LINK COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

FINAL REPORT OF THE FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

Children playing a syllable game in the sand

DEDZA DISTRICT

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Acronyms

ADC: Area Development Committee
CBE: Complementary Basic Education
CDA: Community Development Assistant
CERT: Centre for Research and Testing
DCDO: District Community Development Office/Officer
DEC: District Executive Committee
DEM: District Education Manager/Management
DEO: District Education Office
EGRA: Early Grade Reading Assessment
FLP: Family Literacy Project
IGA: Income Generating Activity
JCE: Junior Certificate of Education
MERIT: Malawi Early Reading Improvement activity
MIE: Malawi Institute of Education
MSCE: Malawi School Certificate of Education
MoEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
MTPDS: Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support
PEA: Primary Education Advisor
REFLECT: Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
TALULAR: Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources
SEGREM: Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi
SSIM: Supporting School Improvement in Malawi
TA: Traditional Authority
USAID: United States of America International Development
VDC: Village Development Committee
VRC Village Reading Centres

Acknowledgements

Link Community Development is indebted to the Dedza District Education Manager (DEM) and District Community Development Officer (DCDO) and their offices for the good partnership that was established and existed throughout the project implementation period. This partnership enabled the smooth implementation of the Family Literacy Project at the grassroots where there was good coordination of schools and the community, our targeted beneficiaries. We are particularly indebted to the Primary Education Advisors and Coordinating Primary Education Advisor through the DEM and the Community Development Assistants through the DCDO. Their daily efforts, working hand in hand with Link staff, to organize the zone activities at community and school level, and to mentor and supervise implementation efforts for maximum productivity, were invaluable to the success of the project.
We are also most grateful to the Dedza District Council for the strong development structures that exist in the form of the Area Development Committees and Village Development Committees which are key community-level partners in this project.

Executive Summary

After-school reading clubs were established in 60 schools and 120 community mentors received comprehensive training to run the clubs. Each club was supported by a committee of 10 members. Club activities focused on making learning to read fun. There was extensive cooperation between club mentors, teachers and the committees to produce reading games using locally available materials. They also cooperated to support the running of the clubs – playing games with the learners and reading with them in small groups. As a result, 37,704 learners in Standard 1 – 3 attended the Reading Clubs throughout the project lifetime.

14,590 Chichewa language books were purchased, produced and distributed to the Reading Clubs. These were used by the mentors during club time and by teachers and parents who were able to borrow the books to read with children. Link also supported the communities to produce their own stories which they wrote on cards, adding to the small selection of local language stories which are available at the school.

Adult literacy Reading Circles were established in 60 centres and tutors were trained to support learning using the REFLECT approach. A total of 1,866 Adult learners (1,454 women and 421 men) attended the Circles and 13,120 Community members were involved in REFLECT learning discussions to support the production of materials for the learning Circles. 420 women were sufficiently qualified and motivated to become literacy coaches in the Reading Clubs.

A total of 5,854 learners in the 60 project schools and 20 control schools were tested at baseline and follow-up to track the impact of the project. 80 female data collectors were recruited, trained and supported to carry out the learner testing in schools. The data was entered into a specially designed database to facilitate analysis. The result show that there is a significant increase in reading ability in the project schools compared to the control schools.

A total of 15 Reading Fairs or Literacy Fairs were held and attended by 9,176 community members. At the Reading Fairs, community leaders personally came to know what had been achieved and they were duty bound to support developmental work in their jurisdiction; teachers, Adult Literacy Facilitators and Reading Club Mentors came to demonstrate their achievements with teaching and coaching learners to read; learners came to proudly demonstrate their ability, mastery and positive change of attitude to life or school; governing bodies came to proudly bask in the glory of their organization efforts; other learners wanted to see how effective the Reading Clubs were; while parents, guardians and community members came to demonstrate that they believed in what was taking place at the occasion.

Introduction

Link Community Development is a family of five non-governmental organisations which design and deliver innovative programmes to promote inclusive and fair education in sub-Saharan Africa. Link began work in Malawi in 2006. At the district level, the Link office is located at the Dedza District Education Office and collaborates with district officials, including the District Education Manager and the Primary Education Advisors in the delivery of all its activities. Link Malawi works with all 236 Dedza district primary schools,
directly impacting on 175,678 learners, and indirectly impacting on 527,034 parents/community members.

Link received £301,703.03 from Oxford University Press to run the Family Literacy Project (FLP). The project was implemented by Link Community Development Malawi from May 2013 to October 2015 in partnership with the Dedza District Education Manager (DEM) and District Community Development Officer (DCDO). This report is a reflection of the implementation activities and processes which targeted Standard 1 to 3 learners in 60 project implementation schools and adult literacy learners in 60 REFLECT Circle Centres in the community. It informs the reader about activities that were planned for the project and any activities that were implemented in response to emerging issues or obstacles that were encountered during the implementation process. It reflects on the extent to which the objectives of the project were achieved, and the ongoing impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries.

**Background to the Family Literacy Project**

Nationally, access to basic education in Malawi has greatly improved since universal free primary education was introduced in 1994 (over 4 million learners are now in primary school). But this massive increase has also had negative consequences including:

- huge class sizes in lower primary. The average is 1 teacher per 80 learners but it is not uncommon to find Standard 1 and 2 classes of 100 to 150 learners;
- insufficient numbers of classrooms, teachers and teaching and learning materials;
- an average dropout rate of 10% and significantly higher rates for girls, especially in Standard 7 - 14.98% and Standard 8 - 15.98%,
- high repetition rates, especially in Standards 1 to 3 (averaging 22%),
- low numbers of girls completing secondary school (30% girls compared to 40% boys).

Dedza district is largely rural, the main economic activities being subsistence and small-scale commercial farming. 50.7% of Malawians are defined as living below the poverty line\(^1\), and 56.6% of those are living in rural areas. In Dedza district\(^2\), 56.8% of the population are designated as poor, and 25.1% as ultra-poor. 61.3% of adults are literate in Malawi\(^3\). However, this figure does not reveal the significant differences between urban and rural areas, or that more rural women are illiterate compared to men.

Dedza district is also affected by the negative consequences of a vastly increased primary enrolment, which is reflected in the EMIS 2011 report\(^4\):

- only 30.2% of children who enrol in Standard 1 in Dedza complete all 8 years of primary education
- there are very high repetition rates in Dedza for children in Standards 1 to 3, with an average 24% of learners having to repeat.

One serious consequence of the massive increase in primary school enrolment in Malawi has been poor learner attainment and there is very strong evidence that the majority of lower primary learners are not learning basic literacy skills.

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\(^1\) Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2012
\(^2\) Ibid
\(^4\) Government of Malawi, Education Statistics 2011
“Although the education sector has made significant gains in increasing equitable access to the primary education system, learning levels remain low as indicated in national learning assessments. The 2010 and 2011 USAID/Malawi early grade reading assessment results show that significant numbers of Standard 2 and 4 students had 0 scores in letter recognition, knew few letter names, read few words, and had minimal comprehension of grade level text, with 97.1% of Standard 2 students and 69.3% of students in Standard 4 unable to answer a single comprehension question correctly.”

A 2011 Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) policy brief corroborates the low achievement in literacy of learners described above, demonstrating that low literacy skills continue to be a problem in the upper levels of primary school. SACMEQ learner testing revealed that Malawian Standard 6 learners were only achieving Level 2 (Emergent Reading skills level) and Level 3 (Basic Reading skills level), well below the levels achieved in other southern and eastern African countries where the tests are regularly conducted.

Compounding the low literacy attainment of many learners is the fact that most Malawian children, particularly in rural districts such as Dedza, live in a literacy-poor environment, with many parents and community members themselves being illiterate and with very little access to reading materials. In such an environment and with the education system under strain, it is not surprising that learner attainment remains low. In terms of education provision, Malawi exemplifies the issues facing many low-income countries, including:

- compromised school quality - overcrowded classrooms, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, teacher shortages, and inadequate contact time.
- the impoverished background of many learners – malnutrition, low parental literacy rates, and lack of pre-school education.

“Literacy is the most neglected of the EFA [Education for All] goals; most children in low achieving countries are unable to comprehend grade-level texts. This has direct implications for achievement in all areas of study.”

