

## LITERACY LEADERS REPORT 2021

### INTRODUCTION

The Literacy Leaders Project continued in the year 2021 despite wave after wave of Covid-19 hitting Malawi. The closure of schools in the first wave impacted learners a great deal and the overall education standards in Malawi dwindled, prompting the government to decide that schools should remain open during subsequent waves as much as possible. However, this involved putting special measures in place for some time, such as having certain grades ('standards') alternating days to free up classroom space and reduce overcrowding.



There also remained restrictions around large meetings for some time after, but the Literacy Leaders managed to conduct a few activities in Demera School, Lifuwu school and Mikute School. These have been much less frequent than hoped, due to the setbacks created by the pandemic as well as numerous teacher transfers out of the zone, and we are now – despite the extensive recent flooding in the region – doing what we can to pick up the pace of the project.

### 1. PLANNING MEETINGS

Due to the pandemic, the monthly 'hub' sessions that were previously being conducted at Ngolowindo Teacher Development Centre were suspended so the Literacy Leaders reviewed their activities and adopted a new direction for how the project was to be continued. This involved more teachers in each target school being included in on-site sessions at school level.



Planning meetings were held with Literacy Leaders from Demera, Lifuwu and Mikute Schools, who opted to conduct their own fortnightly sessions on Fridays. Ngolowindo's and Maganga's planning meetings were postponed due to further school closures and a need to focus on exams, but Ngolowindo School finally held their planning meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> February and a similar meeting will be held for Maganga school once road access improves, as they suffered particularly bad flooding.

### 2. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Whilst Rachel sent guidance for the two initial in-school sessions welcoming newcomers and remains available to answer questions on point of English, the more experienced Literacy Leaders now take

turns to do the planning of sessions for their respective colleagues themselves. Jean, the local Project Coordinator, also leads some parts and facilitates the smooth delivery of the sessions.

Since the last annual report, in-school sessions were conducted in Lifuwu, Mikute and Demera.

### **Lifuwu**

The first session was conducted at Lifuwu primary school in April, 2020. New joiners were welcomed and Jean gave an insight with regards to the project background, the direction that the project had taken so far, and what was changing in response to the pandemic. The second session was delayed until after schools were opened for the second term of the academic year on 11th June, 2021. Eight teachers were present. A third meeting for the school occurred in October 2021 towards the end of the third term and 10 teachers attended with Mable, one of the original Literacy Leaders, leading the session.



It is hoped that the teachers who are new to the project will, in due course, start to also take a leading role, both in terms of delivering the sessions and in promoting good practice throughout their schools. However, mobilisation in 2022 has been made difficult by the arbitrary transfer-out of the school's brilliant head-teacher (local authorities choose when this happens) with whom the project has a longstanding relationship. Luckily he is now working as a teacher in Mikute though!

### **Mikute**

For Mikute School, two sessions were conducted, with the initial one in October 2021 followed by another one in November 2021. At the initial meeting, 10 teachers were present while the second one had 12 in attendance, showing a growing embrace of this opportunity for continued professional development and the chance to enhance the quality of education for the children with whom they work.



Above: Teachers learning an educational game.

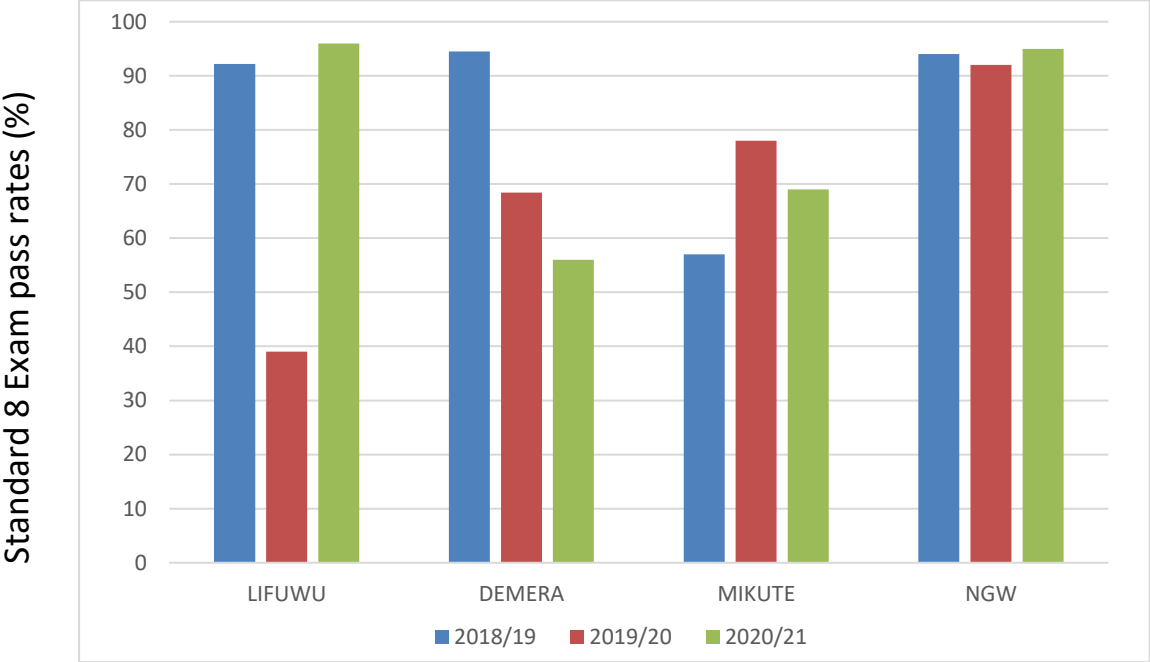
### **Demera**

Demera had its first in-school session on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021 with seven teachers in attendance. Jean led the session to welcome the newcomers, in collaboration with Martha, one of the original Literacy Leaders. Similarly to Lifuwu, Jean gave an overview of the project at length and highlighted what participation will involve. The second session was done in June 2021 and this time eight teachers were present for the session. Two more sessions were conducted at Demera in October and November. The project has also lost longstanding participants from Demera; the lovely headteacher moved on from the school in 2021, Martha has since been transferred to the Southern region of Malawi and another Literacy Leader Esnarth secured a university place studying Education Languages. She is not the first

Literacy Leader to progress to higher education and show great gratitude to the project for its part in the journey. We trust that these wonderful teachers will spread the impact of the project through sharing what they have learnt, further afield.

### EXAMINATION PROGRESS AND GOALS

Below is a graph showing the pass exam results for the Primary School Leaving Certificate over the last 3 years. Maganga is not included as we were unable to obtain data from the previous two years.



You can see from the graph the drop in exam pass rates in the first sitting of exams after the pandemic hit (2020), with the exception of Mikute, which had low rates in 2018/19, following a long period without a head teacher regularly being present at the school.

You can also see how some schools have started to recover while others are still struggling. Over the next few years we would like to see a greater number of children reaching standard 8 to sit the exams whilst retaining the high percentage pass rates of Ngolwindo and Lifuwu and achieving improvements in pass rates for Demera, Mikute and Maganga to at least 80%.