days, due to continuous rains,” said one teacher.

Despite such challenges, the community never took steps to solve the problem. Their common belief was always that it was government’s responsibility to construct school buildings. “We believe that construction of school infrastructure is the sole responsibility of the government, not villagers like us,” commented one community member. No strides were made towards improvement of school infrastructure.

The Thonje drama club’s performance at the school changed the community’s mind. In the performance, actors highlighted the need for the community to accept responsibility for its school and take the lead in developing school infrastructure. Actors trained by PSSP: SFP in action research and TFD techniques based the performance on their study of 12 villages’ perceptions about the school.



Following the TFD performance and encouragement from other PSSP: SFP project interventions such as small grants, the community molded bricks to kick-start construction of a classroom block. The community has since constructed a classroom block for two classes that used to learn under shades of trees. “We thank the drama club, whose members are our own children from here, for enlightening us on the need to spearhead development work at this school,” said Village Head Lufeyo as he inspected the newly constructed block.

The community has also gone further to mobilize its own resources by building a teachers’ staff room. Village Head Lufeyo said, “Teachers need a good staff room to prepare their lessons well.” The headmaster acknowledged that “with the new classroom block, learning will be much better in the classroom than outside. The classes will no longer be interrupted by the rains.”

TALULAR: TEACHING AND LEARNING USING LOCALLY AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Materials known as TALULAR (Teaching And Learning Using Locally Available Resources) are used in lesson delivery by teachers to help learners acquire knowledge and skills. TALULAR can be leaves or bottle tops, knowledge or experience, living or nonliving, animal or plant, human or non-human. It can be in its original form or modified to suit its intended use. Learners, teachers and community members bring TALULAR to school — cloth, empty bottles, books, old shoes and paint.

Collection or development of TALULAR means making sure it is available in required quantities and at the time it is needed. A lot of TALULAR in a variety of sizes is required at a school — which calls for a concerted effort by community, teachers and learners in production and storage.

TALULAR can help learners acquire knowledge and more readily understand concepts. Teaching without TALULAR, on the other hand, may sometimes mean the lesson will be all but impossible to grasp. Learners are the target beneficiaries of TALULAR, and teachers are repeatedly reminded of its significance in lesson delivery. This prompts teachers to seek assistance from other stakeholders in collection and production of TALULAR.



Production of TALULAR is a shared responsibility. Every stakeholder plays a role. Teachers hold sensitization meetings with the community and learners to inform them about TALULAR and why it is needed. Teachers requisition TALULAR based on classroom topics. Community members help collect writing surfaces such as paper, dried animal skins, pieces of cloth or wood and even old shoe soles brought to the school by parents or children. Communities also provide paints made from soil, fruits, flowers, leaves and charcoal powder, as well as paint brushes made from maize pith, sugarcane peel and sticks. Another form of TALULAR is folk

tales, also provided by community members and written for learners' reading pleasure. Literate community members help with writing while the illiterate prepare writing surfaces or decorate finished products.

Teachers and learners both produce and use TALULAR. Teachers gather materials and work with learners to produce TALULAR as needed. Teachers work in schools and in clusters during continuing professional development to produce TALULAR for immediate or future use.

TALULAR has had a great impact on school-community communication, teaching, learning and assessment. Community members play a key role, so they develop a sense of ownership and feel responsible. They safeguard what they have created, even providing lockable doors. "Some of us were



ignorant about these teaching and learning materials,” says Ethel Kazula, a community member from Chimbuli. “We saw them as classroom toys and decoration. However, after we got involved in the production itself, we learned how to care for and value the items.”

Production and use of TALULAR is highly recommended for every school, teacher and learner. Involvement of the community in production and safeguarding of teaching and learning materials is the best way to sustain its production. To ensure continuity of TALULAR production and use, the Ministry, through District Education Managers and Primary Education Advisors should emphasize the need for TALULAR and make its production with the community a requirement of the community-school partnership. The best TALULAR production troupers should be used even as district trainers. TALULAR banks should exist for every school, and exchange visits should be arranged to showcase role models at work.



The main challenges to TALULAR are vandalism, poor storage facilities, and techniques and ineffective use. However, all of these can be effectively addressed in training and awareness meetings with stockholders.

TALULAR is a basic necessity for teaching, learning and assessment in every lesson. It helps teachers give learners more quality time to acquire knowledge and skills. It simplifies concepts with materials grounded in reality. In assessment, learners can reference material they know — and because it is familiar, it stays in their memory longer.

Success Story: TALULAR has Simplified Teaching and Learning

Before PSSP: SFP was introduced in Dowa, teachers at Karonga Primary School in Senga Zone did not have adequate government-produced classroom materials and were not creating their own materials to make up for that gap. As a result, learners struggled to understand complex concepts. Lessons lacked variety and visuals, making learning boring for the pupils. Teachers found it hard to use just words to explain concepts to learners, but left the challenge unsolved.

PSSP: SFP offers professional development opportunities for teachers. Karonga School has benefited, and after three cycle trainings the situation began to change. One concept taught during these trainings was how to find and use local resources to create teaching and learning resources. Now all the teachers in Karonga are applying this knowledge and are showcasing some of the best TALULAR displays in Dowa.

