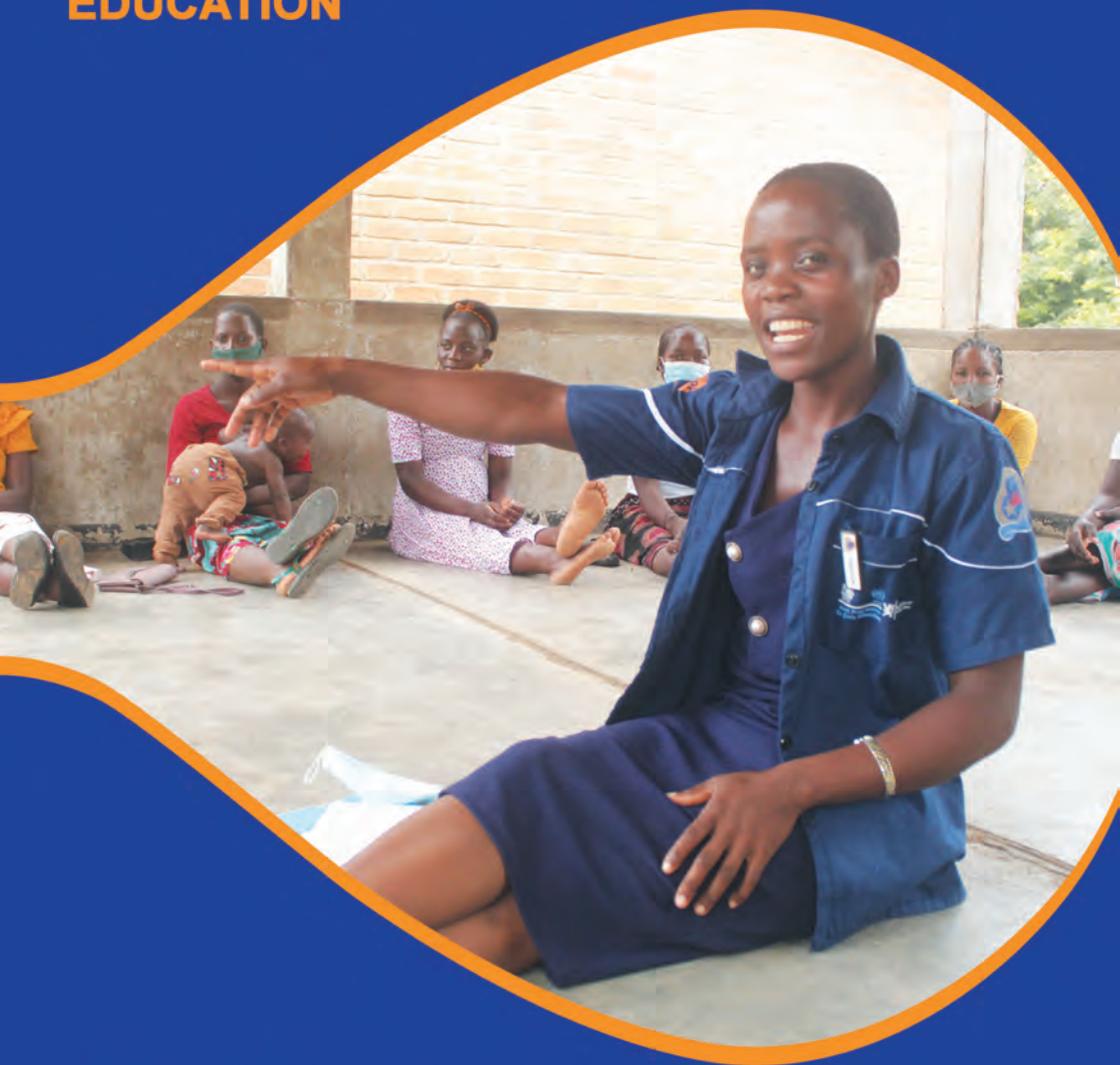


MALAWI GIRL GUIDES ASSOCIATION UN JOINT PROGRAM ON GIRLS EDUCATION



Safe Space Mentorship:

Building the health, social and economic assets for adolescent girls



MISSION

‘To enable girls and young women (3 to 25 years) to develop socially, emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually, economically and culturally so that they become responsible citizens of Malawi.’

