



Child Protection and Victim Support Services

UNICEF and the Malawi Police Service have partnered for over a decade to improve prevention and response to all forms of violence.

In 2008 the Malawi Police Service introduced “community policing” as an approach to promote enhanced safety and security through strengthened partnerships with the community and all stakeholders.

A key component of community policing is the “victim support unit,” established as part of the Police Reform Programme. This offers much needed assistance to adult and child victims of crimes, especially gender-based violence (GBV) and child abuse, exploitation and neglect.



Zomba Community Policing Coordinator, Gertrude Kanyemba (left), is seen providing counselling to a father whose son has been reported missing.

Victim Support Units (VSU)

The Malawi Police Service has established victim support services at 364 police formations including stations, sub-stations, posts and units across the country. In each formation, at least two officers have been trained to handle cases of violence in a child-friendly, gender-sensitive and victim-centered way. These services are provided at “victim support units” or at the “Child and GBV desks.” Client satisfaction surveys reveal positive experiences of VSUs by most users.

One School One Police Officer

To address violence in and around schools, the Malawi Police Service has assigned a dedicated police officer to a specific number of schools. The officers act as focal persons for cases of violence and carry out regular monitoring visits. Police officers visit schools to interact with learners, teach them about their roles and responsibilities, and link them to police formations with the aim of preventing violence in schools and communities. This initiative has created an enabling environment for learners to report various abuses they might face.

Pupils, teachers and members of the community use “feedback and complaint boxes” to seek assistance and provide tips to the police. The phone numbers of a social welfare officer, a medical officer and a police officer are painted on school walls to enable children and school staff to reach the officers anytime.

The initiative brings police officers closer to the learners.

Policies, Guidelines and Professional Development

To ensure that all police officers have knowledge on child rights and protection, the Malawi Police Service includes child protection as part of its curriculum for new recruits. This content is delivered at the Malawi Police Service Training schools reaching over 1,500 recruits since 2016. The UNICEF/Malawi Police Service collaboration has also resulted in the development of a Child Protection Policy, Community Victim Support Unit Guidelines on Management of GBV; and Community Policing Handbook.



Learners, teachers, and community members at Nthulu School in Dedza witnessing the opening of the school’s complaint box.

SMS Reporting System

The Malawi Police Service uses SMS Reporting System to send data from VSUs to the National Police Headquarters every month. Every officer in the VSUs uses this system. Before the SMS Reporting System was introduced, police officers printed data which was sent to the regional headquarters. The data was compiled at the regional headquarters then sent to the national Police Headquarters in Lilongwe. Now the data is sent directly to the headquarters from the VSUs, enabling the police to collect and analyse relevant data to better target interventions.

Zomba Community Policing Coordinator, Gertrude Kanyemba, is typing the station's register data for the month before sending it via the SMS Reporting System on her mobile phone.



Community Engagement

The Malawi Police Service regularly meet communities to share information on human and children rights, and what to do when those rights are violated. These messages include protection of women and girls from sexual exploitation and abuse. These activities utilize multiple channels including radio, comedy, football and traditional dances. Community engagement has helped communities to report abuse as evidenced by increased tip offs and reporting to the police.

The Malawi Police Service has also strengthened community policing structures that link communities to the police. These "Community Based Complaints Mechanisms" include committees and forums at village level, which empower community members to identify and report cases of abuse and exploitation to the police.

Pre-Trial Diversion

The Malawi Police Service have developed and implemented a diversion programme for children in conflict with the law. Through this programme, children that come into conflict with the law are not detained or imprisoned but rather assisted through counselling or enrolled in rehabilitation programmes run by NGOs. This is important because children are not impacted by the negative consequences of the criminal justice system and can continue with their education and other activities beneficial to their development.



Dedza Community Policing Coordinator, Moses Chipeta (left), checks the station's charge book to make sure no children have been wrongfully detained or imprisoned.

Milestones

- ✓ Improved quality of services rendered to children and women
- ✓ Officers in every VSU have been trained to handle cases where children's rights are violated
- ✓ Increased cases reported to and assisted by Police Victim Support Units.
- ✓ Introduction of children's and women's rights in Police Training Manuals
- ✓ Victims Support Units established in every district of Malawi through main Police Stations, Sub-Stations, Police Posts and Police Units
- ✓ Development and implementation of the Malawi Police Service Child Protection Policy

2017 Facts

Police
VSUs
assisted

14,013
victims

30% were
children



Police VSUs are available at
**364 police
formations**



**122 Community
Policing Forums**



Protect, promote and uphold the rights of women and children

Mercy Masanza of Yahaya Village in Dedza had faced a difficult situation for a long time until she sought help from the Malawi Police Service Victim Support Unit.

The pain of experiencing physical violence inflicted by her own husband seemed to have no solution until one day when she told her neighbour of her ordeal.

“My husband used to beat me up and when I explained to my neighbour, she advised me to report to the Victim Support Unit (VSU) where I would be assisted,” says Mercy, a mother of a one-year old daughter.

She sought assistance from the VSU. The husband was summoned.

Of course, the police officers played an important role in taking forward Mercy's case and promoting the VSU services. However, Mercy - and other individuals like her that have been supported through VSU - also play a crucial role. Mercy has

become the voice of change in her community; she has helped others too.

“When my friend faced a similar problem like mine, I advised her to report to the VSU because that's where she would be assisted. I call upon those who face similar problems not to be afraid but report to the VSU too. No-one is arrested for seeking help from the Police because the officers are there to listen to us and help us accordingly,” she says.

With support from UNICEF, the VSUs have improved the services rendered to children and women. The VSUs operate in every district in Malawi and a lot of people like Mercy, have their lives improved through their services.



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