Using the newly created TALULAR has improved pupils' interest in school and has made their learning more enjoyable, hands-on and accessible. Whereas before most standard 3 pupils struggled to write simple sentences, now approximately 60% of learners recently sampled were able to read and write simple sentences and passages with little difficulty.



Success Story: TALULAR Makes a Differences in Classrooms at Dowra I

The effectiveness of the teaching and learning process depends on a variety of factors, including teaching methods and materials used. In Malawi, Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR) is a key teaching strategy that PSSP: SFP is promoting, especially given the significant lack of materials for the classroom.

However, TALULAR requires creativity and commitment to make effective use of resources that are available near schools. For Dowra I Primary School and other schools within the Dowra I Cluster, Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCMs) helped address the challenges.

MCM, a key PSSP: SFP support strategy, is a voluntary service-learning program that provides youth with the opportunity to lead rural Malawian communities in practical responses to complex development problems facing quality education. Chikoya Kayera is one such MCM, serving in Dowra I cluster in Boma zone. Chikoya Kayera assisted teachers and pupils by making classroom materials from chalk, ashes, baked bricks, clay soil, recycled paper and even waste from trees, bananas and maize stalks.



Knowing how busy teachers are, Chikoya enlisted the 60 pupils (35 girls and 25 boys) to learn to make these materials. They made 300 numeric counters for standard 1 and 2, 82 alphabet letters, two clocks, three abacuses, one fish, three map globes and two wind vanes. These tools help 700 learners, of whom 34 are children with special needs. The 30 teachers at the school provided guidance to ensure the materials meet the needs of the classroom.

A standard 8 science teacher, Mr. T. Z. Balaza, commends the MCM contribution in involving pupils in TALULAR development. He observes that learners are more engaged since he has used more TALULAR, and they are proud they are involved. His students use what he calls a “word tree” — a branch with words dangling from the branches. “I have made my lessons in science interesting by summarizing them using a word tree,” says Balaza. “I ask my pupils to recall terms, topics, words covered in previous lessons by writing on pieces of paper. I stick them on the word tree and then review them with the class.” He also commented that pupils are passing their exams with higher pass rates.

TALULAR is showing that its value is more than what many would imagine when, for example, the word tree was just a stick on the ground.

PLAY PARKS

Children are playful and are drawn to opportunities for play. Play parks on the grounds of primary schools in Dowa district have attracted more children into schools, increasing school enrollment and retention.

Children are allowed to use these school play parks even during weekends. This encourages students to return to classes on weekdays and helps attract children who haven't yet enrolled in the school.

In schools where play parks are not available, children tend to shun classes and stay at home, occupying themselves with other games.



Play parks help children grow mentally and physically. Equipment at play parks encourages learning-related games during free time at school. Equipment and games are made from locally available materials such as wooden poles, plastic papers, sisal, tree-bark string, sand and marble. The play equipment includes seesaws, *bawos*, swings, long-jump and high-jump areas and a number of other local games.

Play parks are important for a variety of reasons: occupational therapy for learners, continuity of skills learned in the classroom, entertainment and social interaction. Play parks make the school environment more

conducive to the intellectual, physical and social development of the learners.

Following PSSP: SFP sensitization meetings about the importance of play for children's learning, community members developed play parks with the help of teachers, learners and MCMs (the Mobilization Corps of Malawi). These sensitization meetings showed the importance of "edutainment" — combining education and entertainment — and serve as a reminder that all work and no play makes John a dull boy or Jane a dull girl. The community leaders in collaboration with the School Management Committee (SMC), PTA and parents in all of Dowa's 226 schools were involved.

Most games in play parks are made with wood, poles and other local materials. Ropes, *bawo*, chess board, draughts (checkers) were provided by the project. Play parks are on existing school playgrounds.

Apart from seesaw, swings and long jump, some schools have introduced games that develop mathematical concepts in which learners play fast and coordinate their activities. Games with *nsikwa* and *nguli* (spinning tops) depict the



concept of force in physics so learners may more readily understand when these concepts are taught in class.

Play parks often show a map of Malawi or Africa on the ground. They may include a wind vane and other weather-station equipment. Thus, as they play, pupil can also learn as well as remind each other about what they learned in class.

Children use play parks early in the morning before class, during break, and at the end of the day. Usually, an older person such as a teacher or a class monitor is present to check on the safety of the children as they play.

The introduction of play parks in schools in Dowa district has been successful. The parks have contributed to greatly increased enrollment, as more learners now flock to the schools to play. Dowa total enrollment has increased by 26% and attendance by 43% as more learners find schools educating and enjoyable.

Parents now can use less effort to influence children to go to school, because children wake up early to be the first ones to enjoy the play park.

Unfortunately, accidents occur at play parks, caused in part by careless or wrong use of the equipment or by breakdown of equipment due to overuse. In some cases vandalism has resulted in equipment being damaged. Sometimes parts of the equipment have been taken for firewood. Equipment needs constant repair.



park are set up in all schools in the district. It is also imperative that teachers be trained on how to deal with accidents that happen as children use the play parks.

The government and its partners would do well to replicate in all districts what communities in Dowa district have achieved with play parks. The simple idea of placing play parks for children at schools clearly has the potential to contribute to improved attendance and to improved educational quality in all of Malawi.



