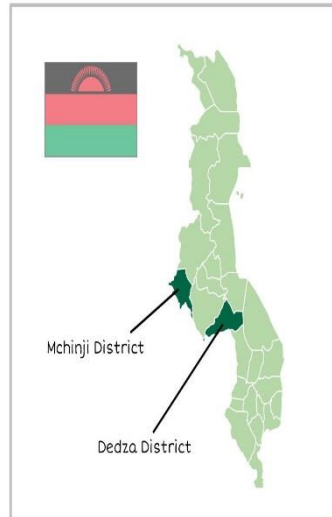




**The School Improvement Cycle “would help to change things. We wouldn’t make decisions without thinking about the consequences.”**  
**Headteacher, Mchinji District**



## KEY FACTS

- Link has been working in Malawi since 2006
- Link Malawi works in Dedza and Mchinji Districts
- Link developed the first National Education Standards in August 2015
- We are leading the community engagement component of Malawi’s National Reading Programme
- We are developing a school report card system
- We have written new guidelines and trained inspectors and advisors on school improvement
- Our projects are sustainable – we work with government at all levels and ensure our interventions align with government policy

## Summary

Link Community Development has been working in Malawi since 2006 with funding from DfID, USAID, the Scottish Government, and Comic Relief, amongst others. Highlights include developing the first National Education Standards to be used in every primary and secondary school in the country helping 4.5 million children; delivering a community engagement model that improves reading skills of young children; and demonstrating our school improvement model in a new district to show that it works.

## Background

Currently only 38% of students reach and complete the final Grade of primary school (Standard 8). Education quality is a major barrier to progression and completion of the primary school cycle. In Malawi the proportion of Standard 4 learners able to demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade-level text is 15.4%. Girls continue to underperform compared to boys. The Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education pass rates has been declining from 74.4% in 2006 to 68.9% in 2011. Boys are performing better than girls and the gap between the two is wider in 2012 than it was in 2006. It is against this backdrop that Link supports schools and the government to provide quality education to all children. [Sources of figures - *Education Sector Improvement Plan II p.20-23*]

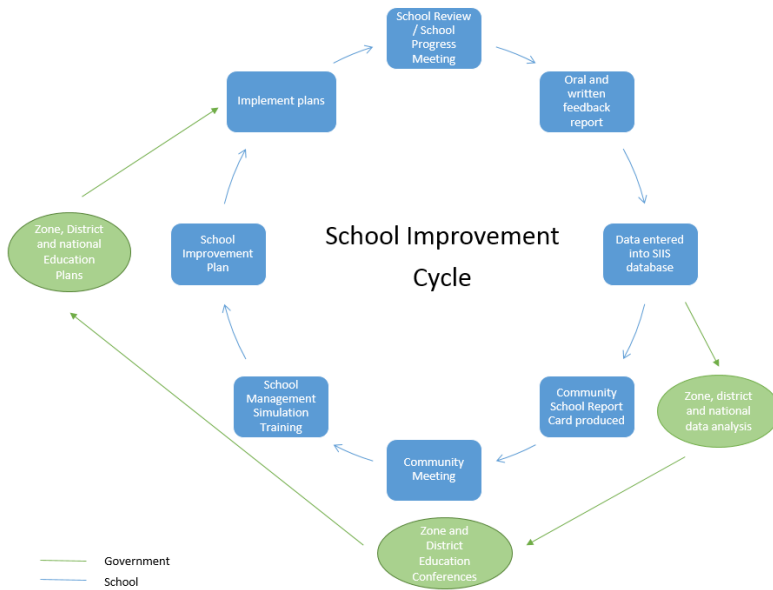
## The INSPIRE Project (2015-2018)

To make lasting improvements in the quality of education in individual schools, change must involve the Headteachers, teachers, parents, communities and local and central governments. Stakeholders need information about how schools are performing so that resources and support can be directed where they are most needed.

The INSPIRE project is demonstrating an integrated system for understanding how schools are performing against the National Educational Standards and supports planning for improvement at school, district and central levels.

*The National Education Standards define the basic minimum requirements which all schools in Malawi must meet, and effective practice which schools should aspire to achieve. The 26 standards relate to outcomes for students, the teaching process, and school leadership and management.*

## The School Improvement Cycle



Link worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to develop a comprehensive set of processes and tools for Malawi's school improvement cycle. This builds on Link's core School Performance Review model, which we have facilitated in Malawi since 2006.

Every three years, advisors from the Ministry of Education carry out a formal **School Review** to evaluate how the school is performing against a core set of the National Education Standards. They speak to school staff, learners, and community members, observe lessons, check records, and judge how healthy and safe the environment is for children. Every year that School Review does not

take place, advisors hold a **School Progress Meeting** with the Headteacher, senior staff and school governing body to examine evidence of how the school is performing. At the end of the Review or Progress Meeting, the advisor provides an **oral and written feedback report** to the school.

The information collected during the advisor's visit is **entered into the Schools Integrated Information System database**. This enables the Ministry of Education to **analyse how individual schools, zones and districts are performing**. Previously, reliable information about schools was often unavailable or was not made accessible to schools, districts or central Ministry in a coordinated way.



|                                    |   |    |
|------------------------------------|---|----|
| Level 4: Effective Practice        | The requirements at Level 4 are intended to be both aspirational and achievable.  | 😊⭐ |
| Level 3: Exceeds Minimum Standards | Level 3 identifies some of the key processes and activities typical of practice which is better than the minimum standard.  | 😊😊 |
| Level 2: Meets Minimum Standards   | Level 2 presents the basic requirements most of all schools in Malawi in view of the twenty-six Standards.  | 😊  |
| Level 1: Below Minimum Standards   | Level 1 relates to those schools which fail to achieve the requirements of an adequate education for their students in one or more respects. Such schools should make immediate plans for improvement so that the experiences and achievements of young people are not further damaged. | 😞  |



The database is also used to produce a **Community School Report Card**. This is a visual representation of the school's performance against the National Education Standards and progress made since the last review. It is a simple and effective way of sharing information with parents and community members who cannot read. The Headteacher presents this at the **Community Meeting**, where more detailed information about the school's strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement are discussed. Representatives from each school attend **Zone and District Education Conferences** where they share their schools' challenges and put pressure on the government to support them to improve.

**School Management Simulation Training** uses a high quality board game to 'simulate' managing a school using real scenarios. It trains key stakeholders to make effective decisions on the use of funds, staff and resources to bring about school improvement.

After the training, schools and their communities identify their priorities for action and make a **School Improvement Plan** to address the key weaknesses revealed by School Review or the School Progress Meeting. The government reflects on the data and stakeholders' feedback to make **Zone, District and National Education Plans** which allocate resources and support where they are needed most. Throughout the next year these **plans are implemented** and carefully monitored by local stakeholders. At the next School Review or School Progress Meeting the advisors check whether the targets have been met, and the School Improvement Cycle begins again.

## Delivery Partner



Ministry of Education, Science and Technology