

## GATEWAY JULY 2021 REPORT

The Gateway programme has proven to be a successful project as many girls continue to go to school during their period, when previously it was hard for young girls to attend classes and socialise with fellow classmates as they felt ashamed for starting and coping with their menses at school.

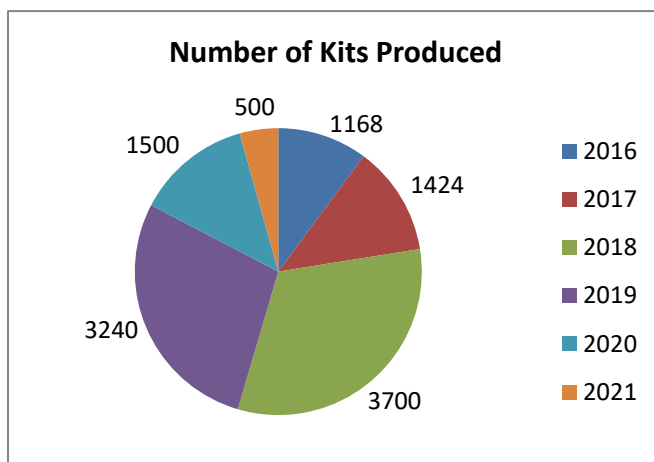
This is the reason why Starfish, through the Gateway women's sewing groups, produce and distribute sanitary kits to school-aged girls in order to keep them in school and to create less absenteeism with all the benefits this brings.

Not only have the kits helped young girls but it has made a big impact with women involved in the production of the kits. They have gained skills in making pads and are able to teach other women on how to make them too, which is also a significant cost saving compared to disposable pads.

### Kits Production Record

When the Government of Malawi eased some COVID-19 restrictions, the Gateway sewing groups resumed their work. From January to April, 2021, we have produced a total of 500 kits from just two groups and are continuing production as all the 6 groups are now functioning. In 2021 we aim to produce 3500 kits if the COVID-19 situation continues to normalise.

The total number of sanitary kits produced from 2016 was 11,532. Women in the sewing groups are doing a great job by producing the kits. Below is the chart showing the kits production record for each year since the programme was established.



From the chart, we can see that 2020 is showing a lower figure compared to the previous 2 years. This is because most of the sewing groups were closed in April 2020 for 12 months, adhering to COVID-19 preventive measures imposed by the government. The women in the sewing groups were greatly affected financially with the closure of schools as they were unable to sew sanitary kits as they are paid on a piecework basis.



'My name is Susan Kantemba from GTOC sewing group. Everyone in our group was greatly affected by COVID-19 and the measures the government put in place. The money we used to get from sewing sanitary kits helped us in a number ways - food items, fertilizer, clothes, fees etc. I used to make money each time I sewed an item.'

*Susan Kantemba from GTOC sewing group*

### **Facemasks production**

When all gatherings were banned by government restrictions, some sewing groups were trained by Starfish to sew facemasks on a piecework basis. This enabled the women to continue to have an income and so far since May 2020, 6800 masks were sewn and distributed in churches, markets and villages, across Salima.

Furthermore, Lenia Joseph, Chair at the GTOC sewing group (see photo) explained that apart from sewing Starfish masks they were also booked by two schools to make masks. They made more than 500 masks and charged money on each one. The money was distributed among the group members. She added that they are all grateful to Starfish for the skills and opportunities.



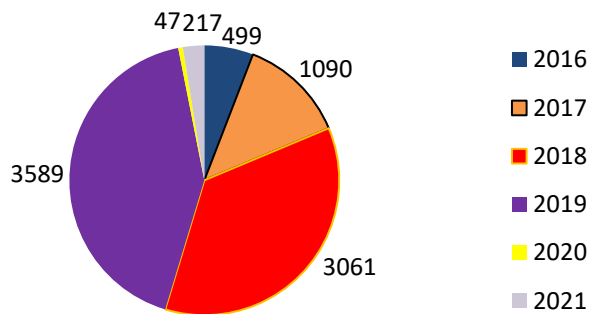
*GTOC sewing group*

### **Kits Distribution Record**

In 2021, we resumed the distribution of sanitary kits; by April 2021 we had distributed a further 217 kits to primary schools in Salima. Distribution is still in progress and we are due to distribute kits to more schools from July 2021.

The total number of kits distributed from 2016 to 2020 was 8,503. Below is chart showing the kits distribution record for each year.

## Number of Kits Distributed



Since the year 2016, the demand for sanitary kits has grown considerably and it was anticipated that the number will keep on increasing as seen on the chart for the next 2 years. However, because of the pandemic, the chart above shows a decrease in distribution of the sanitary kits in 2020 because schools were closed in March 2020 and only re-opened in March 2021.