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5 USAID, EGRA RFA 2012
6 SACMEQ Policy Brief, Trends in Achievement Levels of Grade 6 Learners in Malawi, 2011
7 Aga Khan Foundation, Improving Learning Achievement in Early Primary in Low Income Countries: A Review of the Research, 2009
The objectives of the Family Literacy Project

The Family Literacy Project is a means of addressing the low literacy achievement of many primary school children and the lack of confidence of parents/community members in their ability to provide support to these children. As the parents are the first and most important educators of children, the family literacy approach supports both adults and children to develop literacy.

The main objectives of the Family Literacy Project are:

(a) to improve the reading skills and learning attainment of early primary learners (Standards 1 -3),

(b) to increase parental/community support for the development of basic literacy skills for children, particularly at lower primary levels, and,

(c) to increase parental/community capacity to support school improvement.

This project aimed to increase access to reading materials, using the learners’ home language. It also aimed to increase adult literacy of parents, particularly mothers, and enhance community support for literacy by: providing literacy classes, especially focused on mothers; establishment of reading clubs where children can learn and read together; training classroom ‘parent helpers’ who will attend literacy lessons in lower primary classrooms to help support the learning of their children.

The project was delivered in 60 schools, directly impacting on 37,704 lower primary learners in the two years of project implementation. At project inception in 2014 there were 35,866 where Standard 1 had 7,866 girls and 6977 boys; Standard 2 had 5,583 girls and 5,811 boys; and Standard 3 had 4,333 girls and 5,296 boys). This intervention impacted directly on a minimum of 56,776 parents. In 2015 1,838 new Standard 1 children joined the clubs where 974 were girls and 864 were boys.

The intended outputs and outcomes of the project were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Standard 3 girl being coached by Adult Literacy Learners</td>
<td>A Standard 1 girl reading from a word tree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. After-school reading clubs established for primary school children and parents in 60 communities in Dedza district, run by community tutors/mentors

1. (a) parents and learners have greater access to reading materials and enabled to share reading and learning experiences
   (b) community members selected and trained to manage reading clubs

2. Open-source Chichewa readers produced and distributed to 60 communities in Dedza district

2. Quality supplementary readers available to learners and parents to enrich literacy learning and skills development

3. Parent literacy classes established in 60 communities in Dedza district, run by community tutors/mentors and parents trained to act as parent helpers in literacy lessons

3. (a) Parents, especially women, attain basic literacy skills to enable them to support their children's learning
   (b) community members selected and trained to provide literacy training for community members (as above)

4. Randomly sampled learners in Standards 1 – 3 assessed annually for reading skills by community members.

4. (a) Learner performance in reading skills determined in 60 (25%) Dedza school communities annually
   (b) Community members capacitated to conduct reading assessments of the children in their communities

5. Annual reading fairs held in 6 locations in Dedza district

5. Community understanding and support for reading and literacy substantially increased

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**Project Implementation**

**Inception phase: establishing partnerships, roles and responsibilities**

**Key Achievements - Inception**

Partnerships with District offices were built and affirmed, and roles for project delivery were agreed. At District level 10 Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), 4 Cluster Supervisors, 5 Assistant Centre Coordinators, and 8 Community Development Assistants received training.

Working through existing community governance structures, support for and ownership of the project were established.

The implementation of FLP started in May 2013 with a review of the project proposal to understand its scope, interventions and implementation processes. This was a step to making a detailed implementation plan which mandated Link Malawi to work with two sectors of the District Council: the District Education Office (DEO) and District Community Development Office (DCDO). Link Malawi and the DEO have an
existing Memorandum of Understanding which guides Link Malawi’s delivery of services in Dedza district in partnership with the DEO, but there was none with DCDO. Since Link was going to work directly with DCDO for the first time, an MOU was developed to guide how the two entities were going to work with each other on the project. These MoU established that Link was going to work with the two district offices through the existing structures.

FLP was designed to complement one of Link Malawi’s existing projects, Supporting School Improvement in Malawi (SSIM), which had already been introduced to the district structure including the District Executive Committee (DEC). DEC are the heads of departments and organizations at the district level, who would critique a project and may disallow it if it was not going to add value to the district or they would recommend if it brought the needed change. At the community level, the highest authority is the Traditional Authority (TA) who is the traditional leader heading the Area Development Committee (ADC) and the custodian of the people that execute all development action in the community. The role of the ADC was to accept the new project, ensure that there would be harmony in its operation and bring perceived change in the community. The TA informed the community about FLP through the existing structures in the impact area where the intervention activities were going to take place.

The ADC development structure gathered Group Village Heads, Village Heads, Village Development Committee representatives, special community committee representatives for committees such as education, health, security, agriculture and special groupings like the faith-based representatives. Government extension workers, civil society organisations and non-governmental organizations workers who are resident in the community also may attend such gatherings. These are the community structures that form the lines of authority from the ADC chairperson to the general community. Alongside the ADC there is the Area Executive Committee comprising of all government extension workers in the jurisdiction of the TA and they also form part of the VDC, a grouping of selected members including government extension workers from different ministries. To ensure effective establishment of FLP in the district and the selected zones of intervention, Link Malawi went through the whole process described in here with the district level and community level staff.

The project implementation partnership of DCDO, DEO and Link was established from the district level down to the grassroots. There was a district project monitoring team comprising the DCDO, the Deputy DEM and the Project Manager for Link whose roles were to plan and direct project implementation activities and processes as well as to review and redirect intervention activities where and when it became necessary to do so. Link Malawi trained PEAs and Cluster Supervisors on specific areas that were implemented specifically for FLP in the Reading Clubs. The PEAs and Cluster Supervisors in turn trained Club Mentors and the teachers who in turn trained the Reading Club Committees, the Mentors, Club Committees and teachers trained the community to coach learners in Standard 1 to 3. CDAs from DCDO trained REFLECT Facilitators to teach adult literacy learners in their learning centres. The Club members and adult literacy learners were the direct beneficiaries of the project.

It was also the role of PEAs, CDAs and Cluster Supervisors to lobby with VDCs to mobilize parents, guardians and opinion leaders to support all FLP activities. They also supported Mentors and Adult Literacy Facilitators in their day to day activities as they worked with the target beneficiaries to implement activities on the ground. From the group of parents, guardians and opinion leaders a VDC elected Reading Club Committees at each school which had a membership of 10 with an equal representation of men and women. The 10 committee members for each school came from ten villages in the catchment of the
school. They were closest to the community and being the liaison between the village and the community their roles were to give information to schools and community about Reading Club activities and quality of coaching reading. They trained communities to produce learning materials and lobbied with communities and enabled the children in the school Reading Clubs and the adult learners to take part and get involved the planned activities.

The DEO, DCDO and Link Malawi made all communications and project orientation at the district level, while the PEAs and CDAs organized and conducted all orientation meetings to inform ADC structures about FLP. After these orientations PEAs generally worked with the reading clubs while CDAs worked with the adult literacy classes and the community.

The 4 TAs, Kachere, Kaphuka, Chauma and Tambala welcomed the project into their communities and called on the community members to support the Reading Clubs by ensuring that their children and wards patronized them and they appealed to the adults to enrol for adult literacy classes. Permission was granted at the ADC for implementation activities to start through the VDCs who mobilized the community. DEO selected 5 zones of Chilanga, Chimwangalu, Chitundu, Tchetsa and Maonde for the intervention based on levels of learner achievement. Adult literacy classes were established in the same zones and as close as possible to the school. The Reading Clubs also allowed Complementary Basic Education (CBE) learners who felt that they needed extra coaching in reading, to attend and take part in the reading activities at the clubs together with the other learners. CBE Cluster Supervisors assisted in the monitoring of the activities at the clubs in their zones of operation.

**Lessons Learned**

Strong working relationships with district government partners meant that the project was aligned to government objectives and was embedded within the practice of government offices. This had implications for the successful delivery of the project as well as its sustainability.

Working through existing structures was very important to the success of FLP. The PEAs, CDAs and other existing extension workers lived in the communities where they worked and they understood the communities that they worked with very well. They devised and followed implementation strategies that were receptive in specific areas, working with Link at every step of the process. As a result, challenges were easily addressed by experienced and trusted workers.

Taking time at the inception phase to build support through community and village structures was also crucial to ensure the support of volunteers at the Reading Clubs and the attendance of learners.