The importance of play parks cannot be overemphasized. The establishment of play parks has improved education quality in Dowa schools. All stakeholders are invited to encourage schools to provide play parks with equipment and to use it effectively.

Likewise, all SMC members and PTAs are invited to prepare action plans for maintenance and upkeep of existing play parks. At zonal level, Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) should supervise the existence of play parks in the schools and support communities to make sure play parks are safe. The District Education Manager should get reports from PEAs and offer support where necessary so play

Success Story: Play Parks Improve Attendance at Mponela School

“I am at school an hour early everyday so I’ve time for fun at the play park before classes begin,” mused Maria. This is the kind of thing one hears from most of the approximately 15,000 pupils in the 22 schools of Mponela education zone in Dowa district, Central Malawi.

Dowa is the impact district for PSSP: SFP, a three-year USAID-funded project aiming to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of basic education particularly for orphans, vulnerable children and girls. Before PSSP: SFP, rampant absenteeism and high dropout rates were common. Those pupils who stayed in school performed so poorly that primary education did not really have much value to the communities.

PSSP: SFP launched an intensive teacher in-service training program with a large community-involvement component. Acute understaffing in most schools and a predominantly illiterate district population limited the impact of these powerful interventions.



So the project launched another intervention: the Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCM), which promotes volunteerism among local youths for community development particularly in rural settings. Mponela education zone received six MCM volunteers, one in each of its clusters. Their activities ranged from assisting community members with development of project proposals in support of education to establishing school-based initiatives such as creating and running school play parks for pupils. The parks have provided opportunities for pupils to play games known as swing low swing high and bawo as well as draughts (checkers). Children can play on a seesaw or participate in long and high jump, triple jump and relay races.

The play park initiative has revolutionized pupils’ perceptions of school life, making teachers’ work easier. Pupils come to school early so they can play games before classes begin, thus eliminating problems associated with punctuality. Most of those who dropped out of school have since reenrolled, raising zonal enrollment from 13,149 to a record figure of 15,362.

“Thanks to MCM initiative,” remarked the Zonal Primary Education Advisor, “teachers are now able to concentrate on their work and pupils are learning a lot.” These sentiments were echoed by the local village head during a recent school open day at Mphimbi Primary School.



Success Story: Volleyball Brings Back a Chimbuli Dropout

In times past, it was rare to see children play volleyball in Malawi schools, but that has changed. At Chimbuli Primary School in Sungeni Cluster in Chimbuli zone in the area of Traditional Authority Chakhaza, this extracurricular activity has won the hearts of many children and has, like a magnet, attracted dropouts to return to school.

Brighton Banda, a standard 8 boy who dropped out of school for two years, was drawn back to school by volleyball. Immediately after volleyball was introduced in schools through the ZIPs (Zonal Incentive Packages), Brighton envied his school-going colleagues who played. He approached the deputy head teacher to request a chance to play.

The deputy head teacher explained that sporting activities are for learners at the school, but that if he reenrolled, he could play. Brighton was back in class the following day.



Since returning to school, Brighton confesses that a lot has changed. He reports that teachers are more friendly and helpful. Brighton finds lessons more interesting now that learners participate with each other and make presentations to their class. There are now a variety of extracurricular and sporting activities after classes, unlike before. Brighton wishes he had remained in school, but expressed that he was frustrated by teachers' seeming lack of commitment to duty as well as meaningless lessons and an uninteresting school environment. "I am happier both in class and outside class these days," Brighton said. Commented Brighton's teacher: "His performance is improving day by day, he attends school regularly and his attitude towards school and his hard work in class have changed for the better."

ROLE MODEL UTILIZATION

Role models are groups or individuals who have made strides towards achieving intended project goals or objectives. Achieving educational quality requires active involvement of all stakeholders in order for innovative approaches to bring about change. Role-model utilization is one such powerful strategy for sensitization and mobilization of people towards achieving equitable access to quality primary education. Identification and utilization of local role models is a critical aspect of meaningful and sustainable community mobilization.

Objectives of role-model utilization in PSSP: SFP were twofold:

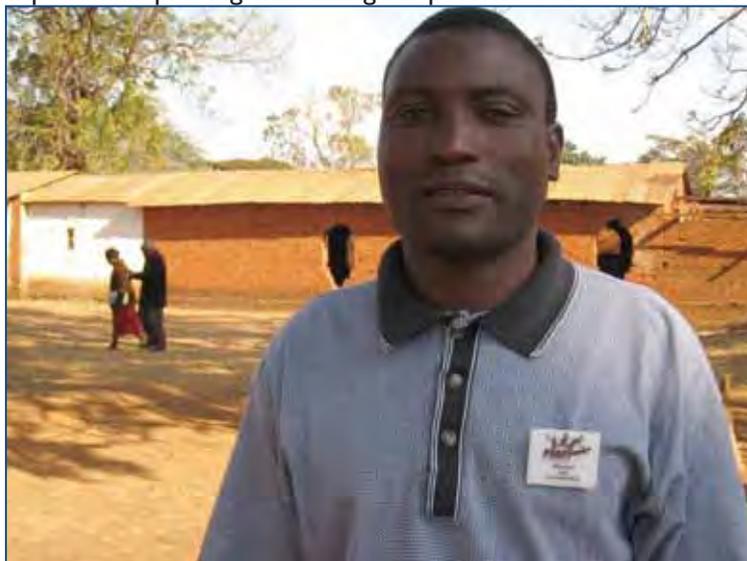
- To help consolidate best practices.
- To influence change where it is slow to occur and to encourage those who are on the right track.

