

PRIMARY SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM: A SCHOOL FEES PILOT

MOBILISATION CORPS OF MALAWI END OF PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT



December 2008

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By Peter Mvula and Alister Munthali

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Peter Mvula and Alister Munthali
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
AIR	American Institute for Research
BLP/M	Beginning Literacy Program of Malawi
CRECCOM	Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GVH	Group Village Headman
HIV	Human Immuno-Virus
HSA	Health Surveillance Assistant
KI	Key Informant
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MCM	Mobilisation Corps of Malawi
MIE	Malawi Institute of education
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
MWAI	Miske Witt and Associates, Incorporated
OVC	Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PIF	Policy Investment Framework
PSSP: SFP	Primary Schools Support program: A School Fees Pilot
SMC	School Management Committee
TA	Traditional Authority
TALULAR	Teaching and Learning Using Locally Using Locally Available Resources
TDC	Teachers Development Centre
TTC	Teachers' Training College
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VH	Village Headman
ZOC	Zonal Coordinator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

While primary school enrolment increased from about 2 million to 3.2 million after introduction of free primary education in 1994, the Government of Malawi has not been able to provide enough and adequately trained teachers for the increased enrolment. Over the years Government has trained teachers to cater for the increased enrolment but only a small proportion has been trained so far. The USAID funded PSSP:SFP project was an attempt to support government through involvement of communities in school management. Through this project, the Mobilisation Corps of Malawi (MCMs) who were community members who had completed MSCE were recruited, trained and engaged to contribute towards improving quality of education in their respective communities in Dowa District in central Malawi. The MCMs were engaged in making teaching and learning materials using locally available resources (TALULAR), making play parks for school pupils, establishment of academic clubs (reading, mathematics, drama and quiz), mobilisation of communities for school development activities such as moulding of bricks for constructing teachers' houses and school blocks, encouraging vocational skills, working with youth clubs and community-based organizations, mentoring children especially OVC and girls, and helping organize fund-raising activities for the schools, among other responsibilities.

This evaluation was commissioned to determine (i) the impact of the MCMs at community and school level, among learners and among the MCMs themselves; (ii) the extent to which the MCMs worked with communities and their leadership in identifying education related problems and developing sustainable ways of dealing with them; (iii) the extent to which they contributed to the improvement of the quality of education; (iv) the extent to which they supported OVC and girls in their pursuit of education; and (v) the effectiveness of the MCM training and on-going support to provide MCM volunteers with the necessary resources and skills needed to work at the community level and effect local change.

2. METHODOLOGY

A number of methods were used to collect data. Program documents such as training manuals, mid-term evaluation report, annual reports and the MCM concept paper were obtained from the PSSP: SFP project. The PSSP: SFP also conducted a survey in June 2008 among MCMs and the raw data was shared with the evaluation team. In September 2008 FGDs were conducted with village headmen, learners, community members and SMCs. KIIs were conducted with the Deputy Chief of Party and MCM coordinator within PSSP, Group Village Headmen, the District Youth Officer, PEAs, ZOC, Desk Officer for PSSP at the District Education office, head teachers and some community members. In-depth interviews were conducted with MCMs still in service and some that had left and were pursuing teacher training courses.

3. RESULTS

This evaluation found that there were a lot of problems that schools were facing before the PSSP: SFP project and these included lack of school infrastructure (such as classrooms, toilets and teachers' houses), shortage of teachers, absenteeism of pupils, the lack of school supplies (notebooks and writing materials), cultural practices such as gule wankulu which barred children from going to school, and, among girls, the lack of parental support, unintended pregnancies and early marriages. Before this project there were no initiatives to address these problems except in isolated cases where World Vision and MASAF constructed school blocks and teachers houses.

The engagement of MCMs made school interesting for pupils as they established play parks, games and sporting activities. They also created a link between teachers and the communities as there was no coordination between these two groups before and they worked with teachers to develop teaching and learning materials. The MCMs were successful in mentoring OVC who in most cases lacked close peers. Before MCMs started working, they were trained and all of them reported that the training was helpful as they acquired knowledge and skills such as community mobilisation, how to work with stakeholders, the production of TALULAR and establishment of play parks and academic clubs among other issues. BLP was the least understood topic as mentioned by 40% of the MCMs.

A number of school blocks, teachers' houses and toilets have been constructed in Dowa District with the leadership of MCMs and parents and other members of the community participated by moulding bricks and carrying sand and water among other duties. The village headmen control gule wankulu which escorted children to school hence increased enrolment. Without village headmen's involvement it would have been impossible for gule wankulu to participate in encouraging children to go to school. Gule wankulu also helped to raise funds which were then used to address the needs of OVC. MCMs created awareness among the community members about the need for children to go to school and coupled with the introduction of play parks in schools, mentoring of children and the production and utilisation of TALULAR, school enrolment has increased in Dowa District. For example at Mtiti Primary School the number of children enrolled increased from about 800 to 2000. These activities have also decreased absenteeism among pupils. The MCMs also brought back to school children who had dropped out of school. With the help of TALULAR and academic clubs, children even those in Standard 2 were able to read and write. The MCMs were also able to teach some classes hence relieving the pressure that teachers had. The use of TALULAR was not common in schools in Dowa. With the coming of MCMs most teachers adopted this practice and it makes their teaching easy and fun. Since MCMs were involved in making TALULAR the pressure on the teachers to produce these materials was eased. For MCMs themselves, they acquired new knowledge and skills and gained some valuable work experience which has proved invaluable as can be seen from those that have been admitted in TTC and the police. The art of community mobilization and communication skills (such as speaking in public) are among the many impacts that the programme had on the MCMs.

The evaluation also found that the MCMs experienced stiff resistance at the beginning of the programme, especially from some teachers: in some schools teachers could not participate in TALULAR production or establishment of academic clubs. In some cases play parks were vandalised. These things however stopped with the sensitization. While the MCMs were provided with bicycles, during the rains mobility was a problem. The frequent breakdowns of the push bikes affected the MCMs' performance. As a pilot initiative, PSSP examined whether volunteers worked more effectively operating from their homes or deployed outside of their home village. Those deployed away from home experienced problems such as lack of good accommodation, lack of family support when ill, taking time to get used to the area as they were new and they bought most of the foodstuffs and firewood and other things they required. A few respondents reported that personal activities such as farming were disturbed when they worked away from home. One advantage for those working away from their home villages was that they were not involved in some activities that they would normally do when they were at home and they had time to concentrate on their work. Those working from home though knew their home area well and this made their job easy and they did not have problems with accommodation and meals. A major challenge was that of not being taken seriously and not being appreciated for the contribution they were making. Some MCMs also felt that working from home was disadvantageous because they were disturbed by activities in their homes hence they could not work properly.

In terms of sustainability, all the MCMs agreed that they would continue serving the children of Dowa as MCMs when the project phased out. They will continue to do the same work they were doing in the schools and communities namely: sensitization of communities about the importance of education, facilitating the construction of school blocks and other structures, establishing and

maintaining play parks, production of TALULAR and running school based clubs. Some said they would be working as temporary teachers and would continue monitoring the activities they had initiated. Some even mentioned that they would do the same work even without being given any stipend. The MCM program instilled a sense of patriotism and responsibility in the MCMs such that most of them mentioned the need to help their communities, relatives and friends and children in their communities and their district of Dowa. With regard to OVC, MCMs created awareness among guardians about the need to care for them and that they should also go to school. In general most of the community members were aware of the MCMs and the work that they performed in their communities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation has generally shown that the MCMs have contributed significantly towards addressing some of the major school related problems that were being experienced in Dowa. Communities now value education: they participate in school development projects and send their children to school. The MCMs have increased school enrolment through the use of gule wankulu which escorts children of school going age to school and establishment of play parks which attracts and retains children in school and encouraging parents and guardians to send their children to school including OVC and girls. In school they contributed to the production of TALULAR which was not happening previously and this has assisted teaching and learning in schools in Dowa District. They have also formed academic clubs which are also helping learners quite a lot as they are able to read and write even the ones in Standard 2. The MCMs have also seen themselves changing in that they have acquired new skills and knowledge and they are now quite good at public speaking. Within the short period over which these MCMs have worked they have demonstrated that, despite the fact that they are young, they can bring about development in their communities.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Judging from the results and the impact, the programme is a very useful one. There is therefore, a need to find some way of sustaining it. It is for this reason that the following recommendations are made.

- This program was implemented for 2 and a quarter years but this is a short period for any meaningful impact. It is thus recommended that USAID extends the programme for two more years. At the same time, it should be introduced in three other districts (one per region) so as to see how this programme could work in a different geographical and cultural setting.
- Even though the project has come to an end, the MCMs said that they would continue doing the same work in their communities. The Ministry of Education through its local structures such as the DEM, PEAs and teachers should be encouraged to monitor and work with the MCMs.
- The MCM program has created a sense of patriotism among the youths of Dowa District. While MCMs can be posted away from their homes as was the case during the pilot it is recommended that the MCMs should work in their communities to ease the pressure on their stipend since they would not have to pay for the accommodation and food.
- PSSP should organize other stakeholders in the education sector, for example UNICEF, the World Bank and DFID and sell the idea of extending and expanding the programme to them.
- It seems gule wankulu played an important role in drawing children to school. It is important that such initiatives should be encouraged by PSSP and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the village headmen and other traditional leaders.

- Most of the young men and women are very enterprising and they could help in sourcing funds for some activities from potential donors. It is recommended that PSSP should expand the training on proposal development so that MCMs are able to write sound and good proposals that could be funded.
- Just as the Ministry of Health has created a cadre of employees (Health Surveillance Assistants - HSAs) from what used to be community health volunteers, the Ministry of Education using structures currently existing in their ministry for supervision and support, should do the same with MCMs as they have proved to be an important link between communities and the school system.
- AIR and the Ministry of Education should continue to sensitise communities so that they should appreciate their roles in the schools including participating in construction and maintenance of school blocks and play parks initiated by MCMs.
- Despite this being voluntary work, it is recommended that a stipend of K5000 should continue to be paid to the volunteers and that this cost should in the mean time be absorbed by AIR. It is further recommended that Government of Malawi should take up the responsibility of scaling up the use of MCMs. This however has monetary implications. As of 2006 there were 5231 primary schools in Malawi. Each MCM should be responsible for a maximum of 3 schools. This implies that 1,750 MCMs would be required to manage the schools countrywide. If each MCM gets a stipend of MK5,000 per month, a total of MK105,000,000 would be required for payment of stipend to all the MCMs per annum. In addition to this, each MCM would be given a bicycle which costs MK8,000 and for all MCMs to get the bicycle MK14,000,000 would be required and this is a once off investment. It should be mentioned that this does not cover the training of MCMs.
- We recommend that the rigorous process of recruitment, selection and training that was used during the pilot should be maintained since it ensures the recruitment of good candidates who subsequently would delivery good quality work.
- Since MCMs seem to do well in making teaching aids, mentoring and community mobilization, it is recommended that these should be their priority tasks and that they should not get into too much teaching.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 WHY MOBILIZATION CORPS OF MALAWI?

Before 1994 both primary and secondary school students paid school fees. The payment of school fees and the mandatory requirement that all school children were supposed to put on school uniform were perceived as barriers to accessing education especially among the poor. This is why in 1994 the Government of Malawi abolished the payment of school fees in primary schools and introduced free primary education. The mandatory wearing of school uniform was also abolished at the same time. This policy directive saw primary school enrolment rising from 1.9 million to 3.2 million. Even though this was the case, recent studies have shown that only 30% of those who start Standard 1 finish standard 8 and only about 86% reach Standard 5. While the policy directive to introduce free primary school education was good as it removed the barriers to accessing education experienced by the poor, the quality of education being offered by public schools is severely compromised by the severe shortage of trained teachers. After introducing free primary education 20,000 untrained temporary teachers were recruited and the PIF reports that in 2001 50% of the teachers in primary schools were untrained. The PIF further reports that Malawi has 45,000 teachers against 3.2 million pupils. The required number of teachers in primary school is 53,344. There are also problems such as inadequate classrooms, shortages of teaching and learning materials; high dropout of girls due to early marriages; and overcrowding in schools.

It is evident from the PIF and the 2007 Malawi Millennium Development Goals report that while primary school enrolment has increased considerably, the Government of Malawi on the other hand has not been able to provide enough and adequately trained teachers for the increased enrolment and this has resulted into many pupils being taught by unqualified teachers. Over the years, the Ministry of Education has embarked on training the teachers who were recruited to cater for the increased enrolment but only a small proportion of teachers have been trained so far. Likewise, the government is re-engaging the communities to be involved in education through the National Strategy for Community Management in Primary School Management which is an attempt by the Government of Malawi to involve communities in education. The USAID funded Primary School Program: A School Fees Pilot (PSSP:SFP) was an attempt to support government through implementation of activities that mobilized communities to be actively involved in school management. Through this program, the Mobilisation Corps of Malawi (MCMs) who were community members who had completed Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) were engaged to contribute towards improving quality of education in their communities. The MCM program was piloted in Dowa District in central Malawi.

I.2 THE MOBILISATION CORPS OF MALAWI IN THE WIDER PSSP: SFP PROGRAM

The PSSP: SFP is a 3 year initiative funded by USAID and its core goal is to achieve equitable access to quality education and to reach this goal, the project has 3 objectives namely: (i) To increase access to basic education and improve learning with special focus on orphans, vulnerable children, girls and children with special needs; (ii) To increase resources at the school level; and (iii) To improve teaching and learning outcomes in schools in Dowa . Acknowledging that there is a shortage of trained teachers, the program works to improve the professional development of teachers as well as mobilize communities to become owners of the schools which has been lacking in the previous years. The program was implemented in all the 226 public primary schools in Dowa District by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in collaboration with the Creative Centre for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM), Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), and Miske Witt and Associates, Incorporated (MWAI). Each of these institutions had specific roles and responsibilities in the implementation of this program.

Within the wider PSSP: SFP a youth volunteer program called the Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCM) was launched. The MCM is a voluntary service-learning program that provides MSCE graduates the opportunity to lead rural communities in practical responses to complex development problems. The MCM supports communities to identify local problems and their causes and develop means to address the problems in collaboration with communities. The MCM mobilize communities to improve the quality of education and enhance support services for orphans and other vulnerable children including children with special learning needs and girls. Ideally, they live and work within their own communities and provide on-going guidance and support in the implementation of plans that are collaboratively drawn up. The MCM model is framed on volunteerism, fostering self-reliance, encouraging a sense of civic responsibility and elevating their sense of patriotism. MCM volunteers act as catalysts within the community to effect change and form the hub of on-going activities to leverage critical change at the community level. In order to achieve the concept, the program engages the services of the youths of Dowa origin as volunteers, resident in the main education zones of Dowa as Mobilization Corps of Malawi (MCMs). These MCMs live and work within the locality of the communities in a cluster of 2 to 4 schools

The MCM program works with a team of 69 volunteers in all zones in Dowa district. The program started as a pilot in 3 zones and 15 volunteers for a 5 month period and was expanded to all zones for the first main cohort in January 2007. The second cohort started in 2008, with 20 new volunteers and 49 original volunteers. MCMs range in age from 19 to 32 years and with an average age of 25 years. Volunteers went through a rigorous selection process that consisted of personal interviews, screening by local leaders and final selection by PSSP project staff. Volunteers were reviewed based on their academic performance, communication skills, and their previous experience working in volunteer community projects. During the performance period, volunteers were expected to complete the following tasks:

- Live and work in select rural communities;
- Implement a range of support mechanisms for learners, including the establish of play parks, academic or interest clubs, tutor, mentor, provide classroom support, liaise with various stakeholders to garner resources, raise awareness in the communities on education issues, support community initiatives, among others.
- Identify change agents and establish working relationships and networks within the target communities;
- Maintain on-going communications with fieldworkers and PSSP staff; including reporting issues or problems that arise within their communities;
- Produce monthly and quarterly reports outlining their work and on-going activities;
- Collaborate with all field extension workers and PSSP staff in community-based activities.

