

MESA Project Gets Established

Malawi Education Support Activity (MESA) Project started its operations in Malawi in August 2003 with the aim of contributing to the improvement of educational standards by addressing a number of crosscutting issues that impinge on education. MESA is a government of Malawi project implemented by American Institutes for Research in partnership with Save the Children (US), Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM) and Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), with funding from United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

MESA builds on the three major USAID-funded projects: Quality Education through Supporting Teachers (QUEST) Project, Social Mobilisation Campaign for Educational Quality (SMC-EQ) Project and Improving Education Quality (IEQ) which were implemented by Save the Children, CRECCOM and MIE respectively. QUEST largely focused on teacher professional development, SMC-EQ stressed community mobilisation to generate a sense of ownership of schools by school communities while IEQ looked at following-up pupils academic achievement and trying to

figure out constraints that affected their performance.

During the implementation period of the three projects it was learnt that there would be a bigger impact if their

intermediate results of teacher professional development by providing teacher in-service training, community mobilisation by empowering school communities to



During some of project planning meetings -MESA and AIR Officials

best practices were replicated as one whole in impact areas, hence the birth of MESA. The project will achieve

get locked into dialogue on social issues negatively affecting the

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Stakeholders Welcome Interventions

MESA Project received a very warm welcome and has won the support of almost all stakeholders,

such as government officials, community leaders and politicians in all of its impact districts. This was



manifested during the time MESA staff briefed stakeholders on what MESA was all about.

Project staff conducted the briefing meetings to familiarize the stakeholders with the objectives and

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Comment

Our dear readers, we welcome you to the first issue of MESA's newsletter. The Forum provides a ground where different stakeholders interested in matters of educational quality can share views and learn what efforts are taking place to avert critical issues that negatively affect education. The newsletter is not meant to be wholly written by people at the project secretariat as that would defeat the whole purpose of a forum.

MESA is a government of Malawi Project. Its operations and objectives are people-centred; hence it is Malawians who bear the responsibility of seeing the project parachuting to its goals. Equally true is the point that it is you who should hunger to make your contribution to the newsletter as well as reading what others have contributed.

The implementation of the project is done in collaboration with the line ministries of Education, Gender and Community Services, as well as the Ministry of Health. This explains why the project is working closely with Primary Education Advisors, Community Development Assistants and Health staff. The reasons for the close collaboration with government are twofold; because MESA is a government project, and for its sustainability. The civil servants mentioned above will keep working in their respective areas even after the project comes to its end.

We hope you will enjoy reading this first issue of the MESA Forum. We also appeal to you to share your copy with others. In case of schools and organizations, making the copy accessible to everyone is very important. ■

Communities Sensitized on What Happens in their Areas

MESA conducted research and verification for needs assessment and community mobilization in its impact districts. The activity utilized a Theatre for Development (TFD) approach.

face informal interaction with members of the communities. Their expertise created good rapport that encouraged the community members to share with the researchers even what the communities consider to be



Actors dance with the audience at Mchilima

People were sensitized on key issues that hamper educational quality and factors that accelerate the proliferation of HIV/AIDS in their areas.

A team of MESA action researchers stayed with people in the selected areas to learn what issues

“classified” information. They also learned the beliefs and practices of the people in the areas.

They used the findings to create plays. The plays were staged before the community at an open arena. The participatory nature of the drama made the audience take part in the



One of the actors interacts with the audience at Chimbiri

there are that negatively affect education. They did not carry with them any questionnaires as their research solely depended on face-to-

dialogue through out the plays. Of interest was the fact that the audience was able to immediately come up

