

## Using Cluster Meetings to Improve ODL Completion Rates

By

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## Teacher Upgrading through ODL in Malawi

- The programme upgrades primary teachers from certificate to diploma in education.
- Only primary teachers who are teaching in Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) are targeted.
- The upgrading programme is offered by Domasi College of Education
- The programme begun in 2000 with CIDA financial support as a project but it is currently institutionalized.

## Introduction of Cluster and Study Circle Meetings

- The college planned for group as opposed to individual completion
- The focus on numbers was for immediate impact on deprived learners in CDSSs
- Clusters provided a mechanism for zonal coordination of the programme nationally
- Study circles provided opportunities for teacher learners to work groups in the same locality.
- Field Supervisors were engaged to give immediate support to individuals and learner groups

## Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate how cluster and study circle meetings supported learners
- To draw lessons from programme beneficiaries about how the support system is working
- To document contributions of cluster and study circles to individual learner
- To document challenges of the field support system.

## Study participants

- Data for the study was collected through interviews and questionnaires from the following informants:
  - a. Managers of the programme (2)
  - b. Cluster leaders (16)
  - c. Field supervisors (16)
  - d. Teacher learners (78)All were considered key informants

## Creating Environments for Sustaining Learning

- Cluster meetings provided for participation of all in dealing with administrative and non academic matters of the learners
- Study circles facilitated academic discussions based on subject combinations.
- Cluster meetings formal interactions between Field Supervisors and teacher learners.
- Study circles created the feeling of not being alone in the learning process.

## Benefits of Study Circles

- Helping each other in assignments
- Providing a forum for discussing difficult areas of subject matter
- Helping one another to improve teaching of various topics in schools
- Providing opportunities for sharing resources among learners of different schools

## Challenges of Cluster and Study Circle Support System

- Distance from schools to cluster and study circle venues pose transport problem
- The system is prone to abuse because some teacher learners use the time for personal errands unrelated to learning
- Study circle organization continues to isolate learners of minority subjects
- Increased similarity in answers to assignments due to group dependence of weak learners could lead to plagiarism.

## Critical Lessons

- Cluster and study circles provide learners with the equivalence of classes in the face-to-face programme (cohort/classmate scenario)
- Cluster and study circles provide great opportunity for socialization which complements learning in a formal education system
- The system provides resource mobilization and sharing (presence of materials and trust)
- Teacher learner expenses in meetings are more than just hidden costs of the programme

## Conclusion

- Cluster and study circle meetings have complemented learner success in the programme
- Study circles provided the peer group opportunity on which new teaching techniques could be tried and polished
- The support system is working as expected because it has helped many learners to succeed on the programme

**Thank You!**