Each group of volunteers received initial training as well as midway reviews and re-training that included techniques and methodologies of social mobilization and content specialized training in areas such as HIV/AIDS, elements of educational quality, problem solving, mentoring, facilitation skills, understanding stakeholders, assessing community resources, implementing small grants, financial management, journaling, and action planning . In the initial phase of program development community leaders and key stakeholders were contacted to elicit their expectations in reference to the potential contribution and impact of the MCMs. In addition to training, MCM volunteers were each provided with a bicycle and supported regularly by PSSP staff.

I.3 PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Purpose of this evaluation

The MCM program was implemented in Dowa District starting in April 2006 and was completed on 30th September 2008. While a number of reviews have been done which have demonstrated that the program has been successful and has achieved its objectives, there was a need for more information in order to determine how effective the program had been. Currently, there are formalised links between Malawi's school system and the communities in the form of SMC/PTA which are Acts of Parliament. These formalised relationships can be strengthened with the facilitation of the MCMs. For policy decisions to be made to scale up such an initiative there is a need for more information about the specific mechanisms of the MCM program upon which policy makers and planners can base their decision.

This study was therefore commissioned in order to determine (i) the impact of the MCMs at community and school level, among learners and among the MCMs themselves; (ii) the extent to which the MCMs worked with communities and their leadership in identifying education related problems and developing sustainable ways of dealing with them; (iii) the extent to which they contributed to the improvement of the quality of education; (iv) the extent to which they supported OVC and girls in their pursuit of education; and (v) the effectiveness of the MCM training and on-going support to provide MCM volunteers with the necessary resources and skills needed to work at the community level and effect local change.

The specific tasks that were supposed to be done as detailed in the Terms of Reference included the reviewing of project documentation related to the MCM program including development of protocols, the analysis of existing survey information collected from MCMs; the development of protocols to assess firsthand the perceptions of target beneficiaries regarding the impact of the literacy pilots and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the MCM program.

1.3.2 Methodology

In order to address the purpose of this study a number of methods were used to collect the necessary data. Available documentation of the program was obtained from the PSSP: SFP including the training manuals, mid-term evaluation report, annual reports and the concept paper. This documentation was reviewed. In addition to this information, the Program also carried out a survey in June 2006 and June 2008 among MCMs and the raw data was shared with the evaluators. At the end of September 2008 FGDs were conducted with village headmen, with learners, male and female members of the community and SMCs. In addition to this, key informant interviews were also conducted with the Deputy Chief of Party, and MCM coordinator within PSSP, Group Village Headmen, the District Youth Officer; PEAs; ZOC; Desk Officer for PSSP at the District Education Office; head teachers and some community members. Last but not least, in-depth interviews were conducted with MCMs that were still in service and some that had left and were pursuing teacher training courses. Annex I shows the list of FGDs and key informant interviews which were conducted as part of this evaluation.

2. RESULTS

2.1 SCHOOL RELATED PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED IN COMMUNITIES

2.1.1 General problems

This study looked at the school related problems that were being experienced in Dowa District before the MCM program. A number of such problems were mentioned. Being a tobacco growing district, one of the biggest problems that the education sector in Dowa faced was absenteeism amongst learners because children were being sent to tobacco estates to work other than going to school:

“Before the MCMs were introduced guardians used children to work on their tobacco fields. For your own information Dowa is one of the districts that grows a lot of tobacco so the children are a major source of labour. Child labour was thus a big problem and absenteeism was a major issue”.
(An interview with Mr. H. Mainja, District Youth Officer, Dowa)

It was learnt during most FGDs and in-depth interviews that previously most parents did not appreciate the importance of education; hence they preferred to send their children to work on tobacco farms and herd cattle instead of sending them to school. This was worsened by the fact that in most schools the infrastructure was poor or not available: there was a shortage of school blocks, teachers’ houses and toilet facilities. The lack of teachers’ houses led to the shortage of teachers because many teachers did not want to work in Dowa, especially in remote areas, where teachers’ houses were grossly lacking. In some cases, teachers rented houses quite far from their school hence sometimes they reported for duties late or they were absent due to lack of transport. In most schools, there was a shortage of school blocks for example a teacher at Chambizi Primary School said that the school had few school blocks and during the rainy season it was very hard for pupils to be in school as they were learning in open space. In addition to shortage of school blocks and teachers houses, there was also a shortage of toilets. A teacher at Mtsukamakoza Primary School further reported that at his school there was a shortage of toilets and at one time there was only one working toilet which was reserved for teachers hence children had to find their own ways of relieving themselves. He mentioned that the boys did not have major problems in relieving themselves but that girls felt shy and the next day they could not report for school.

While accommodation for teachers was a problem, it was also mentioned in most FGDs and in-depth interviews that in general there was a shortage of teachers in schools in Dowa District for example as reported by a participant in an FGD with school committee members at Kalipindire Primary School:

“The school only has 3 teachers teaching all classes from standard 1 to 8. This affects the children in such a way that they spend much of their time not learning. Some who see that they are not being taught they go back home. Little by little they start to lose interest in school”.

The shortage of teachers meant that school pupils were not learning much and this also led to absenteeism. Learners for example from Mtsukamakoza Primary School mentioned during an FGD that it was difficult for the few teachers to teach all classes hence sometimes they could go to school and come back without learning. At this school, there were 4 teachers and one teacher was responsible for 3 to 4 classes.

Because of widespread poverty pupils also lacked school uniforms, writing materials, clothes and food and these things also were major reasons for absenteeism from school among school pupils. Key informants namely teachers and village heads and participants in FGDs with boys and girls also reported the shortage of teaching and learning materials especially in the infant section. Another problem was the *gule wankulu* whose programmes often coincided with the school calendar and this attracted boys to its activities at the expense of school. In some cases *gule wankulu* just instilled fear

in the school going children who then could not go to school. Early marriages due to poverty were also reported as a major barrier in the education of girls. During an FGD with school girls at Mbalame Primary School participants further mentioned that they lacked educational support from parents because they (parents) also did not understand the importance of education. In addition to this, in a number of schools for example Mtiti primary School, it was further mentioned that there was shortage of water at the school.

Above all else, the communities in Dowa did not have a sense of owning the schools. Schools were either for the government or churches. This led to the spirit of vandalising school property. Worse still, school management committees were not transparent enough in dealing with school matters. This discouraged others from taking part in school activities. A teacher at Mtsukamakoza Primary School further added that children in the community lacked role models and they had nobody to admire for them to work hard at school and with the coming of MCMs children have someone to admire. This was also mentioned during an FGD with male community members held at Mtsukamakoza Primary School.

Another problem that was mentioned in one FGD with female learners at Mbalame Primary was the lack of clubs in schools. Participants in this FGD mentioned that one of the major problems that they faced was lack of clubs such as debating clubs. In an FGD with boys at Chambizi Primary School participants mentioned that in some cases they could not understand some topics because of failure to understand English. They explained that this was a problem because they had difficulties in learning English mostly spoken English. Debate clubs which are now available have helped pupils to be confident when they are speaking in public and the majority of students became fluent in English. The participants further mentioned the lack of play materials such as balls, swings and other games. According to participants, this increased absenteeism because school pupils had nothing to do. In some cases because of lack of play parks school pupils for example at Mtiti Primary School used to play at the market and this resulted in coming late for classes.

In summary it can be concluded that there were a lot of problems that the schools were facing most notably the lack of school infrastructure, the shortage of teachers, absenteeism of school children for various reasons, early marriages, the lack of school supplies such as notebooks and writing materials and cultural practices such as *gule wankulu* which used to bar children from going to school and the lack of support from parents for girls education..

2.1.2 Problems faced by girls

While school pupils may face similar problems, there are special problems that girls might experience which are different from those experienced by boys. One of the major problems experienced by girls as narrated by key informants and participants in FGDs was the general lack of support from parents as there was a widespread belief that education is for boys and not girls. Because of lack of encouragement from parents and other members of the community, girls dropped out of school and married quite early when they were still too young for marriage.

“The girls were mainly forced to marry before they were ready. Early marriage was a problem. The coming of MCMs has changed things. The MCMs tried their best to sensitise the community here and the people have realized that school is important for everyone. People are no longer thinking that if a girl is a grown up then she should drop out of school and get married”

(An interview with Mr. N. Samuel, a Head Teacher)

In some cases though, it is the girls themselves who feel that they are grown-ups especially after attaining puberty and hence they desire to get married. Girls, as mentioned in an FGD with female learners at Kalipindire Primary School, are assigned a lot of work for example sweeping the compound, cooking, caring for their siblings and fetching water. This is done even before they go to school and engagement in such activities makes them late for classes. Since poverty is widespread, households would rather prioritise boys to go to school than girls and some preferred girls to get

married early so that they can get some money in form of bride price or *chiwongo*¹. It was only during one FGD with boys at Mtiti Primary School where mention was made that girls are raped and they drop out of school. The major problem that girls experienced was therefore early marriages and this was mainly because of lack of support from their parents or guardians who preferred that boys are the ones who should go to school.

2.1.3 Problems experienced by orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC)

There are a number of problems that orphans are experiencing and these arise because of lack of parents who can provide for them. It was reported in some cases that the same problems which have been highlighted above are also experienced by OVC. During most in-depth interviews and FGDs it was reported that orphans generally experience a lot of problems and these include the lack of parental love, lack of clothes, lack of school uniforms, lack of blankets, lack of food, lack of soap and other basic necessities hence they opt to drop out of school:

“Some do not have clothes to put on as they go to school. Some are even made to work in their foster homes and do not find time to go to school”. (Participant in an FGD with female learners at Mtsukamakoza Primary school)

“Mostly the orphans face the problem of hunger and this is especially those coming from child headed households. Instead of spending much of their time doing school they spend it doing piece works to make money for food”. (Participant in an FGD with school committee members at Kalipindire Primary School)

“The orphans were failing to go to school because of lack of things such as clothes, soap and food. Most of them are kept by their grandparents and they used to feel embarrassed to go to school with torn clothes.” (Participant in an FGD with male community members at Mtsukamakoza Primary School)

Because of the problems that orphans experience, it was reported in FGDs and interviews that instead of being at school they are forced to look for *ganyu* in order to find money and address the immediate problems that they are experiencing. While a good number of OVC go to primary school, some of them find problems to go to secondary school because even if they are selected school fees and school uniforms are major barriers to continue with education. In an FGD with school committee members at Kalipindire Primary School a participant gave an example of a boy who was selected to go to Robert Blake Secondary School but could not go because he was from a poor household which could not afford school fees and other school requirements. This study also found that there are some orphans who are not treated well in their households: some are verbally abused; some are sent to work to generate money instead of going to school; while some are forced to get married. In most cases these orphans live with their grandparents who are equally very poor and cannot afford to cater for the needs of orphaned children. The bulk of the problems that orphans experience are as a result of lack of parental care and poverty.

2.2 ADDRESSING SCHOOL RELATED PROBLEMS

The above discussions demonstrate that there were a number of problems that were being experienced and these included the lack of school blocks, the lack of teachers' houses, the lack of toilets, absenteeism, widespread poverty especially among OVC and early marriages for girls. In almost all the FGDs and interviews conducted it was mentioned that previously before the coming of the MCMs there were very few initiatives to address the school related problems that were being experienced by the community, learners and schools/teachers. There were isolated cases for example during an FGD with girls at Chambizi Primary School participants reported that organisations such as World Vision and MASAF have been constructing school blocks and teachers houses in the area.

¹ *Chiwongo* is money that people from bridegroom side pays to bride family.

Apart from this, it was also reported that the community recognized these problems and that even though there were attempts to address them not much was achieved because people were not used to working together as reported by, among others, Village Headman Kanjire. Even though the village headmen in some cases called meetings aimed discussing how these problems could be addressed, the response was quite poor especially in the area of education. One school committee member at Chambizi Primary School also reported that there were no initiatives to address these problems as there was no one to influence the community the way MCMs are doing. People generally appreciated the role of MCMs in addressing these problems as narrated by one head teacher and community members:



“If I see clearly, the change has come with the coming of MCMs. There were no people who were entering the villages holding community meetings like the MCMs. In those days there were many cases of early marriages, absenting from school and general lack of parent concern on education of their children”.

(An interview with Mr. N. Samuel, a head teacher)

“Gule wankulu is helping to make the children go to school. It is also fund raising for the orphans but also helping in building projects at the school. Now we are building the headmasters house because of gule wankulu”.

(Participant in an FGD with male community members at Mtsukamakoza)



As will be discussed later, it is clear that the coming of MCMs has contributed quite a lot to addressing the school related problems that have been discussed above. They have played an important role in the construction of school blocks, teachers’ houses and toilets thus addressing the infrastructural problems that schools were facing. The MCMs have also helped in addressing the needs of orphans for example the *gule wankulu* has been involved in mobilization of funds which have been used to buy school uniforms and food for orphans and it also escorts children to school.

2.3 MOBILISATION CORPS OF MALAWI (MCMS)

2.3.1 The MCM program according to key informants

There is recognition that in general there is quite high unemployment in Malawi and most of the people who finish MSCE are not able to find employment. Most of the MSCE graduates are just staying within their communities and not doing anything productive. The availability of these people in the communities was perceived by the program as a useful resource that can be used for the benefit of the community especially in terms of improving the quality of education. Key informants at PSSP: SFP and CRECCOM explained that the MCM program is modelled on Peace Corps who are volunteers. The idea was that while people, both men and women, who have finished their MSCE are waiting for something else to do in their lives they can serve their communities as MCMs and contribute to the development of education in their natal communities. This involvement can shape their career and, as shall be seen later, a number of the MCMs have since been accepted into Teachers Training Colleges (TTCs), police and other organisations.

The youth, as mentioned by a teacher at Mtsukamakoza Primary School and a key informant at CRECCOM, are always perceived as trouble makers in almost every community and at the beginning of the MCM program, many people thought that the youth would not make it. They thought that the program will be a failure. Such a mentality is common in Malawi and according to a key informant at CRECCOM the MCM program was really aimed at changing people's perception about the youth and demonstrate that the youth can be involved in supporting development initiatives. It also aimed at bringing attention to government and other stakeholders that the youth are equally important and have the potential to bringing about development. According to informants from CRECCOM and PSSP the engagement of MCMs was aimed at making the school interesting to school pupils by bringing play parks, games and sporting activities which were forgotten in most schools; creating a link between teachers and the communities as there was little coordination between these two groups as exemplified by communities vandalizing teaching and learning materials made by teachers; to work with teachers to develop teaching and learning materials; and, lastly, to mentor OVC who in most cases lacked close peers. These responsibilities, as narrated by key informants, were in line with the project documents².