VISION

‘A population of Malawian girls and young women that is empowered to realise their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the country.’

MANDATE

‘Offering opportunities to girls and young women to develop character, become responsible citizens and give services in their communities’

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MAGGA Cooperation with UNFPA

The cooperation between Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA) and United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) started in October 2002 with the implementation of the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and HIV and AIDS Awareness among Girl Guides programme. The programme aimed at increasing SRH/HIV and AIDS awareness and motivate positive behavioural change among girls and young women. Since then, the Association's programme activities form part of the UNFPA/Government Annual Work plans every year.

The Malawi Girl Guides Association with technical and financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is currently implementing the The UN Joint Programme on Girls Education

The UN Joint Programme on Girls Education

The UN Joint Programme on Girls Education (JPGE) seeks to achieve Poverty Reduction through improved Quality Education and Basic life skills for in and Out of School Adolescent Girls in Malawi. Implemented in 169 schools in three districts of Dedza, Mangochi and Salima the programme aims at empowering Adolescent Girls with information to demand Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and Rights.

Jointly implemented by the UNFPA, WFP and UNICEF the programme tackles the deep-rooted challenges in girls' education. Government and community involvement in coordination, monitoring are critical and allow for programme acceptability, smooth implementation and program sustainability.

The JPGE program aims at improving access to quality and relevance of education for girls, through addressing key and known threats to girls' education. The threats include poor food and nutrition, inadequate protection against sexual and physical violence, poor quality schooling, harmful social and traditional practices and violations of girls' sexual and reproductive rights.

MAGGA's role in the JPGE programme is to ensure that Adolescent Girls have access to information so that they are empowered to demand Sexual Reproductive Health Services and Rights. MAGGA also promotes girls' participation and take on leadership positions within schools and their communities. The organization has also been creating an environment where out-of-school girls are through the involvement of mother groups given a second chance to return to class. MAGGA ensures that communities are empowered and committed to value quality education for all children, especially girls.





SAFE SPACE MODEL GATEWAY TO PREVENT EUP

Teenage pregnancies and early marriages continue to be some of the major challenges affecting girl education in the country. However according to Cecelia Chinula, Adolescent and Youth Specialist at UNFPA the trend is changing following the implementation of the UN Joint Programme on Girls Education (JPGE) in some districts of the country.

She said the JPGE programme whose main objective is promoting education among adolescent girls especially those that are in primary

schools has managed to make sexual reproductive health services and rights available to girls who have been facing challenges to continue with their education because of challenges aligned to their sexuality.

“We are looking at issues of menstrual health management that is leading to most of the absenteeism for girls especially for those that are in primary school,” said Chinula.



She said with the data and statistics indicating that from standard one to standard five there is limited dropout of the girls from school, the programme is targeting girls from standard five to standard eight where the statistics indicate there are more girls dropping out of school.

Chinula said according to statistics the pass rate for girls in most of the schools is lower in standard five to standard seven. She said that while the transition rate of girls from primary to secondary school is lower for girls as compared to boys, the programme is looking at the issues that are affecting the girls to proceed with their education.

“There have been several achievements as evidenced by the evaluation reports, for instance as of the UNFPA we have the Malawi Girl Guides Association that is implementing major component of the sexual reproductive health and rights including the menstrual health management and the mentorship programmes for girls,” said Chinula.

She said through the initiatives under the JPGE programme more girls have been able to open up, and they are becoming members of different clubs within schools, are able to access sexual reproductive health services, and are currently taking leading positions within the clubs in their schools.

Chinula said the programme has resulted into limited absenteeism of girls in schools because they are going through their menstruation periods because of the menstrual management component that MAGGA is promoting where the girls have been taught how to make sanitary pads.

“In Malawi when girls are menstruating they can absent themselves from school for the entire period that they are actually menstruating, but with the sanitary pad making skills that these girls have learnt they are going to school throughout the school term,” said Chinula.