Role models can be individuals, groups, a structure, or a system. Examples of role models in PSSP: SFP included teachers, village heads, female role models, school infrastructure such as a classroom blocks, an entire zone, or community groups such as *Gule Wamkulu*.

To achieve results, utilization of role models started with sensitization of communities on the importance of learning from others. This happened during sensitization meetings, focus group discussions and community-based workshops. This prepared and inspired community members to learn from others and from peers who had made strides. Key stakeholders were encouraged to identify and learn from those who are doing well. Cluster leaders, government extension workers, project staff and Mobilization Corps of Malawi workers (MCMs) identified outstanding performers. Such role models were utilized for appropriate target groups — for example, a teacher who excelled in using TALULAR would be utilized among teachers.

Role models would also be utilized during open days. Sometimes exchange visits would be organized to learn from those who had been successful. During teacher conferences, role model teachers were used as trainers. Role-model teachers were also among local troupers who counseled teachers at other schools.

Frequent utilization of role models inspired groups that lagged behind and it brought home practical experiences proving that change is possible and it is for the better. Facilitating development of plans of



action immediately after hearing from a role model cements and augments participants' motivation and moves people into action. Results were evident through the replication of good practices.

Initiatives sprouted in school communities due to role-model utilization. To motivate role models further, incentives were given, including recognition, praise and being named to a supervisory or mentorship role.

As a result, some teachers improved their productivity, intrinsically motivated and responding to improved

team spirit. There was evidence of healthy professional competition and greater competence among teachers, as evidenced by the fact that more teachers sat for the Malawi School Certificate of Education exam during project years than ever before. Children, meanwhile, have become more ambitious and set higher goals for their lives after exposure to role models.

These are among the lessons learnt:

- Role-model utilization is a powerful tool for sharing good practices and learning.
- Using role models breeds healthy competition, which is often difficult to cultivate because it may create envy among peers.
- Utilizing role models can be counterproductive if the same models are used over a long period of time. A long-used role model can demoralize others if they come to think that such a level of performance is unreachable.
- It is good practice to encourage use of role models at cluster level, as it is more practical and sustainable.
- Utilizing female role models for girls is empowering to girls and goes a long way in changing their mindsets and attitude towards education.



Success Story: Girl Attracts Peers

The spectacle of the PSSP: SFP launch—the silent prompting and compelling feeling that accompanied messages, displays and activities of the occasion—spurred a renewed zeal and eagerness in education for Madalitso Banda, a standard 5 pupil at Nauchi School in Madisi zone. Her renewed vigor in education has surprised everyone.

Those who knew her dubbed her as a lazy girl who frequently absented herself from school. In fact, her best friends Rhoda Michael and Yosofati Sainani had already dropped out of school. They used to work on people's gardens, helping in maize harvesting and earning some money to help themselves and their families meet basic needs. Their influence on Madalitso was such that she too was on the verge of dropping out of school. "Some of my close friends had dropped out of school due to lack of basic needs," Madalitso said.

All these thoughts vanished when she was one of the representatives from her school during the launch of USAID funded PSSP: SFP that took place at Chimungu Primary School. She saw women driving cars

and some being driven by men to the venue. She watched with interest a drama performance by young, vibrant boys and girls who proudly said they were from Chancellor College, a constituent college of the University of Malawi. All the posters, speeches and activities emphasized that education was good and called upon boys and girls to work hard in school despite the problems and hardships they face. She felt a burning desire in her heart to change her attitude: "I will never be absent from school again," she said to herself. The PSSP: SFP T-Shirt she got during the occasion was a supplement to her determination.



Since that day she has never been absent from school. She comes early and has surprised teachers as well. "Her performance is improving steadily. It's like she has taken a magic pill and all is going well for her, even in class," her class teacher observed. She has since joined the AIDS *Toto* club at the school, which was initiated by Mr. Chiwonetsera Msampha, a MCM. The tide of peer influence has changed. Now her friends Rhoda and Yosofati have re-enrolled in school as a result of Madalitso's influence on them since she returned from the launch of the project. Rhoda is in standard 5 and Yosofina is in standard 6. "We did not want to be left behind as our friend proceeded with school," Yosofina said.

Just the presence of female role models makes a huge impact in a rural girl's life. Her narrow perception of life is suddenly awakened by the realization that her life can also change if she focuses on education. PSSP has mobilized communities and schools to use role models — including female role models.

Success Story: Mr. Mazungwi Sets the Pace

Andrew Murray Primary School is a big school close to the Teacher Development Center (TDC) and one of the oldest schools in Mvera Zone. It has boarding facilities and caters to learners from other districts. Surprisingly, despite its status, Andrew Murray did not have any pit latrines for years. Everyone was aware of this problem including all the 13 villages that the school serves.

So what happened when 800 learners needed to answer the call of nature? “We used to run to the closest bushes or go all the way to the hostels. Others went to their homes,” said Princilla Kalino, a 14-year-old standard 8 student. The lack of toilets made the school environmentally unhygienic and caused pupils to stay away from class a long time or never return at all.

