

Written Report

What we are all about:

As young women, we feel deeply concerned about women's rights, their education and health. We intensely believe that young women must have the access to free sanitary items because it is a necessity, not a want! However, most of the time, Malawian girls have to use pieces of cloth, straw, paper and other alarming items which is absolutely humiliating to the female. The cheapest pad available in Malawi is about \$1, which is extremely expensive considering that the annual minimum national wage in Malawi is only about \$41. Hence, the use of a sanitary pad is completely out of reach. Acknowledging these alarming statistics, we started a small group that decided to make a difference. Considering the short time frame we had, we knew that helping every single girl would be unrealistic. Nevertheless, intending to support 50 young girls, we provided them with reusable sanitary pads.



Another we found startling is the lack of sex education in Malawian schools. Children are taught lessons like Mathematics and English reasonably well, but teachers seldom provide life lessons, especially to girls. The Head Teacher of Matiya Primary School in Zomba Damiano Nkhoma, says that last academic year alone the school recorded that 5 girls dropped out of school due to early pregnancies (this is without adding those who dropped out due to unknown reasons). This is a primary school, and children there are all well below the age of 13, indicating how little these young girls know about sex, periods and pregnancy. A child at the age of 13 could destroy her future life of a successful woman, as she may never be able to complete her education, hence being illegible for a well-paid job causing her to take up domestic jobs and live her whole life in poverty. If we manage to open the eyes of these young girls and educate them about pregnancy and sex, the chances of them getting pregnant will decrease, enabling them to have a bright future.

Challenges we faced and how we overcame them:

As a team, we faced a few challenges. Firstly, we needed to choose a school to work with, and there were many schools in dire need of help. We asked a few people about the neediest of schools and heard that the situation for girls at Blantyre Girls was by far the most concerning. We found that many of the girls there didn't know enough about menstruation and pregnancies. They also had trouble with pads as they could not afford it.

Another complication we faced was the issue of team members. We started out with 5 members, but unfortunately, one of our team members had to leave as their school hours were clashing with our allocated time to work on this project. This hit us hard as we had lost a lot of input and contribution. However, with many initial struggles, we managed to work through it in our assigned time, planning and discussing event after event. Due course, another obstacle arose in the form of exams as we are all senior students. This meant that we all had to do work at home without having the time to meet up due to study leave. Thus, we assigned each other tasks of making more badges, raising money, organising the trips, and designing pamphlets. We did really well individually, and managed to raise enough money to buy pads (Mk165,000). We also managed to contact the Head teacher of Blantyre Girls and organise days where we could visit and conduct a program for the students. We were also able to make and sell about 100 badges, which brought us about Mk20000.

One more dilemma we faced was to do with the regulation regarding raising money as a nonprofit organisation. We needed an approval from the city council of Blantyre before we were allowed to legally fundraise. We applied for this in December 2018, but only got approved after several weeks of waiting, on 24th March 2019. This took a huge toll on us as we could not raise any money legally till we had proper approval. In the meantime, we told our fellow friends, peers and families about our project and gained publicity for it, and many generous people gave their word to make contributions. Per contra, as soon as we got permission, we quickly began collecting all the donations promised, and managed to gather a great Mk114000. The city council slowed our process down slightly, but nevertheless, we kept going.

Another challenge that temporarily blocked our path was managing to get the money from people. Many people generously agreed to donate to us, but they wanted to deposit it into our bank account. Unfortunately we were a newly established organisation with limited amount of financial power, as we were all under the age of 18. Hence, we had trouble creating a bank account. We looked into it, and realised that even if we were willing set up an account for Go girl, the process itself will take a great amount of time, which wouldn't meet the deadline requirements. Accordingly, we decided to talk to our school management to see if they would let us use their account. We asked the financial controller and she said that we can use the school's official bank account. She also ensured us that the people donating to us would write "Go girl! Project" on the cheques deposited in order to make sure that we'd get all the money we needed without any hurdles. This helped us immeasurably as many more people started depositing cheques in the school's account, providing us with more funds, hence more power to the girls in need.