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8 Complementary Basic Education is an accelerated learning programme for out of school children, designed to enable children who have dropped out of school to catch up and re-enrol in mainstream primary education. It is run by Malawi government and Link is the implementing partner in Dedza District.
Output 1: Establishment of after school Reading Clubs in 60 primary schools

**Key achievements - Output and Outcome 1**

After-school reading clubs were established in 60 schools and 120 community mentors received comprehensive training to run the clubs. Each club was supported by a committee of 10 members. Club activities focused on making learning to read fun. There was extensive cooperation between club mentors, teachers and the committees to produce reading games using locally available materials. They also cooperated to support the running of the clubs – playing games with the learners and reading with them in small groups. As a result, 37,704 learners in Standard 1 – 3 attended the Reading Clubs throughout the project lifetime.

When implementation of FLP started, Link Community Development and the District Education Manager consulted and decided on the selection of intervention zones so that deserving zones were targeted. The target zones presented high dropout and repetition rates and low performance in standards 1 to 3. Membership to the reading clubs was voluntary. In response to this, Family Literacy Project targeted 60 public primary schools for the intervention which naturally also selected the same school communities for the adult literacy learning centres intervention as well.

The 60 schools were selected from the 5 zones of Chilanga which had 14 schools, Chimwangalu with 16 schools, Chitundu with 12 schools, part of Maonde with 8 schools and Tchetsa with 10 schools. Meetings were held with VDCs, a grouping where head teacher are members, with the emphasis for the need to take an active role in mobilizing the community to support reading clubs and adult literacy centres in their jurisdiction. The VDCs took an active role in advertising and calling for applications for the positions of Mentors for Reading Clubs and Facilitators for Adult Literacy Centres. Many applications were received from Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) holders and few Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) holders where no MSCE holders could be found. Over 590 applications were received for all the positions and 340 were shortlisted for interviews. They ensured that the application procedures were not flouted and some of the VDC members took part in the interviewing of the candidates.

At the end of the interviews in each zone, 2 Mentors were identified for each Reading Club. Initially Reading Clubs were staffed by a Mentor and Supervisor, but later it was discovered that the nature of

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9 MSCE is obtained after successfully completing exams after all 4 years of secondary school; JCE is obtained after 2 years.
work at the club allowed no specific work for the Supervisor, while the Mentor was overburdened, so they both became Mentors doing the same work for the members.

PEAs of each intervention zone called for an all head teachers meeting in each zone to orient them about the setting up of reading clubs in each school. The meetings were also attended by selected VDC members and CDAs. CDAs also called for community meetings to lobby with parents to encourage Standard 1 to 3 learners to patronise Reading Clubs and parents to enrol for adult literacy classes.

The essence of these meetings was to ensure that all implementers were starting activities from the same perception and at the same time. Head teachers were to oversee the running of the clubs, the performance of Mentors, the mobilization of Standard 1 to 3 teachers to work with the Mentors and be the custodian of all teaching and learning materials.

Schools were grouped into clusters of two to three schools in each zone at VDC level to provide a platform for club members and adult literacy members to meet for activities and share experiences. Communities identified a pool of men and women who were keen on education to sit on the Reading Club Management Committees. Names were submitted and ten names, five men and five women, were approved at the VDC. It was decided that they should not be members of any school governing body or learners because their work was demanding.

A reporting structure was established where the school administration were given the mandate to ensure that Clubs, comprising of Standard 1, 2 and 3 learners, met on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at the schools for two hours from 2:00 to 4:00pm. In schools where there was strong Moslem background, clubs met for about an hour or an hour and half to share the time with Madrassa classes. The club Mentors reported to the school administration every day to inform the head teacher that they were present and to collect their working materials on every meeting day. Mentors were instructed to inform the head teacher if they had any problem or needed something.

Standard 1 to 3 teachers were mobilized by head teachers after the briefing and orientation on FLP impending establishment of Reading Clubs. Teachers provided names of learners by class and by gender. They also provided preliminary learners’ reading grades in each class into four categories by level of performance those in the alphabet level, in syllable level, word level and sentence reading level. Teachers also monitored the learners’ reading ability in their classes and gave feedback to the reading club Mentors to help verify if the learners had to move up to the next level or regroup with another group of learners for a new learning environment in the same level. Teachers also reminded learners to attend the reading clubs and take part in all activities.
Training
Before any activity could start, PEAs and Cluster Supervisors received thorough orientation about FLP, trained on production and use of local teaching and learning materials and experimented with different teaching and learning methods for reading coaching. They had to pass all these skills to Mentors before they started interacting with the learners in the clubs.

One hundred and twenty Mentors attended an intensive three day initial training workshop where they were oriented to the Family Literacy Project. They were taken through the objectives of the project, intervention activities and implementation processes, and were trained how to teach learners to read. They were oriented to the Standard 1 to 3 Chichewa reading syllabus to know and understand the content and scope of work by class. Link Malawi trained PEAs and CBE Cluster Supervisors to train Mentors to produce teaching and learning materials using locally available resources. Generic topics for FLP Reading Club trainings covered several areas that enabled the administration of the clubs, management of multi class learners on task, identification of learner reading skills gaps, production and use of materials for reading skills development and mastery.

Introduction to FLP and the reading clubs
Participants learnt that the major objective of the FLP was to improve the rate at which the target learners mastered the reading skills and how to read with understanding. They were informed that they were going to interact with Standard 1 to 3 learners, that they may have learners from CBE centres and adult literacy learners. The participants were urged to respect the learners they were going to interact with for maximum productivity.

Communication
The topic defined communication and discussed ways of communicating, demonstrated effective communication, discussed importance of effective communication and possible barriers to communication. This topic equipped participants with skills and knowledge for communicating effectively with the learners who attended the reading clubs.
**Reading the alphabet**

This involved alphabet letters recognition and identification, naming and reading. They compared the English alphabet to the Chichewa alphabet and noted the letters that were included or excluded to make the difference. They did this using the alphabet line, alphabet songs, alphabet grids, bottle tops and letter cards line up. Participants were asked to pick, match and read the alphabet letters.

**Reading syllables**

The topic involved vowels and consonants recognition and identification, naming vowels and consonants, building syllables from a combination of vowels and consonants, matched similar syllables and lined up syllables from the same root. They made use of syllable grids, letter grids, vowel line cards, letters on bottle tops and letter cards for building syllables and sang songs to master reading.

**Building words**

Participants were asked to build as many words as they could make from a combination of consonants and vowels and syllables. The participants were asked to identify syllables in a Chichewa word, name the syllables in a Chichewa word, and build as many words as possible from syllables that were provided and read them. They identified and labelled real objects found in the environment like the classroom ‘mpando’ (chair), ‘khoma’ (wall) and zenera (window) and they did the same with objects and plants outside the classroom. They matched words with objects and matched objects with words which were demonstrated in different ways to make reading enjoyable to the learners. They brainstormed, built and listed family words like ‘zovala’ (clothing) chipewa, buluku, diresi, nsapato among others. They also listed words and their opposites. This activity was done by using syllable grid, word grid, word cards, pictures, drawings, numbers and objects and listed words from root syllables.

**Reading sentences**

Participants used different word cards to make as many sentences as they could from the available words. They drew match stick figures and matched the drawings and pictures with sentences. They re-ordered words in given sentences and also composed sentences using given words based on given pictures or drawings. They joined phrases to make complete sentences.
**Reading with understanding (comprehension)**

Participants identified mistakes in given sentences and made the corrections using word cards and sentence strips. They also completed sentences correctly, re-ordered sentences in a given passage, used substitution tables correctly, developed a story line from given pictures and answered questions from a given passages. They substituted words in sentences to change meanings of sentences or they added words to sentences to extend meanings or removed some words from given sentences to change meanings.

**When reading for comprehension and enjoyment**

Participants produced picture stories and wrote sentences that described them. They dramatized stories they had read, answered questions on the stories they had read and they also completed some simple cloze passages.

**Record keeping**

Participants were taught how to complete the records in the learner attendance register and how to use all the reporting templates. They were taken through different reporting templates and discussed the significance of each data collection tool and the data collected by discussing the effects of the gaps that would occur if some specific data were omitted.

