

GATEWAY ANNUAL 2023 REPORT

BACKGROUND

Menstruation is a natural and unavoidable part of the lives of women and girls. Many girls in the rural communities of Malawi are unable to manage their menstruation alongside their studies and are forced to drop out of school entirely because of inadequate sanitary protection.

As one way of coming up with a solution to this problem, Starfish Malawi established a programme called GATEWAY (Girls Access to Education) in 2016, to produce and distribute sanitary packs to young adolescent school girls in order for them to be in school during their menses. GATEWAY provides girls with a reusable sanitary hygiene pack. Each pack contains 2 shields made from waterproof mattress protector material to ensure non-leakage, 5 liners to fit inside the shields for absorbance, 2 knickers and a discreet bag to carry the kit in. This encourages them to attend school during their monthly periods and ultimately complete their education.

GATEWAY is an incredibly effective programme run by Starfish Malawi to help young girls stay in school, as well as promoting women's empowerment as it teaches women and girls to take their future into their own hands. It has also created job opportunities for local women as they are taught how to produce the packs in sewing groups. Starfish buys the packs from the groups which generates income for their families.

Before distributing the packs to girls in schools, a demonstration of how to use the sanitary pack is conducted by the Gateway Officer with the help of a few volunteers. After distribution the Gateway Officer gives the girls a questionnaire for them to answer just to review their menstrual journey and challenges, they faced.

UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The chart below shows the kits production record for the past 5 years, it shows that in 2021 and 2022 the production was not good because of covid 19, but sewing has resumed in 3 groups that is GTOC, Chitiwiri and Kapiri and we have seen that the numbers of kits produced have improved.

In the year 2023 we manage to distribute to 5 primary schools and 1 resource centre and below are the distribution records

Name of school	Number of kits distributed
Ntchentche primary school	164
Kapira primary school	68
Demera primary school	81
Kaputu primary school	111
Thundu primary school	62
Kudimba resource centre	20



Some of the girls from Thundu Primary school after receiving the kits.

The impact has increased in different communities across Salima as it has enhanced cleanliness and reduced school absenteeism for girls. This is confirmed by the absenteeism records from some of the schools to which Starfish distributed the kits.

In August 2023, the Mission direct team accompanied by Charity the project coordinator of Gateway visited GTOC sewing group, to appreciate the work that the group is doing and understand how the whole process is done.



Some of the Mission Direct team, interacting with some of the GTOC sewing group members

NEW RESOURCES

We received 2 boxes of microfiber tea towels and 205 already cut liners from Starfish. Mission Direct also gave us knickers, press studs, sewing thread, needles and a large duvet cloth to be used as shield materials.



Charity in green (Gateway Coordinator) receiving the materials from Joanna Maybury of Mission Direct

WHAT DIFFERENCE ARE WE MAKING?

Gateway is making a huge difference in the lives of girls. This is shown with the absenteeism records that the gateway officer collects from schools that received the kits.

Below are some of the absenteeism records that were collected in 2023

Kaphatenga primary school

Class	Girls absent per month (before kits)	Girls absent per month (after kits July 2023)
5	29	3
6	33	5
7	27	4
8	36	3
Total	125	15

Kambwiri primary school

Class	Girls absent per month (before kits)	Girls absent per month (after kits July 2023)
4	18	4
5	15	7
6	20	11
7	29	19
8	9	3
Total	91	44

Msalura primary school

Class	Girls absent per month before kits	Girls absent per month (after July 2023)
5	18	5
6	22	10
7	21	6
8	20	9
Total	81	30

Story of Lenia Joseph

Lenia Joseph, is the co-ordinator of the GTOC sewing group and she explains how the group has been of great help to her.

"I now know how to make the kits, and am happy that Starfish uses me sometimes to teach other women in other groups on how to make them. My family has also changed as I no longer depend on my husband on everything at home as the group is also a source of income," she said.

She further thanked Starfish for introducing the programme as it is helping women and girls in the Salima district.



Lenia Joseph, Co-ordinator of the GTOC sewing group

FARZANA IBRAHIM

Farzana Ibrahim is a student at Thundu primary school, she says she has been skipping classes because of menstruation and she misses a lot of lessons and this has been affecting her studies so much so that she has to repeat class 7, three times now and she is only now in the final class at primary level.

“I will be sitting for my final primary school examinations in May 2024, thanks to Starfish I will no longer skip lessons even when I will be menstruating and I have hope that that will help me pass my examinations with good grades and achieve my goal of becoming a nurse,”

explained Farzana.

As seen in these stories, the Gateway project has brought a positive difference in the lives of girls and women as it has proved to be very beneficial. It ensures menstrual security for the girls at school and at home as well as a source of income to the women sewers. Girls can now attain education with a free spirit.