2.3.2 Recruitment and deployment of MCMs

The MCM program started in April 2006. There are 13 zones in Dowa District and the MCM program only started in 3 zones namely Chimungu, Mponela and Madisi which were located close to Lilongwe for easy supervision. During the pilot a total of 15 MCMs (7 girls and 8 boys) were recruited. In an interview with officials from CRECCOM and PSSP, it was mentioned that after recruitment MCMs underwent training for a 5 day period. This training involved all the major stakeholders: Ministry of Youth, the Director of Planning and Development in the District Assembly, CRECCOM and American Institutes of Research in Malawi and the United States. At the end of the training, the MCMs were also given bicycles. Before the recruitment of MCMs, a lot of sensitization of the communities was done. Members of the community were told that MCMs were supposed to be secondary school graduates and from Dowa District and those who were willing to serve on a voluntary basis. The program went to each and every school and briefed them about the program. In the catchment area of each school, the program met the school management committees, parents' and teachers' associations, teachers, community leaders and the community at large including parents, guardians and learners. The idea was to determine what they could do, what is acceptable and what is required to train them or to be included in their training. MPs, TAs and other stakeholders were also sensitized. Vacancies for MCMs were advertised in the communities through placing posters at TDCs and trading centres and people applied, applications were screened and the names of candidates were then taken to their communities and community members selected them

² See *Mobilization corps of Malawi - original concept note*.

after which a list of successful candidates was compiled and this list was taken to the community again.

The idea was that the communities should be involved in the selection of MCMs who could work in their area. While in some interviews and FGDs it was reported that communities did participate in the recruitment of MCMs, there were a number of MCMs who were recruited without communities being involved. For example, in an interview with a member of the school committee at Mtiti Primary School he said that community members did not choose MCMs in their area but rather they were asked to search for someone who had an MSCE and the community did not have anyone who had that certificate. It seemed therefore that the program just chose the MCM for the community in this context. In most cases, however, the members of the community were involved in choosing the MCMs as they, together with the village headmen, had to verify whether that MCM was from the same community or not.

There were some people in the communities who did not know how MCMs were selected for example in an FGD with school committee members at Kalipindire Primary School and another FGD with female community members at Mtsukamakoza Primary School participants reported that they had no idea about how MCMs were selected. All they knew was that whoever applied for the job was supposed to have an MSCE and this community did not have this person. The MCM was therefore just sent to them. During a key informant interview with an official from CRECCOM it was also mentioned that there were a number of problems during the recruitment process as in some communities it was difficult to find people with MSCE. While the program also wanted a good number of female MCMs, it could not find females who had the qualifications required for an MCM. During interviews it was also found that some applicants could not speak English fluently and in some cases the interviews were done in vernacular. Things have however changed significantly as shall later be demonstrated later that even those who failed to communicate properly in English, their communication skills improved significantly.

2.3.3 Why they chose to be MCMs?

In a questionnaire which was administered to MCMs in June 2008, respondents were asked to explain why they chose to be MCMs. A number of reasons were given. The majority of the respondents mentioned that they chose to be MCMs because they wanted to assist their communities and improve the quality of education especially among OVCs and girls. It is evident from the results that the MCM program instilled a sense of patriotism and responsibility in the MCMs such that most of them mentioned the need to help *their* communities, relatives and friends and children in *their* communities and *their* district of Dowa. While they wanted to assist children some of the respondents were quite specific that they wanted to support OVC and girls who were most vulnerable. For OVC it was mentioned that their major responsibility was to create awareness among guardians of the responsibilities that they have towards OVC. In most cases they also reported that they applied for the position of MCM because they developed an interest in the goals of the PSSP program:

“I chose to apply to serve as an MCM because I felt comfortable when I heard the goals of PSSP through posters. So I wanted to assist my community and OVCs without getting something.”
(An interview with Emmanuel Chagwenje, an MCM in Kayembe Zone)

Most people knew about the MCM programme through the advertisements that PSSP put up. From the job description most people saw this as opportunity to contribute towards the education of the learners in Dowa District. The job description aroused in them the desire to bring about change in the community to which they belonged and promote education. The saying that *“fumbi ndiwe mwini”* which literally means that if you want something you have to be in the forefront yourself was evident in most of the respondents. One would not fail to notice how patriotic the young men and women were. Below are examples of things that motivated MCMs:

“...From what I read from the vacancy, they said that the MCM’s were to serve the community in their various areas. For the love that I have for my community, I thought that I could help just like all other programs where volunteer work is involved. We see a lot of that in the villages and many women do it for the love of the community. I have a very good example, we see the women sweeping in the churches, this is also volunteer work and I thought I could also manage to serve the community...” (Khumbidze Singo, a female MCM from Chimungu Zone)

“I joined the MCMs when I was already teaching on a voluntary basis due to the acute shortage of teachers at my school. My motivation for doing so was the love for my community and to serve those that are deprived. That was my motive then and it still is my motive now”.
(Patrick Mnjale, a male MCM from Kamphenga Zone)

“...Being a citizen of Malawi and the fact that I was born in Dowa District, I thought that it was a very good idea to improve the education of others. I take all people in Dowa to be my relatives, I love them and I thought my services can help a lot of girls to get back to school. There is no reason more than what I have said but I vowed to work for my people even with no pay or stipend...”
(Davie Makina, a male MCM from Chimungu Zone)

“...MCMs were to work as volunteers and the main aim was to help develop the various communities in Dowa District. Though it may sound tough to work as a volunteer, looking at how one would sustain himself or herself considering how the food prices have gone up, I still had the feeling that I would manage to contribute just to help my community no matter how difficult my up-keep would be. I mean, it is always good to develop your own home, don’t you think so? Apart from that, I wanted to set up an example to the community. I wanted them to learn that educated or not educated, it is still important to work with your own community as far as development is concerned...” (Hetala Nyamukani, a male MCM from Katalima Zone)

In addition to serving their communities, another major attraction for applying was that they were interested in the contents of the advert. There were also other reasons which were mentioned and these included to take part in developments taking place in their areas; to serve learners in their district; encourage children to go to school; and to serve as role models in their own areas. It should be mentioned that most of these MCMs never worked before hence some reported they wanted to gain some skills, knowledge and experience that they could use in future for example community mobilisation. It is evident therefore that they applied for this job mainly because they wanted to serve their communities and contribute towards the improvement of education.

2.3.4 People’s awareness of MCMs

In all the FGDs, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews it was reported that people were generally knowledgeable about the MCMs and they became aware of these MCMs through different channels. Some people learnt about MCMs through meetings called at the school by the PSSP program and the Teachers Development Centres (TDC) during which they were told about MCMs. School pupils for example female learners at Mtsukamakoza Primary School reported that the MCM was actually introduced by their teacher in class or by the headmaster during the assembly. Apart from meetings held at the schools, the PSSP and TDC also arranged for meetings within the communities with village headmen and their members where issues to do with MCMs were discussed. There were also other ways through which members of the community heard about MCMs and these included through the radio and school children learning from other school children:

“My friend who was in Standard 8 told me because the MCM worked with Standard 8 class a lot”,
(Participant in an FGD with female learners at Mtsukamakoza Primary school)

Some female learners at Chambizi Primary School reported that they heard about MCMs from their mother; some MCMs introduced themselves to children while others said they met the MCM while she was looking for children who had dropped out of school to ask them to go back to school. While most people reported having heard about MCMs, there was only one group of females in an

FGD conducted with them at Mtsukamakoza Primary School who reported that some people have never heard about MCMs.

During the study, participants in FGDs and respondents during interviews were also asked what they expected from MCMs after they were introduced. MCMs were expected to be available all the time and help the communities in school development work, introduce different games including toys, teach the communities things they were failing to do on their own, encourage children to go to school, encourage village headmen to participate in development work and support orphans and other vulnerable children. In most cases it was explained that people's expectations were met, while others were not met or were met partially. One of the issues that came out from an FGD with female learners at Chambizi Primary School was that the MCM was not available all the time at the school as he or she was also supposed to be at other schools hence not all expectations were met. In some schools such as Mtiti Primary School the MCM was expected to improve school attendance but this was not fulfilled as the school does not offer porridge. In some cases peoples' expectations were too much as they also expected the MCMs to be involved in water and other development initiatives within the village.

2.3.5 Training of MCMs

The idea to introduce MCMs is a new one in Malawi. It was therefore necessary to train the recruited MCMs on their new roles in society. According to key informants at CRECCOM, the major focus for the MCMs is community mobilization and during the training they were mainly trained on how they can enter communities and start their work: their training therefore emphasized on how to work with communities, how to make people participate, how to motivate people among other issues and the training involved role plays and practicals within communities. After the 5 day training period, the program further continued mentoring the MCMs and they worked with them to determine the challenges they were facing and how to address them. The training was also attended by Luke Shores from AIR.





People from CRECCOM and PSSP participated in the first meetings that were conducted in the communities where the MCMs were working. The presence of PSSP and CRECCOM in these early stages was quite useful because they provided support and helped the MCMs to address emerging issues. After the initial 5 days training there was a review and planning meeting which was attended by all the MCMs. The MCMs were able to teach each other the games that they did in their

communities. Another training followed the review and training meeting. Then a 15 days training session was mounted for MCMs, building on previous lessons from the initial training and reviews. The MCMs who participated in the pilot phase were quite useful as they had experience of doing the work as MCMs. The District Youth Office was also involved in terms of how best to involve youths. During the training there are a number of things that the MCMs are taught and these are:

TABLE I: TOPICS TAUGHT IN THE MCM TRAINING³

Working in a community	Conducting meetings	Small grants
Problem solving process	Building teamwork	Playing with children
Understanding quality in education	Features of effective teams	OVC, girls and CSNs
School supporting bodies	Conflict management	Case studies
Community mobilisation	Monitoring and evaluation	Theatre for development
Leadership styles and qualities	Sustainability of projects	TALULAR
Key functions of leadership	Cross cutting issues	Planning
Management of education materials	Promoting life skills development among school children	
Communication	Absenteeism	

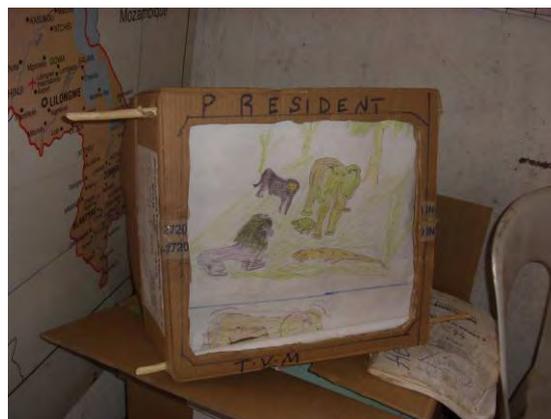
In general MCMs were aware of most of the topics that they covered even though they could not exactly mention these topics. In the survey that PSSP conducted among MCMs, the program wanted to find out how the training that the MCMs attended helped them. Most of the respondents reported that the training that they attended was quite helpful because they acquired knowledge and skills such as community mobilisation, how to work with stakeholders, the production of TALULAR

³ CRECCOM and AIR. (2007). *Mobilisation Corps of Malawi Training manual*. Zomba and Dowa: CRECCOM and AIR.

and establishment of play parks and academic clubs among other issues as can be seen from the following quotes:

“I was equipped with knowledge in different areas such as theatre for development things which were not there before the PSSP project”, (Charles Julias, a male MCM, Kayembe Zone)

“The training prepared me well for me to be an MCM in the way that I was fully trained in how to work in a community, how to make TALULAR, how to work with teachers, how to perform theatre for development, gender issues, health issues, forest issues and even encourage me to have a career path”, (Ireen Banda, Female MCM, Senga Zone)



Training was therefore useful in terms of equipping the MCMs with requisite knowledge and skills that they required in order for them to perform their work. All the MCMs appreciated the training. About 10% of the MCMs in the PSSP survey conducted in June reported that all parts of the training were most effective. Most of the MCMs said that the most effective part of the training was really the production of TALULAR, formation of academic clubs, theatre for development, establishment of the play parks and community mobilisation/working with different stakeholders. This is consistent with the activities that they are most popular with. On parts of the MCM training that was least effective approximately 40% of the MCMs mentioned BLP. Most of the respondents did not explain why they felt that BLP was least effective. Some said that they did not have much information on this topic and that not much time was given to this topic and since it was a new concept and not yet launched at the time, most probably did not understand the program well and their role in it. Nearly 36% of the respondents mentioned that none of the parts of the training was least effective. The other issues such as forestry, HIV/AIDS, human rights and democracy among other issues were mentioned only by one or two people. The training was therefore useful in terms of imparting the knowledge and skills that the MCMs required during their work. If the use of MCMs in promoting education has to be scaled up then training of selected MCMs should constitute a major component.

2.3 6 Community perceptions regarding the motivation of MCMs

During interviews and FGDs informants and participants were asked to explain what motivates the MCMs to do their work. This information is necessary as MCMs work on a voluntary basis and they receive a stipend of MK5,000.00 which is not much. All the MCMs understood that a volunteer is someone who works without pay. Some members of the community said that the MCMs are motivated to work because of the stipend that they receive. Before they started working as MCMs they were not getting anything and it was therefore an opportunity for them to earn some money. They also mentioned the support that the MCMs get from PSSP such as bicycles and the training they received as motivating the MCMs to work. Most of the people interviewed however mentioned that MCMs work because (i) of the passion they have to help children in their communities to get educated; (ii) they love their work; and (ii) they want to develop their areas. There were some key informants such as Chief Kanjire who mentioned that the reception that the MCMs get from the community and the teachers motivate them to work. This is because these two groups spend too

much time with the children and since the MCMs also involve children and if they (the community and teachers) do not want to be involved then the MCMs cannot be motivated.

Another important element that motivated the MCMs was the desire to gain knowledge, skills and experience. Since most of them were unemployed and chances of accessing training programmes were very slim, they saw this as an opportunity to be trained in something that could make them useful in the community and at the same time that would make them marketable. This fact was closely associated with the fact that some saw it as an opportunity for them to put to productive use the education and knowledge that they had gained during their secondary school days. One individual got her inspiration from a TV documentary that showed volunteers at work. She saw that they were not only providing a service but building their future careers as well. Others indicated that joining the programme was one way of killing boredom since they completed their secondary education. One MCM intimated:

“I was tired just to be at home. People talk too much and I was really fed up and wished to be out of that place. You know what, I was in big problems. The ladies were all over me because they really wished if I would get married. “.. amandinena kuti chiberekero changa chatopa chofunika ndikwatiwe nanga ana adzingothera kudambwe?”

(Edna Kachule, a female MCM from Chigudu Zone)

There were therefore a number of factors that motivated the MCMs to do their work and the cooperation that they received from the community and their willingness to help their communities constituted some of these.

