

# SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE BULLETIN

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## UNRAVELLING THE DILEMMA OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The dilemma of Gender-based violence (GBV) is that it is the most pervasive human rights violation in the world and the most invisible. It affects people everywhere and transcends race, class, sex, nationality, and religion. At least 1 in 3 women and girls affected, likely more, as this figure does not include sexual harassment and less than 40% of women who experience violence seek help.

The Spotlight Initiative, - launched by the UN And EU in 2019 – is the single largest investment in ending Violence against Women and Girls (VaWG) that the world has ever seen. If the World and Malawi are to achieve the SDG's by 2030 then SDG 5 on gender equality must be at the forefront.

In Malawi, Spotlight has established a network of committed people, women, and men, young and old, who want to put an end to gender based violence, taking determined action from all sides. This sided and diverse approach is at the heart of Spotlight in Malawi, making a reality of the UN's emphatic belief that the eradication of VaWG is the responsibility of each and every one: not just women and girls, but fathers, brothers, young boys.... all of us. Ending GBV is a vital step to sustaining peace, increasing nations', households', and individuals' wealth, improving health and wellbeing for all, and propelling developmental gains in every sector.

Certainly, ending VaWG does not happen overnight. At the root of VaWG are harmful gender stereotypes, norms, attitudes, and behaviours that take time to change. And gains remain fragile and can be reversed or lost as we have witnessed with the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 Pandemic for instance, caused a massive spike in child marriages in teenage pregnancies in Malawi. The SI Malawi therefore prioritises these issues by enhancing access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and transforming harmful cultural practices in close collaboration with traditional and religious leaders.

In 2021 alone, for instance, the SI built the capacity of 1,561 Chiefs on VaWG, including gender related laws and referral pathways. These champions of change went on to collectively annul 1,222 child marriages (representing 98% of registered child marriages in the 6 SI districts), and the re-enrolment of the girls in school.

2022 saw Malawi get off to a difficult start. In the space of 2 months, Tropical Storm Ana and Tropical Storm Gombe wreaked havoc across the country's southern region, affecting at least 1 million people. In Nsanje, one of the most affected districts, Spotlight partners were able to adapt to meet the needs of women and girls affected by the storms. The Programme engaged all 90 mentors and created 40 safe spaces in the camps, empowering 3,065 girls to identify and report violence, access Sexual Reproductive Health Services, and support each other to challenge harmful social norms and practices.

Spotlight's whole-of-society approach is closely aligned to the 2030 Agenda's rallying cry: leave no one behind and reach those furthest behind first. It deliberately targets women and girls living in remote



*Maria Do Valle Ribeiro*  
*UN Resident Coordinator to Malawi (a.i.)*

and hard-to-reach areas, those with disabilities, and other key populations. With 95% of Malawians living in rural areas, this prioritisation ensures maximum impact.

One example is how 193 mobile court sessions in 2021 accelerated access to justice for women and girls in rural areas and sent a strong deterrent to would be perpetrators. The distribution of 180 motorbikes and 1,340 bicycles to community-based service providers has improved access to quality and essential services for survivors of violence living in marginalised areas.

This, together with the empowerment of women and girls to report violence and demand their rights led to an 87% increase in GBV case reporting between 2020 and 2021 alone. I am greatly encouraged by these figures, suggesting that violence is no longer considered normal, and impunity is not an option.

As positive as these results are, our fight to end VaWG is far from over. As Spotlight approaches its completion date, we must replicate and scale up the many good practices and lessons learned. Let us unite our efforts to transform harmful social norms, attitudes, and perceptions.

This is the time to reiterate loudly and boldly, that freedom from violence is a human right, and that the prosperity of the Nation is contingent upon the empowerment of all Malawian citizens.



# SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE: CHANGING LIVES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN MALAWI

Greetings!

I am honoured to address you in this edition of the Spotlight Newsletter focusing on our various activities fighting against gender inequalities in Malawi through the Spotlight Initiative. Violence against women remains high in Malawi, and the country experienced a spike in cases of rape, teenage pregnancies, and child marriages at the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Despite a Constitutional amendment passed in 2017, raising the minimum marriage age from 15 to 18, Malawi has one of the highest rates of under-age marriages in the world, with 42% of girls married by 18 years. There is high rate of teenage pregnancy – 29% of adolescent women age 15–19 are already mothers or pregnant with their first child.

The EU supports the Spotlight Initiative globally because we consider that violence against women and girls undermines our core fundamental rights and values. We believe in dignity, access to justice and gender equality. We also believe that making targeted investment in women and girls will help achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. This is crucial to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda and Malawi's 2063 agenda.

Society is at a pivotal moment where investment in the empowerment of women and girls is critically needed to ensure progress towards gender equality. We cannot let the social and economic fallouts from the Covid pandemic continue into the post-Covid era. Action must be taken now to not only reverse the current disparities, but also to further close the gaps already present before the pandemic. It is our wish that women and girls are given an opportunity to participate in politics, are given equal access to education and that they are economically empowered. Let me stress the **importance of women's political participation**. During the 2019 elections, more women were elected to the national Parliament and local government councils than in previous elections (44 at parliament and 67 at local councils).