Even after PSSP: SFP sensitized the school’s communities about the problem, the communities were slow to act. They planned construction of pit latrines but no one seemed to take a leading role until Mr. Mazungwi, one of the longest-serving teachers at the school, stepped up. Despite being in his early 60s, he dug a four-room latrine, two for boys and two for girls. He built its walls and constructed its roof. “I did this to set the pace and show a sense of ownership, as PSSP: SFP had taught us,” he said.



His action made an immediate impact. One of the village heads and his community members marveled at Mr. Mazungwi’s enthusiasm and commitment. They came and constructed more pit latrines. Two other teachers have been mobilized to make bricks and dig more pits where they intend to construct more latrines. Other villages are ferrying sand and bricks to construct still more pit latrines with the plan of each village providing two latrines.

Mr. Mazungwi started it all with his individual effort. “To us he is a role model. Look how the communities have responded to the action of just one man — who is, fascinatingly, a teacher,” said Mr. Sosola, a teacher at the school.

“Our school environment is now more hygienic and we no longer have to use the bush or rush to our hostel and homes to use the toilet facilities,” added Pricilla Kalino.

Success Story: Resurrecting the Sweet Past of Storytelling

Surrounding a hearth in the quiet of evening, spellbound and attentive children sit listening to the voice and rhythm of an elderly storyteller. From a distance, they look like human shadows drawn together by the magnetic power of a burning fire. This was a common sight in days that are now far gone, when parents and elderly people told stories from which children suckled the milk of moral lessons — and learned the art of storytelling themselves. It was part of the life and identity of clans and communities.

When communities ask why children are not as disciplined and morally upright as children of the past, one of the most cited contributing factors is the disappearance of storytelling in the villages.

Following PSSP: SFP sensitizations and mobilization activities, communities around Lufe School lamented the morality of their children. Some girls had dropped out of school because of early pregnancies and marriages. Some children were said to be rude and lacked respect for teachers and parents. “We need to resume storytelling,” one parent commented during a focus group discussion at the school. The entire community agreed.

Today volunteer parents come to schools to tell stories and anecdotes to pupils. At the end of each story, children are asked to glean moral lessons from the story, and parents summarize. “We are happy with the storytelling, as we have seen some positive change of behavior in some children,” commented one of the teachers at the school. This has also increased the interest of the children in school and has led to increased enrollment.



9. BUILDING CAPACITY AND CREATING SYNERGIES WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The Primary School Support Program: School Fees Pilot (PSSP: SFP) followed a holistic approach to achieve its objectives. Its implementation involved a number of institutions. The lead implementer has been the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Its partners are the Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM), Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) and Miske Witt & Associates Inc. (MWAI). These institutions developed strategies to draw on the capacity of government extension workers, communities, teachers and other stakeholders in Dowa and beyond the district's borders.



The project worked closely with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Information and the Dowa District Assembly. Meetings to brief and begin planning came first, followed by briefing meetings with members of the District Assembly, government extension workers and traditional chiefs. The departments involved included Education, Youth, Agriculture, Information, Social Welfare, Labor and Community Development. The extension workers included Primary Education Advisors, Community Development Assistants and Social Welfare Assistants. The briefings addressed the project goal, objectives, methods and activities. The exercise was intended to include every stakeholder from the very beginning.

Stakeholders in the briefing meetings selected sites at which baseline data would be collected and where Theatre for Development action research activities would be conducted. This was followed by a week-long training of Change Agents (government extension workers) and government districts' heads of department. The extension workers trained teachers, community leaders and members of school governing bodies at community-based workshops. Participants in these workshops created plans of action for more concentrated community and school-based project activities.

The project built the capacity of teachers in pedagogy through incremental training sessions. Tutors from Teacher Training Colleges were taught how to facilitate these sessions. The project also piloted the Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCM), an initiative that aimed at empowering Malawian youths who have attended school to render voluntary services for the development of education in Dowa. The initiative proved that Malawian youths, if used well, can help in the development of the country more or less the same way as the Peace Corps does. This project also collaborated with other projects operating in Dowa in order to share with them valuable information for the district. All these initiatives and several others are presented in this section.



TRAINING AND ENGAGEMENT OF CHANGE AGENTS

Change Agents are extension workers employed by the Government of Malawi. These are the people who are found either at the zone or district level working with communities and schools. The PSSP: SFP Project has worked closely with Change Agents from Malawian line ministries: the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Ministry of Women and Child Development, and Ministry of Health.

PSSP: SFP has trained and involved 63 Change Agents from the three key ministries and 384 support Change Agents such as agricultural extension workers, forestry assistants and health surveillance assistants.

The training and involvement of the Change Agents aims at building the Agents' capacity with mobilization skills and with content matter related to the project. This was meant to put in place sustainability measures for PSSP: SFP. When the project comes to an end, Change Agents will remain in the communities of Dowa and ideally continue the progress the project tries to encourage.

The Agents' ongoing involvement helps to establish a holistic and coordinated force for continuing improvement. Their training ended with creation of plans of action to ensure their continual engagement.