Go Girl key events:

- Having our original team break up and losing a member.
- Going to Blantyre girls for the first time
- Ran a bake sale
- Creating a logo
- Creating an Instagram page and social media presence to allow



publicity for our organisation. In order to do this, we firstly decided to write a message in our school's daily bulletin which is read every morning, so the whole school would now be aware of our organisation and its deeds. We asked them to kindly donate for the cause by buying badges we made and through cash. There was an extremely positive response from them.

Next, we decided to create an Instagram page called @gogirl.lrigog in order to maximise promotions of the cause and to give our followers updates on the work we're doing for the girls.



- Public Fundraising from the city council approved
- Getting a bank account to place all the money in
- Making badges and selling badges
- Making a pamphlet and distributing them

- Buying the pads : we needed to make the best choices regarding which pads we were going to buy. We contacted two sellers ,called Grace Pads and Supreme Pads. Then we decided to buy 50 packs of reusable pads, each containing 4 costing us Mk165,000 in total. This seemed like the best offer as each girl will have 4 pads, so once she is done utilising one, she will still have 3 to use during her cycle before washing the others.

- Going to the school and giving out the pads and the inspirational talks :

In order to educate the girls on the topic of pregnancy, boys, menstruation and future careers, we decided to conduct a workshop where we could actively converse with students and help them understand the importance of these aspects in their lives. On Friday the 26th of April 2019, we went to Blantyre Girls along with a guest speaker, Her Honor Mrs.E.Bodole. She is an extremely inspiring woman who works as one of the chief judges in the high court of Malawi and we felt that she is the right person to talk to the girls as she grew up in Malawi and can understand and connect with the girls on a personal level. She was underprivileged herself in her childhood, and hence had to work immensely hard in order to get to where she is at present. She asked them questions regarding boys and pregnancy and realistically told them how drastically their lives would change if they accidentally got pregnant. Hence she also told them to focus on their education, as it is a superpower in order to have a bright future. She inspired them by reciting her personal story and motivated them to work hard, and taught them the most important lesson: hard work, dedication and commitment pays off. The students reacted well and cheered and clapped for her. We then went on to discuss careers. Splitting the girls into two groups, we asked them what they wanted to be in the future. There were many positive replies such as 'lawyer', 'actress', 'accountant' and 'nurse'. The girls had a dream, but many of them didn't know how they were going to achieve it. So we helped them by talking to them about the possible subjects they must have to study their chosen courses in the future. We also talked to them about where they could go to study in the future, and educated them about the many colleges that they could get into Malawi including Chancellor College. Subsequently we talked to them about how to keep themselves clean during their menstrual cycle. We advised them to shower twice a day instead of once, preferably early in the morning and before bed, in order to ensure they are clean throughout the day and the night, which helps prevent many diseases. We also told them to change their pads at least twice a day, to prevent potential infections and serious diseases this may cause. It was an extraordinarily successful event, as many students responded positively by participating in our discussions and answering questions.



Explain how it helped the girls:

With the awareness and enlightenment they gained from her Honor Mrs. E. Bodole's speech and our efforts, the girls felt a spark within them. They realised how powerful they are with education in their hands. They felt an inner strength to prove that they are no less than a man. They experienced a sense of success over their hurdles. This trust that arose amongst the girls will give them strength and focus on their future ambitions, which will definitely start their journey to a fruitful future for them.

Closing remark :

We have enjoyed everything. From the word Go, to the word Girl, and all that happened in between. Recognising the disturbing situations young girls in Malawi were facing brought us a sense of awareness and community. We deeply felt that something must be done. Therefore, we started off small, but aim to continue this legacy due course for several years. We hope we can raise awareness amongst more and more girls as time comes. With a humungous amount of trust, hard work and belief, we believe that one day, gender equality, quality education and period poverty will not be a problem in Malawi.