By the end of the project in October 2015, Reading Club Mentors had mastered ways of assessing learners’ performance and allocating them into appropriate working groups according to attainment levels. They kept records of learner performance which they shared with teachers. The support and efforts that Reading Clubs had were especially appreciated by Standard 1 to 3 teachers who saw change in reading ability for learners who frequented Reading Clubs; and teachers who kept library books reported an increase in learners who were borrowing books to read, in this case even the English books.

**Further training**

After the initial training, Mentors received three more incremental trainings one of which they attended with head teachers and the Standard 1 to 3 teachers. The subsequent trainings mostly focused on production of locally made pre-reading and reading materials in order to increase their availability for the club. They needed to produce different types and amounts of reading materials so that they were enough to go round for everyone. When materials were adequate it was easy to enhance diversification of reading methods. Early grade reading was made to look ‘accidental’, meaning it was made to be fun and easy and
not taxing, neither for the teacher nor learner. Different reading materials of different grades were produced and different reading methods were used to occupy the learners and give as many children as possible an opportunity to play one or two reading games every meeting day.

**Involving teachers**

Head teachers and teachers for Standard 1 to 3 were trained to produce local pre-reading materials. These ensured adequate provision and availability of a wide range of reading materials for learners to use by reusing discarded paper and any flat surface; they made paints from soil, chalk, charcoal and other powders. Several simple and playful methods for training in early grade reading were introduced, used where participants practiced individually, in pairs and in groups. The provision and use of these Teaching And Learning Using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR) helped to establish learners’ reading levels so that they could be grouped into appropriate reading levels. With these materials and methods, learners played different reading games which made learning to read a lot of fun.

The teachers were trained together with the Mentors and they learnt useful hints from the demonstrations made by Mentors during training that they employed in their classes. This also helped the teachers to identify reading stages which helped them to see why learners failed to read in their classes, they discovered which stages of reading such learners had missed. Teachers were assisted to make informed decisions about how to deal with the different challenges that were presented when reading in class. Teachers realised that non-professional stakeholders in the community could be trained and be relied upon to provide professional assistance when needed.

**Establishment of Reading Club Committees**

The intention of FLP was to embed the Reading Clubs within the village community. This arrangement required the services of a liaison body that would join the community to the school and the school to the community and this was none other than the Reading Club Committee. In some quarters on the ground, this body is known as the Literacy Committee. These were a group of 10 people generally comprising of 5 men and 5 women, although in a few areas the men exceeded the women because very few women were bold enough to effectively show what they were able to do or few were literate to follow activities that children were learning at the clubs.
The committee had three major roles: (i) to lobby with the community including parents and guardians to support the activities of the Reading Club by encouraging the learners to enrol and participate; (ii) to train the community how to make reading materials by contributing stories, drawing and painting illustrations, providing cardboard, local paints, string, rice sacks and other materials; and (ii) to help manage the Reading Club and use these materials with the learners. Village Development Committees called for community meetings in their areas from time to time to review the impact of FLP activities on the children who participated in the reading clubs and adults who attended the REFLECT classes. It was at these meetings where Reading Club Committees were elected for each school, one person was elected per prominent village for ten villages in the catchment of the school and their roles were spelt out to them and shared to all. At the same meetings, VDCs informed the attendees that they would be calling on community members that were interested to help with coaching children how to read. They needed to enrol so that they could be organized into a working roster for different club meeting days to work with groups of children.

“I am very happy and don’t regret working as a member of the Reading Club Committee. I have been to school and I am literate; but for the first time since I started working with Reading Clubs I have learnt why it took me so long to learn to read and write Chichewa when I was in Standard 1. I didn’t understand how syllables were formed. Now, I know how letters make syllables and syllables make words, and this has even improved my reading abilities,” said Ms Kenala, Family Literacy Committee Member, Maonde Primary School

Reading Club activities
The Clubs meet three times a week for two hours per day. During this time the Mentors engage the learners in activities which improve their ability to read. The focus is on fun and variety rather than replicating a classroom environment which focuses on rote learning.

TALULAR materials are used to engage the learners and give as many children as possible the chance to play one or two reading games every meeting day. For example, a word grid (these are words written in boxes drawn on a large piece of paper) is provided to a group of learners. The same words are written on stacks of word cards and the children share the cards among themselves. Each child now has a stack of cards. Group members take turns reading aloud one word at a time from the grid and members check from their stack if they have that word. The learner who has the card with that word will cover the word on the grid with the word card. Some words will be written more than once, but only the one who covers
the word first will have given up the word card, such that some group members will be left with some word cards when there are no more words on grid. They are going to read the words on the cards and put where they should have been on the grid. Everyone will read the word on the card before putting it on top of the word in the grid. Reading Club members point out letters on the word grid. When they get something right the Committee leads the clapping and sometimes sings a song for them.

Another game is sentence building, where learners use word cards to build sentences. Here, the Mentors write a number of sentences on paper and cut the sentences into separate words. Learners in groups are given the word cards and are asked to build as many correct Chichewa sentences as they can. Length of the sentences is not a limitation as long as it is in correct Chichewa. In their groups they copy down the sentences they have built before moving on to the next activity. At the end of the day, each group presents sentences that they have built in plenary and the fun is in seeing and knowing what opportunities each group had missed as revealed by the other groups’ work.

A “cinema box” created by the Reading Club Mentors, committee and the children at the club. The club members turn the handle to show different pictures on the reel. Then they select words to construct sentences which tell the story they see on the ‘screen’.

Having the opportunity to read books in Chichewa is also one of the highlights of the Clubs. Learners progress to reading books after they have built confidence in the basics through the literacy games. They might be given the opportunity to read individually or in pairs, or they might read along while the Mentor who reads aloud from a Big Book.

Reading Club Attendance
The 60 Reading Clubs were attended by a total of 37,704 learners in Standard 1 – 3 throughout the lifetime of the project. In the first year, a total of 35,866 Standard 1 -3 children enrolled and at the beginning of the second year another 1,838 were enrolled from Standard 1. There were some Standard 4 children, who had graduated from Standard 3, who came to help with coaching siblings or friends especially using reading games at the clubs.
30% of the clubs experienced a significant reduction in membership over time. The most common reason given by learners for dropping out was the distance between home and school where the clubs were based. Learners who live a significant distance from the school have to travel home to eat lunch and then have a long journey back to school to go to the clubs. After the initial excitement following the launch of the clubs, most of these learners found the distance too great to continue attending.

Another challenge was that in 23 schools there was competition with Madrassa classes which also run after school. In these cases Link worked with the school and the community to find a compromise whereby the time after school could be shared between the Madrassa and the Reading Club. In most cases this was successful and children were able to attend both after school activities. However, in three schools (Mapuyu, Kadmomba and Chitundu) a satisfactory arrangement for sharing time between the Reading Club and the Madrassa had not been found by the end of the project. Most children at these schools were forced to drop out of the Reading Clubs due to pressure from their parents. As a result, attendance at these clubs was low, but the children who continued to attend improved their reading performance.

**Lessons Learned**

Establishing links between the Clubs and the schools not only supported the smooth running of the clubs, but also enabled teachers to pick up different techniques for teaching reading which they found very useful and also interesting for their classes.

However, the distance between school and home prevented some learners attending the clubs. To ensure that all learners can benefit from the Clubs, there is a need for some Clubs to be based closer to home in areas which are far from school. This was taken into account when considering the next phase of the project – see **Sustainability**.

Report writing presented a challenge to some Club Mentors. Some repeated submitted late or incomplete reports. This highlighted the need for more training to support the Mentors to understand the importance of reports and how to do it properly. It is also important to recognise that the Mentors have a challenging job running the clubs, motivating learners, teaching creatively, and liaising with the Committee. In this context it is necessary to make reporting requirements as easy as possible so that the relevant information is collected without burdening the Mentors.

In some cases procedures for loaning reading books to learners were flouted where books were given on loan without proper records and the risk of losing such books became very high. 5 schools had reported losing 6 – 8 reading books which were 39 in total, but the children who had lost them were all traced through their friends. 27 of these books have been recovered. It is necessary to emphasise during the initial and further training of mentors and in community meetings, the importance of following procedures so that everyone can benefit from the resources. In future the Reading Committees will take more responsibility for management of the resources. As they are based within the villages there will be greater accountability.

