



GATEWAY MID-YEAR REPORT JULY 2023

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

Sewing has resumed in 2 of the sewing groups that had been closed for 3 years due to the Covid 19 pandemic - the groups are Chitiwiri and Kapiri. At GTOC sewing is still in progress as they were the first active group after the Covid 19 pandemic. So far 1,752 packs have been produced of which 1,352 are from GTOC and 400 from Chitiwiri and 400 packs are still in the production process at Kapiri.

So far in 2023, we have been able to visit 3 schools in Salima to distribute the pads.

Name of School	Number of Students that received the pads
Ntchentche Primary School	164
Kapira primary school	68
Demera primary school	81



Girls from Kapira 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 March 2023, 300 kits were distributed to 3 school camps namely: Chimbiri, Nansomba and Minyenje. These school camps are in the Southern region of Malawi in Phalombe District. This distribution of kits was to help adolescent schoolgirls who were 'Cyclone Freddy' victims.



Happy girls from Nansomba School Camp showing their Sanitary Kits from Starfish Malawi

WHAT DIFFERENCE ARE WE MAKING?

*"My name is **Chifuniro Mwehiwa**, I am 19 years old. On that fateful night I saw something coming towards our house with a loud drum-like noise, by this time I was making nsima (a traditional Malawian meal).*

I saw people with torches running, I noticed one of the walls of our house was soaking wet, sensing imminent danger I rushed into the house to call out for everyone who was inside to come out. Just after we got out the wall collapsed, everything was damaged and we could not take anything from the house.



Upon reaching Nansomba Camp, I received a bucket and a blanket but as a girl who was in her monthly period at that moment, I was too shy to ask for sanitary kits as the person who was giving us the things was male, so I resorted to using plastic papers, and some old cloths that I found at the camp. I would stain on myself and not move around the camp to collect food and some medication because of embarrassment that will come if people see stains on my clothes.

But ever since Starfish donated the sanitary kits at our camp, I have no reason to stay away from people or skip meals. Now I am comfortable and stay at the camp with a free mind. Thank you, Starfish Malawi, for making a huge change for us who are living in camps,” said Chifuniro.

Aisha Mussa, a student from Ntchentche Primary School shares her story on how Gateway has made a difference in her life.

*“My name is **Aisha Mussa**. I am 14 years old, I remember when I was at school fetching water from the borehole, a friend of mine rushed to me and informed me that my uniform had red stains. I froze that instant, tears rolled down my cheeks.*

The following day I did not go to school because I was ashamed. I was in standard 5 then, sometimes I would skip classes when I was in my monthly periods because I was unable to afford sanitary protection as I come from a very poor family and none of my parents can afford to give me money for pads. This has been affecting my performance and this is my second time repeating standard 7.



Now that Starfish has given us these packs am very happy because it will help me reduce stress when I am approaching my monthly periods because I always stress about where to get sanitary protection. This was also affecting my activeness in class because I would always ask myself that what if the blood comes out while in class. The sanitary packs will also help me improve my performance as I will be attending classes even when I am in my monthly periods and I believe that this term I am not repeating standard 7 again. All this because of Starfish Malawi,” she said with a happy face!

As seen in these stories, the Gateway project has brought a positive difference in the lives of girls as it has proved to be very beneficial. It ensures menstrual security for the girls at school and at home. Girls can now attain education with a free spirit and without menstrual stress as they now have the GATEWAY Sanitary Kits.