### Life impacting Stories from Kits Distribution



Lahema Yusufu is a standard 8 learner at Chitiwiri Primary School comments,

*“Normally I don’t go to school during my first 3 days of my period. Although I go to school for the remaining days, I don’t concentrate in class and it is also difficult to interact with boys and male teachers. With the kit I have received, I believe I feel safe and will be in school always”.*

*Lahema Yusufu, a learner at Chitiwiri Primary School*

Bahati Phiri is a 13-year-old standard 8 girl at Chigombe Primary School. She explained that she started having periods at the age 10, in standard 5. “My parents cannot afford to buy sanitary pads at the shop for me, so in the end I was forced to use pieces of cloth, which were not secure as they used to leak especially if I was travelling a long distance. Ever since I received the Gateway kit I am able to use these hygienic washable sanitary pads without having to stress my parents for money. Having the ability of going to school and enjoying my school days even in my period days is remarkable.”



*Bahati Phiri - a learner at Chigombe Primary School.*



A lot of women have benefited from the sewing groups being established by Starfish. Lenia says she has developed skills such as sewing and now has brought a sewing machine for herself. With the machine she has also been able to teach a young man how to sew, who now has opened a tailoring shop! “Honestly I am grateful to Starfish for equipping me with sewing skills. I am an independent woman now”. She concluded that she doesn’t have to now give her young daughter money to buy sanitary pads from the shop, but with the skill she developed she is able to provide for her.

*Mrs. Lenia Chiweyo one of the beneficiaries*

Phales Kaligwembe is a standard 8 learner at Msalura primary school. She has multiple disabilities due to cerebral palsy. She has speech problems and difficulties in walking etc. Her mother explained that the sanitary kit is of great help to her daughter, “before the kit it was very difficult for my daughter to go to school since I could not afford to buy disposable sanitary pads for my daughter to use at school. As a result, she was always absent from school when having her menses. She added that now her daughter is no longer absent from school, and she ensures her kit is packed whenever her daughter is having menses.”



*Phales Kaligwembe, a learner with multiple disabilities at Msalura Primary School*

**Girls’absence record from some of the schools where Gateway kits were distributed**

The attendance of girls at schools where Gateway kits have been distributed has significantly improved and many teachers continue to report the positive impact that they have on the girls. The results below show a reduced rate of absence.

Girl’s Absence Record for Chilumba CDSS School.

Std	Girls Absent per month (before kits)	Girls Absent per month (after kits April 2021)
1	12	4
2	15	3
3	17	4
4	11	2
Total	55	14

At Chilumba Community Day Secondary School, Gateway kits were distributed in November 2019 and in April 2021 absence records were obtained. The figures had dropped with 41 less girls absent per month after the Gateway distribution, representing a 74.5% decrease in absenteeism.

Girl's Absence Record for Chikombe Primary School.

Std	Girls Absent per month (before kits)	Girls Absent/month (after kits April 2021)
4	11	3
5	15	5
6	24	4
7	31	10
8	28	6
Total	109	28

Gateway kits were distributed in August 2019 and in April 2021 absence records were obtained. The absence figures had dropped with 81 less girls per month after the Gateway distribution, representing 74.3% decrease in absenteeism.

Girl's Absence Record for Mpitilira Primary School.

Std	Girls Absent per month (before kits)	Girls Absent/month (after kits April 2021)
4	7	3
5	14	3
6	22	9
7	19	6
8	26	11
Total	88	32

Gateway kits were distributed in July 2019 and in April 2021 absence records were obtained. The figures had dropped with 56 less girls' absent days per month after the Gateway distribution, representing 63.6% decrease in absenteeism.

Girl's Absence Record for Kawangwi CDSS School.

Std	Girls Absent per month (before kits)	Girls Absent per month (after kits April 2021)
1	14	4
2	22	10
3	16	6
4	20	9
Total	72	29

At Kawangwi Community Day Secondary School, Gateway kits were distributed in May 2019 and in June 2021 absence records were obtained. The figures had dropped with 43 less girls absent per month after the Gateway distribution, representing a 59.7% decrease in absenteeism.

Girl's Absence Record for Sambafumu Primary School.

Std	Girls Absent per month (before kits)	Girls Absent/month (after kits April 2021)
4	5	1
5	13	4
6	19	5
7	16	6
8	17	9
Total	70	25

Gateway kits were distributed in August 2019 and in April 2021 absence records were obtained. The figures had dropped with 45 less girls' absent days per month after the Gateway distribution, representing 64.3% decrease in absenteeism.

This programme continues to make a significant impact on the girls in our district and it is encouraging that we are now beginning to return to the normal routine in terms of production and distribution.