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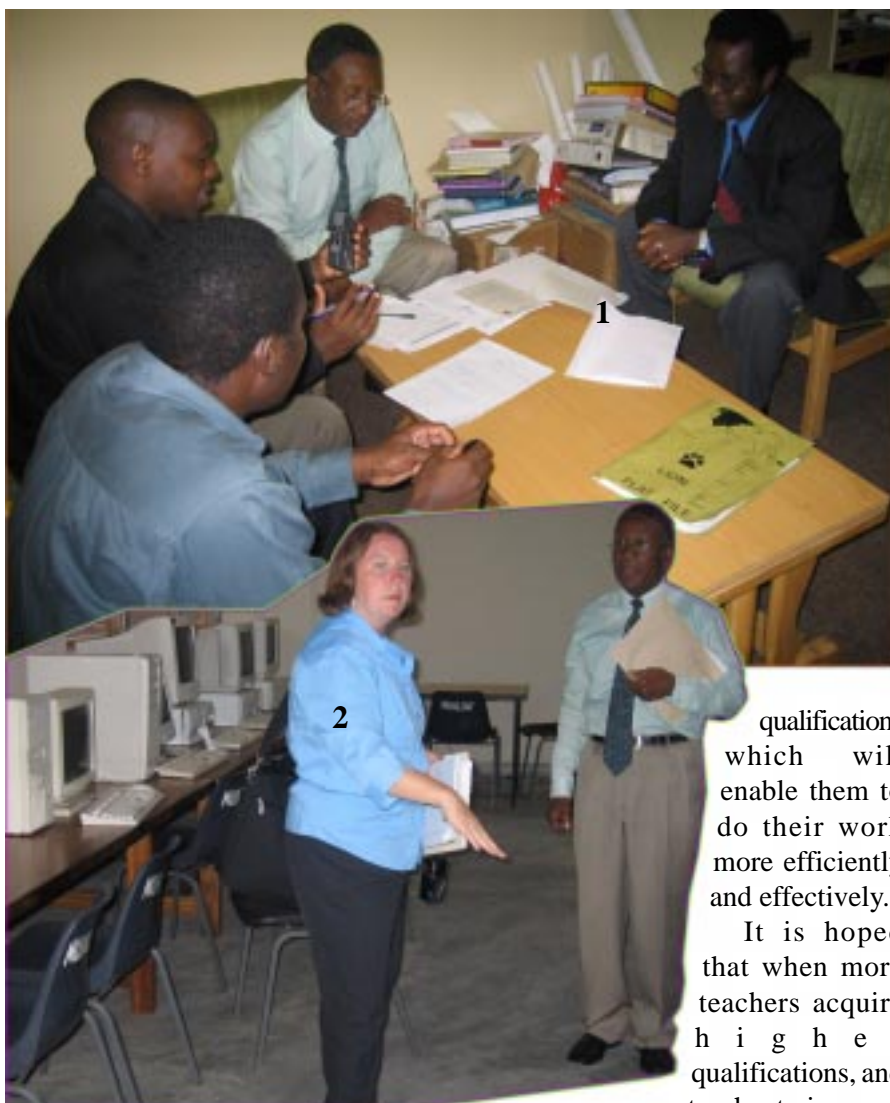
Mzuni and DCE - Channels of Educational Quality

MESA is working closely with Mzuzu University and Domasi College of Education as the other two partners besides CRECCOM, Save the Children US and Malawi Institute of Education. There will be an establishment of a communications hub at the university while at Domasi College of Education the project will construct two lecture-rooms and twelve lecturers' offices.

In the project's quest for teachers who are professionally competent, it is envisaged that the communication hub will facilitate distance education that will enable more teachers to upgrade and enhance their

professional excellence. Specialists at the university will initially administer distant education through printed matter before moving on to the internet when the hub gets operational. The students will be called to the university periodically to work with their tutors.

The construction work at Domasi College of Education aims at contributing towards the training of tutors for primary school teacher training colleges. The college will start a bachelor's degree programme in primary education for the tutors. The development means that teacher trainers will have specific



Photograph 1 shows Mzuzu University team, led by Prof. Joseph Uta mapping out the way forward while photograph 2 shows Prof. Uta (right) and MESA Project Manager from the AIR Office in Washington DC., Cassandra Jessee, inspecting the smart classroom (computer room with internet services).

qualifications which will enable them to do their work more efficiently and effectively. It is hoped that when more teachers acquire higher qualifications, and teacher trainers are

specialized in their teaching field, the teaching force will be strengthened leading to the uplifting of education quality in this country. ■

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Stakeholders Welcome Interventions

the methodologies of the project. The meetings also made sure the districts accepted the project and supported its interventions for sustainability.

The meetings were held in phases; bringing together different target groups at each phase. First day meetings drew together district heads



Ms. Sophie Mhone, one of the facilitators during the briefing meetings, holding the floor.

who comprised the District Commissioner, the District Education Manager, Director of Planning and Development, District Community Development Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, District Water Officer, District Health Officer and the Police Officer-in-charge. Then later in the day the briefing involved Primary Education Advisors, Community Development Assistants and Social Welfare Assistants. The following day, Traditional Authorities and politicians from various political affiliations were briefed.

All the stakeholders enthusiastically pledged to ensure that the project succeeds in their districts. ■

A Saying of Wisdom

"All dreams can come true, if you have the courage to pursue them"

News in Brief



Project Advisory Committee Put in Place

MESA has an advisory committee called Project Advisory Committee (PAC) which had its maiden meeting on 12th January 2004. The committee comprises professionals from various educational institutions.

Among other functions, the committee has been established to anchor and render technical support to project activities.

