



The Child Protection Programme in Malawi

UNICEF is working with the Government of Malawi to protect girls and boys from violence. UNICEF's Child Protection Programme establishes a child protection system that prevents and responds to all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children. It also works to mitigate the effects of HIV/ AIDS. The programme increases access to child protection services across the country, from districts to rural communities.

The child protection sector is led and coordinated by the Ministry of Gender Children Disability and Social Welfare and includes other ministries, departments and agencies. Non-government organisations and faith-based groups also play an important role.

Enhancing the legal and policy framework

UNICEF's Child Protection Programme supports the Government's National Plan of Action for Vulnerable Children. The action plan enhances the national effort to care, protect and support vulnerable children. UNICEF also supports professional development of the child protection workforce and other related fields, including social welfare officers, community child protection officers and police officers, thereby improving the ability to provide efficient and effective child protection services.

Eliminating child marriage

UNICEF's programme uses messaging campaigns, known as communication for development, advocacy and strategic partnerships to help eliminate harmful cultural practices such as child marriage. About 46 per cent of girls in Malawi are married before 18, and 9 per cent before 15. UNICEF works with traditional and religious leaders to combat social norms that lead to child marriages and violence against children.

Ending gender-based violence

UNICEF works to break the silence around child abuse, and at the same time, increase reporting of violence against children, and gender-based violence. Children in Malawi experience high rates of violence from early childhood through adolescence. UNICEF supports efforts by the Malawi police to provide child and gender-sensitive services for women and children affected by violence. As part of the United Nations Joint Programme on Girls Education, UNICEF supports a Safe Schools programme which works to reduce the risk of violence against children, increase children's participation in school settings, and enhance child-friendly reporting mechanisms.

Increasing birth registration

An extremely low number of births – just 5.6 per cent – are registered with the Government in Malawi. Studies show a child whose birth isn't registered is vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, from birth to adolescence. With no officially established existence and thereby no birth certificate, no proof of age, no proof of biological parentage and no identification, children are more likely to lack recognition in child protection systems and will not be counted when governments make policy decisions. For example, it is difficult to prove the age of a child in child marriage cases. UNICEF supports the delivery of birth registration through health facilities and is providing technical assistance to the National Registration Bureau to strengthen the national birth registration system.

Reintegration programme promotes family-based care

UNICEF has supported the Government in developing a Reintegration Framework to guide the relocation of children from care institutions to family homes. The framework recognises that the cost of raising one child in institutional care can support nine other children in nurturing households.

Encouraging Family-Based Care

Placing children in orphanages (or institutional care) should only be a last resort, and should only last for the shortest possible time. Evidence shows institutional care has a negative.

Impact on children's development and can make children more vulnerable to abuse. More than 8,000 children in Malawi are living in 168 child care institutions. Children in Malawi are often sent to institutions because they are poor and lack access to education. Yet 70 per cent of them have at least one living parent.

The Reintegration Framework developed by the Government with support from UNICEF is working to return children to family-based care and reduce institutionalization. So far, more than 200 children have been successfully reunited with their parents.



Gertrude playing netball with her peers at Jombo Children's corner.

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Jombo Children's Corner helps Gertrude go back to school

By **Lulutani Tembo**, UNICEF Malawi

Just over three years ago, Gertrude Chirambo dropped out of school to take care of her child. Her future was looking bleak. However, with her resilient attitude, she was adamant to get her life back on track. This was made possible through Jombo Children's Corner. She relishes spending her afternoons there with her friends, partaking in fun activities like drama. It keeps her and other children engaged and less likely to get into trouble.

Children's Corners are community spaces for both in and out of school children aged 6 to 18 years. They provide what is known as an enabling environment that protects girls and boys from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, responding to their developmental needs and enabling them to thrive. UNICEF has been supporting the Government of Malawi to establish Children's Corners to provide psychosocial support to children.

While in school Gertrude was a bright student, but everything changed when she became pregnant by her boyfriend. **"I dropped out of school when I got pregnant as I was about to complete form 2. I was forced to take care of my son alone since his father does not provide us with any support. I did not know how I would manage to raise my child. I used to cry all the time and nearly gave up on my future"**, explains Gertrude.

The turning point in her life came when Jombo Children's Corner coordinator, Davie Mkandawire persuaded her to join the Children's Corner. Gertrude did not hesitate and accepted the offer. **"My first day at the children's corner was encouraging and motivating. What I loved most was how they taught us about goal setting in life and the importance of education. This was an eye opener on how I can reset my goals and pursue them"**, she says.

A week after joining Jombo Children's Corner, Gertrude went back to school. **"I made the decision to go back to school, though I was worried about how my school fees and learning materials would be taken care of. The Children's Corner took over this responsibility and gathered the resources to make sure that I can stay in school"**, says a confident Gertrude. When she returned, she re-enrolled in form 2 and is currently in form 4, the year she is set to write her Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations. Through the help of the Children's Corner, she was awarded a scholarship from an international organization which will take care of her school fees and learning materials until she finishes secondary school. **"The scholarship makes me feel a lot better, I know I can continue my education without experiencing problems and achieve my goal of becoming a teacher in future"**, Gertrude says jubilantly.

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