This is good news, but with the by-elections that have since taken place, many of these women have lost their seats, and we are remaining with 40 women MPs. This is the time for all stakeholders to collaborate, to implement meaningful programmes for ensuring significant female representation in 2025. Education is another **critical area in the fight against gender inequalities**. Educational attainment is higher for men than women. While 5% of the men have never been to school, this is true for 12% of the women (MDHS, 2015-16). Whilst gender parity in primary school enrolment has been achieved, the transition rate to secondary school in



*Rune Skinnbach*  
*EU Ambassador to Malawi*

Malawi remains low and the drop-out rate high. Only political commitment at all levels can change things. Education is key to change mind-sets and social norms.

I am very pleased to see that with support from the Spotlight Initiative, 624 girl survivors of SGBV and child marriage accessed education through scholarships. Education is pivotal in the fight against violence against women and girls because well-functioning schools empower girls and teach them of their rights. This is where it all starts. That is why the EU is investing massively to support the education sector in Malawi. EU is supporting the Government in providing bursaries to vulnerable girls, and will continue to do so. In a similar vein, EU has been sponsoring the construction of girls' hostels to minimise the risks for them to be victims of violence and increase the likelihood for an increasing number of girls to complete secondary education.

Women who are self-reliant and financially independent will be in a better position to say no to violence and resist any form of abuse. Very often abuses like child marriages, just to make an example, are a direct consequence of a perceived lack of alternatives for the girls and their families. It is; therefore, key to provide livelihoods to these women. This has been one of the key achievements of Spotlight with many women being trained and gaining access to capital investment. With less than 7 months to the end of Spotlight Initiative, this is a crucial moment to take stock of what has been achieved through the programme and to think of what will come next. The EU will soon start designing with the Malawi Government the next programme on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.



# SCHOLARSHIPS BRING HOPE FOR SCHOOL GIRLS IN MALAWI

By Lulutani Tembo-UNICEF



To make it to school on time, Aisha Mussa\* had to get up long before dawn. She would complete her chores, fix herself a simple breakfast and then walk for hours in the dark.

“Because my school was so far away, I had to get up very early in the morning,” she says. “But I was determined to complete my education, so I had no choice but to walk.”

Walking long distances to school is just one of the barriers facing secondary school girls in Malawi. But if they stay at home, they risk gender-based violence and being forced into early marriages. While Aisha was determined to continue attending the Puteya Community Day Secondary School (CDSS) in the eastern district of Machinga, her parents lacked the money they needed to pay for her

school fees and exams costs.

“I had no money to pay for my Standard 8 exam fees. The guy I started seeing offered to pay. But before my results came out, I realized I was expecting a child. Then I found out I passed my exams. I felt so hurt.”

It was about this time Aisha learned about the Spotlight Initiative. Being implemented by UNICEF and other UN agencies, the global Initiative provides scholarships to girls and is designed to protect them from gender-based violence, including harmful social norms. In Malawi, the multi-year initiative, funded by the European Union, aims to have a significant impact in the lives of women and girls in six districts across the country.

Says Aisha: “My family could no longer afford to pay

school fees and my mother went to explain my situation to the headteacher. He told her that I would qualify for a Spotlight scholarship. This is what has been supporting me to date....I felt so good to receive a scholarship. It would've been a real struggle to find the money for school fees."

As the first child in her family to go to secondary school, Aisha was very excited. The scholarship provided her with a schoolbag, shoes, uniforms, exercise books, and sanitary pads. Even better, it is expected that Aisha will take a spot at a new hostel being built at her school with funding from Spotlight, meaning she will no longer have to walk there from home.

"I am looking forward to moving into the hostels because I live very far from school. When you're staying in a hostel, your focus is on school and learning. You don't have to worry about doing house chores. My focus will simply be on learning."

Dyton Chitseko, head teacher at CDSS, says the hostel will accommodate about 96 female students and will go a long way to protect girls and keep them in school.

"The issue of distance makes the children vulnerable and puts them at risk of experiencing violence and sexual harassment as they walk to and from school, particularly the girls," says Chitseko. We expect the hostel will create a safe space for students and give them more time for learning and improving their grades."

He said having girls stay on campus was also likely to contribute to a reduction of teen pregnancies. So far, hostels are under construction at Puteya, Mpatza and Magoti secondary schools in Machinga and Nsanje Districts.

Furthermore, 364 girls benefit from Spotlight scholarship in the six districts. Simon Jan Molendijk, UNICEF Malawi chief of education and adolescents, said some 31 per cent of girls in Malawi's rural areas have a child by the time they turn 18.