She said the programme has led to a reduction of teenage pregnancies in some schools, with other schools registering good performance grades for their learners, meanwhile she said the UNFPA and MAGGA were trying to understand what had made some schools to have reduced teenage pregnancies.

“In the programme we have mother groups that make follow ups on girls that dropped out of school because of early pregnancies and are re-admitted to school after nursing their babies,” she said.

Chinula said all the girls that were enrolled on the Safe Spaces mentorship programme have not become pregnant, a clear indicator that the JPGE programme has managed to achieve its goal. She said the programme has also contributed to the development of good parent to child communication on sexual reproductive health.





EMPOWERING THE GIRL CHILD

The UN Joint Programme on Girls Education (JPGE) is reducing poverty by improving girls' education and making sure that girls are empowered to stand on their own. The programme that is implemented by three UN agencies, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and UNFPA has reduced school dropout rates in the districts where it is being implemented.

Mphatso Baluwa Jimu, National Coordinator for Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA) says that the JPGE programme that started as a three-year pilot programme in Salima, Dedza and Mangochi had before it was scaled up in the same districts managed to create a conducive environment for girls to stay in school.

“MAGGA through UNFPA has been providing comprehensive sexuality education to girls in schools,” said Baluwa Jimu.

Baluwa Jimu said the programme has managed to create an environment where girls that dropped out of school for different reasons are returning to class or equipped with skills that can empower them to make informed decisions in the field that they are currently engaged in.

“We have returned some girls in school and we have been able to refer the girls to other stakeholders where they can access other services like contraceptives which we did not offer,” she said.





UNJPGE LIVING ITS PROMISE

Linda Asani, JPGE coordinator with the UN in Salima said the programme has three components of reducing school dropout rates, improving pass rates and improving girls' attendance at schools.

She said the JPGE programme has managed to transition girls into secondary school in the district where girls were dropping out of school in primary.

“There are three UN Agencies that are implementing this programme; World Food Programme looks at the school feeding component where we are providing diversified meals to learners, UNICEF looks at improving the quality and access to education and UNFPA is looking at access to youth friendly health services and provision of the services,” said Asani.

She said the programme has made it possible for girls that were failing to access secondary education due to school fees to continue with their education because of the bursary scholarships that are provided under the programme.

Asani said there has been an improvement in school attendance with Salima for instance currently registering 90 percent school attendance rate for both girls and boys. She said the school dropout rate in the district is now at 4 percent from 5 percent before the programme. She said in Salima the pass rate has also drastically improved to 82 percent from around 70 percent before the programme.

She said that through the Safe Spaces model where the UNFPA is working with the Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA) and the district youth office, girls have been able to start understand their societal value through the mentorship sessions under the programme.

Asani said under the Safe Spaces model, a mentor is assigned to mentees who are engaged in self-awareness discussions that are aimed at empowering the girls with information about issues that affect their day-to-day lives. She said these mentors help the girls to understanding their bodies so that they can avoid pregnancies.



YOUNG WOMEN BEARING FRUITS

It is a sunny Tuesday morning, members of Tidziwane Club gather at Katerela primary school in Salima for their weekly Safe Space meeting. The members start their weekly meeting reminding each other of some of the healthy eating habits and the six food groups every person has to take daily to meet calorific requirements.

The club comprises young women aged between 20 and 24. According to mentor, Prisca Binwell the young women who patronize the club have varying social problems.

After the interactive session on the impor-

tance of taking six food groups in human nutrition, Prisca Binwell, the group mentor ends the discussion by reminding the participants the main points of the discussion before proceeding to a family planning and sexuality education session.

She stresses that family planning is by choice, and every young woman has a choice of modern and traditional family planning methods. In the group discussion mentees were encouraged to opt for modern methods of family planning as they are reliable because they are scientifically proven.



“The traditional family planning methods are good because they are locally found and they are very cheap; however they are not as good as the modern methods which are very reliable and scientifically proven,” she says.

Despite agreeing that long distances to hospitals is one of the barriers to access of family planning methods, the group after a discussion comes to a consensus that modern family planning methods are better than traditional methods because they are reliable and scientifically proven.

