

GATEWAY MID-YEAR REPORT JULY 2022

Background

Education is the key to success, and pursuing education is the best option to achieve one's goals in life. In making sure that everyone gets adequate education Starfish Malawi established a programme to distribute washable sanitary kits to young adolescent girls. Usually, a girl is absent in Malawi 4-5 days in a month during their menses which totals up to 15 to 18 days per term. This affects the academic performance of these girls and eventually many drop out of school. GATEWAY provides girls with a reusable sanitary hygiene kit, which is a bag holding 2 sewn pad holders to fix into the pants, 5 cotton cloths, and 2 pairs of pants. This is to encourage the girls to continue to attend school during their period and ultimately complete their education. The programme started in 2016 and 7 years down the line it has proven to be a very effective intervention in helping young girls stay in school.

After a short break in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic which put a halt to many projects in the country, in July 2021 the distribution programme resumed. Every week the Gateway coordinator goes out to different schools and distributes sanitary kits to young girls, working hand in hand with the school coordinator to educate girls on menstruation, and care during these times. This is particularly important as often the girls have not been taught at home what to expect and how to handle this issue. So, after a short lesson on periods, a demonstration is given on how to use the sanitary kits and then each student is handed a kit. Following this a questionnaire is completed by the girls on their experience of menstruation to help the programme manager stay informed on how the kits make an impact and make necessary adjustments.

Update on Progress

We will be resuming the sewing groups in July 2022 as the kits stock is running low. The only difference this time is that there will be just 3 groups running - Glad Tidings Orphan Care, Chitiwiri, and Kapiri.

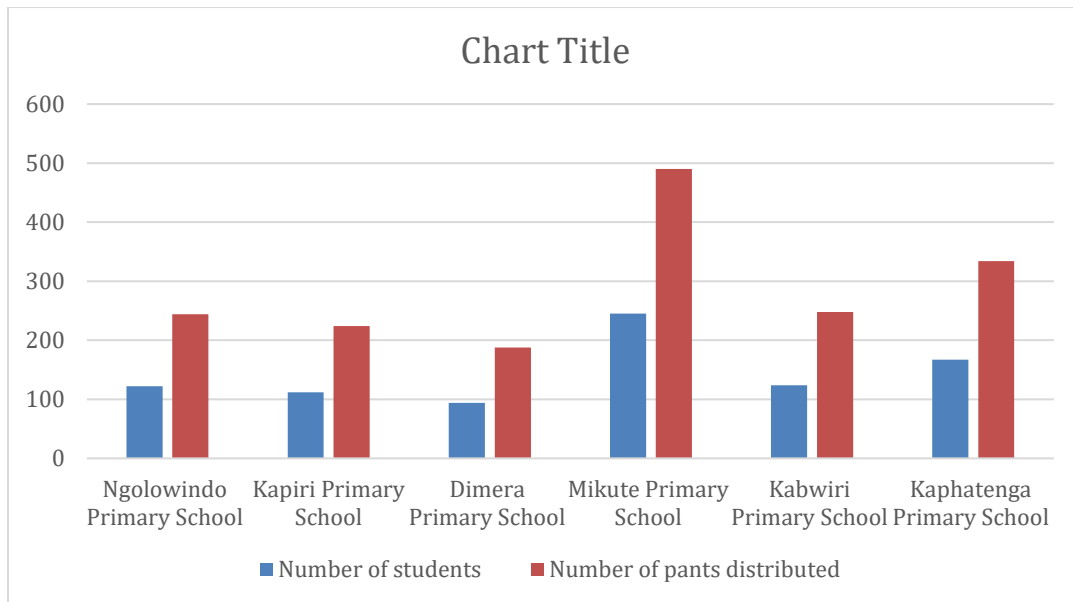
The women are excited to be resuming their work, as not only are they helping young girls in communities, but it is a way for them to generate income as they are paid on a piece-work basis. So far in 2022, we have been able to visit 6 schools in Salima, distributing a total of 874 kits.

Name of School	Number of Students
Ngolowindo Primary School	122
Kapiri Primary School	112
Dimera Primary School	94
Mikute Primary School	245
Kabwiri Primary School	124
Kaphatenga Primary School	167



Girls at Kabwiri Secondary School Singing Songs after Receiving Sanitary Kits

Girls find that pants are in short supply due to cost so the provision of these in the kits is important to them being able to use the kits. 620 knickers (3 sizes) were brought in March 2022 as shown in the following chart.



The following chart shows the impact on absenteeism with the provision of the kits at Kaputu L.E.A. School

CLASS	ABSENTEES BEFORE PADS (Jan 2021)	ABSENTEES AFTER PADS (July 2022)
STD 4	9	2
STD 5	34	0
STD 6	45	0
STD 7	72	1
STD 8	32	3
Total	192	6

What difference are we making?

Ruth Gide is a mother to a student who received a kit at Kaphatenga Primary School. As a single parent she had been struggling to afford to buy sanitary pads which cost MWK1,000 each (equivalent to £1) so she could only provide her child with pieces of cloth to use while on her periods. This was inadequate because they leaked and caused embarrassment. So to avoid this she simply told her daughter to not attend school to avoid further embarrassment.



Ruth shared, “My name is Ruth Gide and my child started her periods in standard 5. When she first started her periods, she didn't tell anyone about it - I heard it from her friend 4 months later! As a parent, I was angry at my daughter for not telling me when she started her period but I had to stay calm and asked her why she hadn't told me. She said she was too shy to tell me.

I am very happy that my daughter has received this beautiful aid from Starfish as she is now able to go to school without any issues, she goes in the morning and comes back home without any leakages or with a stained uniform, thank you Starfish Malawi, I believe now my child will be able to go to school all the days of the term.”

Thandiwe shares, “My name is **Thandiwe Banda**, I remember when I was in standard 4 and I used to skip school because of my periods, I come from a very poor family and none of my parents can afford to give me money for pads so I resulted to using pieces of cloth that I tore from my mum's bed sheet. Unfortunately, I used to come home with a stained uniform all the time as the pieces of cloth could not hold up the liquid, in the end, I would skip classes on the days of my periods to avoid the embarrassment. Ever since Starfish handed out Sanitary kits to us, I've never skipped a day of school, as I have no reason to, now am comfortable in going to school without being afraid of staining my uniform, Thank you Starfish Malawi.”



Mr Mwasiya shares, “Am one of the Teachers who is responsible for monitoring young girls who have benefited from the initiative. This initiative has brought a big change to our students because at first there were high cases of absenteeism due to a lack of sanitary pads and it's also a challenge for them to buy on their own because some come from families which are poor so due to this they just made a choice that they will not go to school until they finish their period, as a result, it ends up affecting their performance.



This initiative has also helped to reduce stress among students. Before this initiative, these children were living a worried life due to a lack of sanitary which also affects their activeness in class because they were always asking themselves that what if the blood comes out while in class. But now there is a change since our girls are living a happy life and attending classes whenever necessary hence there is an improvement of academic performance. As for our teachers, we always encourage them to work hard and take advantage of the opportunity they have.”