"To reverse this trend, Spotlight is investing in scholarships for girls. At the same time, we are establishing girls-only hostels and toilets. We believe these changes will reduce school dropout rates and promote better educational and health outcomes for girls," says Molendijk.

Since its implementation, the Spotlight Initiative has supported a total o... secondary school girls with scholarships across the six districts.



**Photos above left and above right: Aisha at school. Photo at the bottom: SI beneficiary Aisha with a bicycle that takes her to school.**

**Photo credit: UNICEF Malawi.**





# HOW THE SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE IS HELPING YOUNG MOTHERS GAIN FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

By Nomsa Taulo – UNRCO



Growing up, Jacqueline Nantawa, now 20, always dreamed of finishing her education. She comes from the area of Group Village Headman Sowani in Machinga, a southern district of Malawi.

“I wanted to get educated and help my community, I wanted to really study hard and become a teacher or a nurse,” says Ms. Nantawa.

Unfortunately, that dream was shattered when she became pregnant while she was still a Form 2 student at a local community secondary school. Jacqueline dropped out of school due to pressure from her parents and peers, and because she felt like settling down with her baby’s father would be the best thing to do.

However, the child’s father, a young businessman, abandoned her and refused to support her or the child.

“Life was hard. The man who impregnated me never saw fit to take care of me and the baby. I was left alone to fend for myself,” says Ms. Nantawa. “I could not afford basic amenities and I regretted having gotten into an affair with a man in the first place.”

Ms. Nantawa was finding it hard to make ends meet when she was identified by community organizations working with the Catholic Development Commission in Malawi-CADECOM under the Spotlight Initiative. She was chosen to undergo women’s economic empowerment activities taking place in her area.

Ms. Nantawa and other young mothers were assigned to a local artisan who taught them the basics of tailoring. They were then enrolled in a two-week tailoring course at Andiamo Technical College, a skills training center.





“The day I learned that I was among the young mothers to undergo tailoring training was one of the best days of my life. I knew with the skills learned, I would be able to support my child,” says Ms. Nantawa.

She now runs a tailoring group business with other women in her area. She is also a member of the village savings and loans (VSL) group, where she and other women are able save and borrow money as a revolving fund. This helped Jacqueline and other women in her area to start small scale businesses.

The VSL group was set up by volunteers in collaboration with the Community Victim Support Unit, which identifies and assists survivors of gender-based violence.

So far, Spotlight Initiative has supported 2,024 gender-based violence survivors to undergo vocational training and other economic empowerment activities. Additionally, 11,239 women and girls have received funds to kickstart businesses.

I am now self-reliant; I can take care of myself and the baby and am able to save a little. I dream of going back to school when I can save more money,” says Ms. Nantawa.



**Photo at the top: Some of the women who have benefited through the SI Women Economic Empowerment showcase what they have learnt.**

**Picture at the top and bottom: Jacqueline shows her tailoring skills during a Spotlight Initiative and stakeholders mission in Machinga.**

***Photo Credit: Luke Tembo, Consultant.***

## CHRISTINA RETURNS TO SCHOOL DESPITE HAVING A BABY

### *How the Spotlight Initiative is helping vulnerable girls*

By Lulutani Tembo-UNICEF



Christina Banda has reached her final year of secondary school. In Malawi, where many girls fail to graduate high school, Christina is on the verge of a major achievement. She is confident she will pass her final exams and looks forward to one day becoming a nurse. But it wasn't always this way.

A few years ago, Christina became pregnant when she was only in Standard 8. She was forced to drop out of school to have the baby, thinking she'd never return.

"I had friends who had boyfriends and encouraged me to start going out with an older guy," says

Christina. "They said that is how they find money to buy food to eat and other needs. I eventually said yes."

After she gave birth, she became depressed because she didn't think she'd pursue her goal of being a nurse. Her parents tried to help, getting piece work to help support her and the child, but it wasn't enough.

It was about this time Christina learned she qualified for the Spotlight Initiative. Being implemented by UNICEF and other UN agencies, the 500 million euro global initiative provides scholarships to girls



and is designed to protect them from gender-based violence, including harmful social norms.

In Malawi, the multi-year initiative, funded by the European Union, aims to have a significant impact in the lives of women and girls in six districts across the country, and targets girls who experienced teen pregnancy.

At Christina's school the Spotlight Initiative is coordinated by Fidelia Mbiru. She says the scholarship has helped 13 girls so far, with six girls taking their final exams and another seven being retained in class.

"Most of the girls on scholarship here were brought back after getting pregnant. They now have a second chance to complete their education. Most of them come from poor backgrounds, so the impact has been massive. I also support them with counselling and guidance on education," says Mbiru.

For Christina, the scholarship brought relief to her and her parents, who immediately felt a burden lift off their shoulders.

Christina explains: "We were so happy when we were told the news about the scholarship. I am also the oldest in my family, and I feel the pressure of being a good role model. I want to work hard, so I can be independent and take care of my child."