We faced challenges with getting women involved in the Committees in some areas due to cultural reasons where women would not take a prominent public position in the midst of men. In such cases, Link Malawi held community meetings with prominent community and opinion leaders to discuss with them how mothers are the first line educators in any child’s life. Through such meetings and discussions, women were empowered to accept positions not only in the Reading Club Committees but also for Reading Fairs.
and materials production committees among others. Low levels of literacy among women in some areas also meant that more men than women were involved in the committees. However, by the close of the project, women took active roles in organizing different activities and in 90% of the committees there was an equal representation of women and men.

Flexibility and strong communication with the community is essential if there is a conflict over the use of time for after school activities as occurred with the Madrassas. Awareness of potential opposition from particular communities at an early stage should allow for discussion and negotiation so that Reading Clubs can fit into existing activities which are valued by the community, rather than being perceived negatively and resulting in low participation.

Output 2: Sourcing Chichewa readers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key achievements – Output and Outcome 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,590 Chichewa language books were purchased, produced and distributed to the Reading Clubs. These were used by the mentors during club time and by teachers and parents who were able to borrow the books to read with children. Link also supported the communities to produce their own stories on cards, adding to the small selection of local language stories which are available in their school collection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading for enjoyment sessions at a Reading Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s reading books in Chichewa are not widely available in schools or communities. In general, there is only a small selection of such books being produced in Malawi. Link sourced a range of 38 colourful titles and distributed these to the Reading Clubs. Each school received 200 books – a combination of individual readers and Big Books to be used by teachers for guided reading - and 8 song posters which were used to teach reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To increase the number of reading materials at club level, Mentors, teachers, learners and community members were encouraged to produce short stories that were edited, re-written and added to the stock in the school’s storage bank. Link held a competition to find the best of these stories, printed these in the
office and distributed them to the Clubs. Contributors to the collection were very excited to see stories and poems that they had written distributed to other schools.

Lessons Learned
The Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), Maneno and Grey Matter bookshops are the best sources of Chichewa reading books.

Producing stories written by community members is time consuming due to the editing process, but is very worthwhile because there is a strong positive reaction to seeing stories that have been told for generations written down with beautiful illustrations.

Output 3: Establishment of Parent Literacy Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key achievements – Output and Outcome 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy Reading Circles were established in 60 centres and tutors were trained to support learning using the REFLECT approach. A total of 1,866 Adult learners (1,454 women and 412 men) attended the Circles and 13,120 Community members were involved in REFLECT learning discussions to support the production of materials for the learning Circles. 420 women out of a total of 521 were sufficiently qualified and motivated to become literacy coaches in the Reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment of REFLECT Circle Centre Facilitators
Recruitment of Circle Centre Facilitators started with VDCs advertising in the targeted communities for applicants. The project was looking for women who were MSCE holders or at least who had a good JCE to be circle Facilitators. VDC ensured that procedures were not flouted for fear of poor administrative consequences. Shortlisted candidates were interviewed by PEAs, CDAs and Cluster Supervisors with the assistance of some VDC members in some cases. Since not many women had the required qualifications, men were also considered and the project ended up recruiting 41 female and 19 male Facilitators in the group.

Training of REFLECT Circle Facilitators
Implementation partners decided that FLP should use the REFLECT Approach as opposed to the Conventional Approach. The Conventional Approach has a defined curriculum and all materials and set books are available. The REFLECT Approach gives participants a choice to decide what they want to learn depending on what they feel most strongly about. If, for example, a Circle wanted to learn about Health; it meant that the theme
would be explored to develop contents for the study area at community level to reflect factors that affect health like agriculture, nutrition, food and hygiene, food storage and preservation, environment and disease etc. This theme developed different activities and vocabulary which made the content for a period of time until all was exhausted then the shift goes to another theme. The REFLECT Approach was very empowering because it provided a forum for community discussion on what was happening in the community and what the people wanted to know and understand about factors that affected their lives.

Facilitators went through a 5 days initial training where they learnt about FLP and its major objective for the adult literacy component. This was to create a pool of literate mothers or women that were to increase the number of literacy coaches for children in Standards 1 to 3. Using the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), they learnt different practical ways of gathering information at community level where literate and illiterate people comfortably share a forum. They practiced how to gather information through Transit Walk, Historical Timeline and mapping among others. Facilitators on training learnt that REFLECT Approach was a formative way of developing learning content which helped to provide knowledge and understanding about life situations and circumstances using the selected topics for discussion.

Supervision of REFLECT Circle centres
There were 60 REFLECT Circle Centres established in the villages closest to the schools in the intervention zones. Since the Facilitators had a short initial training time and that training for REFLECT could not be exhausted in a classroom situation, it was agreed that there should be intensified mentoring to accomplish on-the-job training on the one hand and conduct refresher training where possible on the other. There was one designated community based refresher course and a lot of on-the-job training. The contents of the lessons reflected the needs of the community which had mostly centred on farming and health. Learners learnt about irrigation, manure making and tending nurseries for tree seedlings which were also learnt practically. They learnt about the environment, food and hygiene, water and sanitation, child care, constructed
roads and embarked on Village Savings and Loans schemes as a part of Income Generating Activities (IGAs). The themes of agriculture and health were the dominant areas of study because they had a lot of influence on the people in the different locations of the project. To enhance reading abilities at the REFLECT Circle, Link and DCDO planned and worked with able and willing women to assist Adult Literacy learners to collect and produce reading materials and to read their set work. During the meetings with VDCs and throughout the other meetings, women had been invited and encouraged to take part in these and all other activities that were aiming at boosting literacy.

REFLECT Circle Attendance
During the lifetime of the project 60 REFLECT Circle Centres were active with a total enrolment of 1,866 learners where 1,454 were female and 412 male.

Some women faced challenges with regular attendance at the REFLECT Circles. Childcare, housework and farming duties were among the reasons women gave for being unable to attend. Some women were discouraged by their husbands who thought they should be working instead of learning.

1,497 of the learners who enrolled were able to read and write well by the end of the course. Out of this number 701 (617 women and 84 men) did not only persist to the end of the course but also sat the course end examinations where 601 passed (521 women and 80 men).

Of these, there were 420 women who were literate and were interested in receiving training to become literacy coaches in the children’s Reading Clubs and school classes. Some of these women started taking on their role of helping to coach children in the village reading circles as was witnessed during the Reading Fairs demonstrations.

Lessons Learned
In addition to developing literacy, the learners engaged in the REFLECT process also improved in their attitude to health and hygiene and nutrition.

Although the REFLECT approach is designed to make learning literacy useful in everyday life, some women struggle to find the time to attend classes. To include more women in literacy, it may be necessary to find more flexible ways of learning which can fit into individuals’ schedules of domestic work.

Gender relations impacted on the ability of women to attend the classes and a number of women cited their husbands’ disapproval as a reason for stopping attendance. Future project should to consider how this can be mitigated, but we recognise that this is an entrenched issue which cannot be easily resolved by any single project.
Output 4: Learner Testing

Key achievements: Output and Outcome 4

A total of 5,845 learners in the 60 project schools and 20 control schools were tested at baseline and follow-up to track the impact of the project. 80 female data collectors were recruited, trained and supported to carry out the learner testing in schools. The data was entered into a specially designed database to facilitate analysis. The result show that there is a significant increase in reading ability in the project schools compared to the control schools – see Analysis for more details.

From inception, Link had the desire to know what impact the implementation of FLP would have on the targeted beneficiaries by the end of the intervention. Learner performance tracking was done through a baseline and terminal survey to establish if there was any improvement in reading by the learners who attended the Reading Clubs.

Learner testing design

First, Link Malawi sought a suitable tool that would be appropriate and authentic enough to be accepted professionally by Malawians. The UWEZO testing tools that the East African countries of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya use were considered. Further exploration with the University of Malawi’s Centre for Research and Testing (CERT) was done where the areas for language testing were discussed from the context of the Malawian primary school curriculum. Literacy research conducted by Malawi Institute for Education and other Non-Governmental Organizations were discussed and their findings and recommendations were reviewed. After all was done Link Malawi settled for the USAID’s EGRA testing tools which had been developed for Malawi Teacher Professional Development Systems (MTPDS), whose viability had been tested and the capability had been acclaimed professionally. Furthermore, USAID had made the tools available for anybody to use.