As a first step in mobilizing Change Agents, PSSP: SFP conducted a needs assessment. Theatre for Development (TFD) provided the needed research findings. The appropriate government ministries to be involved had already been identified during the writing of proposal for the project to the donor, USAID. The TFD research findings enabled the project team to gain deeper understanding of the problems in Dowa. Based on the needs assessment, relevant training materials were developed. The materials included information about PSSP: SFP and strategies for mobilizing people in the communities.

Some of the community mobilization strategies were designed to equip the Change Agents with information about how to approach adults, mobilize community members and teachers, monitor areas of challenge, facilitate meetings and document project impact.



Change Agents received one week of training including theoretical presentations and practical training such as focus group discussions. Project facilitators listened attentively and modeled appropriate behavior for the Change Agent trainees.

The project also contributed fuel for Change Agents' motorcycles to help them travel around their areas when doing community-based sensitization activities under the project. Participatory monitoring was established at all levels, enabling PSSP: SFP to document the project's interventions and impact.

Training and involvement of Dowa Change Agents has helped build project ownership among the Change Agents as well as in communities and schools of the district.

Change Agents later implemented their plans of action, including sensitization meetings, group discussions, community-based workshops, supervision, review meetings and follow-ups to community-generated actions plans. These activities led to intensive and extensive sensitization, motivation and mobilization of communities. Consequently, community-based initiatives mushroomed, resulting in more resources for schools, more committed teaching by teachers, community members teaching vocational skills to pupils and greater support for orphans and other vulnerable children. The time children spent learning also increased as they received more support from various stakeholders. Pupils' learning gains increased between 28%-39% through the project lifespan.

Training and involvement of Change Agents is a sure pathway to project sustainability. They bring the technical expertise and support to schools and become proponents of education. The value of Change Agents is now recognized in development work. Almost every project wants to involve them. Hence, PSSP: SFP established Cluster Leaders to complement the work of Change Agents. Cluster Leaders are members of the community selected within community clusters to serve as community-based Change Agents. They also receive training at the community level and have proved to be another powerful tool for community mobilization. Ministries and department heads at district level should utilize all the trained Change Agents for effective continuity of education development programs that the project has instituted. Thanks to the use of Change Agents, PSSP: SFP will remain a legacy in Dowa communities.



Success Story: Extension Workers Proudly Support Goals of PSSP: SFP

Government field extension workers help guide communities to solve community and school related problems. Extension workers support school and community initiatives and pupils' learning. One of the achievements of PSSP: SFP has been to foster and build good relationships between communities and extension workers — or Change Agents, as they are called.

Before PSSP: SFP, many government field extension workers did not work with communities and schools, leaving the task to Primary Education Advisors (PEAs). To some extent Community Development Assistants (CDAs) and Social Welfare Assistants (SWAs) worked hand-in-hand with PEAs in projects such as the Social Mobilization Campaign for Educational Quality. However, PSSP: SFP extended the involvement of field extension workers to include Change Agents from other government departments, such as health, agriculture and forestry — whereas in the past the same extension workers viewed schools as a no-go zone.

Through PSSP: SFP activities, extension workers realized they had greater roles to play in assisting their communities and schools. Agents consequently became instrumental in supporting school initiatives and conducting demonstrations at schools to help pupils acquire practical knowledge and skills.

Among field extension workers most active in communities is Mr. Owen Mhango, an Agriculture Extension Development Officer from Bowe cluster in Chimbuli. As a role model of the district, Mr. Mhango has been instrumental in demonstrating agriculture lessons and establishing irrigated vegetable gardens (*dimba*) to raise money to support orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in his cluster and beyond. Mr. Mhango also supported villagers in their efforts to establish Community-Based Child Care Centers (CBCCCs). These communities now are ready to sustain their CBCCC through community-based income generating activities.

“We commend the efforts that our agriculture advisor has made in making sure that this CBCCC is self-sustainable. Through his sound advice and commitment we have been able to cultivate two acres of cassava and one acre of maize,” commented the chairperson of Katseka CBCCC within the catchment area of Gudyu school. The maize harvest was 20 bags which helped to feed 60 children at the CBCCC. “Thanks to the PSSP: SFP project, as it has drawn together different stakeholders to make sure that our children are able to learn,” said the chairperson of Katseka.

Mr. Mhango has inspired other field extension workers to follow his example. Schools at Matsewa, Gudyu and Bowe have also established school gardens as a result. These efforts are assisting many children to understand agriculture, health and science better.

“The most commendable thing is that when the children have acquired the skills they are able to apply them at their homes. These have assisted not only the OVCs but also the economically disadvantaged families. We are sure that the agriculture initiatives that we have introduced at school and village level shall empower the communities economically and improve resources at the school level. This could not have happened in the absence of PSSP: SFP. Thanks to the multi-sectoral approach of the project that has drawn different stakeholders to work together in improving the education of every child in Dowa,” said Mr. Mhango.



CLUSTER LEADERS

A cluster leader is a man or woman elected by the community to lead in various social development activities within a community and find solutions to problems affecting the community's everyday life.

The cluster leader is elected transparently to the position by all members of the community at a gathering. No single person has the power and the mandate to dictate and impose a cluster leader on the people, not even the community leader. Doing so may result in nonperformance by the community with regard to development of the area.

