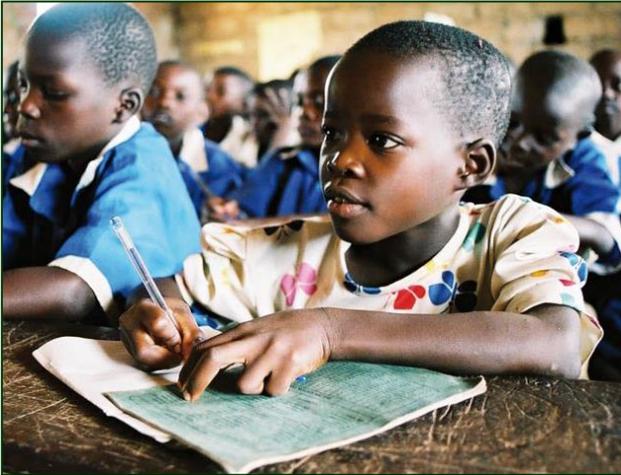


# MOTHER GROUPS

## IMPROVING GIRLS' EDUCATION IN MALAWI



Primary education is free for all in Malawi – now the major challenge is not just getting children into school, but making sure they stay in school and receive a good quality education. Many schools lack basic resources, class sizes are huge and families living in poverty often don't consider education a priority.

Girls are particularly disadvantaged. While equal numbers of girls and boys start primary school, very few girls complete the full 8 years and even fewer successfully make the transition to secondary education.

There are multiple barriers to achieving quality education for girls. Cultural attitudes and expectations mean that educating girls is not seen to be as important as educating boys. Rather than attend school, girls are often expected to help with household chores, look after younger siblings, find paid work to increase the family income and many parents expect their daughters to marry once they reach puberty which can be as early as 11 or 12.

At school, girls are faced with poor toilet facilities, which can be a huge challenge especially when they reach puberty. Girls sometimes fear for their personal safety as often they are subject to sexual harassment from male pupils and teachers. There is a severe shortage of female teachers who act as positive role models for girls.

Sadly, these challenges mean that many girls drop out of school and miss out on an education. However, things can be done to tackle the problems that girls face.

**Mother Groups** have proved to be a hugely successful initiative.

Comprising of mothers from the school's catchment area, Mother Groups aim to support girls to participate in education. Activities led by Mother Groups vary from school to school but include:

- ◆ Guidance and counselling sessions on a range of issues including hygiene, sexual health and personal safety.
- ◆ Community awareness campaigns on the importance of education with the aim of challenging negative attitudes and perceptions, especially those towards the education of girls.
- ◆ Income-generating activities, such as maintaining school gardens and selling produce, in order to provide financial support to vulnerable girls to cover the costs of uniform, learning materials and items to meet basic needs such as food and soap.





## Chipudzi Primary School Mother Group

The Mother Group at Chipudzi Primary School meet every Tuesday and provide a wide range of services within the school and the community.

- ◆ In meetings they explore factors which deter girls and boys from school and devise possible strategies to overcome them.
- ◆ In school, they meet with pupils to discuss the importance of education and offer guidance and counselling on various aspects, such as expected behaviour, appropriate dressing, hygiene and sanitation, HIV/AIDS and child rights.
- ◆ In the community, they identify girls and boys who have dropped out of school and work with them and their families to encourage them to return to education. They also encourage parents to become more involved in their child's schooling by looking through exercise books and asking about school each day.

The group manages an income-generating business on the school site, where with the help of a start-up loan, they purchased a plot of land and have successfully grown cotton plants which they now plan to sell in order to raise funds. They will use this money to support the most needy girls in the community to stay in school by providing for basic needs including food, soap, uniforms, and textbooks.

## How does Link Community Development help?

Link Community Development has supported the establishment of Mother Groups in all of the schools in their supported areas and continues to support them in their aim of improving girls' engagement and participation in education. LCD provides training to Mother Groups on the importance of education, counselling skills and sexual health issues, as well as providing advice and support with income-generating activities by equipping Mother Groups with the skills needed to manage a small business and providing start-up loans where needed.