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NON-FORMAL BASIC EDUCATION IN MALAWI

A brief survey, as a contribution to the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2008 on NFE

by Celia Swann

The plethora of initiatives in NFBE in Malawi is set against a background of poor literacy levels. The adult literacy rate is 64.1% (male: 74.9%, female: 54.0%); literacy among the youth (aged 15-24 years) is around 76%.¹ Formal education became free in Malawi in 1994, and created a wave of new entrants to school; as a result there were many students outside the normal age range for their Standard. Thus, there is high enrolment at primary level, but there is a high drop-out rate, with only 44% of those enrolled at Standard 1 still in school in Standard 5.² There is a big gap in drop-out rates between urban and rural areas with an average urban rate of 2.8% and rural rate of 8.9% in 2004.³

Reasons⁴ for dropping out include:

1. Poor conditions of schools, not encouraging a child to go to school.
2. Poverty.
3. Hunger.
4. Teacher's attitudes towards students may lead the child to shy away from school.
5. Teacher's absenteeism may lead the child to stay away from school.
6. Lack of relevant curriculum, not meeting students' needs.
7. Orphanhood that leads the older school-going children to take care of the younger children thereby not finding time to go to school.
8. Social and cultural pressures, i.e. children above a certain age not encouraged to go to school.
9. Early marriages.

Repetition is also a serious problem. A World Bank Country Status report summarises the consequences of high drop-out and repetition as follows:

Given the high repetition and drop-out rates in primary, 60% of the public resources at this level are used either on children who drop out before completing primary or on children repeating a year. Put another way, Government finances 20 school years to generate a single graduate from primary school. Thus the cost to Government is of an additional 12 years of per pupil spending relative to a scenario with no drop-out or repetition (8 years)⁵

It is important to note that while the literacy levels improve slowly, the numbers of illiterates are increasing. In 2004, the population aged over 15 years stood at about 6.3 million; of these 35.9% were illiterate, i.e. at least 2.3 million people.⁶

¹ Human Development Index 2006. Data on adults for 2004, data on youth for 2003.

² HDI 2006. Data for 2003.

³ Government of Malawi, (2004). Education Statistics 2004, Ministry of Education, Malawi

⁴ Proceedings of Stakeholder Consultative Meeting on Non-formal Basic Education for out-of-school children and youth, Ministry of Education, 15-17 February 2005, p40

⁵ World Bank, (2004), "Cost, Financing and School Effectiveness of Education in Malawi" (usually referred to as the WB Country Status Report), Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series, Washington p7

⁶ Human Development Index 2006.

The **Ministry of Education and Vocational Training** is responsible for providing basic education to children between the ages of 6 and 17 years. Where this provision has not been made, there is scope for complementary systems and flexible schooling.

In 2004 Malawi produced a Draft Education For All (EFA) Plan, which refers to the provision of alternative forms of education to youth who have dropped out of school and those who never attended school.⁷ A redefinition of Basic Education has been called for by the Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE).⁸ There is a recognition that “the total education system is both the mainstream of the formal system as well as the multiple channels of lifelong learning which form part of the integrated diversity of any learning society.”⁹ NGOs offering basic education within their sphere of activity include ActionAid, Save the Children-US, CRECOM (Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation), and OXFAM.

Complementary Basic Education (CBE) is being provided under a new GTZ-funded programme (with additional support from UNICEF) that addresses the problems of drop-out and youth non-attendance at primary level. Experience has shown that boys may be less likely to become learners because of expectations that they generate some income for the family, and so the community sensitisation process and the curriculum take account of this. The CBE team have calculated that a drop-out spends an average of 3.6 years in schooling. Out-of-school children aged between 10 and 17 fall within the scope of CBE, and are being offered, initially, a one-year course, with the expectation that the course will be expanded to three years.¹⁰ CBE thus attempts to address the issues underlying school non-attendance¹¹, and aims to offer ways back into the formal system. CBE lies somewhere between formal and non-formal education, and such schemes of flexible schooling are sometimes referred to as “para-formal education”.

The **National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP)** runs courses through the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services, which last ten months and are accredited, giving the equivalent of five years primary schooling. In the year 2004/5 869 new adult literacy calluses were set up, and 2665 communities sensitised to promote the equitable participation of women and men in adult literacy classes. Some 90% of learners were women in 2003¹², with regional differences in the gender ratios.