A total of eight tests (called “Gawo” in Chichewa) of learners’ literacy were administered:

1. Letter-naming fluency: Ability to say the names of the letters of the alphabet accurately, without hesitation and naturally. This is a timed test that assesses automaticity and fluency of letter name knowledge—measured in correct letters per minute.

2. Initial sound awareness: One of two measures of phonemic awareness (the understanding that words are made of sounds). This subtest measures students’ ability to hear and isolate the first sound in a word. This is generally considered a pre-reading skill and can be assessed in a variety of ways.

3. Syllable segmentation: The second measure of phonemic awareness. The subtest measures students’ ability to hear a word and break it up into syllables. This is one of the first skills needed to understand how to read new words by decoding.

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4. **Syllable reading fluency:** This subtest is used because Chichewa is considered by Malawians to be syllabic in nature. This subtest asks children to identify the most commonly occurring syllables in a particular language—measured by correct syllables read per minute.

5. **Familiar word fluency:** Ability to read high-frequency words. This assesses whether children can process words quickly—measured by words read correctly per minute.

6. **Non-word reading fluency:** Ability to decipher “words” that follow the linguistic rules but do not actually exist in Chichewa. The non-words used for EGRA are truly made-up words. It assesses a child’s ability to “decode” words fluently—measured by words read correctly per minute.

7a. **Connected text oral reading fluency:** Ability to read a passage, approximately 60 words long—measured by words read correctly per minute. (The scores for Test 7a were not available at the time of this analysis).

7b. **Reading comprehension of connected text:** Ability to answer several comprehension questions based on the passage read—measured by number correct out of five comprehension questions.

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**Data collection**

Preparations for data collection started with a review of the FLP proposal which suggested a baseline and follow on longitudinal survey in two consecutive years, 2014 and 2015, following the same sample of learners. Each of the 60 schools was sampled by providing randomly sampled learners from Standards 1 to 3 where each class provided 25 learners totalling 75 from each school. He project schools were drawn from the intervention zones of Chilanga, Chimwangalu, Chitundu, Maonde and Tchetsa. 20 control schools were selected from the zones of Mthandiza and Chimbiya which were nearest to the intervention zones. The two zones were generally exposed to similar socio-economic conditions which made them not too different from the intervention schools.

The survey was expected to target a total of 6,000 learners, but some schools did not have Standard 3 classes, other classes had fewer learners than the targeted number, and some of the selected children were absent on the day of the assessment. As a result, a total of 5,854 learners completed the baseline assessment in 2014 and 5,845 completed the follow-up assessment in 2015. The aim was to sample equal numbers of boys and girls, but due to the above constraints, the sample contained 144 more girls than boys.

The design of the project was to maximise the involvement of mothers in the community for FLP activities and data collection was one such activity. Mothers are the custodians of most of the children in the Standard 1 to 3 age group. Involving these in the project activities brought the mothers and children close to each other in developing the children’s education career. It was believed that mothers would be more readily available in the children’s career life at this stage. Communities identified females with MSCE certificates that had some credit passes. Candidates were interviewed at the individual schools by a panel which included teachers, and 80 female data collectors were recruited: 60 for intervention schools and 20 for the control schools.

Data collectors’ training was conducted with four objectives: (i) to demonstrate to data collectors the administration of the data collection tool; (ii) to familiarise the data collectors with the data collection
tool; (iii) to familiarise the data collector with research skills; and (iv) to provide practice for data collection before interacting with the learners in the clubs. The training was two-pronged: the theory in the classroom and a practicum at a primary school nearest to the training venue. The baseline survey was administered in March, 2014 and the follow-on in May, 2015. Although it was planned that the follow on survey should be done in March, 2015, it was not possible because of very heavy rains. In May, 2015 the follow-on survey was administered following the same procedure as for the baseline, starting with refresher training for two days and a half-day practicum. The two and a half days’ training helped replacement data collectors to catch up and seek valuable assistance from others. Data collection in the schools started on 19th May and generally ended on 22nd where there were no disturbances.

Data was collected twice during the life time of the project as baseline and follow-on. Although Reading Club membership was voluntary, sample selection was random in the intervention classes and not restricted to club members only. It is clear that even learners who were not members of the Reading Clubs benefited from the club interventions since their teachers took part in the trainings and they exposed their learners to what they learnt. In the baseline 5,854 learners were tested and in the follow on 5,845 were tested.

The same data collection tool was administered on every learner in the baseline in Standard 1, 2 and 3 and follow-on in Standard 1, 2, 3 and 4. We tested the same learners regardless of in which class they were in, even if they were repeating a year. Those who had transferred to another data collection school were followed. The data collection exercise revealed that there was a lot of movement of learners between schools where 67 were recorded during the exercise. High absenteeism in all classes was also observed which necessitated the provision of an extra data collection day in 5 schools to complete the testing of the school sample. Some schools did not follow up well on transferred learners who were able to operate between two schools easily for some time without proper transfers. The cohort tracking (provision of unique pupil numbers) that MoEST is instituting will be very helpful in tracking learners between schools.

Link Malawi has achieved the objective of using mothers to collect data and as they administered the exercise they were able to observe how children struggle to read, which areas were difficult to read and they witnessed the gains in reading within a year. During data collection review meetings with the data collectors, it was evident that they were disturbed by how the children were failing to read. They cited the children’s failure to identify and know the names of the letters of the alphabet and general phonemic awareness. Children were generally unable to read simple sentences from a simple passage and failed to answer any questions on the passage. However, in the follow-on data collection, some data collectors reported an estimated that about 30% of the sample they tested had made some improvement in performance.

Because they were aware of the low literacy levels, the mothers were motivated to take action. 10 of the women who were recruited as data collectors volunteered to assist with coaching of children at the Reading Clubs when the mentors needed extra support or were not available. 15 of the data collectors developed interest in teaching and had applied for teacher training. It has also been reported that 17 of the data collectors are helping with organizing and coaching children at the Village Reading Centres in the 2015-16 school year (see Sustainability).
However, using unskilled and inexperienced data collectors who have been provided with short training on data collection raises the possibility that there will be mistakes in data collection. It was therefore necessary to spend a significant amount of time checking the data. We found that the results for Gawo 7a had been recorded incorrectly and so this could not be measured. A large number of the follow-up assessments has data missing which meant that they could not be used for comparison with the baseline.

Data entry and analysis
Consultants were contracted to establish a database for the baseline data and follow-on data. Data entry for the baseline took a long time to enter because it was being done on-line which was affected by the frequent internet interruption. It was decided that the 2015 data would be entered on stand-alone computers, which was more efficient.

For data analysis, a sample of 2,956 completed assessments were available for comparison between the baseline and follow-on survey because they had all data for the two years. The other assessments could not be used for comparison because there was some information missing. This reduced the number of assessments that could provide reliable data. As discussed above, Link Malawi believes that this happened because training was short which did not provide adequate time for practice with children.

Results
The tables below show the mean scores on the Tests G1-7b in 2014 and then when retested in 2015. They are for the Control schools sample, drawn from 20 schools, and the Comparison sample from the 60 Intervention schools.

The mean (average) scores of the pupils in the Intervention sample in 2015 on each of the tests, are statistically significantly greater than their mean scores in 2014, and than the scores of the mean scores of the control sample in both 2014 and 2015. (t-tests, p< 0.001). Difference of this size are likely by chance in less than 1 in 1000.

Control Schools (N = 1415 pupils)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
<th>G7b</th>
<th>G total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 2014 Mean score</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>16.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max scored</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max possible</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% zeros</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2015 Mean score</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>21.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max scored</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max possible</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% zeros</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intervention Schools, Comparison Sample (N = 2956 pupils)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
<th>G7b</th>
<th>G total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 2014 Mean score</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>19.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max scored</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max possible</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% zeros</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Year 2015 Mean score | 16.77 | 5.87 | 4.2  | 11.74 | 9.59 | 8.64 | 0.92 | 57.89  |
| Max scored | 100  | 10   | 10   | 28   | 50   | 50   | 5    | 250    |
| Max possible | 100  | 10   | 10   | 100  | 50   | 50   | 5    |        |
| % zeros | 26   | 30   | 41   | 35   | 48   | 48   | 73   |        |

The scores G1-6 are counts of letters, syllables or words, per minute.