"I do not think early marriage is the way to go, because you could meet a lot of difficulties in marriage and be left alone to take care of your kids. Focus on your education instead."

UNICEF Malawi's chief of education and adolescents, Simon Jan Molendijk says the girl child deserves to thrive and reach their full potential.

"Christina's experience indicates that, girls empowered by education are powerful agents of change, taking back control over their lives, positively impacting their future the lives of their families, communities, society and possibly the world," says Jan Molendijk.



**Picture on the left : Christina**

**Photo credit: UNICEF Malawi.**

**Infographics by: UNICEF**

**Info card: Spotlight Initiative**

## IN THE WORDS OF A MALE CHAMPION-SIMEON RAJAB

BY Faith Mvula - UNWOMEN



*Rajab Simeon is from Mwapata village, Traditional Authority Mlomba in the southern Malawi district of Machinga. Rajab learnt how to mobilize men and boys for gender equality using the HeForShe Barbershop toolbox through the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative. He formed a forum where boys and men in his local football team can become agents of change against gender inequality and violence against women and girls.*

“I grew up seeing child marriages and different types of gender-based violence practiced by my community without knowing their negative consequences. Girls were treated differently and couldn’t go to school.

It was normal for me to see a man beating up his wife for serving him cold food. My own mother had gotten married at the age of 16, so early marriages were not strange. Through HeForShe dialogues arranged by the Spotlight Initiative, I now better understand gender inequality and my role in changing harmful social norms.

The trainings were eye-opening as I gained understanding on different types of sexual related gender-based violence that prompted me to establish a football barbershop group for Chirwa Football Club. I am a football player for Chirwa FC and for every football match that we have, we do meet after the football match and discuss ways of treating women and girls in the homesteads and community well. We encourage each other to take responsibility for our actions, we hold other men accountable, and teach boys in the junior football team healthy, non-violent behavior. Our group started with 21 members who meet after every football match.

I encourage more men and boys to participate in the gender equality conversation and be part of the solution”.

***Rajab is one of 6459 male champions scaling up promotion of positive masculinities for male engagement on EVAWG and SRHR. The male champions are raising awareness on positivity masculinity/ inequalities (GBV) through different***



**community awareness mediums. UN Women is working with an implementing partner, Creative Centre for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) through the Spotlight Initiative funded by European Union.**

## **MOBILE COURTS: BRINGING COURTS NEAR PEOPLE**

**By Faith Mvula- UNWOMEN**



The trading centre is deserted as most buildings either collapsed or are closed. A small, thriving goat meat market is one of the few businesses open. A short distance away, police officers and court clerks are shuffling outside an old building that used to be a grocery.

Today, no sweets or other groceries are being sold in the building. A magistrate is holding court inside and dispensing justice. The magistrate has travelled over 30km to hear cases involving people around the trading centre. Under normal circumstances, the people would have followed him to his court at Emfeni to have their cases heard. But thanks to mobile courts, they do not have to travel long and spend 4 USD on transport costs as the court has followed them home. Through the Spotlight Initiative, UN Women Malawi has been supporting the Women Judges Association of Malawi (WOJAM), Women Lawyers Association (WLA) and Gender and Justice Unit in improving access to justice for women and victims of gender-based violence in the country. Chigomezgo Kamanga is a lawyer from the Legal Aid Bureau in the northern city of Mzuzu. She has so far represented women in 13 cases, nine of whose judgement

was already delivered. She says the mobile courts are helping women appreciate their rights in seeking justice whenever they feel aggrieved. "Rural women now appreciate the importance of getting justice when they are abused. Women these days even approach our offices directly to seek legal assistance," she explains.

Wongani Kanyenda, the coordinator for the project, says between July and November 2020, the mobile courts heard 170 cases in the six districts under the Spotlight Initiative. "Demand for the services is rising but we cannot attend to each and every case because of limited human and financial resources. But the people we have assisted are appreciative," she says.

Kanyenda discloses that defilement is the leading issue in the cases the project is handling. While WOJAM coordinates the mobile courts, WLA provides legal representation to the women who would otherwise not afford a lawyer. Apart from the mobile courts, the project has also conducted legal clinics where women in rural areas have been sensitized on gender-related laws and how to identify gender based violence in their homes. "We also work with other service providers such as the police, hospitals, and social welfare officers so that they are part of the process of ensuring that gender-based violence is eliminated in our communities. Women should be able to approach any of them when they feel their rights have been infringed upon," Kanyenda explains.

High Court Judge Dorothy NyaKaunda Kamanga says the project is helping improve access to justice by reducing the distance people travel to the courts.

"Sometimes victims give up because they have to travel long distances to courts for their cases. Some have to pay for transport. Sometimes witnesses also must pay for transport to get to the courts when they are far. In the end some just give up. "With the mobile courts, people don't have to walk long distances to appear before the magistrate. The magistrate travels to their area," Justice Kamanga explains.