After discussing about nutrition and family planning methods, the group goes into a Village Banking session where each member contributes the week's savings. Such is the way the Safe Spaces sessions go like at Tidziwane Group in Salima.

“At the club meeting I assist members with problems that we are facing in the area, we had many problems but I have managed to help the young women find solutions to their problems,” said Binwell.

Previously, Binwell said girls used to have problems with early and unintended pregnancies and early marriages because they did not have access to contraceptives. She said the situation has since changed following the Safe Spaces mentorship she has been offering to the young women under the JPGE programme, implemented by the Malawi Girl Guides with support from the UNFPA.

Binwell said following the intervention there has been an improvement in the uptake of family planning methods among girls, as well as a reduction of school dropout rates among girls. She added that girls that had dropped out of school because of unplanned pregnancies have since returned to school.

“Under the programme we have attended so many training sessions that have been organised by the Malawi Girl Guides, however we play a leading role as most of the bad practices take place in our localities,” she said.

Emanuel Phiri the Focal Person for the Safe Space mentorship at Katerela in Salima said through the mentorship programme many girls have socio-economically benefited through different initiatives under the programme.

“Some girls are engaged in Village Savings Loan groups and most of the girls have said encouraging stories of the benefits that they have gained from the mentorship, with others testifying that they have been able to buy fertilizers for their gardens while others have started businesses from the proceeds of the VSL group savings,” said Phiri.

He said through the Safe Space mentorship girls that dropped out of school have returned to class after gaining accurate information from the mentorship program while those that were encountering rights abuses are now able to report the abuse they were suffering to relevant authorities.



BACK TO SCHOOL



For 22-year-old Victoria Malasa, of Katerela in Salima getting pregnant whilst she was about to sit for the Malawi Schools Certificate of Education in 2018 meant that she had to drop out of school to nurse her baby. A fellow student impregnated her, and having little financial resources, the father could not manage to provide support for the child.

Frustrated, Victoria who is third born in a family of five children considered getting married, a decision that did not interest her parents. Her parents, despite the disappointment kept advising her to be patient as the future still held a lot for her.

“My parents kept advising me to be patient

and as we were going through this period that is when I heard about the Malawi Girl Guides and my parents advised me to go for the mentorship,” she said.

Victoria who was initially reluctant to go for the Safe Spaces mentorship said that upon her parents’ determination, she finally decided to go for the mentorship programme where the mentor, Prisca Binwell encouraged her to talk with her parents to nurse her child so that she returns to school.

Victoria who has an ambition to become a nurse is now in form four. She is going to sit for the Malawi Schools Leaving Certificate of Education this year and through her mentor’s advice, she has since started using contraceptives to avoid her previous ordeal.

“I am now using contraceptive pills, soon after the birth of my child I was on injectable contraceptives; however, these were giving me a lot of side effects. I was regularly sick and I was very weak, but when I presented the issue to my family planning nurse she put me on the pill and I have been very healthy since then,” said Victoria.

A daughter from a subsistence farming family, with the father supplementing the family’s earnings through menial building jobs, Victoria is now a member of the Tidziwane Safe Space Club where she says she has greatly benefited from the mentorship that has instilled her ambition to succeed in life.

At the mentorship sessions, she said the youth women that are interested to go back to school encourage each other to get contraceptives methods to avoid getting unplanned pregnancies so that they can go through with their education.





FULLY EMPOWERED

Hawa Abi is a 23-year-old woman who attends mentorship at Tidziwane Safe Space Club. Before she started attending the safe spaces meetings, Hawa from Group Village Headman Ngolomi 1 in Traditional Authority Kambwiri was not engaged in any meaningful activity.

Today Hawa has a different story. Following her participation at the Tidziwane Mentorship Club, Hawa has a small-scale business that she has managed to build from her savings from the Village Saving Loans club savings at the club.

“At Tidziwane club we are engaged in different activities including Village savings Loans, and human rights discussions,” she said.

She said with her savings, she also managed to buy maize seed and fertiliser for her farm. Hawa said that she had saved K15, 000.00 in the Village Savings Bank, and at the end of

the savings window, she made a profit of K20, 000.00 from her initial K15, 000.00 savings.

