

SCHOOLS LINKING JUNE 2023

BACKGROUND

Schools Linking was established to improve the quality of teaching and learning practices shared in the U.K and in Malawian linked schools. Over the years exchange visits between teachers from these linked schools has resulted in over 100 teachers meeting face to face in both UK and Malawi, giving them the valuable opportunity to share teaching methods and practices.

Schools Linking has also helped in engaging learners in various shared projects. These are aimed at improving learners' skills such as those of literacy, numeracy, participatory, among others. Children in the partnerships share issues that are topic based within a given timeframe. The activities help them think outside their normal classroom work and to explore work done by their peers in a different country. Currently 40 schools are in Schools Linking partnerships.

UPDATE ON PROGRESS

In the last academic year, we maintained links between the 40 linked schools. Over the past year schools have shared the project 'Clean Hands'. This project promoted cleanliness amongst learners in partnered schools through the shared activities that both schools carried out. The project guided children in UK and Malawi in listing key things needed when building a new school, for example types of toilets, and the factors to consider for them to work. Schools shared pictures and activities via WhatsApp, scrapbooks, and live links online via Zoom.

The project further promoted practical activities by ensuring that the learning environment has basic needs such as clean water, soap, and improved hygiene practices. Starfish Malawi provided soap in the Malawian schools. The project focused on practical activities such as washing hands regularly with soap and clean water and ensuring the cleanliness of school surroundings such as toilets, classrooms, and school grounds.

THE WATER PROJECT

Water plays a vital role in day to day life. However, there are differences and similarities in the availability of clean water in both Malawi and UK schools. The project takes a thorough look into clean water to drink and washing hands in schools. It was noted that in Malawi school children have to draw water from boreholes, but not every school has a fully functioning borehole which enables them to do this. During school breaks, children drink water direct from the borehole using their hands which have germs. This act exposes pupils to diseases.

The project found a solution: drinking bottles should be used for drinking water during school breaks. While water-bottles prevent diseases, it would also save time that the learners spend at the borehole. Most would bring clean water from home to school every day.

The good news is that some UK schools sent water bottles to their counterparts in Malawi.



Children at Thundu School waiting in turns to drink water.

In ensuring that the Water Project is a success, Starfish Malawi provided soap, buckets and permanent hand washing points in strategic places around the school.



Learners washing hands at Kaputu School with hand washing facility provided by Starfish.

In May, Chris and the UK team visited Malawi. During their visit, a Schools-linking meeting was held with 24 teachers in attendance. The meeting took place at Msalura Primary School.

It was a great meeting as it highlighted cross-cutting issues around the water project and how schools would enhance learning through curriculum sharing. Chris and Cathy did most of the lectures as they interacted with the teachers. On this visit the team visited various schools, encouraging them to do more with their linked partners in order to enhance learning.



Teachers at a meeting at Msalura primary school.

WHAT DIFFERENCE ARE WE MAKING?

Chisiyo Primary School is found in Lilongwe City. The school has over 3000 pupils! Chisiyo School is one of the schools that did not have a water source and it was relying on water from a stream. Children had to walk a distance of 2 Kilometres to fetch water to wash their hands and clean their surroundings. However, the water from the stream is not clean to drink or wash hands as animals tread or drop their waste in the river.

Chisiyo was recently closed due to a cholera outbreak that hit several parts of the city. This was due to lack of clean water. The school was exposed to waterborne related diseases as shown in the cholera outbreak. The temporary closure was to avert the dangers that the outbreak would bring.

During live links sessions, children at Chisiyo shared the importance of water and how their school encountered difficulties in accessing clean water. Their story compelled St Joseph's School to take an action. As a result of this partnership, a new borehole will be drilled at Chisiyo this coming summer. This provision will help learners concentrate on their school work as they will no longer miss lessons because of the need to fetch water.



Learners at Chisiyo Primary school

*"I am **Dyson Phaka**, a teacher at Chisiyo primary school. I would love to express our school's gratitude. We are very grateful for the gift of a borehole from our friends in the UK. We have been at a high risk because of not having clean water in school for so long.*

Our school feels so proud of the community and learners at St Joseph's for raising funds to drill a borehole. This borehole will serve as a great blessing to our school because we desperately needed clean water. Over the past years it was difficult as no one could help us with a good source of water. We are so happy that our UK counterparts played an amazing role in raising funds,"

explained Phaka.

KAPIRA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Kapira School is linked to St Mary's in the UK. It is privileged to have the partner school raise funds to purchase textbooks. Across many schools textbooks have been a huge challenge as most schools rely on Government supplies. Had it been not for St Mary's school, Kapira would have been in abject need of the most important learning resources.

Francis Chautsi, the School Head for Kapira Primary School expressed his gratitude to St Mary's as follows:

"On behalf of Kapira Primary School, I would love to thank our dear friends at St Mary's. We feel so proud of them because they raised funds to buy textbooks. It is hard to get textbooks for senior classes. Most government partners that supply books focus much on the infant section.

The emphasis is to make sure that standards one to three are capable of reading and writing properly at that stage. I have been in the teaching service for a bit longer now and I haven't seen a school receiving textbooks for classes 5 to 8 for over 7 years!

We would love to thank both Starfish and St Mary's School for supporting us in this special way. It was a difficult situation. Teachers would only read the story to learners. Learners are now capable of reading the written word themselves as the content is being taught. As a result, concentration is improved."



Francis Chautsi of Kapira School displaying some of the books and soap.

About 450 learners have benefitted from the textbooks. Their lives have changed as they no longer need to be in large groups or rely only on the teacher's reading as it used to be. The result of this has direct impact on the pupils' standard of learning. Their performance has improved and they are able to practice fluent reading, gaining words for their vocabulary as well as practising comprehension.

Just as in the Starfish story, these acts of such kindness make a huge difference in the lives of so many children in our schools.

Thank you Starfish.