

CASE STUDY

Field Testing -non optional for quality reading material production



Reading time: a cross-section of Standard 3 class at Mponda Primary School -Zomba captured during one of their library reading session

"It is not the quantity of books but the quality of the books that matters! The authors of those books you see there on the shelf came to our school to pre-test the materials before printing them. They asked the average learners to read the drafted materials while teachers together with the authors observed and listened to the learners' reactions and suggestions. After the session we sat down to discuss the reactions and the suggestions and mapped the way forward..."

– Mr. John Wesley Mwenyeheri, a teacher from Domasi Primary School in Zomba, Malawi.

Telling Our Story

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MALAWI'S EDUCATION IS riddled with many challenges that have led to poor pupil access, retention and achievement in class. The Education Management Information System 2007 report indicated that 22.6% of repeaters in the first four standards and many learners are unable to read and write by standard 3. Many reasons have been cited and one of them being lack of reading materials leading to poor reading culture. In the past, the Government of Malawi and many other stakeholders have responded by stocking the schools with some books for the learners to use but still not much improvement seems to have been made.

However, a new dawn seems to have engulfed Malawi when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through Read Malawi Program made a breakthrough by supplying many reading books in schools. Even so, one of the teachers Mr. John Wesley Mwenyeheri from Domasi Primary School that is situated 20 kms from Zomba, the old capital of Malawi says, "It is not the quantity of books but the quality of the books that matters!" He further explained that the process that Read Malawi followed during production of reading materials was very commendable. "The authors of those books you see there on the shelf came to our school to pre-test the materials before printing them. They asked the average learners to read the drafted materials while teachers together with the authors observed and listened to the learners' reactions and suggestions. After the session we sat down to discuss the reactions and the suggestions and mapped the way forward. The input from this "Field Testing" has assisted in coming up with materials that have pictures and stories to arouse interest in many learners to read. Apart from that the "Field Testing" also provided the opportunity to the teachers to participate in developing the teaching instruction materials that are being utilized for these Read Malawi books." Mr Henri Chilora, former Principal Curriculum Specialist in Malawi echoed the same sentiments and said, "There is a tendency by most authors to write books for children without the authors themselves taking the books for "Field Testing" just because they want to cut down costs or feel there is no need for doing so as they have been doing this exercise for a long time. The idea of sending reading materials to teachers and asking them to comment on them without the author being there in person to test the materials with the children and teachers compromises quality!"

Thanks to USAID through Read Malawi that ensured "Field Testing" took place and many learners and teachers participated in the development of the reading books that are making a difference in Malawi. More than 90% learners are able to read and write by standard 3 at Mponda and Domasi primary schools where Read Malawi program is being implemented. Parents too have seen the fruits of these quality materials and are showing their appreciation by sending their children to such schools leading to high pupil enrolment in standards 1 to 3. One parent from Mponda Primary School Mr. Oscar Kumala remarked on such increase, "Good commodities advertise themselves and schools that provide good quality education do not need any advertisement!"