The rationale behind the introduction of cluster leaders is that government field extension workers who have been in the lead of development activities in communities for some time, are overly engaged as government and institutions discover their importance, leaving some activities undone or poorly done. To remedy the situation, PSSP: SFP introduced cluster leaders to take the lead in implementing some of its project activities. Cluster leaders' other responsibility is to involve the community so that development activity will be sustainable.

Roles of Cluster Leaders

Cluster leaders have a range of roles to perform in developing the community: spearheading development work; facilitating, guiding and shaping ideas in the community; lobbying for external support for their schools; monitoring development work for quality outcomes; and working with other stakeholders including extension workers, traditional leaders, and SMCs and PTAs. Cluster leaders also mediate development-related conflicts among stakeholders and try to cultivate a smooth working spirit.

The process of identifying cluster leaders started with sensitization meetings for all stakeholders, including community leaders, SMCs, PTAs, teachers, religious groups and community members. The goal and objectives of the project were described at these meetings.



Selection of a Cluster Leader

Thereafter, community members were asked to select a cluster leader: someone dedicated to development work, especially education; someone who participates diligently in development work; someone with no criminal record and no reputation for poor behavior. Cluster leaders should manage their own household activities well and have education at least to standard 8. The cluster leader must be someone the community can trust and who commands respect. During the election of a cluster leader, no one in authority should try to appoint a cluster leader, but traditional leaders and religious leaders should be present to ensure a free and fair election.

A needs assessment must be conducted to help the community come to agreement on what a cluster leader's focus will be in leading development activities, and to assist in deciding what training materials need to be developed. The needs assessment is followed by development of required training materials for the project to be implemented in the community. Soon after the development of materials, a training workshop is organized at which cluster leaders receive training in goals and objectives of the project,

sensitization, motivation and mobilization skills. Finally, cluster leaders create plans of action to be carried out for the next six months.

Implementation of the Action Plans

After training, participants go to their communities to implement the plans of action. They conduct sensitization meetings with various stakeholders and start doing initiatives and activities to develop their schools. While this is taking place, cluster leaders monitor progress of the work being done in schools. They give guidance where needed. Consultations are done with traditional leaders and project staff to make sure everything goes on well. PSSP: SFP project staff also monitor progress and support the cluster leaders technically and sometimes materially.

Today the role of cluster leaders is valued in communities. They have brought about positive results in development activities. Financial resources have increased in schools. Income-generating activities that cluster leaders have helped develop in schools include growing agricultural crops and raising pigs, goats and chickens. School infrastructure has improved as government and donors have provided more support.

School blocks, toilets, teacher houses, libraries and head teachers' offices have been built. Cluster leaders' success at developing schools strengthens their hand in asking government, individuals and the donor community including the embassies for more support for school development activities. Kapaza School in Mponela zone is a shining example.



There are a few challenges. When the wrong people are elected to the position of a cluster leaders, the community may shun development work. Poor sensitization meetings have resulted in some conflict of cluster leaders with other stakeholders such as the MCMs (representatives from Mobilization Corps of Malawi) on who is senior between the two. Cluster leaders lacking education may underperform in the role. Also, some suburban communities haven't responded well to development work under cluster leaders.

A lesson learnt from the activity is that cluster leaders who are educated and experienced perform better. This is seen at Kapaza School, where the cluster leader had the capacity to go and lobby for support from the American embassy because he knew what to do.

It is recommended that cluster leaders work with other stakeholders including CDAs, PEAs and SWAs (Social Welfare Assistants) so that funding of development work can be referred to the district assembly for assistance.

Success Story: Cluster Leaders Bring a Ray of Hope for Mau Zikiyere

What a tough and rough road Mau Zikiyere seems to have had in life ever since her birth. She was born with deformed legs that rendered her unable to walk. At 14 years old, she still crawls on her knees. During her first year of basic education, her loving mother used to carry her on her back to Simankwala School in Senga Zone. At that time, they were staying in Saika Village, within sight of the school.

However, in 2002, that all changed when her family broke apart after years of problems. This forced Mau's mother to return to her home village, Chiotha, about a kilometer away from the school and marked the end of schooling for Mau. Her mother could no longer carry her that far to school.

Mau's heart was broken. Unwilling to accept the reality of her schooling fate, at first she would wake up in the morning, dress, get her books and started crawling to school. However, within the first week of starting standard 2, she dropped out completely due to the frustrating journey.

At times she sat on the verandah of her home, watching her fellow learners playing and laughing on the way to school, and tears trickled down Mau's cheeks in hopelessness and frustration.

Then came PSSP: SFP, which initiated its activities in the district with a series of community sensitization and mobilization meetings. PSSP: SFP's message at the meetings hinged on providing more access to schools and better quality in basic education, especially for girls, orphans and other vulnerable children.

These activities included Simankwala School, where the SMC realized it had a mandate to help girls like Mau get to school. SMC conducted a series of meetings to plan activities. Using lobbying skills taught by PSSP: SFP, the SMC approached American doctors who worked at Blessings Hospital in Lumbadzi and narrated the story of Mau to them. The doctors donated a wheelchair to Mau Zikiyere. SMC members built a ramp to facilitate her entry into the classroom and raised MK2,000 (USD\$15) to repair Mau's wheelchair when needed.



