



SUCCESS STORY

From Young Bride to Young Child Again

School effort leads parents to take daughter out of early marriage



Photo: DevTech Systems, Inc

A program to raise awareness about school-related gender-based violence has made communities safer for children both in and out of school.

“I am so happy to have the support of my family and my community in continuing my education,” said Glory, a pupil in Kaombe who looks forward now to secondary school.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Until recently, Glory (a pseudonym) was an average girl growing up in the village of Kaombe. She never thought she would complete primary school, much less attend secondary school. But, after her community got involved with a USAID safe schools program, Glory is now an example of how girls are achieving in school, despite the many challenges they face.

One of seven children, Glory is part of a typical family in Malawi, where over 80% of the population subsists on farming. She attended Kaombe Primary School sporadically, as her mother needed her at home to assist with tasks such as tending to crops, gathering firewood, and getting water from the local well. When Glory turned 13, her parents decided that she should get married. Glory was given no option but to drop out of school and move to her new husband’s village.

In 2005, USAID began working with communities near Glory’s village to raise awareness about school-related gender-based violence and how it impacts students, parents, and the community. School-related gender-based violence is violence (whether physical, psychological, or sexual) committed against girls and boys in or on the way to or from school. That is when Kaombe’s Group Village Headman, Chilembwe, and Glory’s parents became actively involved in making their community a model for keeping children safe and in school.

Although reducing child marriage was not an explicit goal of the program, project activities have created a space where girls can voice their concerns and aspirations, and parents can imagine possibilities for their daughters that go beyond an early marriage. As a result, Glory’s parents and Chilembwe worked together to annul Glory’s marriage and re-enroll her in school.

Today, Glory is a student and a “peer leader”, trained to encourage positive, healthy relationships among boys and girls in her school. She looks forward to attending secondary school and her family, who now sees a future in an educated daughter, is supportive of her endeavors.