2.3.7 The work that MCMs do



The tasks which were performed by MCMs varied from one MCM to the other and from one community to the other depending on the resources (both human and material) available. In general the responsibilities of MCMs revolved around: making teaching and learning materials using locally available resources (TALULAR); making play parks; formation of academic clubs (reading, mathematics, drama and quiz); mobilizing communities for school development activities; encouraging vocational skills; encouraging schools to top up the school Incentive package; working with youth clubs and

community-based organizations; mentoring; and helping organize fund-raising activities for the schools. The activities done by MCMs have generally made the school very interesting for children and the number of dropouts has greatly been reduced. The MCMs have also been instrumental in the construction and renovation of classrooms, teachers' houses and toilets. They are also involved in encouraging village headmen and parents to be involved in school activities for example moulding of bricks for building houses for teachers, providing teaching and learning materials and providing materials for making play parks in schools. In general community leaders were appreciative of the work that the MCMs perform and because of this work there has been great improvement:



“Our children are doing very well in school because of the work that our MCM, Estery Kadzisake, is doing. Our children are able to speak in English while in Standard 1.” (GVH Chakhaza)

In addition to these, the MCMs are also involved in the performance of drama that reflects the problems prevailing in the community and this passes on the message to the members of the community. In an FGD with female learners at Mbalame Primary School participants said that the MCMs were also giving assistance to the orphans for example food and clothes; checking what the school does not have so that they can assist in obtaining them and influencing children to stay in school by making play parks that have swings and games such as football which attract them to be in school. The MCMs also track children and they have a register for OVC. The MCMs also talk to school management to raise funds to buy soap for children who are in need or to buy what the child needs. The duties as performed by MCMs have not been done by any other persons previously in the communities hence they are playing an important role in the improvement of quality of education and enrolment.



One of the most powerful tools that MCMs used in their work of sensitisation and mobilisation of communities was theatre for development (TFD). This tool had a three way impact. The community was entertained and got the messages at the same time. The learners were also entertained, got the message and were also empowered. They used the same techniques when acting in the drama clubs. The MCMs themselves were empowered in that they got the skills necessary to do research needed for writing plays, create scenes and finally act. This gave them the potential to act but more importantly it was a

platform for community mobilisation. The evaluation team had an opportunity to observe the whole process and the work was impressive. From the interviews, key informants and FGDs it was clear that MCMs were mainly beneficial in terms of community mobilisation and production of TALULAR. Community mobilisation was important because, through this, MCMs managed to work with communities to construct and renovate structures (including play parks) at the schools which provided a better teaching and learning environment for the teachers and learners. It also increased school enrolment through the use of *gule wankulu* escorting school pupils. The use of *gule wankulu* further helped in fund raising. The production of TALULAR further enhanced the ability of the learners to read and write.

2.3.8 Role of the community and other stakeholders in MCM's work

The MCMs cannot do the work in the communities without getting support from members of the community. During the FGDs and in-depth interviews, it was reported that the communities play an important role. Parents and other members of the community help in the construction of classrooms and teachers houses. It was mentioned earlier that the lack of school blocks and teachers houses constitutes one of the major problems in Dowa. Through the work of MCMs, a number of school blocks have been constructed and parents and other members of the community participate by moulding bricks and carrying sand and water among other duties. It is the village heads who lead this community initiative. The participation of the communities in the work of MCMs is important because they are the ones who know the communities well and they know the problems they are experiencing as far as education is concerned and they contribute to the identification of solutions to these problems. Village headmen, school committees and community members mentioned that they contribute to whatever the MCM suggests. There were a few places where it was mentioned that the MCMs did not work all that well because they lacked support from the

community and that the MCM was not to blame. The members of the community also provide materials for making TALULAR and play parks. This can be enhanced by sensitizing the communities,

In a number of FGDs and interviews it was also mentioned that village heads are the ones who have control over *gule wankulu* which plays an important role in ensuring that children go to school. Without the involvement of village headmen who control *gule wankulu* it will be impossible for *gule wankulu* to participate in encouraging children to go to school. Recognising that orphans especially are facing a lot of problems in meeting their needs members of *gule wankulu* have also conducted fund raising activities and the funds realized have been used to address the needs of these orphans. There are also groups of parents which have been established within the communities to help orphans. In this way the community is contributing to the work of MCMs. These groups cultivate maize which they distribute to orphans and other vulnerable children.

“The most closely people I have worked with are chiefs, parents and teachers because these people are the keys to development issues at the school. In the absence of these people I believe school cannot be there since even teachers’ houses cannot be found at the school which is the responsibility of chiefs and parents including SMCs.” (Davie Makina, a male MCM, Kayembe Zone)

The survey administered by PSSP: SFP further reveals that there are a number of stakeholders that the MCMs work with and these included village headmen, SMC, teachers, PEAs, ZOCs, learners, parents, *akunjira*, artisans and youths among other stakeholders.

It was explained that all these stakeholders are important as they, in one way or another, are involved in the work of children. Village headmen are particularly important because they have authority over their people and when they call for meetings their subjects heed such calls. Their involvement is important as they are the ones who lead development projects such as the construction of school blocks. Some MCMs also mentioned that they work with learners. As has been mentioned earlier the MCMs spend a lot of time with children in play parks and they are also involved in teaching children and other activities such as quizzes and other academic clubs. They work with teachers in many ways including the making of TALULAR. It can be concluded that communities, SMCs and parents were important because they helped in the construction of schools among other initiatives and they create awareness amongst these people about the importance of education. Other extension workers such as HSAs have also played an important role especially in teaching HIV and AIDS as they are knowledgeable of such issues. What was emphasized by most MCMs was that they worked with a wide range of stakeholders mostly because there is a need for *team work* if the quality of education will improve in Dowa.

2.4 CHALLENGES BEFORE JOINING MCM

Before joining the MCM programme, about 55 percent of the 21 MCMs who were interviewed were like everybody in the villages living a normal village life. They were engaged in farming (growing tobacco, maize, groundnuts and soya beans) and helping with household chores. Only a hand full of them were engaged in some productive activities that would give them extra income (one operated a tea room, another was a nursery school teacher, one sold salt and cooking oil and taught at a private school, another was a fish monger and taught at a private school, one did carpentry and two taught voluntarily). It is in this light that one should understand the challenges they faced before joining the programme and these have been grouped into three categories namely economic, social and psychological.

2.4.1 Economic (poverty) problems

From the 21 in-depth interviews with MCMs, 75 percent mentioned lack of money to buy basic personal necessities as the number one challenge that they faced before joining the MCM program. They depended on their parents for almost all their needs. Given the situation of poverty in the villages, the parents could not meet most of their needs:

“Sometimes it was not easy for them to support me as they may wish. I had no clothes and even bathing soap was much of a problem. You don’t want to imagine that sometimes, I could bath with just water and a sponge, it was quite a challenge.” (Amina Chadzunda, a female MCM from Chigudu Zone)

Those that were doing small-scale businesses, the major problems were the lack of adequate capital and most of them used to make losses.

2.4.2 Social problems

Other statements from MCMs bordered on social interaction. Most of them indicated that staying idle after completing their secondary school was a problem because they slowly slipped back into village life and slowly began to forget what they had learned in school. This was because the only people they were interacting with were villagers. Hence, some of them lamented that even the quality of English that they spoke as time went by was getting poorer. The quotes below give an idea of the sentiments to this effect:

“...I was just like any other villager. Little by little, I forgot what I was taught at school. I used to speak better English, but I am telling you that my English and many other things that I learnt from school were affected. After I got employed as an MCM, I got back my English as at our review meetings, we presented everything in English and even at the office, we reported all other things in English plus more knowledge has been gained, even much better than what I got from school...” (Amina Chadzunda, a female MCM from Chimbuli Zone)

“You tend to forget about school when you are at home. You just get used to staying at home and all you think of is to do farming.” (Tamara Kwalira, a female MCM at a TTC)

2.4.3 Psychological

Just like any other school leaver, not finding a job when one has completed secondary school education and one has a certificate is bad enough. Some MCMs though indicated that they could live with this but the problem was the ridicule they got from some community members. People were actually mocking them for wasting time to go to school and some even went to the extent of telling them that they were a good example of why children should not waste time with school. Instead, they should either marry or help parents in their gardens. Below are some of the experiences:

“...Well, it was a very tough period. As you may agree with me, it is not fun at all to stay home the whole day just doing household activities when you have papers (MSCE Certificate and Junior Certificate). Just this fact that you are at home after spending so many years at school, you feel great pain. Secondly, I affected innocent children in the community, the parents looked at me with all those certificates but were unemployed and they put it into their heads that school is not that important. They thus did not see the need of sending children to school just because of me; they looked at my education as being useless. Lastly, I was being teased by many people in the community, they thought that I am old enough to get married and that I was just wasting my time being at home. They were sending men to propose marriage to me and they in turn encouraged me to accept, imagine...” (Khumbidze Singo, a female MCM from Chimungu Zone)

“...it was tough! There was no role model in the community; most people saw education as not being important since they could see me around and unemployed and yet I had certificates at home. Some parents were even telling their children to look at me as a good example of someone who had been educated but was doing nothing. Hence, they did not see any need to send the children to school. When I got this work as an MCM, this entire attitude is gone...” (Amina Chadzunda, a female MCM from Chimbuli Zone)

“Often people tell that even if I went to school, there is nothing that I had benefited because we are all just staying idle.” (Felson Chinyama, a male MCM from Senga Zone)

2.5 THE IMPACT OF MCMS

The impact of the work of the MCMs on learners, communities and schools can be looked at by first of all taking into consideration their mandate. From the earlier discussions the main responsibilities of MCMs were to mobilise communities to improve the quality of education; to link community's efforts to external support such as government institutions, NGOs, and donor agencies, enhance well developed practical time referenced action plans in response to targeted constraints; and provide on-going guidance and support during implementation period. In this evaluation in-depth interviews were done with 18 MCMs and 5 of these MCM stories have been developed and put at the end of the report (MCM stories 1-5). This section therefore discusses the impacts of the MCMs on the community, the learners and the teachers. Despite the fact that there were some village headmen such as VH Kanjire who mentioned that the MCM program has not had any major impact because the community is not interested, most of the people interviewed in this study including MCMs, learners and members of the community appreciated the impacts of the MCMs in the education sector in Dowa district.

2.5.1 The impact of MCMs on learners

The MCMs in a survey conducted by PSSP admitted that they have had a huge impact on learners in that they have reduced absenteeism mostly through (i) the introduction of play parks in the schools where they are working; (ii) the introduction of TALULAR which has made teaching and learning easier than was the case previously; (iii) the pupils are gaining more knowledge through the formation of academic clubs; (iv) they have instilled the culture of reading due to establishment of academic clubs; (v) the number of pupils dropping out of school has considerably been reduced; and (vi) they have motivated or encouraged community members to take part in school activities. The discussion below focuses on the results from other stakeholders:



2.5.1.1 MCMs have increased school enrolment through play parks and other activities

This study reveals that the impact of MCMs on learners is more pronounced than probably the impact on the community. In the interviews with MCMs almost all of them have been instrumental in bringing back children that had dropped out of school or those that had not enrolled in school. Even the learners and the key informants such as village headmen and teachers did acknowledge that MCMs encouraged children to go to school and that they have created awareness among the members of the community about the importance of education. Many children are therefore attending school these days unlike in the past when they spent their time working on the farms and herding cattle. The increase in school enrolment has largely come about because of the introduction of play parks in schools, mentoring of children and the production and utilisation of TALULAR. Children stay in school because they also want to play. This activity increased school enrolment and attendance and decreased the rate of absenteeism. The play parks also contributed to the punctuality of the pupils. Stories along this line are many and below are some examples.

“...I tried all I could to establish play parks in all the five schools that I visit. I can challenge you to go to my schools, you will agree with me. With all the play parks that we made together with the teachers, learners and some community members, many children were happy to go to school so they could play. I have a child at Mtsukamakoza primary school who told me that she came back to school after hearing from her friends that there were a number of games that have been introduced at the school. I got very interested when I heard that and I followed up the child and we had a chat. She told me clearly that she got back to school really because of the play parks. She explained that when she was a drop out, she tried to play with the friends at the school when they knocked off but her friends were teasing her and telling her not to use some of the playing materials as these were made for only those that were in school. When she went back home, she decided to get back to school. Apart from that, many teachers and even the parents of the learners have commented on this issue....” (Amina Chadzunda, a female MCM from Chimbuli Zone)



“..... If you know Dowa very well, I am sure that you can agree with me. At first, parents, akunjira had completely nothing to do with education but you can imagine that these same people are there at the school improving the learning and teaching conditions. At the same time, let’s look at the children; they seem to be happy with the play parks. Even when they knock off, they go home to eat but spend most of the afternoon playing at the school. This shows how much the young ones appreciate the effort done.....” (Davie Makina, a male MCM from Chimungu Zone)

“I have also realized that with the coming of the play parks children are always in school until knock off time. The case was different then as they would come back home very early.” (A participant in an FGD with female community members at Mtsukamakoza Primary School)

Only in one school did a play park end up being controversial because a child died after falling. The community was angry and destroyed the park. Reports indicated though that this did not please the pupils and they put it back on their own accord. In the words of one key informant:

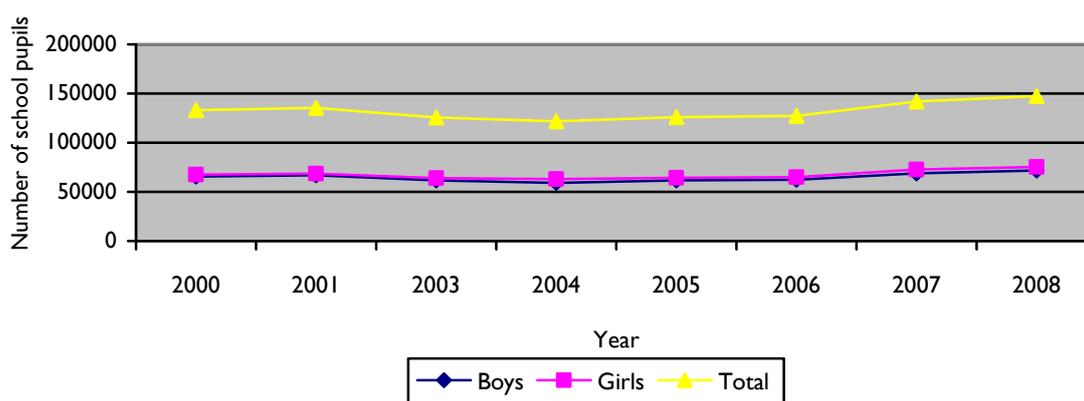
“The impact on the learners has been enormous! Can you imagine, at Gawamadzi a child accidentally died at the play park. The community was outraged and destroyed everything at the park but in the evening the learners reassembled the park.” (An interview with Mr. Thengoliweta, Desk Officer, Dowa District Education Office)

Learners in their own words also appreciated the establishment of the play parks. A 14 year old Standard 5 boy intimated:

“Most children were not coming to school because there was nothing to play with. School was not serious and dull. Now, most of those who were staying at home come to play on the ply parks and learn at the same time.”

In an FGD with female community members at Mtsukamakoza Primary School participants reported that there are very few children in the village who are not going to school as they are scared of *gule wankulu* which actually escorts or encourages children to go to school. These activities have generally resulted into an increase in enrolment. In terms of enrolment, district figures do show that indeed there was a rise in the number of pupils that were enrolled in the district since 2005.

