

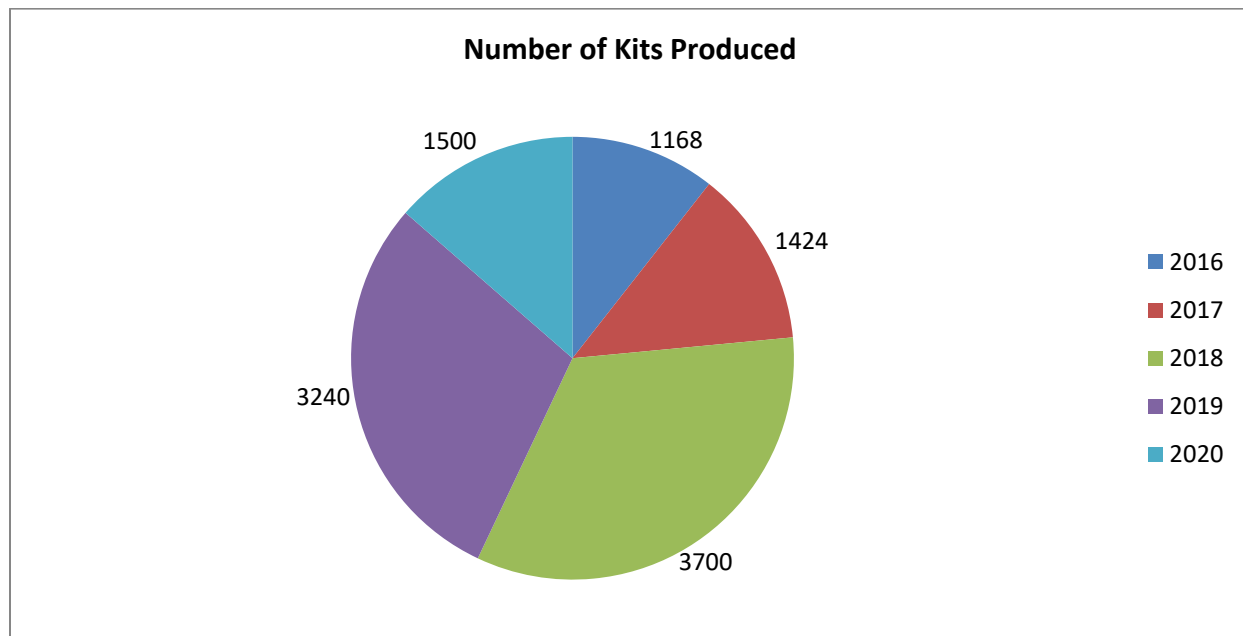
## GATEWAY JANUARY 2021 REPORT

Menstruation brings many challenges to girls who come from underprivileged families as they face stigma due to lack of sanitary pads and are unable to interact and attend classes. Period poverty is a barrier to numerous efforts being implemented either by Government or Non-Government Organizations to empower girls through education, as their sense of belonging is diminished. Most of them do not perform well at class and examinations as a result of their absence from school because of menstruation. This is the reason why Starfish through Gateway is working very hard at producing and distributing sanitary kits to school going girls in order to keep girls in school.

### Progress Report

#### **Kits Production Record**

By the end of the year 2020, the total number of sanitary kits produced from 2016 was 10,284. Women in the sewing groups are doing a great job by producing the kits. Below is the chart showing the kits production record.



From the chart above, we can see that 2020 is showing a lower figure, this is because the sewing groups were closed in April 2020 due to adhering to COVID-19 preventive measures imposed by the government. However, in 2021 the groups intend to produce a total of 3,500 throughout the year.

## Covid-19 Impact on members of the sewing groups

'My name is Clara Masakatira from Kapiri Sewing group. COVID-19 has affected my family negatively. Firstly, sewing gateway kits was my source of income and the money I used to get from it helped me to buy some items for my household. Now with COVID-19 things have become tough since I could no longer get money as the sewing groups were closed. Secondly, my children have been out of school for 7 months and I noticed that they started to lose interest in their studies. As a mother, I am very concerned. I pray that we fight this disease and return to our normal life.'



