

Back to School Campaign (Mfera Initiative on Education)

Organisation

Camfed

Region

Malawi

Length of programme

2013

Supported by

Camfed Malawi

1. Project summary

Camfed Malawi is working to ensure all girls have access to a quality and safe education by dismantling the barriers imposed by poverty and partnering with communities in support of girls' education.

In Mfera, Malawi Camfed has worked with a local health centre and education authority to identify girls who have dropped out of school after becoming pregnant.

The project works to:

- Integrate girls who have dropped out of school back into the education system.
- Prevent child marriage and further early pregnancies by keeping these girls in school and providing them with support to gain their independence.

2. What is /are the anticipated outcomes of the project as identified in the Girls Not Brides Theory of Change?

- Increased access of married girls to education.
 - Girls are increasingly aware of their rights.
 - Girls have opportunity to develop solidarity with one another through peer groups and collective action.
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3. What are the key activities of the project?

Camfed first worked to identify girls who have dropped out of school because of early pregnancy or child marriage and wanted to be reintegrated into the education system.

Galvanising support from the community

Camfed worked at the community level to ensure that the girls are supported as they re-entered the education system. They partnered with a local school and held conversations with key community members to ensure the project was sustainable.

Providing support

Camfed provided the girls with complete bursaries to cover school fees, supplies, school uniforms and sanitary products in order to dismantle the financial barrier to education. Camfed also worked closely with the school and community to ensure that these girls stayed in school.

Camfed also provided capacity building workshops to build the capacity of girls in areas of self-esteem, self-confidence, education, sexual reproductive health etc.

Ensuring sustainability

Generating financial and emotional support within the community to help the girls reintegrate, stay in school and graduate is a key part of the project. Once girls have graduated, they are also encouraged to join CAMA, the pan-African alumnae association for Camfed graduates. It is the largest network of its kind in Africa, uniting girls by their common background of acute poverty, their determination to finish their education, and their desire to help other girls overcome issues such as early marriage and pregnancy.

Today there are over 33,111 members across Zimbabwe, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi. These girls are stepping up as peer mentors, teachers, entrepreneurs and leaders who are tackling child marriage and early pregnancy and helping young vulnerable girls to stay in school.

4. Has the project been evaluated?

The project has not yet been evaluated.

5. What have been the challenges in implementing the project and how were they overcome?

- The girls and the schools faced many challenges along the way. Extra pupils often meant there was inadequate space in the classrooms and teaching and learning resources were often stretched.
 - Some girls faced hostility from their fellow classmates, who called them different names such as 'makolo inu' (you are parents) which had to be mediated by the School Based Committee (SBC), working with students to raise awareness of early marriage and early pregnancy and encourage empathy and support for the young mothers.
 - Many of the girls had additional challenges outside of school. Many have their own homes to take care of, and at times stayed away from school as a result. Some had to walk long distances, compromising their safety, and some were worried about leaving behind children without adequate parental care and guidance.
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6. What factors were important in the success of the project?

- Teacher Mentors, School Based Committees and the community played an important role in supporting the girls and trying to find solutions to keep them in school. For example, Parent Support Groups helped to care for children in Community Based Child Care Centres (CBCCCs), where, in addition to benefiting from an early learning and care environment, children received nutritious porridge, so that their mothers did not have to worry about them while they attended school.
 - One of the major investments by Camfed - and critical to the success and retention of young mothers in school - was a series of weekend workshops conducted with the girls, as well as with the school administration. This helped to ensure they were integrated, developed confidence and drive, and received the support they needed. The topics covered during these weekends included human rights, rights of the child, assertiveness, communication and leadership. These were underscored by talks given by young women role models, who encouraged the girls and emphasized the importance of working hard at school.
 - The bursary support which provided girls with school fees and educational material helped girls in households which would otherwise would be unable to attend school.
 - There were a number of support services offered to the girls which complemented their integration into school. Sexual reproductive health sessions were conducted by the medical officers at Mfera Hospital on a weekly basis and a peer support network worked to support girls both academically and emotionally. Girls also received role modelling sessions which included exchange visits to Machinga, Chancellor College (chanco), Mangochi.
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7. What pieces of advice would you give other civil society organisations considering implementing a similar project

1. Strive to promote a holistic approach to ensure all girls remain and complete their education. The provision of bursary support should be part of a broader approach, including strong community partnerships and advocacy to ensure that girls' challenges - both financial and psycho-social - are addressed.
2. As well as involving parents, communities and CSOs, organizations should involve all the institutional actors who are instrumental in ensuring that girls are educated, including schools, district and national government departments.