Figure 2: Trends in school enrolment in Dowa district



Source: Dowa District Education Office

One MCM who had figures handy also indicated that enrolment at one of her schools had increased from 950 before PSSP to 1,187 currently; a 21% increase over two years. In an interview with GVH Chakhaza, he reported that at Mtiti Primary School which is in his area the number of children enrolled increased from about 800 to 2000 because of the work of MCMs. One head teacher also mentioned that there were initially 520 school pupils at his school but this has since increased to

887. In addition to this, overall school enrolment has increased significantly since the start of the MCM program in Dowa: for example From January 2006 to September 2006 school enrolment increased from 120,789 to 133,006 - an increase of 10.1%. Between February 2006 and February 2007 school enrolment increased by 12%. Overall, between 2006 and 2008 at the end of the program school enrolment increased by 26.4%. The number of children dropping out of school has reduced and even the number of repeaters has gone down as performance in class has improved.

2.5.1.2 Mentoring

Another area in which impact on learners was evident was in mentoring which often resulted in school drop-outs going back to school. Examples as the ones below were not uncommon.

“A good example is one girl at Kapatamoyo primary school. She dropped out of school after she got pregnant. When we conducted our research and we were doing theatre for development, this young girl was present. She heard everything and she sat with me and asked me a lot of questions. I talked to her and encouraged her to go back to school. As I am talking now she is in school, she left the baby with her grandmother”. (Edna Kachule, a female MCM from Chigudu Zone)

“There is a girl called Maria Chaima, She stays right in our village. She dropped out of school in the year 2006 after she was impregnated by a fellow pupil. After she delivered, she decided not to go back to school. Through mentoring, I befriended this girl and I kept talking to her. I ended up meeting her parents and I encouraged her to go back to school. Right now, she went back to school and she has written her form 4 exams.” (Mercy, a female MCM from Mvera Zone)



“At Kawere primary school, there was a girl who dropped out of school when she was in standard five. The parents tried to talk to this child but he never listened. Even after putting the play parks at the school, the child was still not interested. When I heard the story of this child I was shocked. I decided to visit the parents and the child. I talked a lot about the importance of education and the next day, the child started going to school. As I am talking now, the child is in school and is in standard 8. I made a number of follow ups at the school; the teachers say that she is doing well in class...” (Khumbidze Singo, a female MCM from Chimungu Zone)

One MCM reported that through mentoring a boy named Goliath Potifar went back to school after herding cattle for a year and he is doing well in class as he was position 2 last year. Quite a number of children have therefore gone back to school because of the mentoring work that the MCMs are conducting in the catchment areas.

2.5.1.3 Ability to read and write

All MCMs were taught how to make teaching and learning materials using locally available resources popularly known as TALULAR. This proved a powerful tool in helping learners read and write. During this evaluation, evidence was gathered of children in standard one or two who could read and write. The picture below of a young Standard 2 girl reading a word and writing the same word is enough evidence on how reading and writing have improved among children.



One MCM had this to say regarding reading and writing:

“Through the introduction of the reading, debate and Quiz clubs, some learners (even as young as std 2 learners are able to read and write). Others are able to express themselves in English to live audiences” (Kenvasi Chimutu)

Even learners were able to point out that through the efforts of the MCM they were able to read and write. A 12 year old Standard 5 learner said:

“Many learners including myself have learnt how to read and write as a result of the TALULAR that is made by MCMs.”

Another 14 year old Std 5 pupil pointed out that:

“Through efforts of the MCM we now have a library where we read and borrow books every Thursday. We are able to read and improve in class, which was not the case before.”

Even the village headmen such as VH Vikumbu and teachers acknowledged that because of the MCMs children in their communities are now able to read and write:

“Through quiz and English clubs that have been formed by MCMs the children are now able to speak English. The performance of the young ones has improved because using TALULAR and other ways children are learning faster and the children are able to speak good English. It is also not common nowadays to see children repeating. The problem previously was absenteeism and for them to catch up it was not all that easy.” (A teacher at Mtsukamakoza)

The formation of reading clubs and the production of TALULAR were reported as having been particularly useful because through the use of these resources teaching and learning have been made much easier. One school committee member at Chambizi Primary School even mentioned that this has motivated teachers to work hard through making teaching and learning materials. They have also learnt to speak English fluently and they do not fear to speak in public.

2.5.1.4 MCMs are also teaching

One of the major problems, as reported by key informants, learners and community members was the critical shortage of teachers in almost all the schools. It was acknowledged that the MCMs have played an important role in production of TALULAR and increasing school enrolment through introduction of play parks among other initiatives. In a number of FGDs and in-depth interviews for example during an FGDs with female learners at Chambizi and Mtiti Primary Schools participants mentioned that MCMs actually teach them in class. Even though they have not been properly trained as teachers, they are filling in a gap relating to the shortage of teachers in schools.



2.5.2 The impact of MCMs on the community

Results from this study also indicate that most MCMs had an impact on the community by mobilizing them for development work in schools. From the KIs it was evident that before PSSP and the MCMs came on board communities in Dowa did not take school activities as their responsibility. Interviews and observations during the course of this evaluation indicated that there is a marked change in attitude amongst some communities in Dowa. People now have a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their schools. In most communities people and MCMs boast of construction of school blocks and renovating old ones; construction and renovation of teachers' houses and the construction of libraries as can be seen from the photograph of a library under construction at one of the schools (see picture below).



Some MCMs have managed to mobilize the community to buy uniforms for OVCs. All this is aimed at providing a better learning and teaching environment. Stories of what communities have done with the help of MCM abound and below are a sample.

“Using TFD I have been able to influence the attitude of the community towards self-help work. In almost all my schools there is some renovation or new construction work either on school blocks or teacher houses. This is after serious sensitization campaigns ... I have also facilitated the establishment of a very vibrant youth club which is on the verge of receiving a 1.5 million Kwacha grant from the National Aids Commission.” (Ireen Banda, female MCM from Senga Zone, Chairperson and secretary of the Youth Group in question) N.B. Most of the youth in the club are learners (21 out of 30)

“The attitude of the community towards school has changed considerably and people now feel they own the school. While as before I started working with them there was a lot of vandalism of school property (including removing iron sheets from school blocks) and the TALULAR, now this is history, so much so that block roofed with the assistance from PSSP is still intact.” (Estere Chatseta, female MCM from Madisi Zone)



“As you may agree with me, the gule wankulu is a secret and feared cult that was never before associated with education in a positive way. With the MCMs, we put this cult to productive and positive use. These people are used in helping to bring the children that intend to stay at home to school. They are also used in fundraising activities because they are one of the main attracting pastime activities for the people in Dowa”. (An interview with Mr. S.S. Nkhonjera, ZOC).

“In one school during a fund raising activity we realised MK45,000.00 which we used to renovate teachers’ houses and school blocks.”(Ireen Banda, female MCM from Senga Zone)

MCMs even go as far as making contributions such as maize for the big walk. MCMs are also responsible for bringing together a number of stakeholders who work for the same cause, that of improving education in the district. The list of stakeholders is endless but includes: the Community and its leadership, Primary Education Advisors, teachers, church leaders, Zonal Coordinators, Cluster Leaders, Health Surveillance Assistants, and *akunjira*. This is unique in that it is rare for so many actors to work together for one cause. The behaviour displayed by the youth engaged by the MCM program and the responsibilities that they were undertaking changed some people’s attitudes towards youths that had finished school and were just staying at home. The MCM programme made communities appreciate the fact that school leavers with some training can be put to productive use and not be associated with mischief only. Furthermore most MCMs were instrumental in the formation of various youth clubs or in supporting youth clubs that already existed in the communities. Thus, instead of just being productive themselves, they also helped others to be productive in different ways.

“Communities now hold the youth in high esteem! The fact that the MCM can call for a meeting and villagers in Dowa come to attend is a sign that they are impressed both with the work and the conduct of these youths.” (An interview with A. Mpenang’ombe, PEA)

In addition, it is clear from the results that village headmen and other members of the community have come to understand the important of educating the children including girl children and OVC which was not the case previously:

“In the past parents used to discourage the girls from getting educated because they used to think that she would help where she would get married. Now parents are encouraging the girls to go to school.” (Participant in an FGD with boy learners at Mtsukamakoza primary School)

While the MCMs have made communities realize that the schools are their responsibility and that education is important, it was also mentioned in a number of FGDs and in-depth interviews that the MCMs have brought cooperation among parents and village headmen to work together and promote education and development:

“We should not lie. In the past this area was behind in terms of development. Our MCM has brought development such as the school block and this is despite the fact that our MCM is female. We are seeing that things are changing.” (GVH Chakhaza, Mtiti)



In addition to this, it has been mentioned earlier that currently *gule wankulu* is being used to escort children to go to school and this is one of the factors that has brought about an increase in the number of pupils enrolled. At first members of the community including boys only thought of *ku dambwe* (a place where boys' initiation into *gule wankulu* takes place) and in general

it was also *gule wankulu* which was a barrier to boys accessing education in the district. Nowadays because of the MCM the attitude has completely changed as *gule wankulu* is being involved in fund raising activities and they are the ones who are also involved in renovating the teachers' houses. In the past *gule wankulu* had no calendar to do their activities but this has since changed and it does not interfere with school sessions. The *gule wankulu* are heavily involved in escorting children to school especially those that are found at home. When they wear their costume they look scary to children.

What we see therefore is that parents now value the importance of education and send children to school instead of working at home and cases of abusing children have also decreased. This has been achieved through community meetings and drama performances that the MCMs perform in the communities. In an FGD with boys at Mtsukamakoza Primary school the participants said that the TFD introduced by the MCM is used to inform the community about education and people are now knowledgeable about the need to send both orphans and their children to school. Most community members have known the importance of education and this is why they are sending their children to school and getting involved in school activities. The communities have therefore been transformed and have started valuing education as evidenced by the increase in enrolment and their involvement in school related projects such as construction of school blocks among others.

2.5.3 The impact of MCMs on schools and teachers

The MCMs' impact on teachers was from two angles. The use of TALULAR was not as common a practice in most schools in Dowa before the MCMs were deployed. With the coming of MCMs most teachers adopted this practice and it makes their teaching easy and fun. On the other hand, since MCMs were involved in making TALULAR the pressure on the teachers was eased, especially considering that there is a shortage of teachers in primary schools in Malawi. In schools where there was an acute shortage of teachers some MCMs helped in the teaching, an act that greatly helped the teachers. One Standard 3 teacher said:

“We learnt skills of making TALULAR from the MCM. There are a few things that we learnt in school but the MCMs brought more stuff and skills that we did not have. It made the teaching very easy and enjoyable to the teachers and interesting to the learners.”

The shortage of school blocks, teachers’ houses and toilets was highlighted as one of the most important problems that was being experienced in Dowa District. In almost all the FGDs and in-depth interviews it was reported that the MCMs have facilitated the construction of school blocks, teachers’ houses and toilets. For example in an interview with GVH Chakhaza it was reported that the MCM based at Mtiti works in 3 schools namely Mtiti, Chakhaza and Mbayo. At Mbayo the MCM has facilitated the building of a school block and 3 teachers’ houses, at Chakhaza the construction of



2 houses and at Mbayo one school block has been constructed. He also reported that more blocks were being constructed. While initially there were no toilets at Mtsukamakoza Primary School a teacher at this school reported that because of MCMs the school has toilets in very good condition and that an office is being built and some teachers’ houses are being renovated.

“At this school, development is being seen. We used to learn under a tree. They have built a school block and teachers’ houses. The school block has two classes.”(Participant in an FGD with boys at Mtsukamakoza primary School)

In addition to production and utilization of TALULAR and construction of school infrastructure, as it has already been mentioned, the MCMs have also been instrumental in the establishment of play parks which have contributed greatly towards the attraction to and retention of pupils in schools. In the past the schools did not have a gardens, as narrated by one of the village headmen, but now schools have gardens and they produce a lot of maize and some of this maize was sold in order to get money and assist the orphans and the remaining maize would be used to feed the children at school.



2.5.4 The Impact of the MCM programme on the MCMs

On the part of the MCMs themselves, the programme accorded them an opportunity to learn new skills and gain some valuable work experience which may prove invaluable in future as can be seen from those that have already moved on and the ambition that others have to move on. Most MCMs had their life dreams change direction as a result of working with the programme (11 out of 17). This was due to the encouragement they got from the MCM family. It has also helped them to be exposed to new ideas as a result of working with so many stakeholders:

“After I became an MCM my interest to pursue further education has grown bigger.”
(Amina Chadzunda, female MCM from Chimbuli Zone)

“Initially I wanted to be a nurse, but after working as an MCM I want to do more. I want to continue with my education and become a science lecturer.”
(Tamala Kwalira, female MCM at TTC)

“...At first, my role model was a nurse, that’s the level that I wanted to reach but through being an MCM, I realised that a Doctor is much higher than a nurse and I have decided to even go that far...” (Khumbidze Singo, female MCM from Chimungu Zone)

A number MCMs qualified for the teacher training course at various teacher training colleges. During the course of the evaluation four of them were interviewed:

“The impact and influence of the MCM training on me has been enormous! Most of the topics that we are covering at the Teacher Training Colleges resemble what we covered in the MCM training. For me it is like doing revisions of my earlier work. Life is really good at the TTC because of what MCM imparted to me”. (Patricia Jentala, female MCM at TTC)

“I am doing exceptionally well at foundational studies and I know that this is because of the training I got from PSSP. What we learn at the TTC I already know. I am a leader at TALULAR making at the TTC because I have the skills and experience of doing it already as an MCM.”
(Evanse Nkhoma, male MCM at TTC)

“I have learnt how to do the TALULAR and this helped me a lot at the T.T.C. I was a star there, other TALULARs that we were doing, the teachers didn’t even know how to do them. Due to the trainings that I went through, it was quite easy to present our work even at school. We would see our classmates who were failing to present their work well.”
(Emelisia Mulinde, female MCM at TTC)

The art of community mobilization and communication skills is among the many impacts that the programme had on the MCMs. Almost half the MCMs interviewed pointed this out. One of the said:

“The first thing that I have learnt is community mobilization. Look here we have a lot of work in Malawi that requires one to have such a skill and I would easily fit in. If I was to decide to stand as an MP, I am sure I would make it because mobilization of people wouldn’t be an issue.”
(Edna Kachule, female MCM from Chigudu Zone)

All the MCMs reported feeling proud to be MCMs. There were two major reasons why they felt proud to be MCMs. The first major reason was that since they started working they have managed to bring positive changes in their communities namely they have sensitized the communities on the importance of education and the need for their participation in development projects; children who dropped out of school have gone back to school because of their activities; they have been able to establish play parks in the schools which are being used by children; they have produced TALULAR and they have led the establishment of academic clubs. What made them more proud was the fact that they were working in their own communities and serving their own people. They help children from their own community and they work with different stakeholders such as teachers, SMC, village headmen, PTA members and *akunjira*.