She explains that the mobile courts are also raising awareness and more women are coming out to speak when they are abused. "Mobile courts empower communities because they can now see for themselves how court cases are heard instead of just hearing and not seeing for themselves. This is also increasing their trust in the justice system because they are following the whole court process," Justice Kamanga says.

**Photo at the top left: Rajab interacting with men in his community**

**Photo above: A mobile court at Emfeni. Photo credit UNWOMEN**

**PROMOTING MULTILATERALISM And A WHOLE –OF -SOCIETY APPROACH TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**



*Teemar Kidane, National Programme Coordinator, Spotlight Initiative*



The Spotlight Initiative (SI) is exceptional and ground-breaking in many respects. Never before has there been such a sizeable, targeted investment in ending Violence against Women and girls (E-VaWG). And never before has a single Programme united so many stakeholders in a collective global effort to protect women and girls from violence.

The SI has brought together a network of actors in 26 countries and regions who are collaboratively working to end VaWG. Over the past 4 years, frequent knowledge and information sharing between “Spotlighters” has resulted in something akin to a movement based on a robust vision and comprehensive strategy to E-VaWG that spans borders, regions and continents.

While the SI is clearly a flagship Programme for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, on gender equality, the Programme has made important contributions towards SDG 17 on partnerships. Effective and innovative partnerships have been established (Target

17h), and equally important- knowledge sharing is being cultivated across SI countries towards the identification of promising and innovative practices to E-VaWG.

Over the past 3.5 years, the SI has worked with the Ministry of Gender Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) and the Ministry of Local Government (whose mandate includes Chiefs Administration) to capitalise on Malawi’s participation in the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) towards E-VaWG. As the custodians of culture, Malawian citizens honor and respect the role of Chiefs, and follow their example closely. Boosting their capacity to protect women and girls has yielded tremendous results that surpassed all expectations. To date, Malawi SI has engaged nearly 2,000 traditional leaders and built their capacity to catalyse progress towards E-VaWG.

Chiefs have taken a particularly leading role in educating, engaging and reprimanding parents that permit child marriage. In 2021 alone, Chiefs annulled 1,222 child marriages- 98% of registered child marriages in the 6 districts, and the girls’ re-enrolment in school. They did so with the SI’s support, but often using their own resources and influence to support survivors of violence and child marriage. Thanks to their dedication, child marriages and VaWG are increasingly viewed as harmful practices (HPs) that hinder developmental progress.

Last year, 195 Chiefs from 85 different communities were trained to develop bylaws, resulting in the formulation of 7 draft bylaws which abolish/ modify 18 different HPs. In connection with the by-laws, Chiefs and community members publicly pledged to end all forms of SGBV – in particular child marriage and HPs. Their pledges were publicised through community and national radio stations and national newspapers, lending gravitas to the process and sending a vital message to their constituencies: VaWG is not part of Malawian culture and will not be tolerated.

Chiefs’ efforts to E-VaWG in Malawi are coordinated through Chiefs Forums at the national, district and community level, which were established under the SI. As the Director of Chief’s Administration Mr. Charles Makanga explained, the forums “oversee, implement, and monitor implementation of SGBV/HP and SRHR laws, policies, programmes, services, including for those most marginalized and excluded.

With similar plans to bolster the role of Chiefs in E-vawg in Zimbabwe, the SI team reached out to the Malawian SI team to request a study visit, aimed at gleaning lessons learned and good practices for how to effectively engage Zimbabwean Chiefs in this work. The study visit included a delegation of UN staff from Zimbabwe and the Hon. Senator Chief Siansani. A Member of Parliament in the House of the Senate since 2013 and a He4She Champion in Zimbabwe, Hon. Senator Chief Siansani has promoted ending child marriages extensively through legislative reforms and is



champion of girls' education in his country.

In addition to senior officials at the MoLG and the United Nations, the Zimbabwe team was received by Paramount Chief Kawinga (Machinga District), and Senior Chief Tengani (Nsanje District). Following field visits to hear directly from community members and the Chiefs themselves, a conference was organised inviting Chiefs from all SI districts, who shared their experiences and advice on combatting harmful cultural practices. Hon. Senator Chief Siansani also shared best practices and lessons learned from Zimbabwe—resulting in an exchange of knowledge and information that fortified both countries' resolve and approach to strengthening the role of Chiefs in E-VaWG.

As TA Mizinga attested, *“I am happy to inform you that immediately after that learning visit, I established a chiefs' forum at my headquarters, and I am extremely happy to report that to date, we have withdrawn 81 girls from child marriages, and they are all back to school. We make sure we follow the girls even in homes to ensure they are indeed back in school. Even within the communities, people now know that marrying off a girl is violence and infringes on the girls right to education. They are now aware that girls need to be in school. The Spotlight Initiative is a good programme, it has made an impact in my community. I can see change.”*

Ratidzai Nyazenga, UN Women Zimbabwe noted that the Malawi visit strongly illustrated how the synergies between two Government Ministries can “yield results at the grassroots level to end violence against women and girls” by working with the chiefs and traditional leaders. “The Chiefs Forum is a strong institution and is key to E-VaWG. Working with the Chiefs can give us the much-needed results to reduce GBV and Harmful Practices and contribute to the promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights within communities,” she said.