Hawa is not only excited about the economic benefits that she has gained from the Safe Spaces sessions. She has also benefited from the human rights lessons that she has been engaging in at the Safe Spaces meeting. Hawa said being a group of women that had dropped out of school due to pregnancies or due to lack of school fees, the club members have greatly benefited from the mentorship and they are able to assist their peers who are facing rights abuses.

“We are now able to stand up when we see that children are suffering abuse in the villages, and because of the human rights lessons we are also to stand for our rights in our families,” she said.

She said that in addition to making monetary contributions to the VSL group, the club members sometimes engage in peace work to increase their savings.

Christina Phillip, one of the participants at the village savings club said her attendance at the club has assisted her to buy farm inputs. Phillip who invested K10, 000.00 in the village savings club made a profit of K10, 000.00 from her initial investment and she has been able to buy farm inputs through her investment.

She said her participation at the Safe Spaces mentorship has made her to become aware of her rights and she is able to rights when she feels abused.

Phillip said that women that do not go to the Safe Spaces meetings are usually victims of rights abuses, as they do not know where to report abuse once they encounter some.



GIRLS MAKING STRIDES

The Joint Programme on Girls Education (JPGE) through the Safe Spaces initiative has positively influenced girls' right to education in Dedza. Dedza is one of the districts having one of the highest girls' school dropout rates. According to Doris Mletseni Ngondo, Primary Education Advisor for Chikololere Zone this is attributed to harmful social and practices affecting girls education.

According to Mletseni Ngondo, the JPGE through the Safe Spaces initiative, where girls are grouped according to their ages, has assisted in the promotion of free flow of life skills lessons among the girls and has since managed to encourage girls to stay in school.

"After attending the safe spaces sessions a considerable number of girls have returned to school," said Mletseni.

She said the intervention was aimed at providing an avenue where girls can freely interact. Mentors under the programme have been

able to impart comprehensive sexuality education and life skills. She said the ricocheting effect has been that there have been evidence of behaviour change among the girls.

"The mentees were grouped according to their ages, with other groups having girls of ages between 10 to 14, 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 with each group accessing age appropriate information," said Mletseni Ngondo.

Mletseni Ngondo said depending on their ages, some girls went through sessions on how they can report incidents of sex rights violations and how they can prevent unwanted pregnancies including contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV/AIDS.

"What these girls were discussing in the Safe Spaces sessions has assisted the girls, for example they know what to do when they are raped while those in the age group of 20 to 24 have sort of being economically empowered as they were engaged in some sort of village banking clubs," said Mletseni Ngondo.





KACHINDAMOTO TAKES A LEAD

Senior Chief Kachindamoto of Dedza shares a similar opinion. According to Kachindamoto, when the girls meet they manage to find solutions to the social problems they are facing by themselves.

“When the peers meet they are able to encourage each other on how they can plan for their future and we can only come in if they are failing to find the solutions,” said Kachindamoto.

Kachindamoto said as a traditional leader she has been in the lead encouraging girls to persevere the challenges that have come with the Covid-19 preventative measures and never rush into marriage. She said that while some have described initiatives aimed at promoting girls’ right to education as a departure from the country’s customs, she encourages her subjects to encourage the girl child to attain education.

She said while girls were previously not comfortable with mentorship that the local authorities were offering, she was very happy that the coming in of UNFPA and Malawi Girl Guides has made it possible for girls to accept the age appropriate mentorship, which has since enabled girls that dropped out of school to return to class.



MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Maleni Banya a mentor at Golomoti in Dedza is a unique example of mentors in the MAGGA-Joint Program on Girls Education Program who are using creative approaches to keep their mentees in their safe spaces sessions.

With creative approaches, Banya proudly boasts that she has managed to send girls that

dropped out of school back to class. As is the case with all mentors in the UNFPA supported JPGE program, Banya was identified as a mentor by the Malawi Girl Guides through her traditional leader, and is one of the 29 mentors that are bringing a positive impact on girl's right to access of education in the area of Senior Chief Kachindamoto in Dedza.