Finally, Mau was able to go to school. Despite entering standard 2 at the age of 14, she is accepted and doing well in school. Her peers and her supportive brother help push the wheelchair to school. She was ranked second in her class at the end of the school year and has been promoted to standard 3. She hopes one day to become a teacher and assist learners, as she has been assisted.

LINKING WITH OTHER DONORS, POLITICIANS, AND NGOs

As the Chewa adage says, “*Walira mvula walira matope*” — or, “Those who cry for rain should get prepared for the mud.” This signifies the importance of self-sacrifice, participation and volunteerism in any endeavor geared towards bringing change in a society.

Communities in Dowa district, including individuals entrusted to represent the peoples’ views in Parliament, have been crying for development. Yet for a long time no meaningful development took place, in part because the people thought doing so would mean scoring points for the present government. The people believe that any social, economic and developmental change is the responsibility of government.

Neither did the people work together with NGOs trying to implement social and economic activities in the district. NGOs themselves were not coming together to share and see how they could complement one another’s efforts. NGOs instead were working in isolation and often were seen as competitors.

It is little wonder that Dowa is often regarded as backward and the least developed district of the country, despite being only half an hour’s drive from the capital city, Lilongwe.

Despite all this, the people of Dowa needed change. Something needed to be done to remove misconceptions surrounding communities’ support towards development and to win the support of all political players, including NGOs.

The inception of the PSSP: SFP project in Dowa district came at the right time, as the people were crying for the much-sought development not only in education but in other sectors as well.



At the very beginning, the PSSP: SFP project took on board all the political players in the district as well as the NGOs through sensitization and initial briefing meetings and participation in District assembly meetings where the project goal and objectives were communicated to the people. PSSP: SFP also made efforts to involve all the members of Parliament in various field activities, such as project launch, open days, fundraising activities, MCM programs and special group activities. This allowed members of Parliament to witness and appreciate what the project is committed to do in the district.

Through its nonpartisanship, the project has maintained the cordial relations that the project built at the beginning, and the two parties have worked well together. This has borne good fruits.

The MPs have been engaged in bringing much-sought external support to the community through the constituency fund. This in effect has increased resources in the schools. For example, teachers houses and school blocks have been constructed that are in use now.

We have also seen resource leveraging among different stakeholders and consequently significant reduction in cost of schooling in the district. MPs have donated materials to teachers and learners, including orphans and vulnerable children. These gifts have improved access as well as quality in the schools. Hence the burden of schooling is not shouldered by the parents only but is shared by the community.

Successful advocacy at district level has seen the district team embracing the project vision of improving education in the district so that sustainability of the project's efforts is assured even if support for the project phases out. Skillful utilization of special groups to enhance education in the district is also being used by NGOs to mobilize the community and raise funds.



Because of these efforts and thanks to support from various stakeholders, in Dowa we can proudly stand and say that we have achieved a lot. Where we

have coordinated efforts among stakeholders and where the political will is strong, the outcome of sustainable project interventions is good.

Projects have brought different stakeholders together to effect change, and indeed change has been seen in Dowa. What remains now is to continue the efforts that have brought this change. The District Assembly must be in the forefront to make sure that the district continues to move progressively.

Success Story: Community Lobbying Gives Gudyu School a New Look

Just north of Chimbuli lies Gudyu School, with a catchment area of eight villages. The school, within the area of Group Village Head Katambo, had two permanent school blocks for standards 1-4 and an unused, dilapidated semi-permanent structure. As a result, some classes were taught outside under trees. This impeded learning, especially during rainy season when classes were frequently canceled.

Most people in the community believed that maintenance and construction of school infrastructure was the responsibility of the government and the community remained idle. The SMC (School Management Committee) sought assistance from MASAF (Malawi School Action Fund) but lacked the lobbying skills to secure that assistance. The community remained despondent about its lack of school buildings and blamed government.

With the inception of PSSP: SFP, community leaders including the SMC at Gudyu school realized they had responsibility for improving education. They embarked on several initiatives, including building of a head teacher's office. Then they heard about the U.S. Ambassador's Self-Help Fund. The mobilized community, using lobbying skills learned from PSSP: SFP training, eagerly seized the opportunity to fix the dilapidated block. PSSP: SFP sensitizations "have really opened our eyes and we are very optimistic that that the assistance we are asking from the American Embassy shall materialize," said the SMC chairperson in submitting the application

The communities' optimism was well-founded. The US Embassy offered K500,000 (\$3,500 USD) to renovate the Gudyu school block. The community contributed sand, quarry stone, bricks and labor. The school block has since been rehabilitated and is better than new.

"We are happy to have this school block, and the problem of inadequate learning space is now being eased. This will help most of the pupils learn in classrooms," said Group Village Head Katambo.



Seeing the impact of the newly constructed block at the school, the member of Parliament for the area, Mr. V. Kamyala, has helped with funding for construction of two teachers' houses. "We are proud that what started as a mere dream has attracted other stakeholders to further develop the school. We were worried that we have a large enrollment with a few teachers because of inadequate teachers' houses. Our MP has bailed us by supporting the school with two teachers' houses. We lobbied for additional teachers and, if they come, they will find ready accommodation," commented the SMC chair for the school.



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