Although across all the tests the Intervention School scores increased significantly the average achievement in reading is still not high. The percentage of pupils scoring zero on the reading fluency test items, in 2015 ranges from 26% in recognising letters (G1), to 48% in reading familiar words (G5). The position improves significantly from 2014 but there are many pupils apparently not making any progress.

The following histogram displays the relative performance of the 2014 and 2015 Control and Intervention pupils.
In 2013 USAID published a report *Malawi Reading Intervention Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Final Assessment - 2012* showing the "Endline" mean scores using some of the same EGRA tests, though with a smaller sample of pupils from across several districts (N=250 initially), and after two years of reading intervention, but with similar year groups to those used in the Family Literacy Project.

Comparability with EndLine figures in USAID MTPDS EGRA 2012 results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>USAID MTPDS 2012</th>
<th>Link – OUP 2015 FLP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S Dev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G1</strong> Letter Naming</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G4</strong> Syllable Reading</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G5</strong> Familiar Word Reading</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G6</strong> Non-Word reading</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N= 250 ?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results are of the same order. The MTPDS standard deviations (which are a measure of average spread) are larger but that is to be expected given the smaller MTPDS sample size.
The 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.

The next chart shows the percentages of all pupils in 5844 pupils tested in 2014 who obtained zero scores on the tests (Gawo 1 to 7b). The percentages of zero scores for the Intervention schools pupils and the Control schools are similar across the tests in 2014.

The following chart shows the percentages of the 2956 pupils who comprise the main Comparison Sample who had zero scores on the Tests 1 to 7b in 2014 and those who had zero scores in 2015. The distribution of zero scores for the Comparison sample is very close in 2014 to that of the full sample tested (see Chart above). The Comparison sample only contains pupils who were tested on both occasions.

After one year of the Family Literacy Programme there has been a significant shift in the number of zero score on all but the most difficult test.
The percentages have not been formally compared with those obtained by the USAID Baseline or with the Save the Children Boost project, but they look very similar.

The Gawo 7b percentage is disappointing but consistent. After only one year, to expect a substantial change on this measure of reading comprehension, was perhaps ambitious.

**Lessons Learned**

The drawbacks of using unskilled and inexperienced data collectors must be weighed against the benefits, which include creating greater community ownership of the project and closer involvement of parents (primarily mothers, who are the first educators of children) in measuring and understanding their children’s learning. If these benefits are to be retained in future projects, extending the length of the training could help to improve the quality of data collection.

In future, the forms used by data collectors should be designed alongside the database for ease of data entry and to reduce the time required for entering and checking the data.

The Family Literacy Project interventions have clearly had a significant impact on reading ability in a short space of time.

More work is required to determine why the results have not improved for all pupils and what can be done to further increase reading ability, which although much improved, remains very low.
Output 5: Annual Reading Fairs

Schools were clustered in groups of two to four in each zone to provide a platform for meetings to share experiences and do some project activities such as reading fairs together in order to learn from each other. Annual Reading Fairs were an annual event where clubs and adult literacy centres came together at a proposed centre to showcase their literacy achievements. This was a forum not just for sharing experiences and learning from each other, but also to inform patrons who were not directly involved in the activities about what was happening in the adult literacy centres and reading clubs.

Key achievements – Output and Outcome 5

A total of 15 Reading Fairs or Literacy Fairs were held and attended by 9,176 community members.

At the Reading Fairs, community leaders personally came to know what had been achieved and they were duty bound to support developmental work in their jurisdiction; teachers, Adult Literacy Facilitators and Reading Club Mentors came to demonstrate their achievements with teaching and coaching learners to read; learners came to proudly demonstrate their ability, mastery and positive change of attitude to life or school; governing bodies came to proudly bask in the glory of their organization efforts; other learners wanted to see how effective the Reading Clubs were; while parents, guardians and community members came to demonstrate that they believed in what was taking place at the occasion.
In July, 2014 each of the 5 intervention zones identified one location where Reading Clubs surrounding the centre met and mounted pavilions for display. Displays demonstrated the ability to read, how to produce reading materials and use them, the best ways of storing different types and sizes of reading materials, and to show records that they kept. Drama groups informed the gatherings of the importance of knowing how to read.

The inaugural Reading Fair was held at Chilanga School, where a group of women from the adult literacy circle were also graduating and getting their certificates. It was a big crowd puller attended by about 2,000 people including learners at the school. Complementary Basic Education (CBE) learners also demonstrated what they learn at their learning centres. The Guest of Honour was the District Commissioner. It was a good forum for calling on parents to see what children are doing at the reading clubs. Those who attended were especially interested to know that the children were being coached in reading by people who were not qualified teachers.

In July, 2015 the second series of Reading Fairs were held under the theme “Ndi udindo wa aliyense kuthandiza ophunzira kuwerenga, kulemba ndi kuwerengerera” translated to mean “It is everybody’s responsibility to help learners to read, write and count”. Reading Fairs were launched at Linga School in Chilanga zone on the 3rd of July, 2015. This was a very auspicious occasion that brought the Education Division Manager for Central West Education Division, Mr Joseph Nkhata as the Guest of Honour. It was attended by the District Council Chairman Mr Chidovu, The DEM Mr Billy Banda, TA Chauma, the Programme Director for Link Malawi Dr Fritz Kadyoma, the Ward Councillor Mr Makalini and other district representatives. The event brought together four schools belonging to this cluster - Mbirima, Kakolo, Linga and Mkundi - and each school mounted its own pavilion. Three different groups gathered here: REFLECT Circle learners, Reading Club members and CBE learners who demonstrated different reading activities from their learning centres. They also displayed some of the reading materials that they had produced and demonstrated how they used them. This was the first Reading Fair for the year but nine more were held, two in each of the four zones and a second one was also held for Chilanga.
Reading Fairs were very important annual events where creativity and innovation in coaching learners to read was demonstrated. During training different teaching materials were produced and their use demonstrated, but Reading Fairs brought a lot of improvements. There were many variations to teaching and learning the same thing. Some Mentors inspired their club members so much that it was evident during the fairs that learners enjoyed the different reading activities that they were demonstrating even at the club.

A range of reading coaches came to the Fairs and showed that they had not just come for this occasion, but also because they had a role to play even at home. These included parents, Reading Club Committee members, school governing body representatives, teachers and some senior class learners and community leaders - a clear demonstration that they were all involved.

Reading Fairs were the epitome FLP because this was where every intervention activity is demonstrated. Patrons saw, heard and knew what FLP was doing in the Reading Clubs, REFLECT Circle centres and in the schools. All players came together to demonstrate what they were best at. Community leaders personally came to know what had been achieved and they were duty bound to support developmental work in their jurisdiction; teachers, Adult Literacy Facilitators and Reading Club Mentors came to demonstrate their achievements with teaching and coaching learners to read; learners came to proudly demonstrate their ability, mastery and positive change of attitude to life or school; governing bodies came to proudly bask in the glory of their organization efforts; other learners wanted to see how effective the Reading Clubs were; while parents, guardians and community members came to demonstrate that they believed in what was taking place at the occasion. Parents’ drama groups were very good at explaining to the audience what FLP is all about and what it aimed to achieve. Our government partners, the Primary Education Advisors and Cluster Supervisors, were there to see the total effect of their training efforts and evaluate what went well and not and what they should do better next time.

**Lessons Learned**

Reading Fairs were extremely important in motivating learners and tutors and inspiring support from parents and community members. They helped to emphasise that learning is fun and literacy development is a positive experience.
Reading Fairs brought together different people at community level and beyond that have a stake in education. District heads of government sections and civil society, Ward Councillors, Members of Parliament, Link’s Director of Programmes, Traditional authorities and the Education Division Manager. This provided an opportunity for them to interact and discuss how they could put their efforts together to improve the quality of education. They got first-hand information and from what was displayed they learnt the successes and challenges that children and teachers faced.

Reading Fairs enabled the community to meet and interact with the learners, teachers, parents and community and community leaders to learn from them what their views on education was and what they feel should be done to improve the quality of education.

