



STARFISH MALAWI

making a world of difference



GATEWAY



Girls Access To Education - Supporting Gender Equality

A STARFISH MALAWI COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 

PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT
February 2015

Supporting Days For Girls (DFG)

The effectiveness of the Days For Girls (DFG) sanitary hygiene packs cannot be over-estimated for women and girls, particularly those attending school. Girls have confirmed that they are easy to manage, very absorbent and above all provide comfort and security in comparison to local materials that they usually use such as rags. Furthermore, they come in a plastic zip-lock bag, which can be used for washing the used pads.

What girls have said...

Sauda Juwawo: *“The kits are readily available to us so that there is no need to worry on what will be used when my monthly days approach. Even if they were to be bought, they are a saving as they can be used for a very long time.”*



Princess Chirwa: *“Being in a gender mixed school, the kits provide much comfort and security when in class as well as during study time, and one can fully concentrate, hence no need to miss classes due to menstruation.”*

Amina Binali: *“They are easy to wash such that they can be put on an open line to dry, yet people cannot notice them as being used for periods.”*



Alinafe Banda: *“They provide comfort and the ability for one to be in groups or public places and get involved in any activity as they don’t produce any bad odour, and one cannot get noticed as being in their monthly days”*

These girls, being students in their fourth, third and second years in secondary school are on the Starfish Sponsorship Programme, and therefore were provided with the DFG packs, sewn in the UK and locally at Chitiwiri and at the Glad Tidings Centre.

Case Study 1: CHITIWIRI

It is now almost two years since the programme was introduced at Chitiwiri by its partner school in the UK, through the Starfish School Linking Programme.

Before its introduction the school had a register of few girls – mainly boys. This was the case particularly in the senior classes from standard four to eight (aged 12 and upwards), where a class was comprised of only a quarter or even less girls.

Therefore most girls in Malawi, more especially those in the rural areas who have no access to sanitary pads, choose to skip classes during their menstrual days, or even completely drop out of school.

When the programme (that was developed in the UK and supported by volunteer sewing groups) was first introduced at Chitiwiri, the whole community welcomed it, so much so, that they formed a women's group, which sew the DFG materials and distribute the packs to every female student who require it.



(Left) **A key member of the sewing group at Chitiwiri:** *“The project has helped to improve school attendance for our girl students, and has even encouraged them to resume classes after dropping out.”*

The women at Chitiwiri have a vision to roll out the programme for the whole community by producing many packs to sell to other girls and women who are not in school, then to use the profits to provide some students with school

However, the challenge has been that **only two of their sewing machines are in good working order.**

Hence, although the women make up a group of ten, they only manage to produce very few packs, which are only given to the new female students, as and when needed.



(Left & above):
Materials used to make up the kits and the sewing machines for the DFG sewing group at Chitiwiri

Case Study 2: GLAD TIDINGS ORPHAN CARE

Starfish introduced the DFG programme at the Glad Tidings Orphan Centre at Ngolowindo with the aim of helping the female orphans registered at the centre. Just as at Chitiwiri, women of the surrounding communities are fully involved in the project and formed a women's sewing group for the DFG kits.

The sewing group meet at GTOC every Tuesday and manage to make enough kits to distribute to the girls in need and even more for sale. For the girls they help, the project has helped improved girl child absenteeism due to their monthly days. **Also, since some kits are sold to other women in the community, many have testified of the comfort and security, which the DFG kits give, particularly for those who have just given birth.**

(Right): Mary Mbassa - GTOC Manager: *"Our girls are comfortable in school in their monthly days because of the DFG kits which we provide them. In addition, women who use the kits testify of their effectiveness when they come for postnatal care at the GTOC centre."*



In order to increase sales, the sewing group plan to reach out to local secondary schools, introduced through the Starfish Sponsorship Officer.



The challenge is that local women have limited funds so there are still plenty of kits remaining in stock to sell.

Case Study 3: MANGANGA SECONDARY SCHOOL

Plans for a New Group



When girl students start their period while in class, they give their excuse and leave school until they have finished.

Girls feel pressured to distance themselves and minimise their interaction with boys as well as the teachers during this time.

Maganga Community Day Secondary School

(Right): **Teachers at Maganga CDSS:** *“We easily notice our girl students when they are in their monthly days because they hide themselves from us teachers, as well as their fellow male students. They feel uncomfortable to work in groups with the boys and this also affects their overall performance.”*



The teachers shared how helpful it would be if a new sewing group were started in the local community: *“As long as the girls feel comfortable in class/school, despite being in their monthly days, they will no longer be absent to school or miss classes due to menstruation. This will help improve the general mood for girls in school, and hence, their performance”.*

Maganga Health Clinic



Maganga is an area, which is dominated by Muslims and due to cultural practice, girl child education is at a low rate as cases of early pregnancies are very high.

The Matron at the local Maganga Health Clinic reported that most maternal challenges faced at the clinic are due to very young girls becoming pregnant, as low as the age of 13 years, a further reason why many girls are not attending school.

Furthermore, due to cultural factors girls feel insecure at school during their menstruation and as a result, most girls in the community drop out as soon as they reach adolescence.

Clinic Matron: *“The Gateway kits can be a motivational tool to get more girls in the area to go to school.”*

The Matron at Maganga Clinic is sure that if the Gateway project is implemented at Maganga Secondary school, it would help to get more girls back in school.



In addition, women from the community would also improve their hygiene after delivery because being in a rural area, sanitary pads are rarely used. Thus, the project will benefit the clinic, as it will help solve some of the problems faced at the maternity department to find protection materials after birth.

Also, of course it could motivate the girls to continue to attend school and not opt for early pregnancies.

As a result of this feedback, we are delighted to report that Starfish is looking for ways to support a new sewing group to produce the kits locally at Maganga. We believe this will be welcomed by the local girls, women, teachers and all the health staff there.

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