REFLECT Approach was introduced in 1996, in addition to the FAL approach being managed by NALP. The INGO ActionAid pioneered it in seven districts, and then it became a national pilot project (1998 – 2000), under the supervision of the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services. Other NGOs using REFLECT include Concern Universal, OXFAM, and Christian Children’s Fund (CCF). Reports and

⁷ Malawi Draft EFA Plan July 2004

⁸ “Towards a redefinition of Basic Education in the context of EFA” Paper by Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education, at the National Education Conference April 2005.

⁹ Complementary Basic Education for school-aged out-of-school children and youth. Concept Note. Ministry of Education Dec 2005.

¹⁰ Complementary Basic Education for school-aged out-of-school children and youth. Implementation Strategy, updated Dec 2006.

¹¹ Cf Appendix One of Complementary Basic Education for school-aged out-of-school children and youth. Implementation Strategy, updated Dec 2006.

¹² Adult Education and Literacy in Malawi: Issues, challenges and the way forward MOGWCS, April 2005

information clearly indicate that the REFLECT approach to adult literacy programmes tends to have effective management, monitoring and evaluation systems.¹³

The Adolescent Girls Literacy Project (AGLIT) deserves a special mention as a project that is particularly aimed at imparting basic skills of literacy and numeracy, with an obvious gender focus. It has run for 8 years in four districts, with UNICEF and other donor support.

The **Ministry of Youth and Culture** defines youth as those aged from 14-25 years¹⁴. Its policy, therefore, envisages youths as those who are of secondary schooling age and above. Existing programmes under this Ministry tend to focus on specific needs of youths, such as civic education and HIV and AIDS education. These are targeted through short courses or on-going activities at youth centres rather than extended and certified courses. Parents and communities are sensitised in order to encourage greater participation by girls, to counteract society's negative perceptions of youth, and to obtain appropriate premises for youth activities. There is a perceived need to lobby for the elimination of certain harmful cultural practices¹⁵.

Life skills education is offered by many HIV and AIDS-related donor organisations and NGOs, who work in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population. One example is the "Tiyeni! Tiyeni!" initiative, funded by EU and implemented by UNFPA; it addresses the issues of early marriages, STIs and HIV and AIDS among the youth aged between 10 and 20 years in seven districts. The reproductive health NGO Banja la Mtsogolo (BLM), largely funded by DFID, has for many years addressed the problems of ignorance and dangerous sexual practices among young people and adults. Its range is wide, with clinics in townships and rural centres. All reproductive health campaigns, especially those promoting Counselling and Testing for HIV, bear the slogan "Knowledge is Power".

NGOs and faith organisations such as World Vision and World Relief offer, in the districts where they operate, life skills training that extends beyond HIV and AIDS to health and nutrition. **IEC** (Information, Education and Communication) is a crucially important element in any outreach, and thus it may be difficult to distinguish where advocacy ends and NFBE begins. For example, Community Therapeutic Care (CTC) programmes for the prevention and treatment of severe acute malnutrition in under-five children are operating in some 18 districts in Malawi. The INGO Concern Worldwide has been at the forefront of this community outreach strategy. When mothers and caregivers are given the Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food, they are also offered IEC in hygiene, in the nutritional needs of young children, lactating mothers and other caregivers, and (in some cases) in family planning. Referral should (but may not always) be made to food security initiatives in the area, e.g. WFP Supplementary Feeding and various agricultural extension / food security messages – all of which in turn have elements of IEC. Given the low literacy levels of the target communities, the point at which IEC and NFBE meet is blurred.

¹³ "Reinforcing national capacities to evaluate NFE and literacy programmes for young people and adults: a case study of NALP in Malawi." Paper presented by Cyrus Jeke at Cross-national Training Workshop on Evaluating NFE and Literacy programmes for Youths and Adults, Feb 2006

¹⁴ Republic of Malawi, National Youth Policy (undated)

¹⁵ Non-formal education for out-of-school youth. Paper presented at National Conference on Education, April 2005, by FS Chatsalira, Min of Youth, Sports & Culture.

