

The Caregiver Homeschooling Instruction Program:

World Vision mitigates the effects of COVID-19 on literacy in Malawi through simple, integrated, home-based lessons

BETWEEN the mid 2000's and early 2020 Malawi greatly improved access to education, reaching net primary school enrolment of over 90 per cent.¹ The dropout rate for primary education has also improved significantly from 11.7% in 2009 to 3.2% in 2018. However, retention remains a challenge, with a primary completion rate of 52% and repetition rate of 24.5%.² Challenges with education quality also remain.³ A national assessment of student performance (2015) showed that mean language scores for male and female students in grade 4 were 25% or lower- far below minimum national standards.⁴ School closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded these challenges.⁵

“Only 16% of early grade readers [in WVM catchment areas] can read with basic understanding in their own language. This is a major challenge.”

WORLD VISION IN MALAWI (WVM) implements education activities in 306 primary schools and 954 early childhood development centers across Malawi's north, central and southern regions, supporting 159,753 boys and 146,647 girls between the ages of three and nine. According to the WVM Education Program Manager, given the low literacy levels of early grade learners, all WVM education programs address age-appropriate reading. One of the key challenges underpinning poor performance has traditionally been limited parental involvement resulting from prevailing negative attitudes about the utility of school.

¹ UNICEF, 2021

² Malawi Education Sector Analysis, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Lilongwe, Malawi 2019

“When we looked at the education cluster interventions, we saw there were gaps. We weren't sure if children were accessing the radio programs and feared they didn't have someone to support them. Most parents were overwhelmed, and they didn't know what to do with their children. We started thinking about how best to support them.”

In March 2020, once COVID-19 hit and school closures began, the WV team in Malawi worked within the emergency cluster system to support Government of Malawi (GOM) efforts to develop and rollout remote education strategies, including radio and television-based educational programming, materials development, and the distribution of age-appropriate printed reading materials. However, with the existing challenges of limited parental involvement and poor student performance, the WVM team worried that long school closures would lead to a chasm of learning loss.

To address the additional challenges of COVID-19, WVM adapted its traditional literacy programming, developing the **CAREGIVER HOMESCHOOLING INSTRUCTION PROGRAM**. The intervention sought to strengthen the capacity of caregivers to lead their children's education. The initiative leveraged national efforts, while building on existing WVM literacy programs, especially Unlock Literacy, and ensuring personalized interaction between families, teachers, and volunteers.

³ UNICEF

⁴ Government of Malawi, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2019)

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THE CAREGIVER HOMESCHOOLING PROGRAM



Training for Parents

Using appropriate COVID-19 protocols, WVM trained 590 teachers, who subsequently trained 7,451 parents and caregivers of ECD and early primary aged children on (1) children basic learning processes, (2) guidelines for supporting children's reading at home, (3) development of conducive home learning instruction space, (4) how to support children's reading and (5) creation of materials using locally available materials. Because many parents don't have education themselves, WV focused on simple instructions and guidelines, such as providing a conducive space for reading and maintaining a daily learning routine.

Working with Volunteers

WVM's existing (pre-COVID) Unlock Literacy programming relied on community volunteers to facilitate reading clubs and other literacy activities. WV trained the existing cadre of volunteers to provide individualized home support visits. Community-based volunteers would move from house to house to provide basic orientation and then follow-up to ensure that children were completing homeschooling sessions and lessons. Although there were insufficient volunteers to facilitate learning sessions, they were key in monitoring progress, providing spot-training, mentoring and feedback both to parent and to WVM staff.



Provision of Materials

Children engaged in the initiative received fungible materials, such as crayons, paper, and pencils, as well as lesson plans and reading materials to support their home-based reading and literacy efforts. Families also used locally available materials to make games and instruction aids. In addition, WVM supported the development and distribution of 10,000 Bloom Books to increase access to local and context-specific reading materials.

Leveraging National Efforts

To ensure that WV efforts built on, complemented, and catalyzed the collective efforts of the education cluster, WV identified gaps in implementation and leveraged the Caregiver Homeschooling Instruction Program to increase impact. For example, many students in WV areas could not access the government's radio program because they didn't have radio at home. To address this challenges, WVM incorporated the radio programs into the daily lesson plans by distributing 2,000 solar-powered radios, organizing households into clusters, and establishing a time for children from across all households to listen to the radio programs together with the support of a caregiver volunteer.



Use of Technology for Monitoring and Supervision

WVM used WhatsApp for monitoring and follow-up. Each volunteer monitored an assigned number of students and was responsible for reporting back to teachers and WV staff regarding student progress, using WhatsApp's user-friendly format to share photos of home-based activities and to provide feedback about both individual cases and overall progress across all their respective students. This enabled volunteers to provide real-time information to support targeted feedback and additional technical and mentoring support, where necessary.



RESULTS

Although WVM has not conducted a formal assessment of the results of the Caregiver Homeschooling Instruction Program, the local team has monitored the program closely, resulting in data and observations that support the following statements. Additional targeted evaluation and/or research should be conducted to verify qualitative anecdotal observations.

ROLLOUT AND SCALING POTENTIAL.

The intervention proved to be highly replicable and was eventually rolled out to all WVM programming areas. When the program began, shortly after the onset of COVID-19, it began as a pilot in three of WVM 26 Area Programs (AP). It was expanded to 16, then 18 and eventually to all 26 APs by the end of 2021.

CAPACITY OF KEY COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS STRENGTHENED.

As a result of the intervention, **WVM TRAINED 590 TEACHERS, 1,200 VOLUNTEERS and 7,451 CAREGIVERS AND PARENTS.** Training enabled the different groups to assume important roles that ensured education access during the unprecedented uncertainty of COVID-19.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION ACCESS ENSURED.

WVM reached **23,721 CHILDREN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 3 AND 5** and **57,093 CHILDREN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 6 AND 9** through the Caregiver Homeschooling Instruction Program. WV considers that the high level of coverage was pivotal in normalizing children's routines and keeping them in the habit of learning and instruction. WVM has observed lower levels of dropout in WV program areas in comparison with national averages, suggesting that the program did contribute to the intended purpose of keeping children in school. Given that this is based on staff observation, this finding should be verified through additional research and/or assessment.

INCREASED ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS.

The WVM team has noticed a significant increase in parental interest in their children's education because of the initiative. Based on anecdotal reports, many parents have expressed **"HIGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION"** with the Program, calling for it to continue. Given challenges in fostering meaningful parental participation in Malawi prior to the pandemic, this is an important observation with implications for WV's education programming post-COVID. Additional research should be conducted to understand the methods and approaches with the greatest impact on parental participation.



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