*Photo 1. Clara Masakatira from Kapiri sewing group*

'My name is Jane from Napache sewing group. Everyone in our group is greatly affected by COVID-19. The money we used to get from sewing sanitary kits helped us in a number ways: - for example food items, fertilizer, clothes etc. Last farming season I harvested 22 bags of maize all because of the income I get from sewing kits. This farming season I'm worried because I don't have enough money for farming input. I only pray to God that He may see us through this time of COVID-19.'



*Photo 2. Jane Gondwe from Napache sewing group*

When all gatherings were banned by government in March 2020 as a way of preventing the spread of Corona Virus, some sewing groups were trained by Starfish to sew face masks and were paid on each mask. So far 6393 masks were sewn and distributed in some churches, markets, villages, etc.

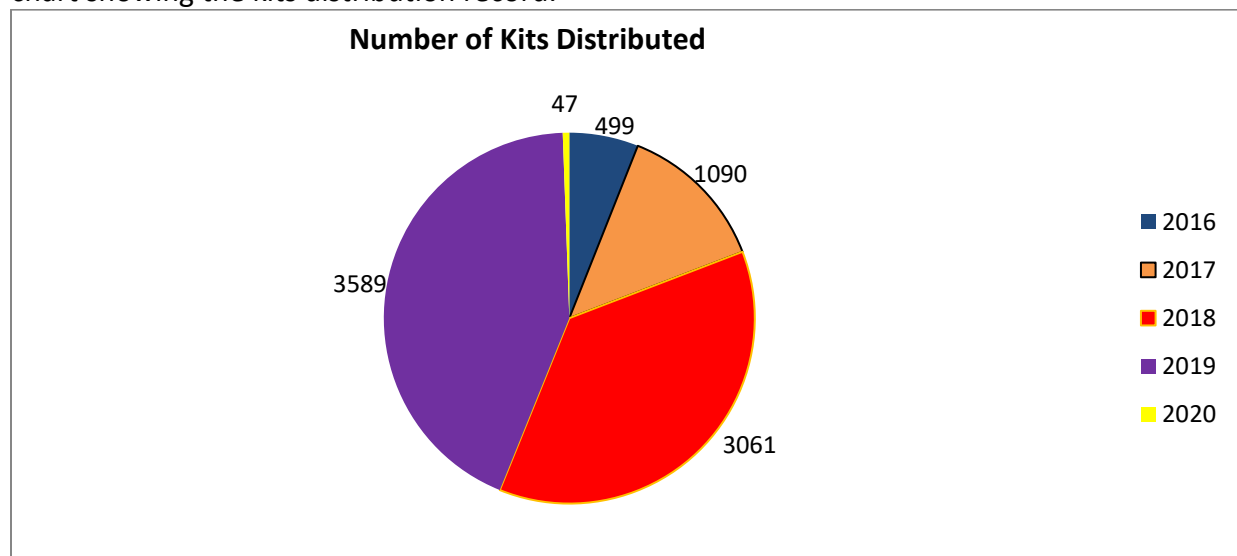
Lenia Joseph is chairlady at GTOC sewing group, she explained that apart from sewing Starfish masks they were also booked by some schools to make them masks. So far two schools approached them with materials for masks. They made more than 500 masks and charged money on each mask. The money was distributed among the group members. She added that they are all grateful to Starfish for the skill and opportunity to develop themselves because even in this hard time of COVID-19 they still earned something for their families.



*Photo 3. Lenia Joseph, Chairlady GTOC sewing group*

### **Kits Distribution Record**

By the end of 2020, the total number of kits distributed from 2016 to 2020 was 8,286. Below is chart showing the kits distribution record.



The chart above shows a decrease in distribution of the sanitary kits in 2020 because schools were closed in March 2020 to COVID-19.