Malawi has over a million orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs) and a host of NGOs address their particular needs, with orphan care centres, residential nurseries, etc. The SOS Children's Village, a worldwide organisation, runs its own schools, offering special education and occupational therapy, and vocational training to older children. Other NGOs are less well-funded, but many offer elements of NFBE within their activities, or try to ensure the continued basic education of the children they assist, either in faith groups or by encouraging them to go into the formal system. Street children are assisted by the Ministry of Gender at the Chisomo Orphan Care Centres, and also by *Tikondane*, a faith-based NGO. UNICEF helps the latter with learning materials.

There may be about 300,000 new entrants to the job market each year in Malawi, and there may be only about 35,000 new jobs created per year.¹⁶ This indicates that at least 80% of new job-seekers will be searching for a livelihood in the informal sector or in rural non-farm activities; others may continue with subsistence farming. Thus *entrepreneurship* is the means towards a livelihood for most Malawians, and so **training in income generation** is of widespread value. Further research would need to be carried out to ascertain which of the many programmes offered include elements of Basic Education, and can therefore be termed NFBE initiatives. These include:

- Malawi Entrepreneurship Development Institute (MEDI)
- Salima Rural Vocational Training College
- Development of Malawian Enterprise Trust (DEMAT).

The Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA) should be mentioned as an independent body that, with DANIDA support initially, and GTZ support throughout, has evolved to offer vocational training both formally in technical colleges, and informally in the informal sector. The low levels of educational attainment that some trainees bring to vocational courses may lead TEVET to offer compensatory elements of basic education. (Further research needed).

Meanwhile, a wide range of **community development initiatives** involving the training of volunteers and community workers entail elements of numeracy and literacy, and alongside livelihood and life skills. Various institutions offer training in community development, with Magomero Community Development College being one of the most long-standing, with a record of training facilitators in adult literacy, training Community Development Assistants, as well as running short courses in basic business management, appropriate technology and community leadership (the latter targeted especially at women and youth).

The **Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation** supports community education initiatives through its extension workers, and develops IEC materials and activities. During 2004/5, 539 extension workers were trained to impart marketing knowledge, and 146 in effective irrigation methodologies¹⁷.

For many years there has been no schools radio in Malawi. The **media development education** NGO Story Workshop has run radio soaps, dramas, discussions and quizzes on contemporary themes with funding by multiple donors. One of Story Workshop's most

¹⁶ Malawi SDIG Project Africa Development Fund Appraisal Report Oct 2001

¹⁷ IMF Malawi Annual Review Report 2004/5

powerful and long-standing series, funded by EU, is “Mwana Alirenji?”, which carries agricultural messages, offering basic livelihoods knowledge to the rural community at large. NFBE through radio was better subsidised in the past, when the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) ran schools programmes and others with basic educational content. Television is not widespread in Malawi, and would not reach those most in need of NFBE, the adult rural poor.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR PROGRAMMES

I. Programmes implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services

1. National Adult Literacy Programme¹⁸

Between 1981- 1985, attempts to eliminate illiteracy among Malawi’s adult population were revived in a pilot programme supported by UNESCO and UNDP. Since 1986 the government with support from various stakeholders has been implementing NFE to address the problem of illiteracy, especially among the youths and adults aged 15 years and above, through the National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP). In the same year the government decided that implementation of its policy on the youths and adult literacy and education should be with the ministry responsible for Community Development Services. The adult literacy policy of 1986 has not been revised; responsibility for its implementation rests today with the Ministry for Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (MOGCWCS).

NALP’s Functional Adult Literacy programme (FAL) is one major way to reduce poverty nationwide. This is being done in collaboration with various partner agencies and NGOs. Material and financial assistance has been provided by UNICEF, UNCDF, UNDP, GTZ, EU and the African Development Bank (see below, the Skills Development and Income Generation project).

The broad objectives of NALP are:

- to increase the attainment and use of literacy skills and sustain the process of learning and life-long education for rural adults;
- to enable adults to take full advantage of modern simple but effective farming techniques, improved health habits and practices, etc and foster national integration through adult education.
- to improve the status, general knowledge and technical skills of rural people especially smallholder farmers by making them receptive to innovations and modernization;
- to mainstream gender and HIV/AIDS in NFE/Literacy activities.

The policy provides that:

- there should be an enhancement of the teaching of a range of basic and technical skills to community members so as to stimulate their further involvement in the

¹⁸ Extracts from “Reinforcing national capacities to evaluate NFE and literacy programmes for young people and adults: a case study of NALP in Malawi.” Paper presented by Cyrus Jeke at Cross-national Training Workshop on Evaluating NFE and Literacy programmes for Youths and Adults, Feb 2006

development process. The emphasis is on a **nationwide functional adult literacy** programme.

