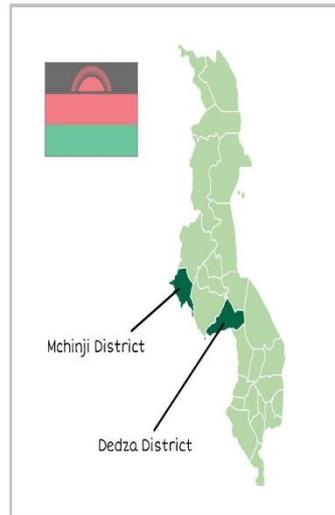




"We are able to teach our children at home because of the skills acquired from here."
Reading Mentor and parent



KEY FACTS

- Link has been working in Malawi since 2006
- Link Malawi works in Dedza and Mchinji Districts
- Link developed the first National Education Standards in August 2015
- We are leading the community engagement component of Malawi's National Reading Programme
- Over 37,000 children participated in our Reading Clubs
- Over 1,800 parents attended adult literacy classes
- 9,000 community members celebrated children's achievements at Reading Fairs
- Our projects are sustainable – we work with government at all levels and ensure our interventions align with government policy

Summary

Link Community Development has been working in Malawi since 2006 with funding from DfID, USAID, the Scottish Government, and Comic Relief, amongst others. Highlights include developing the first National Education Standards to be used in every primary and secondary school in the country, helping 4.5 million children; delivering a community engagement model that improves reading skills of young children; and demonstrating our school improvement model in a new district to show that it works.

Background

Currently only 38% of students reach and complete the final Grade of primary school (grade 8). Education quality is a major barrier to progression and completion of the primary school cycle. In Malawi the proportion of Standard 4 learners able to demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade-level text is 15.4%. Girls continue to underperform compared to boys. The Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education pass rates have been declining from 74.4% in 2006 to 68.9% in 2011. Boys have been performing better than girls and the gap between the two is wider in 2012 than it was in 2006. It is against this backdrop that Link supports schools and the government to provide quality education to all children. [Sources of figures - *Education Sector Improvement Plan II p.20-23*]

The Family Literacy Project (2013-2015)

The Family Literacy Project addresses the low literacy achievement of many primary school children and the lack of confidence of parents and community members in their ability to provide support to these children. The ability to read is the foundation for all learning, so gaining literacy skills leads to better learning outcomes across the entire curriculum. As parents are the first and most important educators of children, the family literacy approach supports both adults and children to develop literacy in the local language, Chichewa.

After School Reading Clubs

After-school reading clubs in 60 schools were run by high school graduates or "Reading Mentors" and supported by volunteers drawn from the local community. 37,704 learners in Standards 1–3 attended the Reading Clubs throughout the project lifetime. Club activities focused on making learning to read fun. This involved lots of active learning games

using materials made from locally available resources. Even volunteers who don't know how to read helped by collecting old cardboard and rice sacks, drawing pictures, and making paint from old pieces of chalk or ash.

Parent literacy classes

Adult literacy classes using the REFLECT approach were also run in the communities. This approach teaches literacy using topics which are useful and interesting to the participants. If, for example, a group wanted to learn about Health, the community would meet and source or produce reading materials which explore factors that affect health like nutrition, food and hygiene, disease and the environment. A total of 1,866 adult learners (1,454 women and 412 men) were engaged in literacy development. After they had gained a good foundation of literacy, the adults were encouraged to support the Reading Clubs and even to act as teaching assistants in their children's schools.



Community Engagement – Reading Fairs

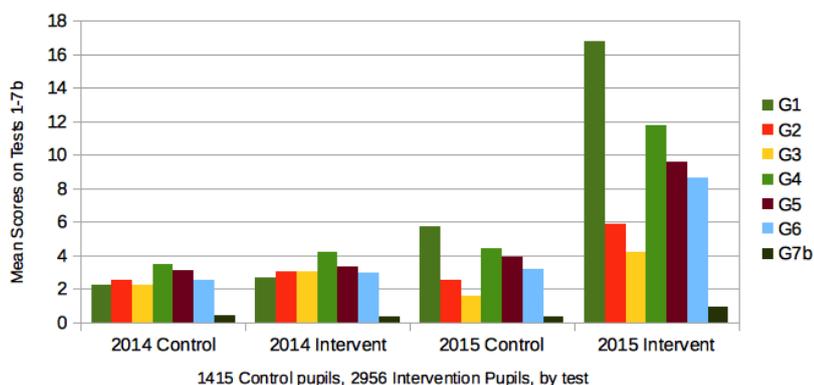


To showcase the children's new reading skills, we held Reading Fairs in 15 community centres across Dedza District. Over 9,000 parents and community members came to see what their children had learned and to celebrate their achievements. Reading Fairs helped to emphasise that learning is fun and literacy development is a positive experience. Children and parents were proud to see the improvements in their abilities, and everyone felt that they had played a role.

Impact on children's learning

We tested learners at the beginning and end of the project to find out if Reading Clubs made a difference to children's learning. Our data analysis demonstrates that the learners in the schools which held Reading Clubs have a higher level of literacy at the end of the project compared both to the literacy levels of the intervention schools before the intervention and the control schools.

Comparing Control and Intervention Pupils, G Test scores



Scaling up our success – the National Reading Programme

The National Reading Programme aims to improve literacy for learners in Standards 1–4 across Malawi through a holistic approach, including curriculum development, teacher training and community mobilisation. Link is responsible for the community mobilisation and engagement section of the intervention, which aims to create opportunities outside of school for young learners to practice literacy skills; to build parents' understanding of the importance of learning to read early, and how they can support this in school and at home; and to enable parents to understand how well their children are learning to read in school. To do this we draw on our learning from the successful Family Literacy Project so that communities across Malawi can help their children to read.

Delivery Partner



Ministry of
Education, Science
and Technology