## ***Case Studies from Kits Distribution***

In September 2020, kits were distributed to 5 girls with disabilities. Mrs. Nellie Matola is a Specialist teacher of learners with learning difficulties, she is running a resource centre as Teacher-in-Charge at Msalura primary school. She explained that before the kits, it was very hard to handle the girls at class. Most of the girls have difficulties in asking for help and sometimes she could just notice that they had soiled clothes. She used her own money to buy sanitary pads to help the girls. She concluded that she is now very happy and thankful to Starfish for the kits.



*Photo 4. Mrs. Nellie Matola Specialist teacher of learners with learning difficulties at Msalura Primary School*

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. She said that before the kit it was very difficult for her daughter to go to school since she could not afford to buy disposable sanitary pads for her 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.



*Photo 5. Phales Kaligwembe, a learner with multiple disabilities at Msalura Primary School*

Now that schools were re-opened in January 2021, we will continue the distribution of kits to school going girls.

## **Cherish Course Update**

Starfish introduced the Cherish Course into the Gateway Program in 2017, with the aim of giving the girls and young women a safe environment where they can talk openly about the issues that affect them concerning relationships and sexuality, inspiring them to choose to live a life of sexual abstinence and find their identity in God according to the Christian Bible teachings. They are encouraged to live with integrity, caring for those around them.

So far there are 10 groups of Cherish; each group has 15 girls and 2 course trainers, the course runs for 6 months.

### **Progress Update**

In the year 2020, Cherish managed to reach out to 158 girls through its 10 groups. 2020 has been a tough year for the Cherish project due to COVID-19. When schools were closed, Cherish lessons were also stopped as a way of following COVID-19 preventive measures. When schools reopened in October 2020, all the 10 groups of Cherish reopened. In most groups, parents were reluctant to send their girls to Cherish lessons due to COVID-19. Instead of meeting once every week some groups meet once every fortnight.

In the year 2021, Cherish Project is planning to identify, train and open 5 more groups in very remote areas of Salima, where there are high rates of gender based violence, harmful cultural practices and beliefs that put young girls at risk of early pregnancies, early marriages and school dropouts.

### **Case Studies**

We spoke with a trainer from Kaputu Cherish Center, she said some girls from her center have started to lose interest because of the long break of COVID-19. However she said she is working on attracting them to come back to the program. She added that all girls that underwent Cherish training at her center were the most well behaved girls in her school. Even the performance at class as well as at exams had improved tremendously. For this reason she promised to try her very best to attract more girls to the course.



*Photo 6. Agatha Mponda, Cherish trainer at Kaputu Primary School.*

Winners Chapel Cherish Centre continued running when schools opened. The trainer, who is also a Pastor's wife said she has been conducting the lessons at her home. Instead of 15 girls of 14 to 17 years old. She had limited the number to only 8 girls in order to adhere to COVID-19 preventive measures. She explained that the girls had interesting questions and she could tell that they need such platforms to express themselves. After every lesson they could look forward to the next one. This encouraged her to work hard on the lesson and do a little research on some crucial topics. This also helped her as trainer to gain more knowledge and experience on how to handle girls in a Christian way.



*Photo 7. Moreen Katambika, trainer at Winners Chapel Cherish Center*

In October 2020, Hancy Baloyi (Gateway/Cherish Coordinator, Malawi), had a baby and was on holiday for 3 months. Starfish continued to pay her.



*Photo 8 Hancy Baloyi with her new baby boy, Shalom.*

### **Total expenditure for the GATEWAY and Cherish programmes in 2020:**

MK3,501,275.16 (approx £3,765)

### **Conclusion**

Like all other Starfish projects, COVID-19 has negatively affected the Gateway project. We have seen a significant decrease in both production and distribution of sanitary kits.

When schools closed (March to October 2020) there were reports of increased sexual and gender-based violence, early pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and child marriages throughout the nation. Many schoolgirls got pregnant and some got married during this period. Parents and teachers have worried that if schools remain closed for a very long time, most girls would not return to school. Schools typically provide safe spaces for girls, because when they are in school, they are less likely to be forced into marriage and be abused sexually. Sadly, during the closure period, schools have not there to protect girls. We look forward to making contact again with the girls in 2021 and offering the much-needed support.