- the target population of the programme should be illiterate adults aged 15 years and above.
- classes should be opened only when communities' demand for classes is significant. The opening of a class should be preceded by the formation of a committee, which should be responsible for the day to day running of the class.
- adult literacy instructors should be identified and selected by communities through literacy committees.
- all literacy instructors under Government should be volunteers receiving timely and regular Government determined honoraria for each month they have actually taught. They should be trained in adult literacy education teaching methods.
- adult literacy services including teaching and learning materials should be provided free of charge.
- separate classes should be organised for men whenever possible.
- close collaboration between partner agencies working in literacy programmes and Government should be fostered.

Functional Adult Literacy (FAL), follows the conventional approach, using a well-defined curriculum. In all activities the learners and the instructor interact quite a lot. In addition these classes create a forum for other partners and extension workers from other Ministries/Departments and NGOs to discuss with learners on subjects of their specialization.

Curriculum development and implementation in FAL are processes that are designed to be participatory and consultative, involving government officials from the central level (NALP secretariat and Ministry of Gender officials) down to district, community and village levels through the involvement of Community Development Assistants (CDA), Village Literacy Committees (VLC) and instructors. The VLCs are responsible for the day to day running of NALP at the village level including identification and selection literacy instructors. After identification and selection, literacy instructors undergo a 2-week training course in adult education teaching methods.

A complete literacy class has an equivalent of a total of 365 instructional hours covered in 10 months. Learning covers two primers – *Chuma ndi Moyo* which is covered in the first 6 months for attainment of basic literacy skills and functional knowledge and *Tigawane Nzeru* covered in the last 4 months for consolidation of literacy skills. At the end of **10 months** learners are assessed and declared either literate or not. Those declared literate are awarded **certificates**.

The **post-literacy programme** is designed to reinforce the skills acquired in the classes. These include Rural Information Centres (RICs) or libraries where learners have the opportunity to read books with various messages. This is done in collaboration with the National Library Services.

At the area level, the CDAs assume the responsibility of literacy supervisors, each in charge of 15 – 20 classes. CDAs are permanent employees of the Ministry of Gender, whose training includes literacy education, and practical knowledge of the management of literacy work. Above the CDAs, there are District Community Development Officers (DCDOs) who facilitate the participation of other development agencies at district level

(e.g. education, health, agriculture, etc) in literacy education and other related developmental efforts.

The **National Centre for Literacy and Adult Education (NCLAE)** is an implementing agency (the secretariat) for NALP. It performs the following functions: orientation and training of personnel; curriculum development; supervisory support; monitoring and evaluation and research; promotional Activities such as audio-visual programmes, and printing, documentation and Information services. The NCLAE is also responsible for seeking collaboration with various specialised agencies, both Government and Non-Government.

Weaknesses associated with NALP are as follows: ¹⁹

- Low staffing levels and high turnover. In 2004/5 the honoraria were increased from a tiny MK200 to MK500 per month;
- Post-literacy learning materials and activities are lacking;
- The curriculum does not respond to the differing needs of groups and regions;
- A link with other socio-economic and community development activities is lacking;
- Reliable and permanent funding for NALP and its materials is not available;
- The various providers do not adequately monitor and follow up on FAL activities.
- There is poor correlation between functional literacy and formal education;
- High drop-out rate of participants – 40% in 2001.
- NCLAE is lacking in capacity to manage the programme effectively.

2. Skills Development and Income Generation Project

Growing out of the Women in Development (WID) project, SDIG is funded by the African Development Bank. It is a five-year project, begun in 2003 with the aim of improving the capacity of the rural poor to actively participate in broad-based sustainable economic activities in Malawi. This is achieved through the following components; Functional Literacy, Basic Business Management Training, Production Skills Training, Institutional Strengthening, Micro-Finance and Project Management Unit.

Community Development staff mobilize groups and take them through the literacy process on to business skills training after which they choose a production skill on which the Project provides appropriate training. Clients are encouraged to go into production type of businesses as they generate other economic activities which eventually bring about a general improvement in the rural economy. Special emphasis is being placed on value-added agriculture.