During the first meeting the committee elected Dr. Simeon Hau, Director of Malawi Institute of Education, its Chairperson and Ms. Virginia Chavura, Principal of Lilongwe Teachers' Training College, his deputy. The PAC pledged their untiring support to MESA staff. Picture 1 shows PAC members and some of MESA staff while pictures 2 shows the PAC chairperson, Dr. Hau addressing the meeting soon after being elected into office. Photograph 3 shows Ms. Chavula. He pledged the committee's commitment to making MESA a success. ■



Journalists Sensitized

MESA conducted media sensitization in November, 2003. The journalists from both print and electronic media were invited to the MESA Secretariat. They also inspected teaching/learning manuals which the project is printing in collaboration with Malawi Institute of Education at Domasi.

They were briefed on what MESA is, its background, goals and objectives and how it will operate. The main photograph shows part of the briefing session, and a tour of MESA's activities at MIE, and below Charles Vimtula of MBC interviews MESA's Teacher Professional Development Coordinator, Lester Namathaka. ■



News in Brief



South Sudan uphold MESA Operational Structure

Seven delegates from South Sudan were in the country on an educational visit to CRECCOM. They spared time to tour MESA Secretariat offices. They envied the integratedness of the project as it tackles key issues that lower educational quality. “We are happy to learn of a project that looks into teachers’ professional development, community mobilization and learning resources at the same time

mainstreaming HIV/AIDS mitigation into education. We wish this were happening in South Sudan as well,” remarked the team’s leader, Joyce Janda. ■

MESA briefs Save the Children’s new Director on Its Operational Structure

Save the Children Director, Jennifer Froisad, paid the MESA Secretariat a visit the time the Project Advisory Committee was meeting. She was impressed by the eagerness shown by the committee as well as project staff. “Although I am just new to Malawi, I am already impressed by the fruits the project is yielding. With the highly motivated advisory committee, I am optimistic sustainability will not be an issue,” she said.

The photograph shows Dr. Froisad sharing some sentiments about MESA during the visit. ■



A Saying of Wisdom

“People are changed, not by coercion or intimidation, but by example”

MESA Participates in an International Video Conference

American Institutes for Research organised a video conference for the EQUIP I partners worldwide on continuous assessment.

The conference was chaired by Washington DC Home Office, and involved Djibouti, Macedonia, El Savado and Malawi. It centred on continuous assessment interventions in these countries. MESA shared with the other countries experiences from its pilot work in Ntcheu. The video conference provided an extremely useful information sharing forum. The Malawi team comprised the MESA Project Manager based at the Home Office, Cassandra Jessee, its Chief of Party, Simeon Mawindo, Dr. Hartford Mchazime, Lester Namathaka, Yoas Kamangira, Madalo Samati, Andrew Malisawa and George Jobe. ■

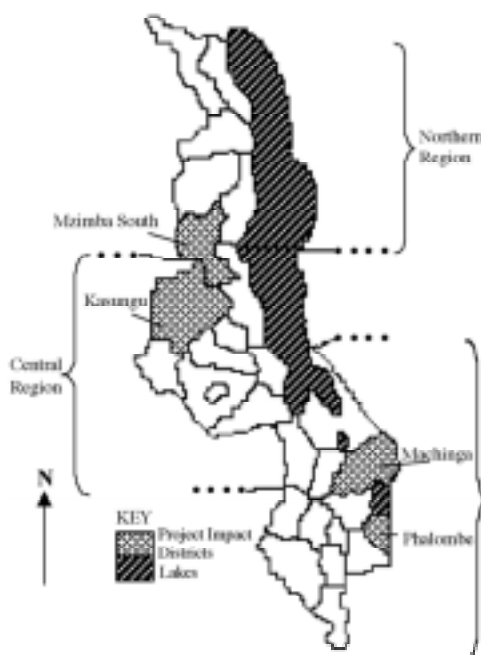
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MESA Gets Established

education of their children in primary schools and take action to address them, and by providing some teaching and learning resources to the schools. It is envisaged that this combination, alongside use of continuous assessment to determine pupils' academic performance, will yield better results.

The project also aims at establishing a communication hub at Mzuzu University which will facilitate easy access to educational

Sketch Map of Malawi: MESA Impact Districts



A map of Malawi showing MESA impact districts

information by secondary school teachers through the internet. Eventually the communications network will facilitate distance learning.

To ensure that primary school teachers are “baked” by highly qualified tutors, the project is constructing additional classrooms and administrative offices at Domasi College of Education.

MESA is operating in the impact districts of Mzimba South, Kasungu, Machinga and Phalombe for a period of three years. The project is coordinated by an AIR Field Office based in Zomba. ■

Teachers Hone Skills Under MESA

MESA is based on the notion that a nation can not talk of quality education if its teachers lack professional commitment and ability. To address this the project targets teacher professional development by training both “qualified” and “unqualified” teachers. In December 2003, the project conducted training of trainers (TOT) in all of its four impact districts. The trainees comprised head teachers and mentor teachers.