“I feel proud to be an MCM in a sense that I help the children from my own community and I work with different stakeholders such as chiefs, teachers, parents etc. which I have never done before and the people in the area where I work recognize my existence unlike 2 years ago.” (Patrick Kapiseni, male MCM, Dowa Boma)

The other reason why the MCMs were proud was that before the program they were just like anybody else who had completed his or her education and was just staying in the community. They were therefore proud to work as MCMs because they had gained knowledge and skills from the program and were able to mobilize communities for development work at the school, work with different stakeholders, make TALULAR for use by teachers and learners, established academic clubs and play parks and were able to identify ways of solving problems together with community members. Because of the program, most of the MCMs acknowledged that public speaking was one of the skills they had acquired and previously most of them were shy. They acquired this knowledge and skills during the training that was arranged by PSSP: SFP. The program therefore transformed their status and had a big impact on the MCMs themselves as well as can be seen from the photograph below where an MCM is explaining things some audience.

MCMs were also instrumental in communicating through Theatre for Development. The following photos show MCM crafting out a play after their research and then acting out.





2.5.5 Challenges faced by MCMs

There is evidence in this study that MCMs have been able to bring about positive development in the schools and communities and this is because of the cooperation that they received from different stakeholders including teachers, PEAs, parents and village headmen among others. Even though there were some problems as will be explained later, the cooperation that the MCMs received from teachers and parents was quite critical in the implementation of the program. For example since most of the teachers stay very close to the school, during TALULAR production some materials such as hoes were borrowed from the teachers. Parents participated in the construction of play parks. They brought wood for making see saws and swings,.

While there were these enabling factors, the study also found that the MCMs experienced a number of challenges. Upon completing training the MCMs faced a number of challenges in the course of their work. One such challenge mentioned by all almost all MCMs interviewed and a number of key informants was the attitude of some teachers when the programme was just starting. This was also mentioned by many MCMs in the survey that the program administered in June 2008. Some MCMs faced stiff resistance and in the words of one key informant, there was fear of the unknown amongst some teachers.

“At the start of the programme, teachers feared the unknown and thought that the young men and women had come to displace them. Hence, there was hostility and resistance! As time went by, the teachers realized the value of and contribution of the MCMs and have since co-existed and worked cordially.” (An interview with S.S. Nkhonjera, ZOC)

Another key informant said

“Some teachers vehemently resisted the coming of MCM because they feared they would take their places and some community members belittled the young men and women. After a few sensitization meetings, everybody is working so nicely and amicably with the MCM. Now that the programme is phasing out some teachers fear the worst as far as TALULAR production in their schools is concerned.” (An interview with A. Mpanang’ombe, PEA)

In some schools this attitude made life very difficult for the MCMs. In one school an MCM could not establish a single club because the head teacher was total against it. The MCM laments:

“I failed to establish clubs at one school because of the attitude of the head teacher. He used to say that establishing clubs would add to their burden of work since there were inadequate teachers. My insistence on this issue brought out his wrath and he told me point blank ... ‘what do you know?.. I am a trained and qualified teacher and you are not! .. Do not come here with your stories again .. I will not entertain them at this school!! That is when I stopped going there.”
(Evince Nkhoma, a male MCM at TTC)

In some schools teachers simply refused to help with the making of the TALULAR and in some places they just tried to break the MCMs down by ridiculing them:

“Some teachers thought that we are receiving a lot of money and as such, they did not see the need to help us to make the TALULAR and the play parks.”
(Edna Kachule, female MCM from Chigudu Zone)

“Teachers used to say, how can we, the qualified teachers listen to him who has just received one week training?”(Evince Nkhoma, male MCM at TTC)

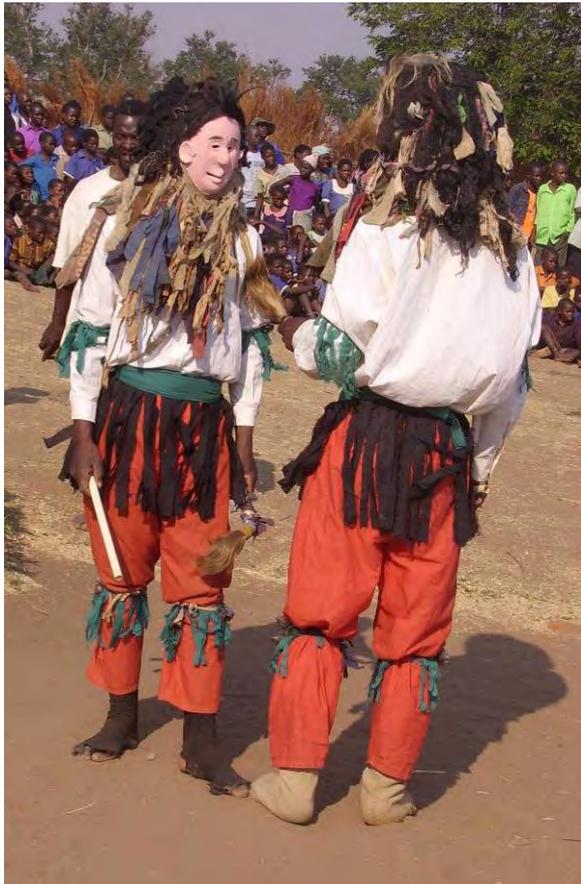
“The major challenge we meet are some teachers underrating me that I am keeping them more busy with activities for example formation of clubs in school. They always say they are losing time for rest or time for doing special work such as tobacco growing.”
(Charles Chakhuma, male MCM, Kayembe Zone)

Another challenge which most volunteers experienced at the beginning of the programme was vandalism of play parks and TALULAR. Play parks are made in the open and they were an easy target for vandals. It took some sensitization to stop this. As indicated before, infrastructure in the schools in Dowa was very poor and most classrooms did not have doors. Anybody could thus walk into the classrooms as they pleased. Teaching and learning aids were therefore being removed from the classes. This also stopped with the sensitization and the improvement of the infrastructure which was the result of community mobilization.

Most MCMs brought up the issue of mobility. Movement on the push bike was difficult during the rains. This was compounded by the frequent breakdowns of the push bikes. This affected their performance as in some cases they had to travel to distant schools. In an effort to use cultural activities to help with the school activities the services of *gule wankulu* was solicited. They are used as pointed out earlier on to encourage learners to go to school and also play a part if fund-raising activities. This was a major shift and required change of the mind set because it meant dealing with a secret society that was associated with nothing else but fear and terror before. It was thus a challenge for these young men and women who have grown up fearing and running away from these ‘animals’ to now start interacting with them. One MCM lamented:

“it could have been better if in the training they taught us on how we can deal with akunjira. It’s tough for me to work with these people because we were not told how to deal with them.”
(Edna Kachule, Female MCM from Chigudu Zone)

Below is a sample of the akunjira crew.



Some of the challenges were not as common but it is still worth mentioning them and these include:

- Lack of cooperation from cluster leaders who were jealousy because MCMs were getting stipend
- Some village heads and teachers were asking for allowances
- Difficult to be separated from parents since some were young
- Difficult to organize meetings during peak agriculture season
- Being ridiculed for working without pay as the following statement shows

“Zona zimenezi! Ati munthu kumangwira ntchito ulere?! Timasekedwa”. (It’s not true! A person working without pay! We used to be laughed at)

(An interview with Mferamunda Katherere, Male MCM from Mvera)

- Relations sometimes could be difficult because they thought MCMs were receiving a lot of money as the statement below shows:

“We were working as volunteers and yet my relatives considered it to be full time job. They thought that I was receiving a lot of money and they used to say ‘mwayamba kumana ndi kunyada masiku ano chifukwa cha ntchito’ [You are selfish and proud because you have started working] and most of them stopped talking to me.” (Evince Nkhoma, Male MCM at TTC)

- Some church elders could not allow *akunjira* to be involved in school activities because they were considered heathen and evil.

During some FGDs and in-depth interviews it was mentioned that the MCMs are given a lot of schools to work with which is at times difficult. One of the major challenges was convincing community members to take part in MCMs’ activities. This is because most of the community members have not been to school and they do not value any education but this has since changed with sensitisation. Sometimes the MCMs visit the schools when the teachers are busy teaching the children and the teachers tell them that they should come some other time when they are through with work. Most of these problems were also highlighted in the survey that the PSSP conducted in June 2008 but they added that for those involved in vocational work some artisans were not all that willing to impart their skills to children for example OVC.

2.6 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MCMS WORKING FROM AND AWAY FROM HOME

According to the survey conducted by PSSP: SFP 48% of the MCMs operated from their homes, 43% operated away from home while 9% operated from both home and away from home. As a pilot, PSSP wanted to examine if placement of the MCM would have an impact on the volunteers’ effectiveness. Ideally MCMs were supposed to be deployed in their homes but as with any other programme, circumstances would and did necessitate other MCMs to be deployed away from their homes. To this effect, those deployed away from home reported facing the following problems:

- Lack of good accommodation and they had to spend money on rent.
- Lack of family support when ill or have other problems.
- One does not know the area and takes time to familiarise.
- One has to buy most of the foodstuffs and firewood.
- One cannot supplement the stipend with other activities like farming or small-scale businesses.

- Rudeness from some community members.
- It takes time for one to get used to the area as he or she is new.

A challenge also mentioned by people working away from their homes was that of the practice of witchcraft and anti-social behaviour from some quarters of the community. Two out of the 21 MCMs that were interviewed had some horrifying experiences as detailed in the following excerpts from their interviews:

“The issue of witchcraft is common. “...Umapeza kuti akutema mphini pa mchombo ponse. Munthu umachita kudabwa kuti abale ndadwala nthawi yanji kodi? Inenso pa mchomboza ziripo mphini zambirimbi... [”You just find that there are a lot of incisions on your navel. One gets surprised as to when he or she became sick. I have many incisions on my navel as well].
(Edna Kachule, Female MCM from Chigudu)

“The reason why I was posted back home is that I got fed up with the behavior of the community members; they were coming at night attempting to open the door of the house I was staying. I tried to tell the village headman but nothing changed.” (Mercy Mikwala, Female MCM from Mvera)

There was only one respondent who mentioned witchcraft in the survey conducted by PSSP and in this survey one or two people did mention that some members of the community were not happy to have an outsider to work as an MCM as they also had young people who were educated up to MSCE level. There were a few respondents who reported that personal activities such as farming are disturbed when you work away from home.

Despite all these problems, those working away from home had one major advantage which was the respect that was accorded to them by the community. In the local language there is a saying that *‘mlendo ndi amene amabwera ndi kalumo kakuthwa’* literally meaning ‘a visitor comes with a sharper blade’. It was easy for the community to listen to them and sometimes they were taken as government employees. Furthermore, it was reported that people were not jealousy of them as was the case with those operating from their homes of origin. MCMs also mentioned that the community did not really know their childhood hence they were not underrated unlike in their home area. The other advantage, according to MCMs was that is that since they were away from home they were not involved in some activities that they would normally do when they were at home and they had time to concentrate on their work and being posted away from was also advantageous because it implanted a spirit of self reliance.

Those working from home had several advantages and these included the fact that they knew their home area so well and this made their job easy and they did not have problems with accommodation and meals; they acted as role models; and they knew the culture of the people; and they also had a chance of doing their own work when free especially over the weekends. Though working from home seemed ideal, a major challenge that kept coming from almost every MCM that was operating from their homes was that of not being taken seriously and not being appreciated for the contribution they were making. Below are some sentiments of the MCMs that worked in their homes:

“...Although it is wonderful to stay home with parents, on the other hand, it puts you in a fix in terms of work. Other people do not respect you because they feel that you are young taking into consideration that they have seen you grow and they know the whole background of the family. Some even tell you to get away from their places as you cannot move them at all to do anything. Others tell you that they carried you and took you to the toilet when you were young and as such, they are old enough to get an advice from you....” (Amina Chadzunda, Female MCM from Chimbuli)

“When you say anything, they say ‘what can that little girl tell us’ you know they start to think that they saw you being born and some of them have carried you when you were young plus others have even sent you to the toilet when you were young. Even the learners they don’t respect you, they just

call you anyhow by your name in a mockery way. When you call for a meeting some of them community members do not even bother to come. They say “what can she tell us that we do not know?” (Edna Kachule, Female MCM from Chigudu)

Some MCMs also felt that working from home was disadvantageous because they were disturbed by activities in their homes hence they could not work properly.

2.7 IMPROVING THE WORK OF MCMS

A number of suggestions were made during FGDs and in-depth interviews on how the work of MCMs can be improved. The following suggestions were made:

- The success of MCMs is dependent on community participation in all their activities. Even though the people were participating, there was low participation during the rainy season. Community members including parents and chiefs should work together with the MCMs and cooperate in everything they do and they should turn out in large numbers when there are meetings called by MCMs. Their participation should be regardless of season.
- A house should be constructed for the MCM at the school so that he/she is closer to where he or she works.
- Female MCMs must stay closer to the school for safety reasons.
- There is need to reduce the number of schools that the MCMs are responsible for.
- Drama should still be used to encourage community members to take part in MCMs work. When an MCM tells us to do things we should go there in our large numbers

MCMs also had some suggestions on how their challenges can best be addressed. The major suggestion was that most of the problems they encounter can be addressed through discussions with different stakeholders and village headmen should be involved in such discussions. Transport was one of the major issues that was raised and that even though they were given bicycles these broke down frequently. Some have tried to repair these bicycles on their own but there were suggestions that PSSP should take up this challenge. Even though this suggestion was made, the idea behind distribution of bicycles to MCMs by the project was that this was supposed to be a community resource and maintained by the community. It has also been mentioned that in some cases teachers were not cooperative and a suggestion was made that the PEAs need to put a lot of effort to remind teachers on the roles and responsibilities in school clubs and the work that MCMs are doing. Lastly it was suggested that the shortage of teachers in schools affects their work hence there was a need for government to post some more teachers.

2.8 SUSTAINING MCMS AND THEIR WORK

It is evident from this study that MCMs have done a lot of work in the communities. They have helped to transform communities to understand the value of education for their children and the need for them to own the schools and participate in school related development work. They have made school more interesting by bringing play parks, establishing debating and other academic clubs and the production and use of TALULAR and have facilitated the construction of school blocks, teachers houses and other school infrastructure. Most importantly the members of the community are currently working as a team in order to improve the quality of education. As we have seen in this study the members of the community appreciate the role that MCMs are playing in the improvement of the quality of education hence they would like to see MCMs to continue working in their communities. Even though there were challenges initially in terms of working with teachers and members of the community, through sensitizations people have come to understand the role of MCMs.

On the part of MCMs it was encouraging to note that all of them agreed that they would continue serving the children of Dowa as MCMs after their term is complete. Most of the MCMs said that even though the project is over they will continue to do the same work they were doing in the schools and communities and with different stakeholders: sensitization of communities about the importance of education; facilitating the construction of school blocks and other structures, establishing and maintaining play parks; production of TALULAR and running school based clubs. A good proportion said that they would be working as temporary teachers and as such they would continue monitoring the initiatives they had initiated. Others said they would join youth groups or OVC groups in order to better serve these vulnerable children. Some even mentioned that since they would do the same work even without being given any stipend.

However, they were quick to point out that this would be with difficulties due to mobility and lack of support, financially and technically. The following statements show what some individuals planned to do after the close of the programme.

