

# CONCERN WORLDWIDE: OUR WORK WITH YOUTH



## Overview

Concern Worldwide has worked in Malawi since 2002, implementing and scaling up innovative approaches to tackling poverty. We currently work in 4 districts: Lilongwe, Mchinji, Nkhokotakota, and Nsanje. Our focus is on ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and households have access to the basic assets they need for a dignified, healthy life. Our strategic plan (2014-2018) emphasizes ensuring gender equality and meeting the needs of youth. Our current programmes fall under three sectors: Livelihoods, Health and Nutrition, and Education. We have a national reputation for high quality, innovative programming and for strong technical leadership in the areas of health, nutrition, livelihoods and gender-based violence. In April 2015, we will be one of the main sponsors and presenters for the National Youth Council's annual conference.

## Concern's Capacity in Adolescent Health and HIV Prevention

A core focus of Concern's work in health is around the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people, including prevention of, and responding to, gender-based violence. Under our current strategy, we aim to adopt a holistic approach to improving the health, nutrition, and overall well-being of young people, in particular adolescent girls. We have formed a number of strategic partnerships over the years to roll out innovative approaches to reaching young people.

## Health Sector Approaches

Over the past several years, Concern has developed and implemented several approaches to increasing adoption of positive sexual and health-seeking behaviors and among adolescents.

In partnership with Grassroots Soccer, Concern designed and launched the SKILLZ Malawi program in Nkhokotakota district in 2013. The SKILLZ program uses the power of soccer to educate, inspire, and mobilize communities to stop the spread of HIV.

Targeting both in- and out-of-school youth, SKILLZ Malawi is a fun and interactive HIV prevention and life skills curriculum for boys and girls, carried out over 12 separate sessions or during week-long holiday camps. At the close of the course, young people access mobile HIV counseling and testing through a partnership with the District Health Office. A total of 58 peer-educators ("Coaches") have been trained in Nkhokotakota district, and 3,916 youth (46% girls) have been reached with the program in the past two years. We recently trained 8 Master Coaches – the only Malawian Master Coaches present in the country – who are able to supervise their fellow coaches in the field and facilitate training of other Coaches. In 2015 we expanded the SKILLZ program to Mchinji district.



**SKILLZ Malawi coaches preparing for a holiday camp session**

In 2014, Concern piloted SKILLZ Girl, a girl-centered intervention designed to meet the specific sexual and reproductive health issues facing young women in Malawi. Twelve SKILLZ Girl Coaches have been trained, who have reached 491 adolescent girls to date. To further support integrated sexual and reproductive health services for girls, Concern has partnered with Banja La Mtsogolo to train 30 youth reproductive health agents, many of whom are drawn from the ranks of SKILLZ coaches, who are now able to provide youth-friendly family planning services at the community level. To complement community-based health services, Concern is working with the District Health Office to assess and strengthen youth-friendly health services in Nkhotakota.

**The impact of Concern's intensive support of Grassroots Soccer initiatives are evidenced in the Ministry of Health 2014 HTC Week Report, which reported 52.5% uptake of HTC amongst youth in Nkhotakhota district; the highest uptake rate out of all districts in the country and significantly higher than the national level uptake of 36.2%, "because of the presence of robust initiatives by Concern Worldwide whereby they revamped their camps in a bit to mobilize youths for HTC."**

## **Education Sector Approaches**

In Nsanje, Concern is supporting education services through improved quality of teaching, better school management, and preventing and addressing gender-based violence in schools. Concern chairs the GBV technical working group in Nsanje and is an active member of national networks on girls' education and gender-based violence. Concern was one of the first agencies to identify school-related GBV as an important issue for young people in Malawi and has implemented programs and provided leadership on girls' education and adolescent health since 2010.

Through close partnership with Theatre for a Change, Concern trains Student Councils to tackle issues such as GBV, physical violence, and sexual health through Interactive Theatre. Performances have so far reached more than 14,000 children, as well as teachers and parents. Interactive theatre promotes positive behavior change by allowing participants to explore gender issues and differing perspectives

through the safe space of theatre, empowering young people to speak out about the issues that affect them. We work to address the barriers to girls' education by targeting the whole community. Concern believes that men and boys are important allies in the fight for gender equality, and has established 17 'Men as Protectors' groups in Nsanje, made up of fathers and other male community members, where men are supported to explore alternative notions of male 'power' and masculinity.

We also recognize the importance of local leaders as change makers and have provided a forum for local chiefs to discuss the roles they can have in reducing violence and promoting girls attendance at school. These efforts have resulted in the development of locally enforced by-laws that penalize parents who remove their girls from school.

Pregnancy is the most common reason for girls dropping out in Standards 5 and 6 in Malawi; in 2014, through a grant from the Clinton Health Access Initiative, we integrated the national Mothers' Group curriculum for sexual and reproductive health into our education program, supporting mothers to have the skills to speak with their daughters about the physical and emotional changes they face in adolescence.



### **Student Council members being trained in interactive theatre techniques**

As a result of these efforts, girls' attendance in target schools has increased from 47% to 63% from March 2013-March 2014. In addition, 148 children (75 boys and 73 girls) who dropped out of school in 2014 returned to school following Concern's interventions.