They were refreshed on classroom management, how to make lessons interactive, psychology of learning, how to make tests motivational through continuous assessment. The training was conducted by MESA staff and teacher trainers from Kasungu, Lilongwe and Montfort Teacher

Nyirongo and Tambala, respectively, commended the holistic nature of MESA. “We appreciate the impact of the preceding projects. However, we are convinced beyond doubt that this project will achieve far more as it is tackling all aspects of primary education involving the classroom



A teacher trainer, Mr Kathewera, takes his floor sharing teaching professional skills with trainer participants

and the community,” the dual said.

It is expected that the Mentor teachers, Head Teachers and Primary Education Advisors will take part in conducting training sessions for all teachers in the education zones and clusters of the districts They will also

perform supervisory roles both in the classroom and in the community as they work closely with Mentor Community Leaders.

Schools in the districts have been grouped into clusters for easy supervision of and interaction with teachers from various schools.

Mentors teachers and Mentor Community Leaders are people selected to assist Primary Education Advisors in managing school clusters in an education zone. ■



It was all joy during the training as the old timer teachers and new ones honed professional skills

Training Colleges; from Domasi College of Education and Malawi Institute of Education as well.

In their opening remarks, District Education Managers for Mzimba South and Machinga, Messrs

Phalombe Politicians Commend MESA Approach

Politicians from different political parties in Phalombe District recently commended the MESA approach. The sentiments were expressed during a project briefing meeting on what the project is all about.

Apart from education professionals, the project drew together leaders from different political parties to its meetings. One of the participants expressed excitement on seeing politicians of dissenting views sitting under one roof to discuss issues of social concern. "This is indeed a good approach. Everyone is equally concerned with the standards of our education as well as the HIV/AIDS scourge which has greatly contributed to the lowering of

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Member of Parliament in Phalombe, Hon. Mweta (middle) and Chairperson of Phalombe District Assembly, Mr Navitcha, (right), during the meeting.

"Chimvano cha Mavu" Gets Launched

Malawi Education Support Activity launched a radio program, *Chimvano cha Mavu*, on 24 October 2003 to facilitate information sharing and dialogue on project interventions. The program aims at featuring grassroots so that they learn from and get motivation/level

interventions and successes by one other.

The first program featured MESA staff as they briefed the nation what the project is about, its key stakeholders, what it aims to achieve and how it will operate. Key speakers were staff members from Save the Children (US), Creative Centre for

Community Mobilisation and Malawi Institute of Education.

The program is aired on Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio 1 every Friday from 6.15 pm to 6.30 pm.

The program has already covered a lot of MESA activities such as the Theatre for Development participatory dramas, collection of baseline data at teacher professional and community involvement levels, social studies interventions, and Mzuzu University activities..

Comments from across the country indicate that there is a lot of interest generated among people. "I have known a lot about MESA through this radio program," said one of the journalists based in Blantyre. ■



The producers of Chimvano cha Mabvu, Hamilton Chimala and Milton Thole busy gathering materials in photos 1 and 2 while in photo 3 Hamilton presents the program



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Community Members Sensitized on What Happens in their Areas

with solutions to some of the problems depicted in the plays. For instance, at Mchilima Primary School, in Machinga, Chief Mposa and his subjects were quick to propose the establishment of a task force to look into the timing of performing some of the traditional dances which were seen to be “seductive” in nature. “It is my strongest wish that this version of Manganje dance be performed during day time,” the T/A said.

The participatory drama performances were attended by a wide range of people. One of the

performances at Chimbiri Primary School in Mulomba Education Zone in Phalombe was attended by journalists while the one at Kamalambo Primary School in Katete Education Zone in Mzimba South was attended by the MESA Project Manager based in Washington DC, USA, Cassandra Jessee. The audience, including Cassandra and the journalists, were impressed by the active interaction between the actors and the audience which left community members highly mobilized for remedial action to some of the constraints identified.■

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Phalombe Politicians Commend MESA Approach

educational standards in the country. Projects should promote this kind of approach to enhance social cohesion,” he said.

Furthermore, the Chairperson of the District Assembly commended the project for broadening their understanding. He said, “the meeting has widened our vision to acknowledge the muscle we have to influence social cohesion in our respective areas. We are always in contact with people at the grassroots level; it can not be difficult to incorporate education quality and HIV/AIDS in our agendas.” He stressed.

At the end of the meeting the participants were seen offering each other lifts.■



Part of the group of participants, leaders of the ruling and opposition political parties share a common goal, fight HIV/AIDS and promote education, in MESA

MESA is part of the EQUIP 1 Program, which gets its funding from United States Agency for International Development (USAID), awarded to American Institutes for Research (AIR) and is co-implemented by Save the Children US, Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM) and Malawi Institute of Education (MIE).



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