“Yes, I will continue to serve the children of Dowa. I may not do it more systematically as I used to do it due to lack of funds but at least for the schools which are close, I can easily do it. At least TALULAR and play parks we use locally available materials and I cannot fail to do that. For community mobilization, it may be difficult since the community know that the program is phasing out.” (Mercy Mikwala, female MCM from Mvera)

“Where possible I will work for example the TALULAR and play parks, I can easily do this as we use locally available resources. Even now, I am still serving the children in Dowa. I established a certain youth club and when I am home, I visit them. I give them test papers and mark. The TALULAR and play parks, I can easily do this as we use locally available resources.” (Tamala Kwalira, Female MCM at TTC)

“Yes, I will continue to serve the children of Dowa. It might be not exactly as I used to do it when I was an MCM but at least for TALULAR and play parks, we use locally available materials and I can easily do it. However, the only challenge that I may have is that other schools are far away from where I stay so maybe I will not manage.” (Edna Kachule, Female MCM from Chigudu)

“... Oh yes, why not? I have gained knowledge and I need to use this knowledge to help the young ones. I feel that where possible, I will do it.” (Amina Chadzunda, Female MCM from Chimbuli)

“I will just go to schools that are close to my village and help teachers there with everything that I can”. (Mferamunda Katherere, Male MCM from Mvera)

“I will try to find resources and help in schools near by. I have already warned the stakeholders about the impending end of our programme and some are keen to come up with something in a form of contributions.” (Maria Banda, Female MCM from Kayembe)

The bottom line is that these young men and women are so much into this programme that it would be difficult for them to just abandon it. It is no wonder then all the MCMs interviewed indicated that they would recommend friend to join this line of work because it was productive for a lot of people, the community, learners and themselves. In fact two indicated that they already enticed friends who were working voluntarily.

There were a number of suggestions on how the work of MCMs can be sustained:

- There was a need to find another organization to help them continue with the work.
- The MCMs should continue working but the amount of work that they do should be reduced.
- There was a need for the MCM cadre to be incorporated into the government structures in the same way as HSAs.

“The effects of this programme will be felt in Dowa in a few years to come but the programme may have problems continuing. The only way is for the Ministry of Education to come and establish a structure of the MCM in the education system as the Ministry of Health has done with the Health Surveillance Assistants who were initially volunteers in the villages.”

(Mr. Mpanang’ombe - PEA Katalima)

- Some MCMs have developed successful programs for youth clubs and have received big funding from NAC to do youth activities.
- Some village headmen have already agreed to take up the challenge:

“The chiefs have agreed to continue the work that the MCMs have started especially work to do with the development of the school” (Participant in an FGD with male community members held at Mtsukamakoza Primary school)

It is difficult for communities to sustain the activities of MCMs on their own but others said that even though they have not yet set aside a plan to sustain these activities, they would nevertheless use the skills learnt from the MCMs in order to improve the quality of education in Dowa. The major problem is that it is hard for them to pay the MCMs. There were also concerns that the project was implemented over a short period and it would have been better if it was implemented over a longer period.

Some MCM asked for training in the development of project proposal so that they can solicit funding from other interested organizations.

“I feel that it is best at the training; we should also learn how to write proposals. Look at us now, the program is coming to an end yet we don’t even know how we can write proposals.”

(Edna Kachule, Female MCM from Chigudu)

“... Oh yes, we really needed to add proposal writing. This was a project and as you know, it is coming to an end. We needed on our own to sustain this program by writing proposals to various organizations. Since we were not taught on how to write the proposals, how are we going to sustain this program? It’s tough...” (Davie Makina, Male MCM from Chimungu)

It should be noted however that proposal writing was one of the components of the training program that MCMs underwent. However it might be necessary to expand this training. There are therefore a number of proposals in which the work of MCMs can be sustained and it is important that policy makers should explore some of these options especially the incorporation of the MCMs into the Ministry of Education.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

This study was commissioned in order to determine (i) the impact of the MCMs at community and school level, among learners and among the MCMs themselves; (ii) the extent to which the MCMs worked with communities and their leadership in identifying education related problems and developing sustainable ways of dealing with them; (iii) the extent to which they contributed to the improvement of the quality of education; (iv) the extent to which they supported OVC and girls in their pursuit of education; and (v) the effectiveness of the MCM training and on-going support to provide MCM volunteers with the necessary resources and skills needed to work at the community level and effect local change.

3.1.1 The impact of MCMs and their contribution to improving quality of education

This evaluation has shown that the MCMs have contributed significantly towards addressing some of the major school related problems that were being experienced in Dowa. They may not have solved all the problems but some progress has been observed and if they were there for a longer time (3 years) most of the problems would have been addressed. It is evident that the MCMs have changed community's perceptions about education and girls in particular; they now value education quite a lot. While initially it was unusual for them to participate in school development projects, with the coming in of the MCMs they now participate in such projects as exemplified by their participation in construction and renovation of school blocks, teacher's houses and offices and toilets. The MCMs have also contributed to the increase in enrolment in most of the schools through the use of *gule wankulu* to escort children of school going age to school; the establishment of play parks which attracts and retains children in school and encouraging parents and guardians to send their children to school including OVC and girls. In school they contributed to the production of TALULAR which was not happening previously and this has assisted teaching and learning. They have also formed academic clubs which are also helping learners to read and write even the ones in Standard 2. The MCMs have also seen themselves changing in that they have acquired new skills and knowledge and they are now quite good at public speaking. These skills and knowledge are helping them to succeed in interviews and do well in their new endeavours. For example as has been reported in this report some of them have been accepted into the TTCs and police.

3.1.2 The extent to which MCMs worked with communities and their leadership

Though difficult at first to penetrate the community and other structures, in the end things worked and the MCM worked very well with a number of stakeholders in the communities they worked in. This was due to a number of factors. First, it was the training that they received which prepared them well for any eventualities. The training provided them with the knowledge and skills that helped them deal with different groups of people and how to address challenges that arose. Another factor that helped MCM penetrate the community was the sensitizations of about the project and linking with respected entities e.g. ZOCs, PEAs, Village Heads and School Committees. The cooperation by the village headmen, the members of the community and the teachers was a major step towards the achievement of the goals of the programme and most MCMs testified to this. The implementation of the activities required team work. For example the construction of school blocks and other structures such as play parks required the involvement of village headmen, the SMC, the PTA, the teachers and other members of the community. They worked quite well with the village heads who are the custodians of *gule wankulu* to ensure that school going children were not found in the village but at school. On their own the MCMs would not have done this work. Community leaders and members including children and teachers acknowledged that they worked so well with the MCMs and would have loved if they continued working as MCMs. This is a demonstration that the MCMs worked well with communities in identifying the problems and finding solutions. Within the short period over which these MCMs have worked they have demonstrated that, despite the fact that they are young, they can bring about development in their communities.

3.1.3 The extent to which they supported OVC and girls

One of the major roles of the MCMs was advocacy. MCM conducted meetings effectively in the community creating awareness about the importance of children going to school including OVC and the girls who are vulnerable. It was evident from the interviews and FGDs that the MCMs changed peoples' perceptions in that girls instead of marrying early they are now being encouraged to go to school. The MCMs visited communities in their catchment areas identifying OVC and other children who were not going to school and encouraged them to go to school. Actually they had registers for OVC. Because of the MCMs it was reported that there are groups that have been formed in Dowa which are helping OVC. *Gule wankulu* has also raised funds for assisting OVC. The end result was an increase in ennoblement and the vulnerable going back to school because of the assistance that the community through the effort of MCM gave. While much remains to be done so as to reach many OVCs, the MCM program has contributed to supporting them and girls.

3.1.4 The effectiveness of the MCM training and on-going support to provide MCM volunteers with the necessary resources and skills needed to work at the community level and effect local change

The MCM is a new volunteer initiative hence there was a need for the recruits to be trained in their new roles. The training that they attended after being recruited was very comprehensive and helped them to prepare for the work they were embarking on. The MCMs are a link between communities and the school system hence the training was aimed at equipping them with appropriate skills on how to work with communities especially considering that they were young. The MCMs appreciated the training that they underwent and the support that they got from PSSP: SFP during their supervisory visits and the reviews that were being done to inform further program development.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Judging from the results and the impact, the programme is a very useful one. There is therefore, a need to find some way of sustaining it. It is for this reason that the following recommendations are made.

- This program was implemented for 2 and a quarter years but this is a short period for any meaningful impact. It is thus recommended that USAID extends the programme for two more years. At the same time, it should be introduced in three other districts (one per region) so as to see how this programme could work in a different geographical and cultural setting.
- Even though the project has come to an end, the MCMs said that they would continue doing the same work in their communities. The Ministry of Education through its local structures such as the DEMs, PEAs and teachers should be encouraged to monitor and work with the MCMs.
- The MCM program has created a sense of patriotism among the youths of Dowa District. While MCMs can be posted away from their homes as was the case during the pilot it is recommended that the MCMs should work in their communities to ease the pressure on their stipend since they would not have to pay for the accommodation and food.
- PSSP should organize other stakeholders in the education sector, for example UNICEF, the World Bank and DFID and sell the idea of extending and expanding the programme to them.

- It seems *gule wankulu* played an important role in drawing children to school. It is important that such initiatives should be encouraged by PSSP and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the village headmen and other traditional leaders.
- Most of the young men and women are very enterprising and they could help in sourcing funds for some activities from potential donors. It is recommended that PSSP should expand the training on proposal development so that MCMs are able to write sound and good proposals that could be funded.
- Just as the Ministry of Health has created a cadre of employees (Health Surveillance Assistants - HSAs) from what used to be community health volunteers⁴, the Ministry of Education using structures currently existing in their ministry for supervision and support, should do the same with MCMs as they have proved to be an important link between communities and the school system.
- AIR and the Ministry of Education should continue to sensitise communities so that they should appreciate their roles in the schools including participating in construction and maintenance of school blocks and play parks initiated by MCMs.
- Despite this being voluntary work, it is recommended that a stipend of K5000 should continue to be paid to the volunteers and that this cost should in the mean time be absorbed by AIR. It is further recommended that Government of Malawi should take up the responsibility of scaling up the use of MCMs. This however has monetary implications. As of 2006 there were 5231 primary schools in Malawi. Each MCM should be responsible for a maximum of 3 schools. This implies that 1,750 MCMs would be required to manage the schools countrywide. If each MCM gets a stipend of MK5,000 per month, a total of MK105,000,000 would be required for payment of stipend to all the MCMs per annum. In addition to this, each MCM would be given a bicycle which costs MK8,000 and for all MCMs to get the bicycle MK14,000,000 would be required and this is a once off investment. It should be mentioned that this does not cover the training of MCMs.
- We recommend that the rigorous process of recruitment, selection and training which was used during the pilot should be maintained since it ensures the recruitment of good candidates who subsequently would delivery good quality work.
- Since MCMs seem to do well in making teaching aids, mentoring and community mobilization, it is recommended that these should be their priority tasks and that they should not get into too much teaching.

⁴ Community Health Volunteers worked in villages providing basic health services without getting any pay or incentives. Later government recognized them as a major link between the community and the health facilities and turned them into Health Surveillance Assistants who work in their home district but not necessarily in their home area and get a wage.

ANNEX I. LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Cassandra Jessee (Deputy Chief of Party - PSSP)
 MR. L. Kalata (Coordinator, MCM)
 Mr. Pemba (CRECCOM)
 Hackson Mainja (District Youth Officer)
 Alex Mpanang'ombe (PEA – Katalima)
 Mr. Chafukira (PEA – Chimbuli)
 S.S. Nkhonjera (ZOC – Katalima)
 W.L.S. Thengoliweta (Desk Officer – Dowa District Education Office)
 Mr. M.M. Bicycle (Std 3 teacher, Mtsukamakoza School)
 GVH Chakhaza – Mtiti Primary School
 GVH Vikumbu, Chambizi School (What Guide was used)
 Mr. N. Samuel (Head – Mtsukamakoza School)
 Mr. H. Palichesi (Head, Thedze Primary School)
 Village Head Kaujire
 Member of School Committee – Chambizi Primary School
 Community Members – Mtsukamakoza Primary school

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

School Committee – Kalipindire Primary School
 School Committee – Mtiti Primary School
 Girl Learners – Mtiti Primary School
 Girl Learners – Chambizi Primary School
 Girl Learners – Mtsukamakoza Primary School
 Girl Learners – Mbalame Primary School
 Village heads (where from)
 Boy learners (Mtiti)
 Boy learners (Chambizi Primary)
 Boy Learners (Mtsukamakoza School)
 Community (Mtsukamakoza School)

LIST OF MCMs INTERVIEWED

Name	Zone	Cluster	Age	Marital status	Year Joined
Kenvasi Chimutu	Mponela	Kalipinde	28	Single	'07
Mary Banda	Kayembe	Sindeya	20	Single	'07
Patrick Mnjale	Kamphenga	Mdanjiri	25	Single	'06
Eseter Chaseta	Madisi	Mtiti	29	Divorced	'06
Ireen D. Banda	Senga	Mbalame	24	Married	'06
Emon Kalaka	Mvera	Mvera MDF	21	Single	'07
Catherine Kalumbu	Mvera	Mvera	21	Single	'07
Chikoya Kayera	Mvera	Dowa I	28	Married	'06
Masautso Lambani	Mvera	Kambalu	24	Married	'06
Khumbidze Singo	Chimungu	Mtsiro	22	Single	'06
Davie Makina	Chimungu	Chimungu	24	Single	'06
Amina Chadzunda	Chimbuli	Sungeni	21	Single	'06
Edson Hetala Nyamukani	Katalima	Chilipiza	31	Separated	'06
Edina Kachule	Chigudu	Kapatamoyo	22	Single	'06
Mercy Mikwala	Mvera	Mphande	22	Single	'06
Felson Chinyama	Senga	Mbalame	25	Single	'07
Mferamunda Katherere	Mvera	Gawamadzi		Single	'07
TTC GROUP					

Praticia Jentalla	Chigudu	TTC	29	Married	06
Emelisia Mulinde	Chigudu	TTC	30	Married	06
Tamara Kwalira	Mponela	TTC	24	Married	06
Evance Chimbalu	Chimbalu	TTC	22	Single	06

ANNEX 2. MCM STORIES

MCM STORY I

Ireen Durban Banda

Life before becoming an MCM

Ireen Banda was born on 20th August 1984 at Dowa District Hospital. She is the last born in a family of five. She did her junior primary (std 1-5) at Chidothi in Mponela where she lived with her mother. In 1996 her mother passed away and her brother took her to Mangochi where she completed her primary school at Mpondas. She then did Forms 1-2 at Mpondasi CDSS, form 3 at Mbalame CDSS and form 4 at Lingadzi Private Secondary School. She sat and passed her MSCE (with two credits – science and technology and Chichewa) in 2003.



After form four she went back home and lived with a stepmother who did not care about her progressing with her education. She then married for 'fear of getting lost' i.e. getting into bad behaviours in 2005. She and her husband cultivated in the fields but also run a grocery shop. No matter how busy Ireen was, she made sure of getting involved development activities at the school that was near her home. She also took pleasure in advising girls to take education seriously. One day she was called at the Village Headman's place to discuss issues of development and there she was told about PSSP. The next time she went to do development work at the school, the head teacher showed her the advert and she immediately applied. Ireen indicated that at one point she watched a documentary on the television discussing voluntarism and this strengthened her desire to help around the school. Hence she did not hesitate when an opportunity arose. At the interview she was asked if at all the fact that she was married would not interfere with her work and she indicated that she assured the panel that her husband was very supportive. Ireen likes singing, worshipping, exchanging gifts and mentoring girls. Her dream in life before she became an MCM was to be a teacher. The reason behind this was that a teacher never stops to learn and she wanted that kind of challenge. MCM never changed that dream. Rather, it strengthened it and opened her up more towards her lifelong dream.