In addition to the impetus and acknowledgement of Chiefs' efforts to E-VaWG that the study visit gave to Malawi, the home team learned a great deal about how Chiefs in Zimbabwe contribute to E-VaWG. As Mr. Makanga explained:

*“The visit was important because [...] the Malawi team also learnt several ways and strategies to strengthen the working relations between different levels of traditional leadership and government structures. It was worth noting that Traditional Leaders in Zimbabwe also have a space even to influence the legislative architecture of their country in line with their culture values, as they are represented in the Senate of their country.”*

A representative of the MoGCDSW, Mr. Ronal Phiri added:

“The Malawi- Zimbabwe learning visit was a landmark event through which chiefs from both countries were able to share how culture can be modified and used to eliminate violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Initiative programme has really demonstrated that eliminating violence against women and girls is a holistic approach.”

“Exchange visits are important for learning and building models,” Nyazenga from Zimbabwe said. “The Malawi Chiefs went to Kenya to learn how to support ending violence against women and girls in communities, and a representative of the Chiefs from Zimbabwe joined us on this visit to learn and take back to others the good practices among Chiefs in Malawi.”

This holistic approach is made possible when stakeholders are brought together to collaborate through knowledge sharing and exchange, whether at the national, regional or international level. “The knowledge, lessons learnt, and good practices shared during the exchange visit are valuable as these will guide the replication of the efforts in Zimbabwe,” said Nicea Gumbo, UN Women's Institutional Strengthening programme specialist. “The exchange provided us with insights and some practical strategies on how to engage with the traditional leaders and other key stakeholders on how to end VAWG in Zimbabwe. It (the visit) also informed us on how a bottom-up approach to programming is a powerful strategy if we want to realise the impact of our interventions under the Spotlight Initiative. It is all about giving the communities a voice and valuing their contributions as agents of change.”

Considering that we all have a unique role to play in E-VaWG, cooperation and partnership building requires that we understand each other's roles, learn from one another, leverage on each other's strengths, and complement efforts where necessary. In so doing, we are indeed movement building, and ensuring a whole-of-society approach, and that is precisely how we will succeed in our quest to eliminate all forms of VaWG.



**Photo on top: Machinga women welcoming the delegates with traditional dances. Photo below: During a chiefs forum meeting in Nsanje. Photo credit: Gertrude Samati-Chitika .**

**Photo on the left: Safe spaces like these play a great role in E-VaWG.**

**Photo credit: United Nations Malawi.**



# HOW TRADITIONAL LEADERS ARE HELPING TO END CHILD MARRIAGES IN MACHINGA: *The story of T/A Mizinga*

By Limbani Ngwata- UNDP



“We have so far dissolved 81 marriages under the chiefs’ forum,” says Traditional Authority Mizinga proudly. “All the girls are back in school.” As Traditional Authority in Machinga district, he is a cultural custodian who oversees day to day activities in the villages and communities. He is also a star performer among traditional leaders when it comes to fighting harmful practices against young girls, such as child marriage.

According to Chief Mazinga, there has been a big shift in attitudes towards child marriage since Spotlight Initiative began working with chiefs to change norms around sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices through coordinating platforms called ‘chiefs’ forums’.

“There is a big change in my area as far as fighting gender-based violence is concerned,” says Chief Mazinga. “The chiefs’ forums track the girls in the schools they are sent back to [after their marriage is dissolved], to ensure that they are really back in school.”

Early marriages are among the most regressive practices hampering girls’ education and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Malawi, especially in rural areas. The country has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with approximately 42 per cent of girls married before the age of 18 and 9 per cent married before they turn 15, according to UNICEF.

The practice is often linked to poverty, but communities are now beginning to appreciate that education and economic empowerment are a better way of ensuring security and safety for their daughters’ future than early marriage.

Chief Mazinga said one way of encouraging the girls who have been removed from child marriages to work hard in school is through the motivational talks hosted by the chiefs’ forum.

“At the chiefs’ forum, we believe that it is hard to be what



you cannot see,” he says. “As such we arrange for role models to inspire the rescued girls. These models are great at helping girls to make decisions for their future in terms of careers.” He adds that the forum provides notebooks to the girls.

Chairperson for the chiefs’ forum, Chief Kalidoso, says they aim to encourage girls to focus on their education and think of marriage only after they complete school. He added that the chiefs’ forum under Chief Mizinga unanimously resolved that initiation ceremonies should no longer be used to teach girls harmful practices, but rather should concentrate on matters of hygiene, education and respect for elders, among others.