**Annual Community Engagement Meetings**

These were invaluable community engagement meetings which targeted Village Development Committees, general community representatives, Primary Education Advisors and Cluster Supervisors (who were trainers) alongside Link staff. These meetings have always come after Reading Fairs because the Fairs open opportunities for discussing what happens at the clubs and adult literacy centres, people learn from each other and the events that take place and the speeches bring new thoughts and perceptions. During the engagement meetings, different groups of FLP participants gave their views on what they experienced in the implementation processes. The meetings brought to the attention of Link Malawi the successes and challenges of FLP as observed by the communities in the areas where they operate. Below are the successes and challenges as presented by the stakeholders:

**Successes**

- Interest in reading has been sparked, no club closed down and there is enthusiasm for continuing the club activities beyond the end of the project.
- Teacher librarians see more children borrowing Chichewa and English books to read.
- More mothers and adult literacy graduates check what their children have done at school.
More children can read, write and numerate, and with improved reading ability there is better understanding of what they read in class.

There were some very effective committees that liaised with the school and the community and guided activities.

Teaching and learning to read was made easy because teaching materials were available and methods that were used were fun.

Even qualified teachers learnt a lot from club mentors methods of teaching.

Graduate adult literacy learners know how to read and write. They can check the school work of their Standard 1 children.

Children are occupied more they have little time for mischief because they spend their time usefully.

The project helped learners, Mentors and REFLECT Facilitators to develop skills and expose their talents in reading and producing reading materials.

Successful data collection exercise.

**Challenges and solutions**

- Absenteeism of learners and mentors sometimes. Committee members should be mobilised to help address this.
- Limited amount of teaching and learning aids where numbers are very big. We will lobby with the community to assist more with provision of TALULAR.
- Weak parental support in some areas. We will continue to encourage them to take part, but also give them a role to play to increase their sense of ownership of the activity.
- Long distance to travel to the reading centre. This is being addressed by moving the clubs to village level.
- Some data collectors omitting information on the data collection tool or not following instructions. There is need to increase days for training to provide more practice.

Alongside the external evaluation, this reflection has informed plans for the sustainability of the Family Literacy Project and other projected implemented by Link Malawi.

**Summary of achievements against outputs**

The table below presents the achievements of the project in numerical form against each of the Output Indicators agreed with Oxford University Press:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output Indicator</th>
<th>Achievement at October 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of premises where programme is being delivered</td>
<td>o 60 Reading Club centres in 60 targeted schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o 60 Adult Literacy centres in 60 communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number participating in the programme Standard 1 children</td>
<td>o 2014 July - 14,843</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Number of people participating that would otherwise have had no access to a similar programme | o 600 Village Development Committee members  
| o 600 Reading Club Committee members  
| o 37,704 Standard 1-3 learners (There were 35,866 learners in 2014 and in 2015 there were 1,838 new entrants in Standard 1)  
| o 1,866 Adult learners (1,454 female 412 male)  
| o 13,120 Community members involved in REFLPECT learning discussions (community members participate in the discussions even if they are not learning literacy)  
| o 9,176 Attendees at 15 Literacy Fairs  
| o 11,597 cumulative number of community members attending community meetings |
| Number of people trained | Groups of people trained to implement the planned activities  
| o 10 Primary Education Advisors (PEAs)  
| o 4 Cluster Supervisors  
| o 5 Assistant Centre Coordinators at the five Teacher development Centres  
| o 60 Head Teachers  
| o 212 Standard 1 to 3 teachers trained to understand the role of Reading Clubs in coaching reading  
| o 8 Community Development Assistants  
| o 60 Reading Club Mentors  
| o 60 Reading Club Supervisors  
| o 60 Adult Literacy Facilitators  
| o 13,120 Community members involved in the development of REFLPECT Learning content for Adult Literacy  
| o 4 Link Malawi staff  
| o 600 Reading Club Committee members  
| o 80 Female Data Collectors (60 from intervention schools 20 from control schools) |
| Number of volunteers helping to deliver intervention | o 300 Community women  
| o 300 Community men  
| o 180 Standard 1, 2 and 3 teachers that were out of interest volunteering to coach children to read at the reading club meetings  
| o 2,150 Standard 4 Learners that were previously Reading Club members in Standard 3 in 2014  
| o 1,379 Senior children at different primary schools |
Number of events held and presentations
- 15 Annual fairs (5 in 2014 and 10 in 2015)
- Review meetings:
  - 3 Area Development Committee meetings
  - 190 Village Development Committee meetings (there were 2 meetings for each VDCs and some schools have more than 1 VDC)
  - 15 Head Teachers’ meetings (3 per zone)
  - 40 Community engagement meetings (once a year for each of the 20 zone clusters)

Number of sites equipped with improved facilities
- 1 Link Malawi office
- 1 DCDO office
- 1 DEO office
- 60 Reading Clubs (60 chalkboards, 60 storage boxes, 1,000 song posters and 14,590 Chichewa books)
- 60 Adult Literacy Centres (60 chalkboards and 60 storage boxes)

Summary of achievements against Outcomes
The table below presents the achievements of the project in numerical form against each of the Output Indicators agreed with Oxford University Press:

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<tr>
<th>Output Indicator</th>
<th>Achievement at October 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% increase in primary carers’ knowledge of their child’s needs</td>
<td>A survey of the 11,597 community meeting attendees revealed that 4,407 (38%) now check their children’s work after school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% increase in child literacy in area</td>
<td>There has been an increase of 38% in reading ability in the intervention schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% increase in adult literacy in area</td>
<td>79% of participants in the Adult Literacy REFLECT Circles run by FLP were literate by the end of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of stakeholders who continue activities following end of grant</td>
<td>100% of Reading Clubs have been decentralised to village level (see Sustainability section) and all of these Village Reading Clubs are operational; 100% of Reading Club Committees are still monitoring and supporting activities at VRC and 95% of Standard 1-3 children still going to and taking part in activities at the Village Reading Clubs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sustainability
In the final months of the Family Literacy Project the focus was on how to ensure that the activities which have been started by the project will be continued after it ends. When planning for sustainability Link Malawi reflected on their experience of implementation, feedback from beneficiaries during the Reading Fairs and Annual Community Engagement Meetings, and the approaches of similar projects, namely the national early grade reading improvement programmes run by Malawi Government in partnership with USAID.

In discussion with the Dedza District Education Office, District Community Development Office and FLP beneficiaries, it was agreed that the activities should be moved from school to village level and become
the responsibility of a volunteer village Reading Committee. A one day orientation on the roles and responsibilities of a Reading Committee was planned, alongside some hands-on training on how to manage a reading club. The focus was on tips for organizing and managing materials, keeping learners on task at the Reading Club, and production and use of locally produced reading materials. This orientation was conducted by Primary Education Advisors and Cluster Supervisors with the assistance of Club Mentors as well as head teachers and the Standard 1 to 3 teachers who were well versed in this work by this time. Adult Literacy Facilitators were invited to take part in the workshop as well to enable them to support graduates of the REFLECT Circles to participate in the village level activities. After the orientation, the village Reading Committee members were ready to train communities on how to produce and use reading materials from locally available resources and to generate support for children’s reading activities at community level.

At this stage it became necessary to coordinate the intervention with the national early grade reading improvement programmes run by Malawi Government in partnership with USAID. This has three phases: EGREA (past); SEGREM (currently operational); and MERIT (at inception phase). In May 2015 the government introduced the Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM) programme in Dedza, which aimed to build the capacity of the community in organizing and coaching Standard 1 to 4 learners in all the public primary schools in Dedza. SEGREM was going to target the same beneficiaries, in the same locations, using the same structures and trainers but using different modalities which if not carefully handled would create disharmony among the implementers later. FLP worked hand in hand with SEGREM because it became obvious that SEGREM could build on the structures and relationships which had been established under FLP. Link Malawi shared our learning and experience with SEGREM programme managers and the Dedza district SEGREM officer for community mobilization was incorporated into the monthly review and planning meetings. It was agreed that SEGREM would support the village Reading Committees which had been established under FLP with additional training and would monitor their performance going forward. Link handed over all the community training manuals, reading materials and storage space to the community volunteers through the implementing primary schools.

As a result of the achievements of the Family Literacy Project, Link Malawi is part of the consortium which was successful in the bid to run the MERIT programme which will supersede SEGREM and aims to improve early grade reading in all parts of Malawi over the next five years. Link Malawi is responsible for the Community Engagement and Mobilisation element of this programme which will enable us to take the learning from Dedza district and replicate the success across the whole country.