“I work with girls from the age of 10 to 14, counselling them and assisting them on their education and since most of the girls are children we do not always talk about education. That could be boring and many would not be interested in the mentorship meetings, hence I have to incorporate some play in the sessions,” said Banya.

Mentoring girls in the age bracket 10 to 14 is not that simple.

Banya said despite aside encouraging the girls to remain in class, she teaches them how to cook and encourages them to sing and play as she imparts vital life skills knowledge in the children.

She said that as a mentor she has to use a playful approach so that she encourages the girls to remain in the mentorship sessions.

“We have several success stories that we can point to on the impact of the Safe Spaces sessions, many children that dropped out of school have gone back to class, and we have been able to source bursaries for girls that had challenges with tuition fees,” she said.

However, her duties as a mentor do not end at the mentorship sessions, she monitors every girl that attends her Safe Space and makes follow up on girls that have been missing from her Safe Spaces so that she understands the challenges they are facing.

“When a girl is frequently absent from the mentorship sessions I follow up with her so that I can understand her problems,” she said.

She said when a child shows interest of going ahead with their education but their parents have challenges accessing their daughters’ tuition they make it a point to identify organisations that can assist with the girls’ tuition.

As a mentor, Banya’s duties revolve around encouraging the young girls to remain in class.

However, Banya realises that the mentorship sessions can be boring if she only concentrates on the academic aspects of the girls’ lives.

It is for this reason that she has to incorporate some play in the Safe Spaces sessions.



CELIA FINALLY SMILES

Celia Samuel is a fifteen-year-old girl from Golomoti in Dedza. Celia's mother died two years ago, when Celia was aged only thirteen. At her death, the mother left behind a two-month-old baby that Celia has been parenting since then. However, that is not the only problem that she has.

Being the oldest daughter from an ultra-poor family, Celia had also to take the responsibility of a parenting her six siblings as well as her grandmother. She said that following the death of her mother, life has not been easy for the eight-member family.

"I sometimes had to go around the village fetching firewood which I would later sale,

and I would do all sorts of menial jobs to find food for the family," said Celia.

While aged 14, Celia was taking care of her six year old brother, and together with her 7 siblings and a her grandmother had to make it do in a two square meter hovel.

Then, Celia had been attending Safe Spaces sessions under the mentorship on Maleni Banya, however at one point, Celia who had been normally going to Banya's Safe Space sessions, started missing from the mentorship meetings.

When Banya noticed that Celia was absent from her Safe Spaces sessions, she made enquiries of her whereabouts, and she later



understood that the girl was coming from an ultra-poor family, and that realization has given Celia something sweet to say about her participation at the Safe Spaces sessions. She now lives in a decent home.

“When I noticed that Celia was missing from our Safe Spaces sessions I made a follow up and visited her home, where I realised she was shouldering a very huge responsibility even beyond my imagination,” said Banyya.

Being a member of the youth movement, Banyya approached the Pastors Fraternal, a grouping of pastors In Dedza that quickly attended to the family’s habitat needs by seeking financial support from Echo Africa, which has since built a decent home for the family.

gone and the husband can marry another woman,” said Banyya.

Celia’s problems are compounded by her absentee father who does not provide her support. She depends on the help that she gets through the mentorship she is getting from the Safe Spaces sessions, she is hopeful that she’ll go through with her education and lead a successful life.

“At the Safe Spaces sessions, our mentor has been encouraging us to seriously take education as it is the only way that can make us self-reliant in future, she also advises us to refrain from sexual activities warning us that indulging in sexual activities could result into early and unintended pregnancies,” said Celia.



“When I learnt that Celia was from a family, I approached some organisations to assist the family with some decent accommodation and luckily Echo Africa came to our support and built the family a decent home within two weeks,” said Banyya.

“Celia’s father is still alive, but according to our culture once a wife dies the husband goes out of the family as it is considered that the person that the husband came for in the village is

However, Celia acknowledges that her education is not going smoothly because of the huge responsibility she is shouldering as a family head, a problem that according to Banyya is rampant in the district.

She said the problem can be attributed to a large number of women who were not taking contraceptives which were resulting into early deaths of mothers due to maternal complications.