“At the chiefs’ forum, we have punished parents and guardians for abetting early marriages. We are determined to end gender-based violence in the area of Traditional Authority Mizinga,” he says.

Chief Mizinga said he has also leveraged gender-based coordination structures which have been strengthened under the Spotlight Initiative. It’s now easier for local structures to access and collaborate with district council structures and government ministries, who monitor the progress of work being carried out in the area.

The programme has reinvigorated gender technical working groups and ensures gender issues are included in full council meetings, where the chiefs, parliamentarians, councilors, and other district council authorities discuss development matters.

UNDP Malawi is among the United Nations agencies working towards eliminating violence against women and girls and has led the engagement of chiefs’ structures as well as work to improve institutional responses to violence.

The Spotlight Initiative is implemented in six districts in Malawi and is an initiative of the United Nations that has received generous support from the EU. Its aim is to eliminate all forms of violence by 2030.



**Photo on the left: T/A Mizinga**

**Photo on top : T/A Mizinga’s chiefs forum and some of the 81 girls rescued from marriages.**



**Photo above: T/A Mizinga’s Chief Forum and some of the 81 girls rescued from marriages**

**Photo below: Principal Gender Officer in the Ministry of Gender Japhet Chirwa, moderates a discussion in T/A Mizinga’s area. Photo credit: Limbani Ngwata– UNDP Malawi.**



# MAKING SHELTERS SAFER FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH SAFE SPACES

By Joseph Scott– UNFPA



For the residents of Tengani Evaluation Camp for displaced persons in Nsanje, the year 2022 will forever be etched in their memories. In January, more than a thousand families had fled to the camp to seek for shelter after tropical storm Ana ripped through their communities flattening their homes.

For weeks, the families stayed in tents set up by humanitarian organisations, as they picked up of what was left of their lives. When things started getting back to normal, another tropical storm, Gombe, hit the districts destroying the camp they now called home.

“The winds were so strong such that they tossed our tents up in the sky,” recalls Maxwell Banda, camp manager at Tengani Evaluation Camp. “We had to seek shelter under

the trees but it didn’t help. The downpours were heavy and, all night, we stood in the rain drenched.”

## Tragedy of double disasters

With the tents gone, and almost half lying torn and broken, desperation gripped the residents of Tengani Evaluation Camp as more people flooded the place in search of shelter. During the first disaster caused by tropical storm Ana, 1325 families were seeking refuge at the camp. The number of families ballooned to 1506 after tropical storm hit the area again.

“We couldn’t chase them away as they had nowhere to go,” says Banda, “Almost all, had their homes destroyed by tropical cyclone Gombe. But the problem was now the sleeping space.”



With a space crisis looming, the camp committee decided that women and girls stay in the few tents remaining, and the men, sleep outside as they awaited for more help from the authorities. The ballooning population at Tengani camp was now a cause for concern because it required more security to keep the peace at the distressed shelter.

“With new arrivals coming, we knew that there was going to be security issues in the camp,” says Banda. “Men and women, even boys and girls were sleeping in open spaces. So the community police had to patrol the camp all night.”

In Malawi, violence against girls and women is widespread with one third of women having ever experienced violence including sexual violence before reaching the age of 15. And the risk for women and girls is heightened during disasters, which called for prompt action for gender based violence response during the humanitarian crisis.

### **Piloting safe spaces in the camps**

Through the Spotlight Initiative, funded by the European Union, mentors from ongoing programme in the district were actively engaged in awareness raising campaigns on sexual gender based violence (SGBV) within the communities, and in the camps.

In addition, 40 safe spaces were established in the camps reaching out to 2266 girls. The mentors are also conducting bi-weekly sessions on SGBV, menstrual hygiene and also ensuring that there is a coherent supportive network and referral system. One of the newly recruited mentees at Tengani Evaluation Camp is 19-year-old Sarai Charles. Sarai, who is in the first year of her secondary education, says she came to the camp with nothing and this made her and other girls in her situation SGBV targets.

“Because of our desperate situation, some men were coming to coerce us into relationships in exchange for food,” says Sarai.

But with the creation of the safe spaces in the camps, the girls have been empowered with knowledge on what constitutes sexual gender based violence and where to report in case they encounter such during their stay at the camp.

“Through the safe spaces, we are now aware of all types of gender bases violence,” says Sarai, adding, “Even the men around the camp know that if they try to abuse us in any way, we can report them to the police.”

During a recent visit to Tengani Evaluation Camp, UNFPA Deputy Representative, Masaki Watabe said the piloting of safe spaces in camps is one way the Spotlight Initiative adapted to respond to the current humanitarian situation in Nsanje. He further adds that the results of the initiative are impressive as seen through the increase in the level of awareness of SGBV by women and girls in the camps, and the host communities.

“We definitely want to scale up this intervention,” says Masaki. “Doing so will enable us to apply the same methodology in disaster response to mitigate the risks of gender based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse that might happen in the camp context.”



