

CONCERN WORLDWIDE

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION



Overview

Concern Worldwide is an international humanitarian organization committed to eliminating extreme poverty. We have been working in Malawi since 2002, developing and implementing innovative approaches to tackling poverty and inequality.

Concern believes that quality education is a critically important mechanism to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty. Access to quality education in a safe environment is a fundamental human right which can in turn empower people to demand and achieve other rights.

Our Approach

Concern focuses on 3 areas in education: Access, Quality & Well-being. **Access** goes beyond enrolment to include full and equal participation by girls and boys in a supportive school and home environment. **Quality** means child-centred, inclusive education delivered by educators with the skills, knowledge and resources to effectively teach early grade literacy and numeracy. **Well-being** focuses on reducing violence in the home, school and community environment and empowering children with positive life skills.

Education in Malawi

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) 2011-2016 recognises education as essential for sustainable development. In spite of significant improvement in enrolment at primary level, educational performance has remained extremely low. Only 1 in 50 of Standard 2 students (2%) and 1 in 6 Standard 4 students (15%) can read and understand text which is appropriate for their grade-level. 1 in 5 students repeat each grade (Malawi's Education Sector Implementation plan). While equal numbers of boys and girls enroll in primary school in the first year of schooling (Grade 1), girls' participation drops off sharply from Grade 6 onwards. The pass rates in the Primary School Leaving Certificate declined from 75% in 2006 to 69% in 2011. Furthermore girls are increasingly being left behind, as the gap between boys and girls in pass rates in the Primary School Leaving Certificate is growing.

Early marriage is a significant factor in reducing girls' educational attainment levels. In Malawi, 1 in 2 girls marry before the age of 18.



Improving the institutional environment

Concern has been working on education in Nsanje District since 2010. Nsanje has some of the poorest education indicators in Malawi. Only 45% of adults in Nsanje are literate (IHS 2012), so parents have limited capacity to support their children's learning. Teachers' attendance at school and the quality of tuition is poor, as teachers lack materials and support.

Concern focused on strengthening institutional structures, including School Management Committees, Parent Teacher Associations and Child Protection Committees so that they can address critical issues around quality of instruction, level of teacher and pupil attendance, support for students at risk of dropping out or exclusion, and prevention and response to GBV.

Access to Education & Literacy Outcomes

The initial 3 year phase of the Nsanje programme successfully changed attitudes to girls' education, by engaging with parents, teachers and school management structures. The follow-on phase saw the impact of this change reflected in girls' attendance and retention.

Average girls' attendance at school increased from 47% in March 2013 to 63% in March 2014 in 17 targeted schools in Nsanje. Student retention increased, with specific increases in girls' retention seen in Grades 5 to 8, where girls are most at risk of dropping out. In 2014, 158 students who dropped out of school were helped to return to school. Of these, 73 were girls and 75 were boys. The girls were mainly affected by early marriage and pregnancy whereas boys were withdrawn from school for economic reasons.

Concern contributed to an improvement in literacy education in schools through: teacher training, using locally sourced teaching and learning resources; facilitating sharing visits, in which teachers had an opportunity to observe and discuss best practice relating to teaching phonics & reading; and by creating 'print rich' classroom environments through the 'Happy Classrooms' project. The project evaluation found that teacher supervision was more frequent in Concern-supported schools, and that project schools were more likely to use learner-centred instruction approaches.

Addressing School Related GBV

A Concern Baseline Report in 2013 found that 45% of students in target schools in Nsanje had experienced an incident of sexual violence in the previous 12 months and 56% had experienced some form of violence in school or on the way to school in the previous 12 months. Concern addressed GBV by:

- Empowering students to know their rights and to raise SRGBV issues with school authorities through Student Councils;
- Engaging men through Fathers' Groups to prevent SRGBV and to ensure that girls remain in school;
- Engaging Traditional Leaders through Chiefs Forums to reduce early marriage, increase school attendance and reduce drop-out rates;
- Training school-based psychosocial counsellors and community-based legal advisors to support students affected by GBV;
- Supporting District level Coordination by strengthening the functioning of the District Education Committee and the District GBV Technical Working Group.

This has contributed to a reduction in the incidence of early marriage as well as a reduction in violence. As a result of engaging Chiefs and Group Village Heads, by-laws prohibiting early marriage have been passed. In addition, a One Stop Centre for victims of GBV has been established in the District Hospital and is supported by the District Health Office, the Police Victims Unit and other relevant stakeholders.



Contributing to Systemic Change: Teacher Training and Early Grade Reading

Concern is working to create systemic change at national level by working with Theatre for a Change (TfaC), who have developed a curriculum for use in national teacher training colleges on promoting gender equality and addressing GBV. TfaC train teachers in 9 Teacher Training Colleges currently and have trained 6380 teachers with Concern's support. TfaC also trains trainee police officers on Gender Equality and preventing and responding to GBV as law enforcement officers.

Concern has also invested globally in Early Grade Reading and Assessment Tools to help identify, address and monitor strengths and weaknesses in education systems serving the world's poorest children. Concern research across 5 countries (Somalia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Haiti) has identified the key strategies that support early years' literacy in resource-poor environments. These include practical steps to improve quality of teaching, school management and the creation of a supportive home environment.

Concern Worldwide in Malawi aims to take this learning and apply it in the Malawian context in support of the Government of Malawi's Education Strategy in order to help ensure that every child fulfils his or her potential.

Katrina & Vito Shako's Story



Katrina Shako's father Vito reversed his decision to marry his daughter off at 16 after joining a Fathers' Group launched by the organisation Friends in AIDS Support Trust (FAST) with support from Concern Worldwide. These groups advocate for and support children to stay in school. Vito is now an active member of his local Fathers' Group, encouraging other parents to send their children to school. *"He is on the top of the list of people who are encouraging girls in the village to go to school and work hard at it,"* says local Village Headman Kalumbi.