Motivation to work as an MCM

Apart from wanting to help her community, Ireen saw the programme as an opportunity for her to learn more and at the same time help girls who were just as needy as she used to be when her mother passed away. The inspiration of course came through the TV programme.

Achievements

Just like most other MCMs Ireen had a whole range of achievements. She boasted of school clubs that improved the performance of the members in the various subjects. In the same vein the establishment of play parks led a rise in enrolment and attendance. Through her community mobilization endeavours, Ireen managed to have the community organize a number of fundraising activities. At one such activity the community raised MK45,000.00. With money from such events orphans and vulnerable children were assisted and schools blocks and teacher houses renovated. In some schools new school blocks and teacher houses were built. Through there were quite a number of activities that she helped the community, two particular activities brought a smile on Ireen's face. First, it was the mentoring of the youth and this regard she has stories of young women and men who had completely given up on school but through her guidance they went back. She also helped establish a vibrant youth club (21 in-school and 10 out-of-school) who through doing piece work here and there managed to raised enough funds to help 13 OVCs. At the time of the

evaluation this club was on the verge of getting a 1.5 million Kwacha grant from the National Aids Commission.

Challenges

Ireen is a bubbly happy lady and only cited three challenges which hastened to point out that they did not dampen her spirit at all. The first challenge was the negative attitude of some teachers towards PSSP activities. This was followed by the fact that some people in the community did not take her seriously since she was born and grew up among them. A practical challenge was the onset of the rains. During this time it was difficult to organize meetings since people were busy in the fields. For her personally, moved was also difficult because some bridges were not strong and some rivers did not have bridges.

MCM STORY II

Amina Chadzunda

Amina Chadzunda (21) is from Zinalanda village in Dowa District. She is the third born in a family of ten children, three boys and seven girls and she is single. Her family has lived in this area for over 30 years being the home area of the father. Unlike all her sisters and brothers who were born at Madisi hospital she was born at Lilongwe Central Hospital because her mother had a complication that necessitated that she goes to a bigger hospital. She did her Primary education at Chimbuli Primary School in Dowa. After completing her primary school she went to stay with her sister in Kasungu District who was a teacher at Chamakala CDSS and this is where she did her form one and form two. Her sister then transferred to Mbapapi Secondary School at Chatoloma and this is where she did her form three and four. She obtained the Malawi School Leaving Certificate of education in 2005, she got thirty seven points. Soon after writing her form four, she decided to come back home to stay with her parents, she felt that they needed a hand in their farming activities.



Life before Becoming an MCM

Like many other girls in the community, Amina helped her parents with their farming. Her parents grew tobacco as a cash crop and groundnuts, soybeans, and maize for food. She also used to help her parents with household chores like washing, cooking, fetching water.

During this time, there were a number of challenges that she faced. First and far most was lack of money. She depended on her parents for money to buy basic necessities and this was not easy since her parents only relied on tobacco for income. She also suffered ridicule for being educated and yet not employed. She was even being used by some people as an example of why people should not waste time and money to send children to school. She reported,

“...it was tough! There was no role model for the community; most of the people took school not to be important as they saw me with the certificates just at home. Some parents were even telling their children to look at me as a very good example and as such, they did not see any need to send the children to school. When I got this work as an MCM, this entire attitude is gone....”

Added to the two scenarios above, her relations and neighbours were pressurizing her to marry. Amina likes playing volleyball, listening to the radio, watching football and playing netball. Her ambition is to rewrite the Malawi School Certificate of Education so that in future, it should be easy for her to get a proper job. Apart from that, her wish is to run a shop.

Why work as an MCM

Amins’s motive to work as an MCM is better expressed in her own words as follows:

“...What encouraged me most was the vacancy that was put on the board at the TDC, they were very transparent that anybody who applies will work as a volunteer and in the community that one is coming from. I got really interested in the program as I have always thought of a way of developing our community and this was more like my answer. In addition to this, I knew that I will definitely gain knowledge from the program. I was thinking that there is no way they can just take me and just leave me like that without teaching me anything. Apart from that, I thought seriously of the community I am leaving in. Many of the parents never cared much to send their children to school. You can imagine that other pupils were staying even two weeks without going to school and it really used to disturb me as some of these were my relations. I wondered whether the program could help so I had to give it a try...”

Achievements

Amina indicated that she was very happy with her work and pointed to a number of success stories. She indicated that in all the five schools that she visited, she was able to make TALULAR. Through her community mobilization she managed to have teacher houses and school blocks built in the four schools that she was visiting. At Chimbuli School, two teacher's houses and one school block were built. At Chilinde School, two teacher's houses and three school blocks were built. At Mtsukamakodza Primary School, three teacher's houses and one school block were built. Lastly at Katengeza Primary School two school blocks were built. In addition to all these the youth club was building one teacher's house at Mtsukamakoza Primary School. *Akunjira* too were building one teacher's house at the same school using money they got from various fund raising activities. *Akunjira* also bought uniform for four orphans from Mtsukamakoza primary school. Amina also established two community-based child care centres which were functional at the time of the evaluation and a few weeks before the evaluation both centres got assistance from the Department of Social Welfare in form of cups, plates, spoons and flour for making porridge.

Challenges

The only challenge Amina mentioned was the frequent breakdowns of the bicycle that she was given. Since some of her schools were far, she sometimes did not work when the bike was down.

MCM STUDY III

Edson Hetela Nyamukani

Edson Hetela Nyamukani was born on 29th February 1978. He married but separated with his wife in 2004. They together have two children aged 6 and 3 years, respectively. He comes from Chipiliza Village, Traditional Authority Chakhaza, Group Village Headman Makombo in Mponela. He did his primary school at Bweya Primary School and his secondary school at Madisi Secondary School. He sat for Malawi School Certificate of Education in 1989. He did not obtain a certificate because he only passed 5 subjects (English, Geography, Agriculture, History and Biology). He repeated at Mgala Community Day Secondary School and managed to get his MSCE. In the year 2001, he taught on a voluntary basis at Bwanyundo Primary School. He then worked for Care International in the ILPWP programme in which he worked as a facilitator based in the community on a two year contract. He then decided to upgrade his accounting skills and he enrolled at Ekwendeni School of Commerce. Due to financial constraints he could not finish the accounting course and went back home.



Life before becoming an MCM

Prior to working as an MCM Edson was a mere farmer who grew maize, groundnuts and Soya as food crops and tobacco as a cash crop. He also used to work as a builder. During this phase of his life he faced a number of challenges and narrating these; he said:

“...I lacked funds to buy materials for use in my career of building houses. You know when you are building, you require materials and if you don’t have money then the job is not done well. The second challenge is that I was little by little becoming a typical villager with no proper future. Since I used to associate much with the villagers, I started to think more like them and my education was being affected. Previously when I was working with CARE, I was always thinking of upgrading but when I started farming, all these thoughts evaporated into thin air”

Edson likes watching football, praying, chatting with friends and watching television. Before he became an MCM he wanted to do accounting but this has now changed. He wants to do a course relating to rural development. In his own words, Edson said: *“I never knew that I would be able to work with communities but when I became an MCM, I have learnt that it is an easy and exciting job. I feel that I can manage to spend all my time doing this work.”*

Motivation to work as an MCM

Edson’s main drive to work as a volunteer was to serve his community and relations. In his own words he said:

“...MCMs were to work as volunteers and the main aim was to develop the various communities in Dowa District. Though it may sound tough to work as a volunteer I still had the feeling that I would manage to contribute just to help my community. I mean, it is always good to develop your own home, don’t you think so? I thought of assisting the community in general and also my relatives. Apart from that, I wanted to set up an example to the community. I wanted them to learn that educated or not educated but it is still important to work with your own community where development is concerned...”

Achievements

Edson was happy with his work and cited a number of achievements that brought him joy and some of the outstanding achievements included:

- Changed the community members' mindset regarding the value of school. People that did not see the value of school before, started sending their children to school.
- Through the English club some learners are now able to speak English.
- Through the mathematics club, the learners are learning this subject faster than before.
- The TALULARs made teaching easy and strait forward.
- Managed to improve school infrastructure in three schools through sensitizing the community to engage in fundraising activities.

Challenges

Despite the so many success stories, life for Edson was not all roses. He did encounter hardships which included:

- Frequent breakdowns of the bicycle and since there was no money allocated to repairs, it was not easy to get this from their stipend.
- Since he worked away from home, accommodation was an issue since he had to pay K500 per month for the house that he rented and
- The vandalising of play packs.

MCM STORY IV

Emelesia Mulinde (Currently at Kasungu TTC)

26 year old Emelesia Mulinde was born at Mponela District Hospital. On her second attempt at the Malawi School Certificate Exam she managed to pass but did not do well in Mathematics. After MSCE, she lived home, helping her father and mother in their daily farming activities. She got married on 25th April, 1998 to a primary school teacher.



Life before becoming an MCM

Emelesia first taught as an untrained teacher at Wenela Private Primary School. This school unfortunately closed in 1999 due to financial problems. She was back to doing household chores. Her relations and husband encouraged her to reseat for the MSCE which she did in 2005. She passed and this time around she passed mathematics as well. Whilst at home studying she also used to do small scale businesses (sold fish, flitters and tobacco). She was also actively involved in farming in which she grew groundnuts, maize and Soya. The main challenges during this time were lack of money for maintaining the family and unemployment. Her frustrations are reflected in the following:

“...From the two challenges that I have given you, the one that confused me most was poverty. I was just a house wife and depended on my husband who is just a primary school teacher for everything. I was also a depressed person; you can agree with me that one cannot do household activities all day, sometimes; I was just seated at home and had nothing to do. ...”

Emelesia’s life dream is to become a secondary school teacher (just like her two brothers) and she will do all it will take to achieve that. This ambition has not changed even after working as an MCM.

Why work as an MCM

Before joining the MCM Emelesia did a lot of voluntary work at her church. Hence, when the advert was put for a job that would not pay, she decided to rise to the challenge.

Achievements

Her achievements are best grouped into 3. First, it was the skills she learnt whilst serving as an MCM (TALULAR making and good presentation of her work – these turned out to be handy in her training at the Teacher Training College). Secondly, she managed to have communities in the three schools that she worked in put or renovate structures like school blocks and toilets (six toilets built at Thedze and one school block at Mayiwe). She also helped schools put up a number of play parks. Last but not least, managed to get back to school a number pupils that had dropped out.

Disappointment

Her major disappointment was in one school where the community expected her to give them materials for development work which in fact they were supposed to contribute themselves. Teachers too were sometimes jealousy because they thought that she was there to interfere with their work. Last but not least Emelesia did not find it easy to work with her cluster leader. She indicated that the cluster leader was complaining that the program was unfair to her since she was working hard and not getting any allowances.

Why teaching?

When she was asked why she went for the teaching course, Emelesia said,

“...I should be very honest with you that being an MCM was a brave decision to take. Previously, I used to think that I am useless as there was nothing I was doing in the community. I never even thought of improving my education, it just never clicked to me. I used to think that doing household

activities was the only thing that I could do in life. Now, when I became an MCM my mindset changed and I earnestly thought of improving myself in terms of education. I thank PSSP staff for encouraging me to apply for the teaching course. When I explained this to my husband, he agreed with the idea and he also encouraged me to apply which I did. In addition to that, I also got influence from my sisters and brothers who are well to do, they have always told me about school but I never used to listen. Apart from all these influences, I thank myself to have joined this program. I got greatly exposed and I saw a lot of role models. The lady trainers, the teachers, the people working in the shops, my goodness, I could not just get this pressure, I wished if it was me. I could not just stand it but to improve my education...”

MCM STORY V

Life of Estere Chaseta

Life before becoming an MCM

Estere was born on 22nd November 1979 at Mtiti. She did her primary education at Mtiti primary school and 1995 she was selected to Ludzi Girls Secondary School. Since her parents could not afford the fees, her uncle assisted her in paying the fees. Whilst in form three some guy befriended. In January 1999 whilst in form four she was 7 months pregnant from the same guy. The head of the school encouraged her to stay on and write the final exam. She sat for the exams when the labour pains had already started and she delivered the baby three days after her last exam. Unfortunately the child passed away after 6 months. She wanted to go back to school but resources did not allow since her sister was also in school and their father did not want to have anything with school. In the year 2000 the Malawi Institute for Democratic Affairs engaged her for 8 months. She used the money she got from this appointment to buy fertilizer that applied to the tobacco and maize that she grew. She sold these and got good money from them.

Seeing the need for teachers at her old school, Mtiti, in 2001 she helped out and taught English and Chichewa. In 2002 she got married again and she moved in with the husband in Lumbadzi where she stayed on as a housewife but she would go back home to cultivate during the growing season so that she would be able to support her siblings. She had a child with this man in 2003 and the marriage started having problems. In June 2004 the man run away to his home in Lunzu. In 2005 they reunited but problems resurfaced. She had no choice but leave the man. This time she was 2 months pregnant.

In May 2006 she heard about PSSP at some funeral. Despite being pregnant, problems at her school made her apply to be an MCM. The letter calling her for interviews on a Monday got to her three days before the day of the interview (Friday). On a Sunday she was in hospital delivering. She asked the ward attendants to look after her baby while she went home to collect certificates and attended the interview. She was successful and when the child was only a month old she was called for orientation. Programme officials doubted her but she assured them that since she would be working at home she would either bring the child with her or she would leave the child with her mother.

Estere's dream in life was to work in the hospital in whatever capacity, so long as it involved serving people. This dream had by the time not changed because what she was doing then was the same as what she had been dreaming about.

Motivation to work as an MCM

As indicated above, Estere's main drive for joining the MCM was the lack of teachers at her old school. Hence, the will to improve things in her community was paramount.

Achievements

She has often been ahead of other girls and in 2007 she represented women when visitors wanted to know more about MCMs. In the same year she was asked to be one of the facilitators at MCM training. She was also appointed as a Leader of Madisi zone in the same year. Estere was also very proud of the way she managed to mobilize the community. As a result of her efforts, vandalism of school property was in this area history and she also managed to have the community build new structures and renovate old ones as well. To add to this a total of no less than 20 children that had dropped out of school had gone back and in her own words, these children were now enjoying school. A climax of her activities was when through her lobbying she and the community got two wheel chairs children in one household who had problems walking. She also managed to convince a couple to take their disabled child to hospital for an operation. The child is now happily walking.

Challenges

Estere is one rare MCM who showed that she enjoyed her work fully. There were hiccups though included nature. Her other two schools were across a big river and during the rains it was difficult to reach these schools. She reported that there were times when she had to spend a night on the other side of the river because the river had swollen due to heavy rains earlier in the day. She also had problems with some teachers at the beginning of the programme. They chose not to cooperate and were demanding allowances from her. Another challenge came about as a result of her working from her home. She lost a lot of time during funerals because she had to take part in all the activities and rituals. Last but not least, at the beginning, there used to be a lot of vandalism of play parks and the TALULAR in the classrooms.



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