**Photo on top left: UNFPA Deputy Representative Masaki Watabe interacting with some of the displaced people at Tengani Evaluation Camp. Photo above: A safe space mentor with her mentees during a community event. Photo credit: Joseph Scott**

**Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation**

Spotlight Initiative Malawi acknowledges the critical role played by different stakeholders in sustaining the accrued benefits of the programme. In this regard, Malawi applies Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) as salient feature for the success of the programme.

**What is PM&E?**

*Participatory M&E* is about engaging different stakeholders, especially targeted beneficiaries, in programme implantation, monitoring and evaluation processes. This approach engages the rights holders at various levels and stages. PM&E recognizes rights holders as active participants and not just source of information and data. In Malawi, the programme uses Community of Practice (CoP) at community level where rights holders provide feedback on the programme. Furthermore, the programme employs scorecard to identify challenges and proposed solutions. The community feedback sessions have proved to be effective in engaging the rights holders whereby a concerted effort is made to amplify beneficiary voices on how to strengthen SI interventions.

**Why PM&E**

A catalyst for sustainability through increased ownership among rights holders, as they are part of the programme implementation.

Providing feedback to the rights holders is way of ensuring accountability and transparency critical for gaining public trust.

Comprehensive stakeholder engagement improves performance and achievement of outcomes.

**How PM&E has improved Programming**

PM&E has improved information among the stakeholders. Communities including the rights holders are able to track the status of the cases from their communities.

Through the feedback sessions and sustainability consultations, the programme scaled up the interventions on male engagement. This came in following the demand from the rights holder and other community stakeholders.

Through scorecard assessments, communities and service providers to identify and resolve challenges. For instance, the need to scale up mobile courts was flagged by communities using these tools; in phase II mobile legal assistance was indeed scaled up.

Through the consultation, communities expressed concerns on missed investment opportunities that would grow the fund and allow them to maximise support to survivors. Accordingly, the SI intends to incorporate entrepreneurial/ financial management capacity building for these committees, and thus improve their sustainability.



**Picture source: Internet**





**Photo on the left:  
A beneficiary explains how the Spotlight Initiative is empowering women and girls at Luweya in T/A Chindi's area in Mzimba district**

*Photo credit:  
Phillip Pemba-  
UNRCO*

**Photo below left: Paramount Inkosi M'mbelwa V delivers a speech during a mission in Mzimba district. Photos below right: Members of the women forum showcasing what they have learnt from Spotlight Initiative interventions in Mzimba district. Photo credit: Phillip Pemba -UNRCO**





# SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE MALAWI COUNTRY PROGRAMME

## MISSIONS AND EVENTS IN PICTURES



*Photo on top left: EU Ambassador H.E Rune Skinnebach, EU Head of Cooperation Ivo Hoefekens and EU Project Manager (Governance) Atiji Phiri during a joint monitoring in Nkhata Bay. Right: Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament Aisha Adams speaking during a mission in Machinga. Photo at the bottom right: UNFPA Representative Young Hong, Machinga East Member of Parliament Honorable Esther Jolobala and Principal Secretary for Gender Ms. Roselyn Makhumula listening to a presentation during inspection of pavilions in Machinga .*



*Photo on the left: Police Inspector General Dr. George Kainja speaking during a mission in Machinga.*

*Photo credit: Nomsa Taulo*



*Photo at the bottom left :Minister of Gender Hon. Patricia Kaliati being briefed in the DNA Lab during a forensic graduation in Zomba. Photo below right: EU Team Leader for Social Development Michelle Crimella and UN Head of RCO Max Bonnel listen to a brief presentation in the DNA lab. Photo credit: UNDP Malawi.*





## Spotlight Initiative Malawi Country Programme missions and events in pictures



*Photo at the top : Participants to the SGBV Survivor Centred Reporting Training for media and Police Public Relations Officers pose for a group photograph during the training in Mponela, Dowa. Photo Credit: Phillip Pemba-UNRCO*

*Photo below left: T/A Mizinga facilitates a Chiefs Forum. Below right: Traditional leaders dance SGBV away during a mission in Machinga district. Photo credit– Limbani Ngwata– UNDP Malawi .*



*Photo at the left: A mentor in Machinga proudly flaunts the Mentorship slogan on her reflector jacket:*

*“ Thupi langa, Moyo wanga, Tsogolo langa, Chisankho changa”*

*In English: I am a Mentor, My body, My life, My future, I decide!*

*Photo credit: Luke Tembo-Consultant.*





"Through the safe spaces, we are now aware of all types of gender based violence. Even the men around the camp know that if they try to abuse us in any way, we can report them to the police."



**SARAI CHARLES, A MENTEE AT TENGANI  
CAMP SAFE SPACE**



**Spotlight  
Initiative**  
To eliminate violence  
against women and girls



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*Thank you for taking time to read the SI Newsletter*