SAVED FROM TRANSACTIONAL SEX



When two of her elder sisters were engaged in sexual relationships, Mwayiwawo Kagwa of Golomoti in Dedza felt that transactional sexual relationships was the best solution to solve one's economic problems. Attracted by the money that her elder sisters were getting through sexual relationships, Mwayiwawo decided to go out of school.

A fourth born in a family of eight children, Mwayiwawo has two elder sisters who dropped out of school in primary school. Despite having an elder sister who has just sat for the Malawi Schools Certificate of Education, the money that her two elder sisters were bringing home after meeting their boyfriends attracted her to go out of school.

“My elder sisters used to bring money home when they went to see their boyfriends, my parents were having financial challenges to support all of us, and when I saw that my sisters were bringing money home I wanted to drop from school and follow my sisters' foot prints,” recalls Mwayiwawo.

She said her parents were going through economic hardships thereby failing to support their children with their education. She felt that dropping out of school was the only way out of her economic doldrums. However, her case changed when she met a Safe Space mentor.



“When I started attending the Safe Spaces sessions at Chipudzu I realised that their mentorship was good because they made me to realise my values which to me was education,” said Mwayiyawo.

She said through her participation at the Safe Spaces meetings, the Malawi Girl Guides through UNFPA has been assisting her with her school needs and the support has encouraged her to go through with her education to achieve her ambition of becoming a social welfare officer.

“I want to become a social welfare officer because I would like to assist other girls that are going astray because of poor guidance,” she said.

Her mother, Christina Zagwa said with her business struggling because of the Covid-19 prevention measures she decided that some of the children should drop out of school bec-

ause she could not afford to support all the children in the family that had made it to secondary education.

“I had financial problems and with the way business is going I thought that some of the children should drop out of school, however when she started going for the Safe Spaces mentorship she has been supported with her education needs,” said Zagwa.

Zagwa was happy that her daughter has been attending the Safe Spaces mentorship programme that she said has built her daughter’s positive attitude to education.

“This mentorship program is good in that our daughters are being taught good things that are having a positive impact on our daughters’ education lessons that are encouraging our daughters to avoid premarital pregnancies,” said Zagwa.

She said the mentorship programme aside encouraging the young girls to continue with their education has also managed to instil good social values in the girls which she said are now polite to their elders.





CSE EMPOWERS GIRLS

The Safe Spaces model has equipped girls with Comprehensive Sexuality Education and has since brought a positive attitude towards girls' education in Mangochi. Having one of the highest child marriage rates in the country, Mangochi is one of the districts in the country that have a culture of silence on sexual reproductive health between parents and their children.

According to Kumbukani Manda, District Youth Officer for Mangochi the Safe Spaces initiative which falls under the Joint Programme for Girls Education has opened a discourse of sexual and reproductive health information and life skills among girls in the district.

"We have been noting over the years that most girls find it difficult to make decisions pertaining to sexual reproductive health and life skills in general," said Manda.

He said since through the programme MAGGA has been training girls to mentor others, the result has been that peers have been able to talk to each other about sexual reproductive health and life skills in general and the approach has brought an impact in the girls' understanding of sexual reproductive health.

Manda said the programme has made it possible for girls to understand the effects of their decisions as well as where they can access various services including sexual reproductive health services. He said through the Safe Space sessions girls have been able to speak out and make better decisions for their lives.

He said the Safe Space initiative has bridged the gap as parents are willing to allow their children to meet in groups and discuss sexual reproductive health matters.

"We need to bridge further the gap between parents and young people; they need to talk freely issues of reproductive health and in that way we are going to reduce incidents of teenage pregnancies and early marriage which is very rampant in the district," he said.

He said apart from the Safe Spaces mentors, MAGGA also trained community based CSE facilitators who have been providing the back-stopping aspect to make sure that what the girls have learnt from the Safe Spaces mentorship is relevant and is able to improve their decision making.



AKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Malawi Girls Guides Association is greatly indebted to UNFPA for the technical Financial Support that it renders to the Association as interventions carried with this support have enhanced the capacity of the Association in reaching out to many girls and young women and addressing various issues that affect the girls and young women, thereby enabling the Association achieve its mission.



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