The success of the Project is mainly due to the community development approach, the training content and dedicated staff at all levels. Communities are mobilized into business groups through community leaders who then assume the role of overseers providing maximum support to the Project. As such, groups are self-forming. The involvement of the community leaders in the Project is a key success factor especially for the adult literacy component of the Project.

By 2005, over 220 groups had gone into the first phase of production, and another 800 were at different stages of establishing their businesses. However, extension staff are grossly overstretched, and were reported to be dwindling in number.²⁰

¹⁹ Malawi Skills Devpt and Income Generation (SDIG) Project Appraisal Report Oct 2001

3. Sustainable Social and Economic Empowerment for Poverty Reduction

This programme, funded by UNDP, has the Ministry of Gender as the implementing partner, with the Min of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs. It began in 2004 and is being piloted in 12 districts for a period of 3 years.

The overall programme strategy is to promote Integrated Functional Literacy using the innovative PRA interventions enshrined in the REFLECT approach. Thus the areas of focus, over and above literacy, include:

- Income generation activities (IGA)
- Enterprise development and Micro Finance
- HIV and AIDS
- Gender
- Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management
- Food security.

By July 2005, the programme had been set up and equipped, with ToTs and orientations carried out. (Further research needed)

II. Programmes implemented by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture²¹

1. Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Programme

Activities include:

- Sensitization of communities and the youth
- Formation of loan groups
- Training of youth in business management and entrepreneurship skills
- Linking youth with money-lending institutions
- Disbursing loans to youth groups
- Training youth in vocational skills, such as carpentry, tailoring, tinsmith, etc.
- Monitoring and evaluation.

By 2005, at least ten artisans, and in turn 35 young people, had been trained at one of the three training centres. The current status of the programme is doubtful, for lack of financial support.

2. Meeting Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls

Funded by UNFPA and UNICEF, it was reported in 2005²² that 250 adolescent girls had been given vocational skills training.

3. Youth Participation Programme

There are roughly 2,500 in-school and 1,500 out-of-school youth clubs, most of which are anti-HIV/AIDS clubs. In addition there are about 81 youth NGOs registered with the National Youth Council of Malawi. In addition there are 32 Youth Centres which provide a venue for non-formal education for youth.

4. Family Life Education and Counselling Programme

²⁰ SDIG Project Report May 2006

²¹ Non-formal Education for out-of-school Youth in Malawi. Paper presented at National Conference on Education. April 2005.

²² Non-formal Education for out-of-school Youth. Paper presented at National Conference on Education. April 2005.

The programme aims to equip youth, especially adolescents, with competency and life skills for responsible behaviour. Over 1,400 peer educators have been trained, and work closely with District Youth Officers. Some 220 Youth Action Committees have been set up. A training package has been developed for the Matrons and Patrons of youth clubs, and other youth leaders, all of whom serve on Youth Technical Sub-Committees (YTSCs). Youth Friendly Health Services are promoted, in partnership with the Ministry of Health.

III. Programmes introduced by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training

1. Complementary Basic Education for school-aged out-of-school children and youth

With funding by GTZ, and starting in 2006 with an initial five centres in three districts, immediate scaling up to the 100 centres can be achieved within a year by within-district expansion. The pilot process will enable a non-formal basic education system to be fully conceptualised, at the same time informing policy.

The pilot is managed nationally through the Basic Education Directorate, with representation on the management structure of other Ministries which have responsibilities for other aspects of non-formal education. Decentralisation to the districts is in general incomplete in Malawi, and the districts' primary education administration is already overstretched. The relevant Directorate at district level is the Directorate of Education, Youth and Sports, however, the recruitment, training and employment of community-based teachers for CBE is being carried out by civil society organisations at local levels.

IV. Programmes implemented by NGOs

1. Adolescent Girls' Literacy Project (AGLIT)

This programme has been running since 1999, in four districts, and focuses on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, but also on health, nutrition and livelihoods. With a UK-based coordinator, Angela Hogg, and support from UNICEF, OXFAM and others, it produces IEC materials on such issues as malaria prevention and scabies. The programme lasts nine months, with two-hour sessions every weekday, in centres which evolve into youth centres for sustainability. Recently, some boys have joined. Honoraria to teachers stand at a relatively high rate compared with those for NALP and SSEPR.

2. (more detail could be included here on, e.g. ActionAid's successes, and that of other leading NGOs in the field of NFBE)